



THE THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE

OF THE ARGUMENTS OF THE GAY

LIBERATION MOVEMENT, 1969-1981

Timothy John Carrigan  
B.A. (Hons.), University of New England

Department of History  
The University of Adelaide

December, 1981

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NAME : TIMOTHY CARRIGAN COURSE : Ph.D.

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S U M M A R Y

The gay liberation movement affirmed a defiant, new identity for homosexual people and vigorously detailed their oppression. It paid particular attention to psychiatry and sought to shift the question of mental illness from the homosexual to society. Gay liberationists initially explored three major avenues in order to define the sources of oppression. The first drew upon the feminist critique of gender, but this provided a unitary conception of masculinity which proved impossible to apply precisely to the gender identities and the social position of homosexual men. The second explored a Marxist explanation of oppression, and a consideration of this raises a number of issues concerning the ability of Marxism to incorporate questions of sexuality without any theoretical attention being given to itself.

The third attempt was a form of Freudo-Marxism by which gay liberationists posited sexual repression as a general feature of capitalist societies. This was elaborated by Altman, Hocquenghem and Mieli who sought to derive a social psychology from psychoanalytic theory. Their arguments located an original homosexuality in infantile sexuality.

Since gay liberationist theory has not addressed psychoanalysis in any detail, it is important to assess the repression hypothesis in terms of Freud's own work. A consideration of his postulate of bisexuality, and of his struggle with the question of gender differentiation, suggests that the origins of both homosexuality and heterosexuality lie in the tensions which characterise the construction of the boy's masculinity. They are different outcomes of the ways in which the boy comes to recognise the opposition between the sexes, an opposition which is socially grounded in their anatomical distinction. With some reformulations, Freud provides a valuable account of the origins of male homosexuality.

Apart from the gay movement, the other major efforts to conceptualise male homosexuality in social terms have been made by sociologists. The orthodox structural-functionalist view shares some of the problems encountered by the early gay liberationist arguments. The bulk of the more liberal statements are purely descriptive. But a certain amount of sociological work has achieved some important insights. Plummer, in particular, used the interactionist perspective to demonstrate that both a homosexual identity and subculture are thoroughly shaped by hostile social reactions. However, his account leaves the questions of the psychological and historical constraints upon the negotiation of sexual meanings.

Weeks explored these historical questions and he isolated the late nineteenth century in Britain as the crucial period of the categorisation of the homosexual as a particular type of person. His work raises important issues about the theoretical status of Marxism in this historical project, and about the nature of the 'break' represented by the late nineteenth century. Foucault too has made an influential contribution to these questions, though his central conception of 'power' remains problematic.

Though the existing work on the social theory of male homosexuality frequently touches upon the question of gender, it is an elusive theme. To grasp its importance, it is necessary to reject monolithic conceptions of masculinity, and to view gender relations historically. This perspective offers a sharper focus for the major questions defined by the gay movement and by sociological and historical studies of male homosexuality.

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Timothy Carrigan

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

This thesis owes its existence to the gay liberation movement and to the many people who have encouraged me to write about it. I would particularly like to acknowledge the support, criticism and assistance of Richard Fiora and John Lee: their commitment to the project has been invaluable. For their advice, enthusiasm and detailed comments on drafts I wish to thank Bob Connell, Rosemary Pringle, Hugh Stretton, Anna Yeatman, Alan Patience and Graeme Duncan. Colin James typed the thesis with care and skill. Many friends have provided practical help, useful comments, and encouragement at those times when it seems that writing a thesis will never end - among them, Judith Allen, Don Baxter, Robert Lawrie, Robert Marchant, Jill Matthews, Dave Sargent, Adrienne Steadson, Phil Stevenson, Frank Watters and Thea Welsh.

INTRODUCTION



The contemporary gay liberation movement represents the most articulate and defiant form of the homosexual consciousness whose development can be traced since at least the late nineteenth century. That period saw a vigorous homosexual movement in Germany, and the beginnings of another in Britain. In the intervening years, homosexual activism has had an uneven and sporadic career in Europe and the United States. There have been some important studies of this political struggle in particular countries, but its overall history remains to be written.

After 1969, the gay liberation movement spread rapidly from North America to Britain, Western Europe and Australia. Few gay liberationists were initially aware of the earlier history of homosexual activism; and they saw little in common between themselves and the groups which had worked for law reform and fought instances of discrimination in the preceding decades. Their sense of being the first homosexuals to recognise and challenge oppression underlay an extraordinary millenarian confidence: the new gay liberation groups demanded nothing less than a revolutionary restructuring of their societies. Though the initial belief in the imminence of revolutionary change lasted only a few years, the impact of the gay movement has undoubtedly meant a significant and enduring difference to the ways large numbers of homosexual people understand themselves in relation to the societies in which they live.

The immediate catalyst of the contemporary movement is usually seen in the raid by New York City police on a Greenwich Village bar, the Stonewall Inn, in June 1969. The riots which this event provoked were soon followed by the organisation of 'gay liberation fronts' in the major American cities. Though there had been signs of a more militant stance by homosexual groups in the preceding years in the United States, the gay liberation fronts marked a distinct break in the style and scale of homosexual activism - and, most importantly, in its arguments.

This thesis traces the development of these arguments. Its focus is upon the efforts within the movement to construct a social theory of male homosexuality. As the directions taken up in the following chapters indicate, the scope of such a theory is very large. For a central conviction of gay activists from the beginning of the movement was that homosexuality could not be understood apart from the general culture of which it was a product. The full implications of this insight are still being realised.

After twelve years, there is a need to grasp the main thrusts of gay liberationist theorising, for the amount of commentary upon the movement's arguments as a whole remains very small. In doing this, the thesis is concerned to draw out the significance of particular lines of thought, to highlight the theoretical problems which they encounter, and to extend the movement's arguments at certain points. The first chapter discusses the major theoretical preoccupations of gay liberationists until about 1974. The second considers a more specific hypothesis about sexual repression which, in an incipient form, has had a long career within the movement.

When stated more systematically, the repression hypothesis is an attempt to derive a social psychology from Freud, and it makes an important assumption about the psychological origins of homosexuality. The third chapter reconsiders this argument in the light of Freud's own work. It is important to discuss the psychoanalytic account of the child's sexual development in some detail, for an assessment of it is one of the most striking absences in gay liberationist theorising. The following chapters suggest some of the implications of Freud's work for a social theory of homosexuality.

The main academic discipline to take up the question of homosexuality has been sociology, and the fourth chapter surveys the major statements in this literature. On the whole, this work is in sharp contrast with the gay movement's perspective, and it highlights the latter's critical achievement;

though to some extent the two have also shared some common theoretical problems. More importantly, the most insightful sociological work has directly contributed to the gay liberationist arguments, and indeed there has recently been a convergence between the two approaches.

This is particularly evident in the recognition of the importance of historical questions concerning homosexuality. The fifth chapter examines these efforts to conceptualise homosexuality as an experience created by specific historical conditions. The concluding chapter makes some suggestions for a sharper focus for future work on the social theory of male homosexuality.

It is necessary to explain why the thesis is concerned with a social theory of male homosexuality rather than with lesbianism as well. This partly reflects the present political division between homosexual men and lesbians. The gay movement originally endeavoured to include both men and women, but after the first few years of its existence, large numbers of women left gay liberation groups and have subsequently worked within either the feminist movement or separatist lesbian groupings. This division is by no means absolute. But the prospect of a reunited homosexual movement has never seemed likely, and the political relationship between homosexual men and lesbian feminists has been marked by continuing tension.

The division is ultimately an expression of the fact that 'homosexuality' is not a uniform category but is divided by gender. The gay movement's literature clearly expresses this, since arguments about 'homosexuals' typically refer to homosexual men, even when this is not explicitly acknowledged. (Of course, 'men' and 'women' are not uniform categories either, but are divided by sexual orientation; and a common reason for many lesbians retaining links with a predominantly male gay movement is their uneasiness in a predominantly heterosexual feminist movement.)

The thesis argues in more detail that a social theory of male homosexuality has to take account of the masculinity of homosexual men as well as of their sexual orientation. At the same time, such an argument will be strengthened when it is possible to set it against a more developed social theory of lesbianism. The two would undoubtedly throw considerable light on each other, and together they would form a crucial dimension to the theorisation of gender relations.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS OF  
THE EARLY GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

In its early literature, the gay liberation movement expressed three broad concerns. It detailed the social values, practices and institutions which oppressed homosexuals; it described the effect of this oppressive culture upon their lives and advanced a new conception of the positive meanings and possibilities of a homosexual life; and it opened up an analysis of the reasons for the existence of this anti-homosexual ideology.

Dennis Altman, in one of the most influential and substantial statements of this new conception of politics, Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation, stressed a perspective which was basic to the movement's outlook:

... let there be no confusion: the very concept of homosexuality is a social one, and one cannot understand the homosexual experience without recognizing the extent to which we have developed a certain identity and behaviour derived from social norms. 1

Using this perspective, the movement's arguments formed the most energetic and vociferous rupture with the medical model of homosexuality since its first definition a century earlier. The fact therefore that some people who engaged in homosexual behaviour were designated 'homosexuals', and constructed a homosexual identity accordingly, required an explanation and could not be taken for granted. This was not conceived to be a discrete problem but was an integral part of the general relationship between men and women: it was sexuality itself and its polarised expression in masculinity and femininity which were on the gay movement's agenda. They were viewed as political matters and not as biological facts of life. For this reason, the movement's literature has been remarkable for its attempt to formulate wide-ranging questions

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1. Dennis Altman, Homosexuality: Oppression and Liberation, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 15.

about the dominant culture confronting homosexuals and, in doing so, to transcend the boundaries within which homosexuality has traditionally been defined. As Jeffrey Weeks commented in evaluating the impact of the London Gay Liberation Front in its short-lived career between 1970 and 1973, "in terms of homosexual's ability to conceptualize their social position, the change has been immense".<sup>2</sup>

The immediate change in those years was dramatic indeed, for many gay liberationists were convinced of the revolutionary power of homosexuals to remould society once they had accepted the ideals of the new movement. Homosexuality in fact was superior to heterosexuality for it pointed the way to a future free of patriarchal relations. This assertion should not be dismissed with hindsight as simply naive chauvinism, for it was based upon important initial insights into the social organisation of gender. Unlike heterosexuality, homosexuality was seen to be, at least within the movement, a relationship between equals: "our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up", wrote the American, Carl Wittman, in his "Manifesto" in 1969.<sup>3</sup>

Militant homosexuals turned their socially marginalised status to their own ends. Having been told that they were sick and generally deviant, they reversed this dominant ideology by characterising orthodox sexuality as crippling of human potential and assumed that they themselves transcended the dichotomy of gender. Once this assumption was questioned, the theoretical problem of the relationship between homosexuals and the gender order, and particularly that of the political position of homosexual men in terms of feminist analyses, became vastly more complicated.

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2. Jeffrey Weeks, Coming Out, Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present, London, 1977, p. 206.
  3. Carl Wittman, "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto" (1969), in Joseph A. McCaffrey (ed.), The Homosexual Dialectic, Englewood Cliffs, 1972, p. 160.

(Indeed, twelve years later, the movement remains deeply confused and divided over this very issue.) Nonetheless, the early gay movement translated the dominant idea that homosexuality was a pathological, individual condition, that it was a stigma to be hidden, into the idea that homosexual men and women could, collectively and publicly, challenge a cruelly restrictive system of sexual values and institutions and, along with other radical groups, the whole society which propped them up. It formed a deeply exciting conviction and unleashed enormous energy. There was a widespread belief in the movement that the end of sexual 'pre-history' was imminent.

Shortly before the beginning of the gay movement, the philosopher of education, Paulo Freire wrote: "To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic."<sup>4</sup> It was precisely this conviction which underlay the first phase of gay liberation politics and it generated an optimism which, for most activists, meant there was no need for further analysis. Yet the largely untheorised character of the movement's initial arguments also reflected the fact that there was, quite simply, very little appropriate revolutionary theory which could be drawn upon.

Certainly the dominant tradition of western Marxism offered little, given its overwhelming emphasis upon the economic in both the theory and practice of revolutionary change and its almost total silence on sexual questions. So instead, gay liberationists looked for theory and inspiration to the feminist and Black Power movements in the United States, and, like both of these, to the struggles for national liberation in the third world to which Freire, among others, had addressed himself. Thus the name 'Gay Liberation Front', adopted by many of the militant homosexual groups in the years from 1969 to about 1973, reflected their

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4. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Harmondsworth, 1972 (1967), p. 27.



clear association with the people's war in Vietnam. As Weeks, who had been an activist in the London GLF, later reflected: "The name was the surest touchstone of GLF's radical intent."<sup>5</sup>

Two initial distinctions need to be made in this discussion of gay liberation ideology. The first is that the movement has consistently embraced what can broadly be termed both liberal and radical tendencies. The liberal tendency was not particularly vocal in the first few years, the political initiative (and the majority of the publications) being firmly in the hands of the radicals. The liberals have emphasised the importance of relatively short term goals and particularly those of the legal decriminalisation of male homosexuality, of the enactment of anti-discrimination laws, and of the advancement of popular education which would eradicate prejudice. Of course, such aims well pre-date the advent of the gay movement but they received a strong fillip in the new political atmosphere and they were vigorously pursued as the movement became more diverse and the radicals lost their former hegemony. This has been most evident in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The liberal aim is ultimately one of the assimilation of homosexuals into society, though under certain conditions such that homosexuals should be able to express themselves openly. A letter to the London GLF newspaper, Come Together, in 1971, objected to the current emphasis upon mass confrontationist policies and continued: "What I think is more important to the liberation of gay people is that

5. Weeks, op. cit., p. 187.

6. This clearly reflects the strong liberal political tradition in that country. By contrast, in Australia, where liberalism has never informed its politics to anything like the same extent, the liberal thrust of the gay movement has been much weaker. One index is that in 1981, only two of the six states had decriminalised homosexuality, this having happened in Victoria only the year before.

they mix with normal society in natural numbers ... This I feel is where our integration with society is going to begin. We are not trying to become an isolated mass community, i.e. a ghetto. We want to be normal people ..."<sup>7</sup> The letter drew a sharp response in the next issue of the newspaper: "Do we really want to be integrated with a society we regard as sick? Do you really want to be accepted by so-called normal people? On whose terms? No. ... When society grows well, the word 'normal' will cease to be meaningful."<sup>8</sup>

The radical tendency in the movement has not necessarily disagreed with the liberals' short term goals but it has insisted that the ideal of integration involves an unacceptable compromise unless society itself is fundamentally changed. The present discussion concentrates upon the radicals, not because it necessarily endorses their political tactics and arguments, but because they have pursued a social analysis far more energetically than the liberal tendency.

This relates to the second important distinction to be made in terms of gay liberation ideology. In the first instance, the movement's main political emphasis was on the perceived dichotomy between homosexuals and heterosexuals. In 1969, Wittman wrote of San Francisco:

... we have formed a ghetto, out of self protection. It is a ghetto, rather than a free territory, because it is still theirs. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators make our laws, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us. And we have pretended everything is OK, because we haven't been able to see how to change it - we've been afraid. 9

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7. Trevor G. Locke, "Letter from a Brother", Come Together, No. 3 (Jan. 1971), in Aubrey Walter (ed.), Come Together: the years of gay liberation (1970-73), London, 1980, p. 62. Walter noted: "The name Come Together was chosen for its triple entendre: the communal or collectivist aspiration, the sexual reference, and the John Lennon song of the time" (p. 14).
  8. Eric Elphenbein, "Danger", Come Together, No. 4 (Feb. 1971), in Walter, op. cit., p. 63.
  9. Wittman, op. cit., p. 157.

However, in the radical argument this perspective, while not disappearing, quickly shifted to an emphasis upon the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity. This resulted from the attempt to integrate the feminist analysis of sexism. To be fair to Wittman, an awareness of sexism was already present in his "Manifesto", which was a remarkably coherent statement of the aims of a social movement then only in its infancy.<sup>10</sup>

However, the liberal tendency has continued to give priority to the dichotomy between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Its subsequent argument has been that homosexuals constitute a minority group, by analogy with an ethnic minority, and that they need to gain the protection by law and the usual freedoms guaranteed to other groups within liberal democracies. This emphasis upon the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy becomes more muted with the conceptualisation of the former as a minority group and in fact leads to a de-emphasis of the differences between the two. The assumption here is that the assimilation of homosexuals is possible precisely because there is not ultimately that much which separates them from the heterosexual majority. As will be seen in chapter four, this assumption also characterises a good deal of recent work on homosexuality within the sociology of deviance. (Given the rubric of 'deviance' this is somewhat ironic.) The radicals, however, have insisted upon the irreducible difference of homosexuality and this has underpinned their criticism of the dominant sexual norms for their embodiment of a pervasive differentiation of power between men and women in which the oppression of homosexuals was embedded.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Wittman's "Manifesto" was reprinted in Australia in William and John, Vol. 1, No. 4 (n.d., 1972), pp. 6-11. Here, the word 'camp' was substituted for 'gay' in order to make the "Manifesto" more consistent with the vernacular. However, such modification was rare: on the whole, North American gay liberation ideology was enthusiastically imported into Australia without consideration as to its immediate applicability.

11. These comments simplify the variety of tendencies within the gay movement. It should be noted that one has taken the homosexual/

The following discussion examines the gay movement's arguments as they developed primarily in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia in the period from 1969 until about 1974. It falls into four sections. The first reviews the basic tenets, practices and social criticism of the movement. The discussion then turns to the gay liberationist critique of psychiatry, a major preoccupation in those early years, and suggests the limitations of this critique. The two subsequent sections each consider a major strain in the movement's explanation of oppression. One deals with various arguments about sexism and notes the difficulties for those gay liberationists who tried to reconcile the position of homosexual men with the feminist conception of gender. The other considers the initial attempts within the movement to advance an historical explanation of oppression in terms of Marxist theory.

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The London Gay Liberation Front's Manifesto was published in October 1971. It was a carefully prepared document of about six thousand words and was written by both men and women. It was designed to be accessible to as wide a range of homosexual people as possible and was very influential in its own right, being reprinted for example by the Melbourne GLF and republished in the United States.<sup>12</sup> The introduction to the Manifesto declared: "Homosexuals, who have been oppressed by physical violence and by ideological and psychological attacks at every level of social

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heterosexual dichotomy to an extreme point and, far from the dichotomy becoming muted, the result has been various forms of separatism. The Gay Sunshine Collective in San Francisco, for example, has pursued a vigorous analysis of 'gay culture' past and present; and the Fag Rag Collective in Boston has developed a gay anarchist stance. Neither could very usefully be termed 'liberal'. However, such tendencies are not considered here for, without wanting to question their contribution to the gay movement in other areas, they have not been particularly interested in pursuing a social analysis of homosexual oppression.

12. "London Gay Liberation Front Manifesto", in Len Richmond and Gary Noguera (eds.), The Gay Liberation Book, San Francisco, 1973, pp. 117-127. This version however is abridged and the references which follow are to the Melbourne reprint. Aubrey Walter suggests that the Manifesto must have sold at least 10,000 copies since its

interaction, are at last becoming angry."<sup>13</sup> As a political statement, it is one of the foremost examples of the perspective reached within the movement at this time. It attacked the heterosexual bias embedded in a range of social institutions and argued, not defensively for greater tolerance or social reform, but aggressively for a revolutionary change to the social structure. In this, it was firmly committed to an anti-sexist position and it reflected the influence of Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex and Kate Millett's Sexual Politics, both of which had been published in Britain in the previous year.

The Manifesto established the subordinate position of homosexuals within society by pointing to those areas in which homosexuality was either ignored or actively proscribed. The method for isolating instances of oppression was to insist that homosexuality should be fully on a par with heterosexuality, and the list which this test produced was extensive. The Manifesto described the family as "the most basic unit of society ... consisting of the man in charge, a slave as his wife, and their children on whom they force themselves as the ideal models. The very form of the family works against homosexuality". Young homosexual people therefore suffered from "the restricting images of man or woman pushed on them by their parents".<sup>14</sup> Schools both reinforced these rigid sex roles and also ignored homosexuality in their courses. The churches, "whose archaic and irrational teachings support the family and marriage as the only permitted condition for sex", had condemned homosexuality throughout the whole Judaeo-Christian tradition.<sup>15</sup> The mass media acted as a powerful support

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publication (*op. cit.*, p. 27); though its distribution, taking account of private reprints such as in Melbourne, would undoubtedly be much higher. In 1979, the "Gay Liberation Information Service" in Britain published a second edition with some minor changes.

13. Melbourne Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto", (n. d., 1972), p. 1.

14. Ibid., p. 1.

15. Ibid., p. 2.

for these assumptions of "'normal' man and woman. It follows that we are characterised as scandalous, obscene perverts, as rampant, wild sex-monsters, as pathetic, doomed and compulsive degenerates".<sup>16</sup> The Manifesto pointed to two explicit agencies of heterosexual control - the legal system and institutionalised psychiatry. Under the former, male homosexual behaviour has typically been a criminal offence especially in Anglo-Saxon societies.<sup>17</sup> As for psychiatry, the Manifesto attacked its standard definition of male homosexuality as a 'mental illness' and its preoccupation with aetiological theories and therapeutic 'cures'. Such literature, it asserted, operated "on the basis of social convention and prejudice, NOT scientific truth",<sup>18</sup> something which was highlighted not least by the theoretical confusion which characterised the field.

The most basic aim of all of such arguments, which were widely reproduced in the gay movement, was to make homosexual people recognise the fact that they lived in a society which, in its values and institutions, was thoroughly anti-homosexual. It was frequently said that homosexual oppression operated on the three levels of persecution (legal, medical and physical), discrimination (in employment, child custody cases and many other areas) and liberal tolerance.<sup>19</sup> In each case the assumption was upheld that heterosexuality was the universal and natural mode of sexuality, and exceptions were typically explained away as sick or sinful and were regarded as fit subjects for therapy or punishment. If individual homosexuals were tolerated, such toleration was most often filtered through a variety of stereotypes which denied their sexuality any integrity or seriousness.

16. Ibid., p. 2.

17. The law in England and Wales was modified in 1967 so that homosexual acts between two consenting males in private was no longer an offence. However the number of convictions for homosexual offences actually increased after that time on charges of 'soliciting' and 'indecent behaviour' (Weeks, op. cit., p. 11).

18. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 3.

19. See for example, Altman, op. cit., p. 46; and Weeks, op. cit., p. 190.

And toleration could be subtle and insidious as two British writers, Andrew Hodges and David Hutter illustrated in their booklet, With Downcast

Gays:

Gay people often think that things are moving in their favour if they are so much as mentioned in a broadcast. We heard one gay man argue for the existence of a more tolerant attitude towards homosexuality by citing the programme "If You Think You've Got Problems", which took the daring step of allowing a sixteen-year-old boy to ask the panel whether he was likely to become homosexual since he was solely attracted to his own sex. "Don't commit yourself, don't give yourself a label, be open to a variety of experience," they advised. One needs to translate: "Don't be too eager to say that you are sick; find a girl soon and it may yet be possible to smother your homosexual feelings."

Taken literally, what the 'experts' said was good; but until we hear heterosexuals advised with equal vigour to make homosexuality a part of their experience, we shall not be fooled into believing such 'permissive' chatter to be anything but the veiled disparagement that it is. The real intention behind the advice, the implied message of shame and inferiority was made crystal-clear by Jean Metcalfe. How awful, she exclaimed 'sensitively', to have a homosexual son; one would feel so guilty!

It does not require very profound understanding of human nature to see that the boy already knew the answer to his question. What he sought was not information, but reassurance that his homosexuality was natural and good. What he received was the raw material from which he will build a lifetime's self-oppression, and from which other gay listeners will reinforce their own. 20

Indeed, it was 'self-oppression', the major theme of this booklet, which was commonly seen in the movement as the most destructive legacy for homosexuals of their experience of living in a stridently heterosexual culture. In 1970, the American gay liberationist, Martha Shelley, linked this to a broader notion of the repression of homosexuality:

Understand this - that the worst part of being a homosexual is having to keep it secret. Not the occasional murders by police or teenage queer-beaters, not the loss of jobs or expulsion from schools or dishonorable discharges - but the

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20. Andrew Hodges and David Hutter, With Downcast Gays, London, 1974, pp. 29-30. This forty page booklet has been a marked publishing success for the movement. It has been widely distributed throughout the English-speaking world and translated into Swedish and Italian. It was republished in Toronto in 1977.

daily knowledge that what you are is so awful that it cannot be revealed. The violence against us is sporadic. Most of us are not affected. But the internal violence of being made to carry - or choosing to carry - the load of your straight society's unconscious guilt - that is what tears us apart, what makes us want to stand up in the offices, in the factories and schools and shout out our true identities. 21

And a British pamphlet noted some common instances:

It is self-oppression for gay people to take for granted that they will be ignored or insulted in newspapers and on TV, that gay adolescents will be ignored or condemned in sex education, and that the police will continue to get easy convictions on charges of indecent behaviour. 22

For gay activists, self-oppressive attitudes were embodied in the commercial homosexual subculture (comprised of bars, clubs, saunas and a variety of publications). This was often described as a ghetto which both separated homosexuals from the rest of society and gave them the illusion of freedom; in fact it was confining and it encouraged homosexuals to blame themselves for their helplessness rather than their oppressors. It was also exploitative as a form of underworld capitalism.<sup>23</sup> However, the gay liberation response to the subculture was critical most of all of its heterosexually derived values. The predominantly male subculture was characterised by the commercially manipulated cult of youth and beauty, by the adoption of 'butch' and 'femme' roles, and by adherence to the value of monogamy (even when this was not upheld in practice). All of this, in the Manifesto's words, was evidence of submission "to the pressures to conform to the straight-jacket of society's rules and hang-ups

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21. Martha Shelley, "Gay is Good", in Karla Jay and Allen Young (eds.), Out of the Closets, Voices of Gay Liberation, New York, 1972, p. 32.
  22. Gay Liberation Pamphlet No. 1, Psychiatry and the Homosexual: A Brief Analysis of Oppression, London, 1973, pp. 27-28.
  23. See Wittman, op. cit., pp. 167-168. He wrote:

Police or con men who shake down the straight gays in return for not revealing them; the bookstores and movie makers who get away with outrageous prices because they are the only outlet for pornography; the heads of 'modeling' agencies, and other pimps, who exploit both the hustlers and the customers - these are the parasites who flourish in the ghetto (p. 168).



about sex".<sup>24</sup> The vehemence in this criticism of the subculture was partly because many gay liberationists saw the movement as a vehicle for personal and social change in the sense of it being a way of life. As such, the movement was an obvious alternative to the subculture and the effort put into organising dances and other public festivities was intended to establish this. And the movement's predominantly counter-cultural style was felt to be sharply opposed to the conventional 'middle-class' style of the ghetto.

"The essence of gay liberation is that it enables us to come out", Altman declared.<sup>25</sup> Activists insisted that homosexuals had to overcome their self-oppression and to construct robust, defiant self images; they saw in the movement the possibility of an open, uncompromising life in which their sexuality was a source of pride and in which they could find the support and sense of community which had always been denied them. Enormous energy was put into urging homosexuals to 'come out', to no longer feel apologetic about their sexuality and to reject the heterosexual values which they had been educated to take for granted.

Fundamental to the movement's ideology therefore was the affirmation of a homosexual identity. The insistence that homosexuality was equal in every respect to heterosexuality was distilled into such slogans as "Gay is Good" and "Gay Pride". The new identity was also a defiant one: words such as 'faggot' (in North America), 'poofter' (in Australia) and 'dyke' were adopted and, within the movement, were freed of their derogatory connotations. The more militant activists urged that homosexuals should not try to win tolerance by appearing to be normal but that they should instead personify the very fears which 'straights' had about homosexuals. They were determined to be 'blatant', to flaunt their

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24. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 7.

25. Altman, op. cit., p. 229.

sexuality in the face of those who would tolerate homosexuality only if it was kept a private matter.

This new identity went hand in hand with the promise of a kind of personal liberation. The Manifesto emphasised the need for, and the possibility of, a "NEW LIBERATED LIFE-STYLE which will anticipate, as far as possible, the free society of the future".<sup>26</sup> This life-style entailed non-role playing, non-possessive relationships, and communal living, all of which were to replace the family; and it also included collective, as opposed to hierarchical, forms of political organisation. While very few homosexuals were able, or even wished, to take advantage of this "liberated life-style", this element of the movement's ideology expressed a new conception of the advantages and freedoms open to homosexuals. Hodges and Hutter, for example, discussed the stereotype that (particularly male) homosexuals are promiscuous and objected to the response that "there are many happily settled homosexuals whose lives of quiet fidelity pass unnoticed". Instead they argued:

It is perfectly easy for a gay couple to enjoy all the mutual care in the world and also enjoy sex with others separately or together. These things are possible simply because homosexuals can identify with the sexual feelings of those they care for in a way logically impossible for non-gay people. For this reason it is easy for a gay partnership to develop into a non-sexual relationship in which the partners share loving companionship but find sexual pleasure outside the union - unlike many heterosexual marriages which turn into a boring embittered cohabitation in which sexual attraction has long vanished but fidelity is still rigidly enforced. 27

Such an image of uninhibited sexual freedom among homosexual men is undoubtedly over-optimistic. And it appears to rely upon the assumption that heterosexuals are constrained by the differentiation of gender, whereas homosexuals are not, in order to assert the logical impossibility of

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26. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 7.

27. Hodges and Hutter, op. cit., p. 8.

a heterosexual couple being able to identify with each other's feelings. Nevertheless, this argument was an important statement that the dominant model of relationships should not be taken by homosexuals to apply automatically to their own. In particular, its defence of homosexual sex outside of a couple relationship was essential to redress the guilt which many homosexual men experienced when their sexual lives contradicted the ideal of monogamy. Such a defence has been a recurrent theme in the movement's thinking and later was given a forceful expression by Guy Hocquenghem and John Rechy.<sup>28</sup> Hodges and Hutter also implied that since the sexual behaviour of many homosexuals differed from that of heterosexuals, the former posed a challenge to the dominant sexual norms; indeed, the variously conceived 'threat' of homosexuality has been a fundamental argument within the movement.

However, as activists came to realise, many homosexuals had no interest at all in emphasising their differences from heterosexuals or in seeing themselves as a threat to the sexual status quo. The Manifesto's response to this was to invoke the idea of self-oppression, reminiscent of the Marxist concept of false consciousness: "The ultimate in self-oppression is to avoid confronting straight society, and thereby provoking further hostility: Self-oppression is saying, and believing: 'I am not oppressed'."<sup>29</sup> Self-oppression formed a crucial political problem because a mass movement of homosexuals which would be able to effect significant changes was dependent upon overcoming such attitudes. Altman wrote:

Because society's attitudes are internalized, homosexuals develop a great sense of guilt about themselves; for myself, however much I try, I doubt if I shall ever totally lose that. Guilt, in turn, produces self-hatred, and those who hate themselves will find it difficult not to despise others who share their guilt. 30

The note of pessimism in Altman's personal reflection pointed to

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28. Guy Hocquenghem, Homosexual Desire, London, 1978 (1972); John Rechy, The Sexual Outlaw, New York, 1977.

29. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 4.

30. Altman, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

difficulties in eradicating self-oppression which became clearer and more widely acknowledged as the movement matured; but during the first few years the idea of 'internalisation' was not considered to be particularly problematic and various 'consciousness-raising' exercises were seen as the major tactic for overcoming homosexuals' sense of inferiority and for arriving at a political analysis.

In this the gay movement was indebted to the women's liberation movement, for North American feminists had formalised the practice of consciousness-raising in the late sixties and the idea was quickly taken up by feminists elsewhere. Juliet Mitchell, for example, wrote in Woman's Estate:

Many liberationists see consciousness-raising as one of the most important contributions of the movement to a new politics. Women's Liberation is crucially concerned with that area of politics which is experienced as personal. Women come into the movement from the unspecified frustration of their own private lives, find that what they thought was an individual dilemma is a social predicament and hence a political problem. The process of transforming the hidden, individual fears of women into a shared awareness of the meaning of them as social problems, the release of anger, anxiety, the struggle of proclaiming the painful and transforming it into the political - this process is consciousness-raising. 31

Consciousness-raising played a particularly important role in the political organisation of homosexuals, for it was a method of confronting the effects of what the British activist, David Fernbach referred to as "the unique fact of our isolation".<sup>32</sup>

The most immediate effect of the dominant heterosexual culture upon young homosexual people was that they typically grew up believing not only that

31. Juliet Mitchell, Woman's Estate, Hammonds Worth, 1971, p. 61. Mitchell noted that "the concept of 'consciousness-raising' is the reinterpretation of a Chinese revolutionary practice of 'speaking bitterness'" (p. 62).
32. David Fernbach, "The Rise and Fall of GLF", in Sydney University Communist Group (ed.), Faggots and Marxists, Sydney, 1976, p. 4; originally in Lunch (October 1973).

they were abnormal but also that they were utterly alone.<sup>33</sup> They had also, compared with other oppressed groups (the movement's literature frequently referred not only to women but also to racial minorities and workers), the unique ability of being able to 'pass', that is, of being able to conceal their inferior status. The degree of guilt engendered by these facets of homosexual experience might vary but the fact remained that the ways in which a person reached an understanding of his or her sexuality and of the possibilities of an adult homosexual life were on the whole a peculiarly private process. External points of reference were very few and concentrated solely on the individual: apart from the starkly negative ones (such as psychiatric definitions) they were likely to be confined to media reports of the bizarre and sensational and to popular literature which was firmly committed to a conception of homosexual life as inescapably tragic.<sup>34</sup> Until quite recently, it would have been very difficult to discover any source from which a positive, let alone a political, perspective on homosexuality could be derived.<sup>35</sup> It was therefore very likely that young people would experience the problems which were related to being homosexual in their society as being an inherent part of their sexuality.

In this context, consciousness-raising had a liberating potential: group discussions revealed that particular experiences were widely shared among

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33. One of the most common themes in the numerous personal accounts of coming out and of working within the gay movement was the extraordinary relief and joy simply at discovering the existence of other homosexuals with whom the person was able to identify. See for example, Konstantin Berlandt, "My Soul Vanished from Sight: A California Saga of Gay Liberation", in Jay and Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-55.

34. John Murphy devoted a chapter of his Homosexual Liberation, A Personal View, to a survey of literary treatments of homosexuality and argued that the most popular works in particular were unrelentingly negative in their depictions (New York, 1971, pp. 42-70). More recent surveys include Jenny Pausacker, "Adolescent Homosexuality: A Novel Problem", Gay Information, No. 6 (Winter 1981), pp 4-9; and, on the popular press, Tim Carrigan and Dave Sargent, "In the Steps of Lee Radziwill: Journalists Sample Gay Nightlife", Gay Information, No. 5 (Autumn 1981), pp. 14 ff.

35. One of the few such positive sources is Melbourne Gay Teachers and

homosexuals, despite their common isolation. As it became possible to make generalisations on the basis of these experiences, they no longer seemed private and inherent to homosexuality but a direct result of the social and, most importantly, political organisation of sexuality.

This was encapsulated in the slogan, "the personal is the political".

One American consciousness-raising group gave this account:

Growing up as male children, we were told that the expression of our feelings was unmanly. (Don't cry, you're a big boy now; Father Knows Best never had any problems; Perry Mason was always in control of the situation; Flash Gordon never cried.) So we hid our feelings and suffered alone, feeling that we were different from the other boys.

In our consciousness-raising group, we relate our experiences as gay males. In this way, we are able to get back in touch with the feelings we had when these experiences took place. We then compare how we felt about those experiences then with how we feel about them now. In seeing the common root of our experiences, we begin to break down our isolation from other gay males and begin to recognize our condition in society as an oppressed class. 36

The idea that homosexuals formed an 'oppressed class' was an elementary response to the complex problem of determining the political position of homosexuals in sexual terms. A more precise analysis of that position was essential in order to discover the reasons for the existence of the pervasive anti-homosexual ideology which the movement had energetically detailed. Before discussing the gay liberationist attempts to clarify this problem, it is important to consider in more detail the critique made of the most systematic expression of anti-homosexual ideology, that of psychiatric definitions of homosexuality as a mental illness. For here, activists were confronted with a set of often implicit theoretical assumptions about the nature of sexuality and the foundation of gender.

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Students Group, Young, Gay and Proud, Melbourne, (n.d., 1978).

36. A Gay Male Group, "Notes on Gay Male Consciousness-Raising", in Jay and Young, op. cit., p. 295.

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The fourth of the formal "Demands" adopted by the London GLF was "that psychiatrists stop treating homosexuality as though it were a problem or sickness, thereby giving gay people senseless guilt complexes".<sup>37</sup> Anti-psychiatry groups were prominent in the early gay movement and there were a number of public confrontations between activists and mental health professionals.<sup>38</sup> The profession was an obvious target for the movement: the greatest proportion of the huge volume of literature purporting to explain homosexuality came from authors in this field and the dominant view was that homosexuality was a pathological mental condition, that it was a symptom of inadequate sexual adjustment. In one sense, the profession was also an easy target. Gay liberationists readily pointed to the ways in which psychiatric and psychoanalytic pronouncements, while claiming to be scientific, clearly coincided with conventional sexual values. Heterosexuality was taken for granted as the natural mode of sexuality and as functional for society; and the fact of male dominance as the natural characteristic of heterosexual relations was not questioned. The literature which defined homosexuality as a pathology was distinctly vulnerable to criticism simply because the idea of pathology was typically assumed rather than argued for theoretically. And efforts to explain the aetiology of the condition had produced an extraordinary range of conflicting theories: the overall incoherence of such work was immediately obvious and the London Manifesto remarked upon "the hysterical disagreements of theory and practice" within psychiatry.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Walter, op. cit., p. 47.

38. For example, in 1970 gay liberationists invaded the National Convention of the American Psychiatric Association in San Francisco. A brief account is given by Gary Alinder, "Gay Liberation Meets the Shrinks", in Jay and Young, op. cit., pp. 141-45.

39. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 4.

By the late sixties, orthodox psychiatry was also under attack from critics such as R.D. Laing and David Cooper, and the anti-psychiatry movement which drew upon them was an important impetus to the gay liberationist critique. At the same time, psychiatry was being confronted as the sole and obvious authority on homosexuality by a growing number of liberal sociologists who rejected the medical model. Within a few years the hegemony of the traditional view was successfully challenged to the extent that, in both Australia and the United States for example, the national psychiatric associations substantially modified their definitions of homosexuality as a pathology.<sup>40</sup> The pressure exerted by the gay movement clearly played a part in this shift, and an appraisal of mental health professionals in Australia in the mid seventies went so far as to state: "Gay Liberation is most directly affected by mental health professionals and has prompted much reanalysis and development of alternatives."<sup>41</sup> However, the authors also noted that in a survey of sixty-seven clinicians, only five endorsed the therapeutic goal of helping a person gain maximum satisfaction from a homosexual orientation.<sup>42</sup>

The gay liberationist critique of psychiatry paid more attention to its practices than to its underlying theoretical assumptions. The

40. In October 1973 the Federal Council of the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists approved a clinical memorandum on homosexuality which read in part,

Current psychiatric opinion of the nature of homosexuality is largely in accord with the results of controlled studies of non-patient homosexuals. Many psychiatrists consider that homosexual feelings and behaviour are not necessarily or commonly associated with neurotic symptoms and are compatible with good adjustment and a useful and creative contribution by the individual to society.

See R.F. Barr et. al., "Homosexuality and Psychological Adjustment", The Medical Journal of Australia, Vol. 1 - 61st year, No. 6 (Feb. 1974), p. 189.

41. Robin Winkler and Una Gault, "Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology", in P. Boreham et. al. (eds.), The Professions in Australia: A Critical Appraisal, St. Lucia, 1976, p. 170.

42. Ibid., p. 177.



behaviourist school drew most attention, rather than the Freudian one, because of its emphasis upon the efficacy of various therapies designed to alter a homosexual orientation. Sydney Gay Liberation, for example, published a substantial critique of aversion therapy.<sup>43</sup> The response by the radicals in the movement was to dismiss psychiatry as beyond reform; the alternative to therapy was political involvement and an American activist quoted Trotsky's remark about the Bolshevik diplomat, Adolf Yoffe: "The revolution healed Yoffe better than psychoanalysis of all his complexes".<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, some within the liberal tendency of the movement have been far less impatient and have actively promoted the usefulness of sympathetic homosexual therapists.

The basic gay liberationist tactic was to shift the psychiatric focus in a quite fundamental way. Homosexuality was not an individual condition but rather an experience thoroughly shaped by social oppression. This relocated the question of 'mental health': pathology was not inherent in homosexuality but in the society which proscribed it. "It is society which is defective and at fault and needs our attention, not the homosexual", insisted the long time American activist, Franklin Kameny.<sup>45</sup> This argument led to a 'diagnosis' of anti-homosexuality in terms of the notion of homophobia. Conceptually, the idea has been deservedly criticised: "...

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43. Robin Winkler, A Critique of Aversion Therapy for Homosexuals, Sydney, (n.d., 1973).

44. Christopher Z. Hobson, "Surviving Psychotherapy", in Jay and Young, op. cit., p. 153.

45. Franklin E. Kameny, "Gay Liberation and Psychiatry", in McCaffrey, op. cit., p. 188. This assertion directly engaged the traditional view as expressed, for example, by the psychoanalyst, Irving Bieber, whose work formed an intransigent and influential statement of the medical orthodoxy: "... emphasis upon fears of censure and rejection as promotive of the personality disorders associated with homosexuality seems to be a quite superficial analysis of this complex disorder" (Irving Bieber, et. al., Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study, New York, 1962, p. 304).

homophobia individualizes the entire problem of homosexual hostility, making it a problem of personalities rather than societies."<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the gay liberationist tactic of throwing the 'problem' of homosexuality back at heterosexuals, and at psychiatrists in particular, was very important. It was a recognition that the obsessiveness with which sections of the medical profession have pursued male homosexuality is nothing less than extraordinary. The range of aetiological theories which have been proposed and the therapeutic techniques which have been tested are themselves a 'symptom' which needs to be explained. 'Homophobia' is not an explanation, but it is certainly an appropriate (if somewhat restrained) description of a phenomenon in twentieth century medicine.

Gay activists further maintained that it was completely untenable for psychiatrists to claim that they provided therapy to change a homosexual orientation only to those who voluntarily requested it. This justification took no account of the pervasive negative experiences which made it impossible for homosexual people to make such a choice freely.<sup>47</sup> Neither did it take account of the power of institutionalised psychiatry, and it was this which activists wished to undermine, particularly in the eyes of homosexuals. Thus, as one pamphlet put it, "we do not want a reformed medical attitude to homosexuality. We want there to be no medical attitude at all"; "a doctor has no professional status with regard to homosexuality".<sup>48</sup>

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46. Kenneth Plummer, "Homosexual categories: some research problems in the labelling perspective of homosexuality", in Kenneth Plummer (ed.), The Making of the Modern Homosexual, London, 1981, p. 63. The notion of homophobia was emphasised particularly by George Weinberg, Society and the Healthy Homosexual, New York, 1972, ch. 1.
47. Gay Liberation Pamphlet No. 1, op. cit., p. 10; Charles Silverstein, "Homosexuality and the Ethics of Behavioural Intervention", The Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 205-11, reprinted in Len Richmond and Gary Noguera (eds.), The New Gay Liberation Book, Palo Alto, 1979, pp. 131-37.
48. Gay Liberation Pamphlet No. 1, op. cit., pp. 26, 5.

As for the substance of psychiatric theory, Kameny made three basic points. The first concerned the definition of such terms as pathology and neurosis:

These terms, when defined at all, are defined as persistent nonconformity in a matter of which society makes an issue. ... Many definitions of pathology are teleological and represent fundamentalistic theology in thinly disguised form. ... Other definitions are objectionable in that, by a pseudo-biological functionalism, they seem to make of people mere appendages of their genital organs rather than the other way round. 49

Kameny's reference to psychiatry's use of functionalist arguments may be illustrated by noting Arno Karlen's work. Karlen replaced the simple biological determinist argument with a view of heterosexuality as being grounded in anatomical functions: "... body functions have profound psychological meanings to people, and anatomy and function are often socially elaborated".<sup>50</sup> There was a functional pre-disposition in human beings towards heterosexuality and, conversely, the fact that exclusive, adult male homosexuality met with universal disapproval was because it infringed upon the biologically appropriate role.<sup>51</sup>

Kameny's second point was that psychiatrists generalised about the homosexual population on the basis of studies of their patients and that they therefore failed to base their conclusions upon a representative sample.<sup>52</sup> This was the issue upon which the earliest critics of the

49. Kameny, op. cit., pp. 185-86. Again, Bieber had simply asserted that humans have a biological tendency towards heterosexuality, and he directly compared the pathology represented by homosexuality to physical pathology (op. cit., p. 305).

50. Arno Karlen, Sexuality and Homosexuality: A New View, New York, 1971, p. 501.

51. Ibid., p. 483. Karlen's work was critically discussed by Herb Spiers, "Psychiatric Neutrality: an Autopsy", The Body Politic No. 7 (Winter 1973), pp. 14 ff.

52. Kameny, op. cit., p. 186.

traditional view had concentrated.<sup>53</sup> Finally, Kameny argued that psychiatric attempts to de-emphasise biological determinism, while still maintaining that homosexuality was a less than ideal adjustment, led to clear logical contradictions. If human sexual response was learned, then the origin of heterosexuality was just as much an issue as the origin of homosexuality; yet the former was never posed as a question, let alone investigated. Similarly, if it was held that the development of heterosexuality involved the 'normal' repression of homosexual interests, then why should the repression involved in the development of homosexuality be defined as neurotic? This inconsistency is found, for example, in D.J. West's work which, from the mid fifties until the early seventies, was one of the most accessible expositions of a slightly liberalised psychiatric view of homosexuality.<sup>54</sup>

The gay liberationist critique of psychiatry left two major theoretical problems outstanding and not very clearly defined. The predominant sentiment in the movement concerning the debate over aetiology was to deem it utterly irrelevant; the main interest, understandably, lay in debunking the credibility of psychiatric practice. To a limited degree, psychiatric assertions concerning the biological foundation of heterosexuality were countered with assertions that all sexuality was socially determined. Wittman, for example, insisted that nature did not define the object of

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53. See the work of Evelyn Hooker, for example, "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual", Journal of Projective Techniques, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1957) pp. 18-31. Hooker wrote: "I would very tentatively suggest the following: ... Homosexuality as a clinical entity does not exist. Its forms are as varied as heterosexuality" (p. 31).

54. D.J. West, Homosexuality, Hammondsworth, 1968 (second ed.). He wrote that: "Exclusive preference for the opposite sex is an acquired trait, and involves the repression of a certain amount of homosexual feeling which is natural to the human being" (p. 17); on the other hand, he considered that,

... the completely homosexual man, one who is repelled rather than attracted by feminine charms, really suffers from an abnormal inhibition, the origin of which can often be traced from psychological causes early in life. In such a case, the flight from heterosexual relations is a neurotic symptom, produced

sexual desire,<sup>55</sup> and another writer argued that sexuality was not inborn in any sense, including the infantile bisexuality posited by Freud.<sup>56</sup>

Yet this position regarding the social determination of sexual object-choice was never stated with much force or coherence and, correspondingly, the psychiatric assumptions that sexual development followed a pre-determined biological path was never sufficiently highlighted. This shortcoming in gay liberation thinking has been very significant, for in attempting to explain the origins of oppression, many activists have been attracted to an argument about the repression within the family of an infantile bisexual disposition. With this, they returned to an assumption of a natural sexual endowment and consequently failed to elaborate the importance of the earlier assertion of the completely social determination of sexual development.

The second important outstanding theoretical problem involved the character of homosexual mental life. Gay liberationists challenged the psychiatric conception of inherent pathology with the idea of 'external' oppression; and they linked the effects of an anti-homosexual culture to the mental life of homosexuals by referring to the internalisation of dominant values which produced self-oppressive attitudes. However, the conclusion drawn about the psychology of homosexuals was inconsistent: they were just as well adjusted as heterosexuals, and such traits as guilt and anxiety were a direct result of the experience of social hostility.

The logic of the idea of self-oppression contradicted the first part of this conclusion, that homosexuals were indistinguishable in their mental

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in much the same way as other irrational fears and inhibitions (p. 17).

55. Wittman, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

56. Hobson, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

life from heterosexuals. For if the internalisation of oppression "wreaks major violence upon the psyche of the homosexual" as Kameny put it,<sup>57</sup> then there had to be a sense in which this psyche was distinct from that of the heterosexual. The implicit confusion over this question was related to the voluntaristic understanding within the movement of the idea of self-oppression. As one pamphlet put it: "Without our willingness to accept it, there could be no oppression except that imposed by brute force".<sup>58</sup> This conception of internalisation posited an unmediated relationship between homosexuals and society: because the oppressive values were conceived to be 'external', and false or wrong in the sense that they were objectively against their interests, the remedy was seen to be in consciousness-raising exercises and in allegiance to the broad ideals of the movement. The oppressive culture was 'forced' upon homosexuals and the process was therefore reversible.

Despite the undoubted benefit of consciousness-raising as a solution for particular individuals, the general gay liberationist argument in effect sidestepped the whole question of a homosexual psychology. It denied almost any determinacy to the idea of internalisation and emptied all meaning from a theory of sexual socialisation. In fact, rather than the idea of a socially produced, relatively determinant homosexual psychology, the assumption was made that there existed an essential homosexuality which could be rescued from beneath the accumulated layers of self-oppressive attitudes.

In a comparable context, Mitchell insisted that it was crucial for women to have "a knowledge of what our oppression has done to retard us":<sup>59</sup>

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57. Kameny, op. cit., p. 189.

58. Gay Liberation Pamphlet No. 1, op. cit., p. 27.

59. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 163.

What does our oppression within the family do to us women? It produces a tendency to small-mindedness, petty jealousy, irrational emotionality and random violence, dependency, competitive selfishness and possessiveness, passivity, a lack of vision and conservatism. These qualities are not the simple produce of male chauvinism, nor are they falsely ascribed to women by a sexist society that uses 'old woman' as a dirty term. They are the result of the woman's objective conditions within the family - itself embedded in a sexist society. 60

She argued that this knowledge had to be translated into a psychological understanding of oppression. Gay liberationists have been much slower to achieve this insight for themselves and to incorporate it into a theoretical conception of homosexual politics. Initially, the personal liberation promised by the movement incorporated the vision of a new kind of sexual being who would radically alter the sexual social structure. In particular, this new homosexual felt liberated from the psychiatric definitions which had played an increasingly significant role in shaping the public debate over, and private experience of, homosexuality since the late nineteenth century. In this sense the consciousness promoted by the movement was an historic rupture with the medical model; but the legacy of the psychiatric dominance meant that activists were very reluctant to re-address themselves to psychological questions.

This reluctance was also related to their approach to questions of gender. The standard psychiatric view of homosexual men involved the idea of inversion: pathology lay in the fact that they were less than 'naturally' masculine, that they were afraid of women, and so on. The gay liberationist response was to charge psychiatry with merely upholding oppressive gender-roles, and to point out that masculinity and femininity were social categories and hence variable.<sup>61</sup> But the movement's arguments did not dwell on these points. For in the meantime, many gay liberationist men were

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60. Ibid., p. 162.

61. Gay Liberation Pamphlet No. 1, op. cit., pp. 3, 7.

trying to arrive at a theory and practice around the politics of gender, and, in various ways, they accepted that they were non-masculine while attempting to draw new implications from this conclusion.

(iii)

The idea that many homosexual men find conventional masculine expectations problematic, and that this is integral to their oppression, has been frequently expressed on an experiential level within the gay movement. The following reflection is fairly typical:

Masculinity was defined for me by the social world I was a part of as a set of personal characteristics that must become part of my identity ... I, like all male children, was taught that my value as a person depended on my power over others. I was taught that I must compete for personal power, and that to be successful I must conceal feelings of weakness, tenderness, and dependence, and present myself to other men as self-sufficient and insensitive.

In spite of the all-pervasiveness of this lesson, I finally found myself in full rebellion against manhood. The source of this rebellion was something that appeared to me as entirely external to the reality of the world I was taught about, the fact of my Gayness. 62

Or, put less abstractly:

I was gay long before I admitted my homosexuality to myself, long before I ever had sex, long before I knew what sex was.

When I was ten, I played paper dolls with the girls and dug it; when I had to, I played baseball with the guys and didn't dig it. 63

One of the most pressing tasks for gay liberationists, and indeed a still unresolved one, has been to elaborate such personal insights in order to develop an explanation of oppression and to define more precisely the position of homosexual men within a theory of sexual politics.

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62. Michael Silverstein, "The History of a Short Unsuccessful Academic Career" (1972), in John W. Petras (ed.), Sex: Male/Gender: Masculine, Readings in Male Sexuality, Port Washington, 1975, p. 236.
63. Gary Alinder, "My Gay Soul", in Jay and Young, op. cit., p. 282.



Weeks wrote of the first years of the London movement that the "politics of GLF were very vague in the early days, yet what came to shape its contours, and differentiate it from the older homophile groups, was its recognition of the existence of sexism".<sup>64</sup> Thus the GLF newspaper, Come Together declared at the end of 1970:

We recognised that the oppression that gay people suffer is an integral part of the social structure of our society. Women and gay people are both victims of the cultural and ideological phenomenon known as sexism.

This is manifested in our culture as male supremacy and heterosexual chauvinism. 65

In this, gay liberationists were indebted to the analyses made by contemporary feminists. It was the isolation of the ideology of sexism, the use of the historical notion of patriarchy, and the problematisation of gender by various feminist texts which sharpened the gay movement's social critique (as in the London Manifesto), and particularly its attack upon the dominant forms of male sexual practices.<sup>66</sup> Most importantly, the feminist arguments suggested an explanation of oppression which went beyond the idea that it resulted from behaviour which simply contradicted the heterosexual norm. It was not a matter of the majority persecuting a minority out of fear of something alien to them or, as Szasz put it in functionalist terms, from the need for a scapegoat against which the community could define itself and thereby maintain its unity.<sup>67</sup> Instead, male homosexuals represented a challenge in a political arena in which men systematically dominated women.

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64. Weeks, op. cit., p. 196.

65. Anon., "The Gay Liberation Front Adopts Principles", Come Together, No. 2 (Dec. 1970), in Walker, op. cit., p. 49.

66. In particular Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex, The Case for Feminist Revolution, New York, 1970; Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, New York, 1970; Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, London, 1970; and Juliet Mitchell, Woman's Estate, London, 1971.

67. Thomas S. Szasz, The Manufacture of Madness, A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement, New York, 1970, ch. 13.

However, it was necessary to spell out the precise nature of this challenge. Given many activists' personal knowledge of the oppressiveness of orthodox masculinity, their consciousness of the fundamental political importance of sexism, and their recognition of the logic of an alliance with the feminist movement, they were faced with the problem of deciding where exactly they fitted into the feminist conception of a dichotomy between men as the oppressors and women as the oppressed. Millett's Sexual Politics, for example, had discussed the ideological force of contemporary patriarchal societies:

Sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ('masculine' and 'feminine'), based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue', and ineffectuality in the female. This is complemented by a second factor, sex role, which decrees a consonant and highly elaborate code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex. In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. The limited role allotted the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience. Therefore, nearly all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity (in their own way animals also give birth and care for their young) is largely reserved for the male. 68

Such a formulation was very difficult to translate into an analysis of the social position of homosexual men. Their superior status as men was maintained only if their sexuality remained hidden. Their role was most often a male one though, if they were unmarried, it included the domestic work (but only rarely the child care) typically performed by women. The item of the temperament or gender identity of homosexual men was perhaps the most ambiguous of the three as their expressions of rebellion against masculine standards illustrated.<sup>69</sup>

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68. Millett, op. cit., p. 26.

69. Somewhat later the British activist, Nigel Young, attempted to apply

Yet it was precisely in terms of status, role and temperament that a significant number of gay liberationists were determined to be as 'non-masculine' as possible. They declared their sexuality publicly, they despised conventional ambition and careers positing instead the importance of communal living, and they sought to eradicate the masculine traits in their personalities. This was part of the revolutionary practice advocated by the London Manifesto but, not suprisingly, it was attempted by only the most committed activists and even then the results were disappointing. Experiments in communal living were typically shortlived and masculine traits often proved stubbornly ingrained.<sup>70</sup>

All of this produced a considerable amount of political conflict, both between different groups of men and, more agonisingly, between men and lesbians, very many of whom left gay liberation groups over the issue of the men's sexism. These conflicts certainly politicised questions of gender. But they also produced a new kind of guilt among many homosexual men and this seems to have been a barrier to the development of new forms of political practice. Similarly, theoretical refinement of the question of the gender identity of homosexual men has been very slow.

There have been a variety of gay liberationist responses to this question ranging between the extremes that, on the one hand, homosexual men transcended the dichotomy of gender and thereby clearly threatened the patriarchal culture and that, on the other, they were indistinguishable from heterosexual men and so posed no threat at all. The explanation of

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Millett's categories to homosexual men, though not very successfully. However he did note "the confusion for us in terms of our sexuality, and the contradictions we have to go through in conforming to heterosexual norms concernings our temperaments" ("Divided We Fail", Gay Left, No. 3 (Autumn 1976), p. 3).

70. See, for example, the account by Keith Birch of a commune in London during the early seventies, "A Commune Experience", Gay Left, No. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 11-12.

this threat and, conversely, an explanation of the origins of oppression, has also involved varying emphases upon homosexuality as a form of behaviour and as a form of identification. In terms of the former, Altman noted Derrick Bailey's remark in a study in 1955 that sodomy involved degradation,

... not so much of human nature itself as of the male, since in it he simulates or encourages or compels another to simulate the coital function of the female - a 'perversion' intolerable in its implications to any society organized in accordance with the theory that woman is essentially subordinate to man. 71

Yet, as Altman was well aware, homosexual behaviour was not necessarily intolerable to the values of such a society. Millett, for example, discussed Norman Mailer's archetypally masculine vision of the sexual world in which "buggery confers an extra honour on the 'male' partner conquering a potential equal".<sup>72</sup> Millett took the challenge represented by effeminate homosexuals beyond the realm of sexual behaviour and into that of gender identity:

But as she minces along a street in the Village, the storm of outrage an insouciant queen in drag may call down is due to the fact that she is both masculine and feminine at once - or male, but feminine. She has made gender identity more than frighteningly easy to lose, she has questioned its reality at a time when it has attained the status of a moral absolute and a social imperative. She has defied it and actually suggested its negation. She has dared obloquy, and in doing so has challenged more than the taboo on homosexuality, she has uncovered what the source of this contempt implies - the fact that sex role is sex rank. 73

Though sodomy between men and effeminacy were clearly anomalous in contemporary patriarchal societies and hence explained something about homosexual oppression, the problem for gay liberationists was to extend insights of this kind to homosexuals generally. The British activist, Don Milligan, argued that homosexual relationships confronted assumptions

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71. Derrick Bailey, Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition, London, 1955, quoted by Altman, op. cit., p. 84.

72. Millett, op. cit., p. 334.

73. Ibid., p. 343.

about the biological basis of the sexual destiny of human beings, for they revealed that the adoption of masculine and feminine roles was arbitrary. Homosexual relationships might often parody those of heterosexuals in acting out active and passive roles, but such behaviour was obviously independent of the sex of the individuals.

By rejecting in practice the idea that the core of human sexuality is the sexual subordination of women to men, homosexuality poses a real threat to the sexual 'balance of forces'. ... men whose behaviour, either socially or sexually, is considered female are savagely ridiculed and oppressed because they break the 'natural' rules. They threaten the status and position of all men by indicating that masculinity is not natural at all, but is instead strictly learned and rigidly enforced. Homosexuals and transsexuals by asserting the primacy of personality and sexual identification over that of social assumptions about biology question the basis of the sexual categories - masculine and feminine. 74

The question remained, however, as to the meaning of that identification. The problem was how to conceptualise male homosexuals in terms of a masculine gender identity, particularly since only a minority were recognisably effeminate.

Wittman's position in his "Manifesto" of 1969 was optimistic and straightforward: though homosexual men did share the chauvinism of heterosexual men to some extent,

Male chauvinism, however, is not central to us. We can junk it much more easily than straight men can. For we understand oppression. We have largely opted out of a system which oppresses women daily - our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up. Also, living in a mostly male world, we have become used to playing different roles and doing our own shit-work. And finally, we have a common enemy: the big male chauvinists are also the big anti-gays. 75

Though this statement would later appear naive with its assumptions of voluntarism, of sexism as a solely conscious phenomenon, and of homosexual

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74. Don Milligan, The Politics of Homosexuality, London, 1973, p. 6.

75. Wittman, op. cit., p. 160.

men and women having considerable ground for unity in their political struggles, it is still remarkable that Wittman was confident that homosexual men were not orthodoxly masculine and, conversely, that orthodox masculinity was oppressive for them.

Two years later, the London GLF Manifesto had a sharper political perspective on sexism but it too was optimistic:

In some ways we are already more advanced than straight people. We are already outside the family and we have already, in part at least, rejected the 'masculine' or 'feminine' roles society has designed for us. ... gay men don't need to oppress women in order to fulfil their own psycho-sexual needs, and gay women don't have to relate sexually to the male oppressor, so that at this moment in time, the freest and most equal relationships are most likely to be between homosexuals. 76

Consequently, homosexuals represented a challenge to the gender dichotomy:

It can easily be seen that homosexuals don't fit into the stereotypes of masculine and feminine, and this is one of the main reasons why we become the object of suspicion, since everyone is taught that these and only these two roles are appropriate. 77

Moreover, the difference of homosexuality was underlined by the assumption that the child's indoctrination into masculinity and femininity within the family and by other social agencies sometimes failed: homosexual people were the result of the process being not always entirely successful.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the Manifesto added a qualification about the gender identity of homosexual men: "... while it's quite possible for a gay man to be a male chauvinist, his very existence does also challenge

76. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 7.

77. Ibid., op. cit., p. 5

78. The idea that the process of gender acquisition sometimes 'fails', and that homosexuality is the result of this, has had a long career in the gay movement. It is discussed in chapter two in relation to the repression hypothesis, and further in chapter three in the light of psychoanalytic theory.

male chauvinism in so far as he rejects his male supremacist role over women, and perhaps particularly if he rejects 'masculine' qualities."<sup>79</sup>

This formulation was obscure, referring both to the fact of a homosexual man's existence and to his voluntary rejection of masculine traits, but the issue was crucially important for both the theory and practice of the movement. The same qualification was emphasised, though not clarified, by Fernbach who observed that "gay males have an ambiguous relationship to the very sexist ideology that oppresses us, as this ideology also offers us a privilege if we can and will play the game by acting the role of proper men";<sup>80</sup> and similarly, Altman suggested that some homosexual men attempted to compensate for their stigma by adopting superior attitudes towards women thereby trying to prove their masculinity.<sup>81</sup> In various forms the issue of gender surfaced repeatedly in the gay movement. Two important and related instances were the debate concerning radical drag and the tendency known as effeminism.

An American activist declared: "There is more to be learned from wearing a dress for a day, than there is from wearing a suit for life."<sup>82</sup> One element in the movement, strongly committed to counter-culturist ideas of social change and to the more radical versions of feminism, advocated drag as a tactic both for personal liberation from masculinity and for subverting the accepted gender categories by demonstrating their social basis. An article in Come Together argued that,

By wearing drag, I feel that I am helping to destroy the male myth as well as the female myth. I enjoy, when wearing a dress, many of the traits that men used to be allowed to enjoy, but which are now buried under the male myth. Make-up, when used as a way of putting women down, is effective as it creates objects of them - mere beautiful

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79. Ibid., p. 15.

80. Fernbach, op. cit., p. 4.

81. Altman, op. cit., p. 210.

82. Larry Mitchell, "The Faggots and Their Friends" (unpublished), New York, 1975, quoted by Mario Mieli, Homosexuality and Liberation, Elements of a gay critique, London, 1980 (1977), p. 193.

possessions; but when used by men, it turns this on its head by re-applying it to men: it is a demonstration, in society's terms, of a man externalising his femininity. 83

The point of wearing drag was not to imitate a glamorous image of stereotypical femininity but to combine feminine images with masculine ones (such as a dress with a beard); the aim was described as gender confusion. But many lesbians and other feminists were appalled. They argued that drag expressed an identification with the most oppressive aspects of femininity, that it mocked women and was basically misogynist. The male radical feminists, as Fernbach observed shortly after the tendency had lost most of its influence, "assumed too simplistically that inside every gay male who passed successfully in society as a man, there was a screaming queen trying to get out". Moreover, as a Marxist, he objected that it was an idealist interpretation of feminism whereby "feminine and masculine qualities are abstract and universal attributes of the two sexes, and the aim of feminism is the suppression of masculine qualities by feminine ones".<sup>84</sup> Yet an adequate Marxist conception of the gender dichotomy was not forthcoming; and the advocates of drag, for all their naivety in imagining that they could "subvert male power by effeminising men, as a sort of fifth column in the male camp",<sup>85</sup> did forcefully express the highly problematic nature of gender meanings for some homosexual men. If they failed to see what was at stake for women in the tactic which they adopted, their feminist critics were similarly unable to appreciate the tensions within the men's identities which they were attempting to resolve. The underlying political point of the tactic of drag was not developed.

The most extreme expression of the gender dilemma was the tendency of effeminism which was first formally expressed in the "Manifesto"

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83. Anon. "Getting Down to the Nitty-Gritty, Come Together, No. 15 (Spring 1973), in Walter, op. cit., p. 205.

84. Fernbach, op. cit., p. 5.

85. Ibid., p. 5.



published in New York in 1973.<sup>86</sup> It spoke on behalf of all effeminate men, whether homosexual or heterosexual, and completely disassociated itself from the gay movement. Reflecting the influence of Elizabeth Gould Davis and Shulamith Firestone,<sup>87</sup> the effeminists looked forward to a revolution led by women which would end ten thousand years of domination by the Male Principle. The role of men in this revolution was completely subordinate to feminists who would organise it and, apart from assisting in whatever ways feminists might require, their primary task was to rid themselves of their sexism and to attack all misogynist and anti-feminist practices. The "Manifesto" was intransigently opposed to the gay movement over the issue of drag, the idea of multiple sexual relationships and such immediate goals as law reform. Most of all, it accused masculine homosexuals in the movement of merely paying lip-service to anti-sexist politics and with being intent on preserving their male privileges. Though the number of men who identified as effeminists was small, their ideas had a wider impact, if in a more muted form.

Within the gay movement, effeminism had the effect of reinforcing the location of homosexual oppression solely at the level of behaviour. And it sharpened a sense of guilt over apparently ineradicable masculine traits. As expressed by two Australian activists: "Whether or not we have 'come out', we participate psychologically and politically in the advantages of being male." Oppression stemmed from the fact that the sexual behaviour of homosexual men was defined by patriarchal standards as non-masculine: "Male homosexuals, along with lesbians, violate the assumed biological congruity of masculine and feminine every time we fuck."<sup>88</sup> But since few homosexual men were socially identifiable as such,

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86. Steven Dansky et. al., "The Effeminate Manifesto", Double-F: a magazine of effeminism, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 1973), pp. 1-4. It was reprinted in Australia in Boiled Sweets, Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 1974), pp. 3-5.

87. Elizabeth Gould Davis, The First Sex, New York, 1971; Firestone, op. cit.

88. Michael Hurley and Craig Johnston, "Campfires of the Resistance",

they were able to preserve their masculine privileges; and many were as oppressive of women as heterosexual men. In this argument, far from the idea of the London Manifesto that homosexuality resulted from a failure in the child's gender conditioning, the elements of sexual orientation and gender were assumed to be discrete. Oppression resulted from a patriarchal logic by which homosexual men were perceived to be feminine. In contrast with the earlier gay liberationist assumption that 'homosexuality' was a simple category in the sense that it unproblematically embraced both men and women, the effeminist position had the virtue of examining the ways in which homosexual men shared various traits with heterosexual men. However, in doing this, any idea of the specificity of a male homosexual gender identity was lost; and gay politics were firmly subordinated to the aims of feminism.

The gay liberationist conception of masculinity, both in the first phase of the movement and later, was a simple unitary one. "Butch really is bad"<sup>89</sup> insisted the London Manifesto, and the formulation of the relationship of male homosexuals to orthodox masculinity which followed produced a series of absolutist propositions. These variously took the form that homosexuals transcended the gender dichotomy, that they had to recover their repressed femininity, that only anti-sexist effeminate men (excluding the great majority of homosexuals) could validly support the aims of feminism, and that homosexual men were conventionally masculine though they should struggle against this in order to accommodate their sexual behaviour. The first three of these conceptions were reminiscent of the old notion of homosexuals as a 'third sex',<sup>90</sup> now translated from

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in The Homosexual Conference Collective (eds.), Papers and Proceedings, First National Homosexual Conference, Melbourne, 1975, p. 54.

89. Melbourne GLF, op. cit., p. 7.

90. This notion was a common preoccupation of reformers such as Magnus Hirschfeld in pre-Nazi Germany. See John Lauritsen and

biological into political terms. Of course, many activists subscribed to less extreme views, or were resigned to more practical approaches to sexism, or else stressed other priorities. Nonetheless, efforts to deal explicitly with the question of male homosexuals and their masculinity were confused and largely untheorised. The feminist arguments, while providing the movement with a critical force and general orientation, proved impossible to apply precisely to the lives of homosexual men.

To explain the basis of the personal crises which many activists described over trying to conform to masculine expectations needed a theoretical understanding of the dynamics involved in the construction of both gender identities and sexual orientations, and of the relationship between them. It was necessary to overcome the constraints entailed by the unitary conception of masculinity to which the movement's thinking was fixed. The questions which were never asked were whether there were different forms of masculinity and whether homosexual men were victims of sexism in a way different from women but nonetheless real. Gay liberationists seem to have been inhibited in exploring such questions by a resistance to psychological theorising and, especially in the first years of the movement, by the urgent need to construct a political practice around the politics of gender. This priority demanded distinctions and strategies which were clear-cut and which matched the clarity of their perception of a social structure permeated with sexual inequalities.

(iv)

The question of the source of the socially pervasive anti-homosexual ideology has been at the basis of most of the theoretical work to have been produced by the gay movement. Having detailed the existence of oppression in a variety of forms and having described the effects of this oppressive culture upon the lives of homosexuals, activists were faced

with the problem of how to explain the position of homosexuals in relation to the social structure. It was a matter of spelling out the postulated sociality of the concept of homosexuality. Though the explanation of oppression as an effect of the social organisation of gender remained unclear, the debate helped to focus the movement's attention upon the idea of sexual repression and upon the family as its primary agency.

This direction was taken up in particular by Marxists in the movement in order to develop an historical explanation of homosexual oppression. Their arguments suggested an investigation of how the family had been shaped by industrial capitalism; they were informed by the assumption that the family performed certain functions for the ruling class and that these functions explained the ways in which homosexuality was incompatible with the dominant sexual ideology. Before considering the theoretical difficulties entailed by this line of thought, it is worth noting both the various constraints upon the project of developing a Marxist account of homosexual oppression and the reasons for this interest.

The development of a 'gay Marxism' was an extremely unpromising task. The Marxist tradition had very little to offer theoretically about the family and sexual relations in general, and almost nothing about homosexuality. This was epitomised by the economicist Marxism which characterised the Stalinist communist parties and which remained largely unchallenged well into the sixties. Indeed, these and other socialist parties defended the family as an essential bastion of the working class, regarded debate about sexual inequalities as divisive for the working class struggle, and condemned homosexuality as a bourgeois perversion. The personal was emphatically not a political matter. At the same time, however, gay Marxists found some encouragement for their project in an earlier strain of socialist practice, albeit a relatively minor and uneven one. They pointed, for example, to the fact that the German Social Democratic Party

had, from 1898 until the fall of the Weimar Republic, actively endorsed the campaign of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee to repeal the sodomy statute, Paragraph 175.<sup>91</sup> In addition, a few years previously, Eduard Bernstein had defended Oscar Wilde at the time of his trial in Die Neue Zeit where he attacked the current psychiatric theories and insisted that sexual mores had to be seen in an historical perspective illuminated by anthropology.<sup>92</sup> The other important example for gay Marxists was the Russian Revolution, for the Bolshevik government had abolished the laws pertaining to homosexuality on the basis that sexual behaviour was a private matter.

Such instances, however, were grounds for showing that Marxists had not always ignored the issue of homosexuality rather than sources for an historical materialist account of oppression. Indeed, beginning with The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State in 1884, the characteristic Marxist position was that true 'sex-love', as Engels referred to ideal heterosexual relations, was a private matter and that it would be achieved once certain impediments such as the system of bourgeois inheritance had been removed. And, by the end of the thirties, with new conservative sexual laws in the Soviet Union, including the reimposition of laws against homosexual behaviour, and the rise to power of the National Socialists in Germany, the Marxist interest in sexual questions was less than ever. The major exception was the Frankfurt School. Thirty years later, gay Marxists found the various socialist parties generally unwilling to recognise either the aims of gay liberation

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91. The Committee was a major homosexual rights organisation begun in 1897 by Magnus Hirschfeld.

92. Lauritsen and Thorstad, op. cit., p. 59. On the general point of socialist support for homosexual emancipation, see also John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, "Sexual Morality in Historical Materialist Perspective", GLP: A Journal of Sexual Politics, No. 8 (Spring 1975), pp. 31-47; and James D. Steakley, The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany, New York, 1975.

or a place for the movement within working class politics. With few exceptions, these parties have either been hostile to the movement or have adopted only a civil rights version of gay politics.<sup>93</sup>

Understandably then, gay Marxists faced pronounced suspicion within the movement. Altman wrote, in relatively moderate terms, that the "traditional Marxist left has been as contemptuous, as disregarding, as oppressive, once given the chance, of homosexuals as anyone else",<sup>94</sup> and activists were especially critical of official policies within the Soviet Union, China and Cuba towards their homosexual populations. Altman himself endorsed the view that, "both Old and New Lefts have tended to make many gays feel they need to be anarchists; any regime, no matter what its ideology, will tend to persecute them".<sup>95</sup> As for the New Left, while many of its characteristic assumptions were reproduced within the movement, both gay liberationists and feminists were highly critical of the limitations of its sexual ideology: it had failed to question the subordination of women to men and it was rarely even tolerant of homosexuality.<sup>96</sup>

Yet the New Left was also an impetus to the interest within the movement in developing a Marxist explanation of oppression. A significant number

93. On the various left parties and groups in Britain, see Weeks, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-36; Nigel Young, "Communists Comment", *Gay Left*, No. 4 (Summer 1977), pp. 9-13; and Philip Derbyshire, "Sects and Sexuality: Trotskyism and the Politics of Homosexuality", in Gay Gay Left Collective (ed.), *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, London, 1980, pp. 104-15.

94. Altman, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

96. One of the foremost statements of the New Left's critique of sexuality was Reimut Reiche, *Sexuality and Class Struggle*, London, 1970. Though he maintained that both homosexuality and heterosexuality were learned cultural achievements, he speculated, without explanation, that "homosexuality would 'die out' in a free society" (p. 117). He also objected to criticism of sexual inequalities between men and women (p. 53), and endorsed the nuclear family in advanced capitalist societies as the most satisfactory institution for the socialisation of children (p. 155).

of activists had already been radicalised by their experience in such groups in the sixties and, most importantly, from an experience of left politics which had emphasised the importance of personal life. An example of the New Left's connection of political revolution with demands for personal liberation was the "Port Huron Statement" of 1962 by the Students for a Democratic Society. It asserted that they "must give form to the feelings of helplessness and indifference, so that people may see the political, social and economic sources of their private troubles and organise to change society".<sup>97</sup> More specifically, the New Left had stressed the goal of sexual freedom from a vaguely defined repressive society and had focussed upon the work of Herbert Marcuse in particular.<sup>98</sup>

The perspective which was gained, despite its limitations for gay liberationist purposes, underlined the political character of sexual life by suggesting its links with other aspects of capitalist societies: sexuality was at least a proper subject for historical analysis.

The impetus to a Marxist account of oppression also arose from a dissatisfaction with the characteristic tenor of the gay movement's politics. The Marxists were particularly critical of the individualistic assumptions inherent in the commitment to counter-cultural ideas of alternative life-styles as a lever for social change. Some, such as Fembach, went further and argued that there was no basis for the radical mass organisation of homosexuals: being outside of the family it was very difficult for them to struggle to transform it, even though it was the basis of their oppression. Gay Marxists had to make their main field of political work within the left to ensure that the socialist revolution would also be an anti-sexist one.<sup>99</sup> This strategy reflected some fundamental assumptions in his Marxist analysis.

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97. M. Teodori, The New Left, A Documentary History, New York, 1970, p. 172.

98. Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation, London, 1972 (1955); Negations, Essays in Critical Theory, London, 1968.

99. David Fembach, "Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation", Gay Marxist, No. 2 (July 1973), pp. 8-9.

Fernbach's brief article, "Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation", was the one early effort of any substance to explore an historical materialist explanation of homosexual oppression.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the fact that it has been republished on at least four occasions over seven years reflects the paucity of attempts to conceptualise homosexuality in Marxist terms in any comparable fashion.<sup>101</sup> Yet the hesitancy on the part of others to formulate an account as neat and encompassing indicates an awareness of the immense difficulties involved in the project of a gay Marxism. The main interest of Fernbach's argument, in fact, is that it very clearly illustrates many of the theoretical problems which arise in an attempt to synthesise issues of sexuality and class without considering whether historical materialism (or a particular interpretation of it) is adequate to the task.

Fernbach was concerned with the role of the state in England. He advanced an explanation of the adoption of the Labouchere Amendment in 1885, which for the first time criminalised all forms of male homosexual behaviour, and of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967, which decriminalised it for consenting adult males in private. He argued that the imposition of broader legal penalties in the late nineteenth century was actually an attempt by the state to reinforce the working class family, and was comparable to its intervention in other areas such as welfare, working conditions and education. Since the unit of production was outside of the family, children

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100. Other efforts merely asserted in the barest possible terms that the repression of homosexuality served the interests of the capitalist class by reinforcing the subservience of the working class. See, for example, Lauritsen and Thorstad, "Sexual Morality", *op. cit.*, p. 35; Bob McCubbin, The Gay Question, A Marxist Appraisal, New York, 1976, pp. 41, 43.

101. Fernbach's article was republished by Sydney University Communist Group (ed.), Faggots and Marxists, Sydney, 1976, pp. 6-10; Socialist Revolution, Vol. 6, No. 2 (April-June 1976), pp. 29-41 ; Mina Davis Caulfield (ed.), Capitalism and the Family, San Francisco, 1976; Pam Mitchell (ed.), Pink Triangles, Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation, Boston, 1980, pp. 148-59.



were a particular economic burden; they could not contribute economically to their family for many years and, for a significant period, their mothers too were prevented from earning a wage. Consequently, marriage for the working class had to be postponed until it was economically feasible and, under these circumstances, pre-marital heterosexual relations had to be restrained with a new vigour.

In this way a pressure of pent-up sexual energy is created, male in particular, which if not also hemmed in by public authority, might burst through the psychological barriers erected against homosexuality, as it often does for example in prison situations. The gay minority ... becomes a possible source of 'contamination'. In a capitalist society this is a particularly acute danger, since marriage involves a heavy economic burden, and is not at all necessary for productive activity, and for men, therefore, homosexuality is in fact economically advantageous. ...

The restraint on pre-marital heterosexuality thus requires the formal proscription of homosexuality as an ancillary. 102

Subsequently, the widespread use of artificial methods of birth control enabled the working class to marry at an ever earlier age. With the proscription of pre-marital sex thereby undermined, there was no longer any danger in homosexuality as a source of 'contamination'. The 1967 Act therefore expressed the fact that "the heterosexuality produced in the family can be given free rein ... The state can step out of the arena of sexual orientation, for sexual orientation is no longer relevant to the reproduction of labour power".<sup>103</sup> The argument depends upon a contrast between nineteenth century capitalism which required a large labour force, and a later form of capitalism which, being geared towards the greater importance of consumption, has less need for intensive labour.

Fernbach's analysis of the role of the state as a source of homosexual oppression is vulnerable to a range of criticisms on empirical grounds,<sup>104</sup>

102. Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory", op. cit., p. 5.

103. Ibid., p. 6.

104. A large portion of historical work on the family, philanthropy, welfare, education, industrialisation and work conditions indicates that the British state in the nineteenth century did not by any means consistently intervene to support the working class family. See, for example, Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution

but it also runs into some important theoretical problems and a consideration of these is more instructive for the purpose of the present discussion. They illustrate the difficulties for a Marxist explanation which attempts simply to relate an account of sexual changes to a separate account of economic changes. His argument that the state's policy towards homosexuality was determined by a varying need for labour relies upon an economic reading of historical materialism: it posits a direct relationship between the requirements of the economy and the official sexual ideology. Conceived in these terms, Marxist theory precludes a consideration of the possibility of more immediate determinants upon the state's policy, such as changes in other areas of sexual life which were occurring at the same time, and hence the conclusion that the influence of economic factors was far less direct. Fernbach's argument, then, is one of simplistic functionalism: the nineteenth century working class family as the source of labour is deemed to be functional for capitalism whereas homosexual relations are dysfunctional. This formulation necessarily attributes a form of intentionality to the state, as he put it, "state functionaries ... must pursue as rationally as possible the capitalist class interest",<sup>105</sup> and this leads to a mechanistic understanding of historical processes. Crude functionalist accounts of homosexual oppression have been common within the gay movement<sup>106</sup> and, as Michele Barrett

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1750-1850, London, 1977; and Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, Children in English Society Vol. II, From the Eighteenth Century to the Children Act 1948, London, 1973.

105. Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

106. Milligan, for example, reflecting the influence of Marcuse and, before him, of Reich, argued that:

Homosexual equality is not possible under capitalism. Gay relationships run against the grain of family life and outrage male supremacists, both agents of the sexual repression that permeates capitalist society. ...

The family is not economically necessary for capitalism but it is vital as a mechanism of social control. ...

Spontaneity and the development of full sexual and personal relationships is denied to most working people, because sexual

has observed,

... from a Marxist point of view the danger of functionalist approaches lies in their over-emphasis on the smooth, at worst conspiratorial, reproduction of dominance and subordination and their failure to recognize the concrete historical conflicts and contradictions that characterize the formation and development of social relations. In seeing, as in their Marxist guises they normally do, the exploitation of one group by another as the unfolding of an inevitable plan, functionalists tend to ignore the historical struggles that have led to their own analyses in the first place. 107

This last point is essential to keep in mind when assessing gay liberationist explanations of oppression, for there has been a strong tendency to see it as so pervasive and so deeply rooted in the social structure, that it becomes impossible to understand how a radical political movement could have emerged from such a static picture. Fernbach's broad explanation was that the "almost universal spread of birth control had broken the causal link between heterosexuality and procreation",<sup>108</sup> so that it was no longer necessary for the state to intervene in the area of sexual relations. Yet while the change from a predominantly utilitarian view of sex to one which tends to uphold it as pleasurable in its own right is clearly relevant to the development of a more tolerant attitude to homosexuality and, correspondingly, a greater assertiveness among homosexuals, Fernbach seized upon technological developments as the directly determining material basis of this change. This, once again, is mechanistic for it fails to address the important question of why women were increasingly prepared to limit the occasions for conception. In

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life is subordinated to the physical demands of capitalism ...

If homosexuality were fully accepted, many more people would have gay relationships. This would present a major threat to the family institution and the functional view of sex (op. cit., pp. 12, 14).

This kind of argument may be compared with conservative functionalist accounts of homosexuality, see below, pp. 199-205.

107. Michèle Barrett, Women's Oppression Today, Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis, London, 1980. p. 23.

108. Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory", op. cit., p. 6.

addition, it ignores the fact that this was done first by 'natural' means and only later by artificial methods.<sup>109</sup>

However, Fernbach saw the separation of sex from reproduction as only a precondition for the realisation of gay liberation. His account of oppression was predicated upon a distinction between the variable policies and practices of the state which he defined as a secondary source of oppression, and the reproduction of gender differences within the family which was the primary source. The latter was basically constant throughout the history of patriarchal societies. Here, Fernbach drew upon psychoanalytic theory, albeit in very general terms, which is notable both because it preceded Mitchell's very influential work,<sup>110</sup> and because it distinguished his from the bulk of gay liberationist arguments then and later (and especially in the English-speaking world).

He argued that Freud's theory of the castration complex, by which the boy resolved his oedipal crisis,

... really refers to the importance given by parents and educators to the presence or absence of the penis, which is presented as the unique organ of sexual gratification.

The psychological production of masculinity and femininity involves the repression of homosexual tendencies ... For the boy, homosexuality seems equivalent to castration, involving the loss of his position as a sexual subject and becoming like women the object of male sexual aggression. 111

The child's bisexual potential was therefore thwarted by a process of repression which enforced exclusive heterosexuality, though in some cases this mechanism misfired.

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109. The methods which women first advocated for birth control in Britain and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century were abstinence from sexual relations and intercourse without ejaculation. See Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right, A Social History of Birth Control in America*, Harmondsworth, 1977.

110. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Harmondsworth, 1975 (1974). Mitchell had, however, announced her interest in psychoanalysis three years earlier in *Woman's Estate* (op. cit., ch. 9).

111. Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory", op. cit., p. 4.

Thus the family has a three-fold effect on homosexuality. 1) It represses homosexuality in general; 2) it does this unevenly, so that some children have difficulty in repressing their homosexuality, and others grow up to be gay; 3) it makes the gay minority the focus of the aggression mobilized in particular by the inadequate heterosexuals to repress their own homosexuality. 112

Fernbach did not however, clarify the issue of how to locate homosexual men precisely in terms of the reproduction of gender differences within the family. If the psychological production of masculinity and femininity involves the repression of homosexuality, it might at least be asked whether the psychological production of homosexuality involves a different organisation of masculinity and femininity. In this he was constrained by the assumption of an original form of homosexuality for which he relied upon Freud's postulate of infantile bisexuality.

This argument contains the basic terms of the repression hypothesis which, in different forms, has enjoyed a broad currency in the gay movement. The assumptions entailed by this hypothesis will be considered in detail shortly, but it should be noted that they include those of the child having a natural bisexual endowment, and of the sexual instinct as a force which capitalism endeavours to restrain. Both of these are biological assumptions and are incompatible with the Marxist criticism in other contexts of the idea of 'natural man'. It becomes clear, then, that while Fernbach's argument is saved from being wholly reductionist by his distinction between two sources of oppression, his formulation faces the opposite problem of dualism: the 'private' realm of gender differentiation is conceptually distinct from the 'public' realm of state regulation. To hold that under certain circumstances the state acts to guarantee the maintenance of the psychological barriers against homosexuality is not to make a connection between the two but to raise the question of the determinacy of the typical gender differentiation produced by the family. Fernbach is in the difficult position of wanting to argue that the

production of masculinity and femininity is co-existent with patriarchy and that they are therefore structures of considerable durability, but that at the same time their stability may be threatened by the strength of the sexual instinct.

The dualistic form of this argument means that only the realm of state intervention is susceptible to a Marxist analysis: the reproduction of masculinity and femininity is outside of history. As recent critics of feminist theory such as Barrett demonstrate, this problem is endemic in Marxist analyses of sexuality, and Fernbach could hardly be expected to have solved it in his pioneering attempt. The source of his problem, however, is his implicit confidence that historical materialism can incorporate sexual issues without any theoretical attention being given to itself. As a first step towards overcoming both dualistic and reductionist formulations it is obviously essential that historical materialism achieve a subtlety which is denied in its economistic form. Only then, for example, will the task of constructing a Marxist psychology be a possibility (a question that cannot even emerge in Fernbach's approach). It was precisely an awareness of this general problem of economism which underlay the regeneration in a major strain of western Marxist thought from the late sixties, centred upon the work of Althusser and with a new interest in that of Gramsci. Within a few years these developments had an impact upon gay liberationist thinking and was evident most clearly in the journal, Gay Left.

Yet whether the project of a gay Marxism can ultimately be successful remains quite unclear. It was also pursued by the proponents of the repression hypothesis. Here, however, it is their Freudianism which is of greater interest than their Marxism.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REPRESSSION HYPOTHESIS:

ALTMAN, HOCQUENGHEM AND MIELI

Apart from the attempts to adapt the feminist account of gender relations and to construct a Marxist analysis, the third major effort within the gay movement to explain the origins of oppression employed a psychological perspective. This may be termed the repression hypothesis. It was stated in the first phase of the movement, principally by Altman, and further arguments about sexual repression and its role in the social construction of homosexuality were advanced by the European activists Guy Hocquenghem and Mario Mieli, whose works were not translated into English until some years later.<sup>1</sup> While all three drew upon Freud and shared a number of theoretical assumptions in their analysis of sexuality, in other respects they were quite distinct and reflected the different intellectual backgrounds from which they approached psychoanalytic theory. As attempts to explain the origins of oppression they may be usefully bracketed together, though they were, of course, concerned with some of the issues already noted in the movement's debates about gender, and in its use of historical materialism. In fact, Hocquenghem and Mieli endeavoured to synthesise elements of Marx and Freud, and Altman's use of Marcuse, although far less ambitious, at least touched on similar ground.

Prior to its theoretical elaboration, basic aspects of the repression hypothesis were something of an immediate response for gay activists. The general perspective was directly linked to their social critique and to the enormous optimism with which they viewed prospects for social change. As Altman observed, the movement was directed both inwards to its own constituency, the mass of still hidden homosexuals, and outwards to society at large.<sup>2</sup> This social thrust was often expressed in

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1. Guy Hocquenghem, Homosexual Desire, London, 1978 (1972); Mario Mieli, Homosexuality and Liberation, Elements of a Gay Critique, London, 1980 (1977).
  2. Altman, op. cit., p. 119.



millenarian terms, as in this description of the ten thousand strong march held in New York in 1970 to commemorate the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

We came battle-scarred and angry to topple your sexist, racist, hateful society. We came to challenge the incredible hypocrisy of your serial monogamy, your oppressive sexual role-playing, your nuclear family, your Protestant ethic, apple pie and Mother. We came to New York holding hands and kissing openly and proudly, waving 15-foot banners and chanting "HO-HO-HOMOSEXUAL". In one fell swoop, we came to destroy by our mere presence your labels and stereotypes with which you've oppressed us for centuries.

And we came with love in our hearts to challenge your hate and secrecy ... 3

In a word, society was repressive and gay activists were determined to demolish its sexual categories. The prospect of a freed sexuality seemed to have vast ramifications.

Wittman wrote that sex had been a symbol of freedom for homosexual men.

Sex is precisely that which we are not supposed to have with each other. And to learn how to be open and good with each other sexually is part of our liberation. And one major distinction is obvious: objectification of sex for us is something we choose to do among us, while for women it is imposed by their oppressors. 4

Beyond this, activists stressed the necessity of an extension of sexuality within society generally. They argued that heterosexual people had to recover their lost capacity for homosexual relationships and, drawing on Marcuse, that this was not to be a narrow genital sexuality, but a wide ranging eroticism freed from the male values of performance and the exclusive goal of orgasm. Wittman formulated four imperatives for gay liberation one of which was: "Free the homosexual in everyone: we'll be getting a lot of shit from threatened latents: be gentle and keep talking and acting free."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Altman insisted: "It is precisely in its attack on the dominant cultural assumptions about woman/man,

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3. Donn Teal, The Gay Militants, New York, 1971, p. 335.

4. Wittman, op. cit., p. 166.

5. Ibid., p. 171.

homo/hetero that gay liberation is revolutionary",<sup>6</sup> and he argued that gay liberation would be a reality when the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality had disappeared.

Between the movement's two priorities, those of challenging rigid sexual categories and of affirming a defiant new identity, ran a covert tension. While the first confronted the popularly accepted dichotomy of homosexuality and heterosexuality, the second readily led to an essentialist conception of homosexuality which implicitly reinforced that dichotomy. This dilemma was later highlighted by gay theorists influenced by Foucault's thesis about the containing power of sexual classifications, but it was also apparent to earlier activists. An article in Come Together in 1971 flatly pronounced that it was self-oppressive to "insist that gay types or a gay nature exists".<sup>7</sup> And Altman argued that,

... Gay is not only Proud, Gay is Angry, and out of anger develops separatism, which bears with it the danger of merely reinforcing both apartness from the rest of humanity and the doctrine that homo- and heterosexuality are sharply defined categories rather than possibilities present in us all. 8

The essentialist conception, that homosexuals comprised an already constituted category of people who had been hidden from history and who would now establish themselves as a fully fledged minority group, became more marked as the movement developed. For the goal of affirmation was relatively successful, first within the ranks of movement activists and then much more widely. In fact, by the mid seventies, gay affirmation was marketable: even the blurb accompanying pornographic photographs occasionally claimed that the model was proud to be gay, though there were undoubtedly very many homosexuals who remained oblivious to both the sentiment and

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6. Altman, op. cit., pp. 188-89.

7. Anon., "Self-Oppression", Come Together, No. 10 (Nov. 1971), quoted by Simon Watney, "The Ideology of GLF", in Gay Left Collective (ed.), Homosexuality: Power and Politics, London, 1980, p. 65.

8. Altman, op. cit., p. 145.

the market. In contrast, the other priority of challenging the exclusive definition of homosexuality proved far more difficult. An Australian activist later reflected:

We tried to get heterosexuals to 'confront their own sexuality' in the mid 1970s, some of them even slept with us to show they were on our side. ... We didn't get that far, then: we had to cope with their emotional traumas as well as their sexual unease. They now consider that sort of confrontation boring  
... 9

Despite the obstacles in practice, the movement's interest in breaking down rigid sexual categories, and in locating the source of oppression in a cultural tradition which denied human sexual potential, was theorised in the repression hypothesis.

(i)

For the theorists who elaborated this hypothesis, sexual repression was in many ways self-evident. Having accepted this, they were concerned with three problems. The first was to explain the reasons for sexual repression and this led to the question of what interests it served in society. Second, as the hypothesis entailed the problem of what it was precisely that was repressed, these theorists were also concerned to define the original character of human sexuality. And third, this led them to consider how the original sexual condition was differentiated into exclusive sexual orientations, a dichotomy in which homosexual oppression was embedded. The idea of sexual repression presupposes a contrast between the modern experience of sex and that of the past. It is the contemporary liberal confidence that sex is now, if not liberated, then at least in the process of shedding its repressive heritage, which highlights an apparently long history of erotic denial.<sup>10</sup> This contrast seemed obvious to many gay liberationists.

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9. Craig Johnston, "Separate but Superior" (review of Mieli, Homosexuality and Liberation), Gay Information, No. 5 (Autumn 1981), p. 20.

10. In different ways, this assumption informs many historical surveys of sexuality, such as G. Rattray Taylor, Sex in History, New York, 1954; Wayland Young, Eros Denied, London, 1965; and Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians, A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in

Altman discussed three closely related patterns of sexual repression deeply embedded in the "Judaeo-Christian religious tradition". First, he argued that sex was intimately related to the idea of sin, that it was regarded as something dirty and to be pursued secretly: "... the strong repression of sexuality that our society has traditionally demanded gives rise to strong feelings of guilt about enjoying sexual pleasure."<sup>11</sup> This reaction had been modified but the emphasis upon romantic love as the proper precondition for sexual relations could be seen as evidence of the continuing presence of guilt. Second, sex was firmly situated in the context of the nuclear family: marriage was a sacred partnership with the utilitarian aim of producing and raising children and sex was subordinated to this purpose.

The linkage of sexuality exclusively with procreation made homosexuality (plus a considerable number of heterosexual acts) unnatural and hence sinful. The concept of 'natural' sex has affected even those who are not practicing Christians, and this provides the argument most often advanced against homosexuality. <sup>12</sup>

Conversely, the logical extension of the divorce of sex from procreation was the demand to recognise the validity of homosexual relationships.<sup>13</sup>

The third aspect of sexual repression which Altman described, and the one upon which he concentrated, was the definition of sex as genital and heterosexual. The significance of this was its distance from Freud's characterisation of the infantile disposition as polymorphously perverse in which the components of the sexual instinct<sup>14</sup> were uncoordinated so that the child had multiple bodily sources of pleasure and it did not differentiate between the sex of human beings in the selection of an object. The contrast between the "essential bisexual

Mid-Nineteenth Century England, London, 1966.

11. Altman, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 233. Barrett has argued that for women, the link between sex and procreation remains a complex one (*op. cit.*, pp. 70-72); and for a suggestive comment by Hocquenghem, see below, p. 79.

nature" of human sexuality and genital heterosexuality seemed stark, and Altman noted Sandor Ferenczi's comment that "the sense of cleanliness, which has been so specially reinforced in the past few centuries, that is, the repression of anal eroticism, has provided the strongest motive" for the repression of the homosexual component of the sexual instinct.<sup>15</sup> In considering explanations for this form of sexual repression, the one most often ignored by Reich and other critics, Altman was interested in attempts to relate it to a theory of economic development. Though it preceded the rise of capitalism and was evident in societies which were not capitalist,

... it is undoubtedly true that sexual repression was to prove highly functional for the rise of capitalism and industrialization which, at least in its early stages, demanded very considerable repression in the interests of economic development. 16

Altman used Marcuse's formulation of this thesis to suggest the threat posed by homosexuality. It expressed a rebellion against the restraints imposed upon sexuality in terms of both object-choice and the narrow focus of genital sex:

In a repressive order, which enforces the equation between normal, socially useful, and good, the manifestations of pleasure for its own sake must appear as fleurs du mal. Against a society which employs sexuality as means for a useful end, the perversions uphold sexuality as an end in itself; they thus place themselves outside the domination of the performance principle and challenge its very foundation. They establish libidinal relationships which society must ostracize because they threaten to reverse the process of civilization which turned the organism into an instrument of work. 17

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14. The psychoanalytic concept of the sexual instinct should not be understood in the sense of a biologically based, hereditary behaviour pattern, though it is argued in this chapter that the adherents of the repression hypothesis do understand it in these terms. For a note on Freud's usage, see below, p. 102, n.11.
15. Altman, op. cit., p. 75.
16. Ibid., p. 79.
17. Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation, op. cit., p. 50; Altman quoted the second sentence of this passage, op. cit., p. 80.

Altman remarked upon the romanticism of Marcuse's views and he made the substantial qualification that exclusive homosexuality represented as great a repression as exclusive heterosexuality.<sup>18</sup> The important difference between the two however, was that the homosexual minority had rejected the dominant pattern of socialisation or, as he later expressed it, "it is the failure to fully repress homosexuality that makes it so significant".<sup>19</sup>

Altman saw a marked connection between the repression of bisexuality which ensured the predominance of exclusive heterosexuality, and the development of the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. Though this was not a necessary connection,

Unlike [Ancient] Greek society ... ours is one that defines masculinity and femininity very much in heterosexual terms, so that the social stereotype - and often indeed the self-image - of the homosexual is someone who rejects his or her masculinity or femininity. 20

He argued that homosexual oppression was therefore a result of the repression of bisexuality and of the gender dichotomy, both of which were effected by socialisation within the family. Yet the connections here were not simple and he objected in particular to the prevalent idea that homosexuality was a result of gender inversion, as illustrated by Stoller's remark that "masculine homosexual men are an exception I cannot discuss since I do not yet understand them".<sup>21</sup> On the contrary,

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18. This was one of the points of disagreement between Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, who wrote that the adult sexual perversions, "like normal adult sexuality, are well-organised tyrannies: they too represent an exaggerated concentration on one of the many erotic potentialities present in the human body" (*Life Against Death*, New York, 1959, p. 27, quoted by Paul A. Robinson, *The Sexual Radicals*, London, 1972, p. 171).
19. Dennis Altman, "The State and the New Homosexual" (1976-78), in Altman, *Coming Out in the Seventies*, Sydney, 1979, p. 108.
20. Altman, *Homosexual*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 18, from Robert Stoller, *Sex and Gender*, New York, 1968.

the majority of homosexual men and women were respectively masculine and feminine by conventional standards and he referred to the "confusion between sex roles and sexuality" represented by "effeminate queens and butch dykes".<sup>22</sup>

For Altman, the connection between oppression and gender was rather that "a good part of the hostility toward homosexuality derives from repressed homosexual urges" in the male heterosexual population particularly, though he was distinctly more cautious about claiming this as a complete explanation than were Hocquenghem and Mieli.<sup>23</sup> In other words, that the repression of bisexuality was not completely successful was explained by the psychoanalytic tenet that repressed desires reappear in a disguised form, and he argued that a constitutive element of aggressive masculinity was repressed homosexuality. Conversely, he suggested that violence seemed to be remarkably absent among self-accepting homosexual men. This argument had an even broader social application in terms of Freud's belief that the sublimation<sup>24</sup> of homosexual desire formed the basis of group solidarity within all-male institutions such as the church and the army. Thus Altman tentatively proposed that,

... the full de-repression of homosexuality would seem to have very considerable consequences for social order.

For if libidinal energy is to be used for the maintenance of the group and its aims, it must not be dissipated in sexual interaction between members of the group; then in all male groups this is most easily obtained by tabooing homosexuality and regarding women as sexual objects either to be used or honoured. ... 25

Freed from guilt, the discovery of sexual feelings by men for each other could make it easier to break down hostility and aggression between each other - and, by extension, make it easier for them to relate as equals with women against whom aggression is also often directed ...

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22. Altman, "The State and the New Homosexual", op. cit., p. 111.
23. Altman, Homosexual, op. cit., p. 69; beyond this, his explanation of hostility towards homosexuality drew briefly upon functionalist theories of social deviance. See the discussion in chapter four below, pp. 191-205, 213 and n.68.
24. In psychoanalytic theory, the concept of 'sublimation' is distinct from 'repression'; see the discussion of this point below, p. 91.
25. Altman, "The State and the New Homosexual", op. cit., p. 121.

Thus one returns to the utopianism of Marcuse's Eros and Civilisation, in particular to his hope that wo/man might move towards a rediscovery of infantile polymorphous perversity which becomes lost in 'mature' sexual regulation. 26

At this point a number of specific observations will be made about this kind of argument, rather than about the repression hypothesis as a whole. Altman's view of sexual repression assumed that the instinct acted as a force in its own right: libidinal energy, if released, would sexualise the human body and radically transform social relations including, it is important to note, gender relations. This 'left wing' Freudianism is the reverse of the conservative view which also endows the sexual instinct with considerable power but believes that social harmony depends upon its restraint.<sup>27</sup> Both arguments interpret Freud's conception of the instinct mechanistically. This poses a particular difficulty for historical analyses of sexuality since the instinct itself is an eternal, ahistorical factor. Explanations of change are then necessarily functionalist ones in terms of society 'managing' the instinct, and the history of sexuality becomes an account of the pendulous movement of repression.<sup>28</sup>

This is a highly abstract formulation with which it is impossible to analyse the changing social position of homosexuals. For Marcuse in 1955, they challenged the utilitarian idea of sex. Yet twenty-five years later, there exists a greater tolerance towards homosexuality and a substantial sub-culture in the larger western cities part of which is highly commercialised. These changes have not appreciably liberated sexuality from either its genital focus or from the primacy of heterosexual relations. Thus, in his later article, Altman disagreed with Marcuse's conception of homosexuals as representing the "Great Refusal" in the face of the performance principle.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Ibid., p. 123.

27. See the discussion of the sociologist, Kingsley Davis in chapter four below, pp. 193-95; 200-01.

28. See for example, G. R. Taylor, op. cit.

29. Altman, "The State and the New Homosexual", op. cit., p. 119. He also argued that with de-repression, "homosexuality would have to



Instead, their increasing integration into society bolstered the dominant values. The theoretical reasons for this pessimism lie in the peculiar rigidity of Marcuse's framework: he romantically counterposed a millenarian view of the transformative power of a freed polymorphous sexuality against the ingenious ability of capitalism to profitably exploit an illusory sexual freedom. This he termed repressive desublimation. Up to a point, his arguments seemed to match the hopes of the early gay movement; but they offered little to the theoretical tasks facing the movement once the initial period of revolutionary certainty had passed.

Altman found it surprising that the movement's literature had paid so little attention to Marcuse's work (nor did this change in the following decade),<sup>30</sup> and it is important to understand the most obvious reasons for this. While it was true, as one critic has observed, that Marcuse "did not defend homosexuality in the sentimental and patronizing manner of liberal ideology" (which may be said of Szasz, for example), and that he "emphasized the critical function of sexual perversion",<sup>31</sup> his analysis was not readily adaptable to the preoccupations of the movement. It said very little of the importance of the family and instead argued that its role had been usurped by the mass media and the growth of bureaucracies; nor did he acknowledge the political nature of the gender dichotomy. In step with this was his de-emphasis of the Oedipus Complex, a concept central to the classical psycho-analytic conception of the child's development from polymorphous perversity to genital sexuality and masculinity and femininity.

These shortcomings were highlighted when Marcuse published an article in 1974 in which he stressed the revolutionary potential of the feminist movement: "... liberation implies ... a society where the established

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moved beyond its current emphasis on genitality, often of an extremely aggressive sort" (*ibid.*, p. 123). See a useful discussion of Altman's political perspective by Rosemary Pringle, "Sexuality and Social Change", *Island Magazine*, No. 7 (June 1981), pp. 33-35.

30. One exception is Ronald L. Peck, "Eros and Civilisation, An Introduction to Marcuse's Essay on Freud", *Gay Left*, No. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 13-15.

31. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

dichotomy between masculine and feminine is overcome in the social and individual relationships between human beings."<sup>32</sup> Yet Marcuse's understanding of feminism was, to say the least, elementary. His concern was not so much with why the dichotomy was maintained, or even how it was, as to argue that capitalism had created the material conditions for its negation and the subsequent synthesis of androgyny. He maintained that this would involve the universalisation of the "life protecting characteristics" which at present "appear as specifically feminine".<sup>33</sup> One of the material conditions which he saw as allowing for this was "the disintegration of the patriarchal family through 'socialization' of the children from outside (mass media, peer groups, etc.)".<sup>34</sup> He anticipated that women would turn "the weakness that was attached to them into strength",<sup>35</sup> but along with the 'feminine' qualities which he listed - receptivity, sensitivity, non-violence and tenderness - should also be included the less attractive ones of passivity, emotionalism and deference. These are the real vehicle of women's oppression and it is impossible to understand their reproduction if the family is excluded from analysis.

It is remarkable that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has never properly recognised the importance of gender in its writings on sexuality.<sup>36</sup> Its focus upon the assumed force of the sexual instinct has meant that questions of gender are at best seen as subsidiary effects of repression, and this weakness is duplicated by the gay liberationist proponents of the repression hypothesis.

(ii)

The translation of Hocquenghem's Homosexual Desire and Mieli's Homosexuality and Liberation, in 1978 and 1980 respectively, mark the first significant flow of characteristically European theoretical perspectives into the English-speaking gay movement. These essays drew upon various debates over Freudian and Marxian categories, and their

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32. Herbert Marcuse, "Feminist Socialism", The Powder Magazine, No. 2 (June 1974), p. 34.

33. Ibid., p. 35.

34. Ibid., p. 36.

35. Ibid., p. 35.

possible synthesis, which have not been reproduced in the English-speaking movement's literature. Before discussing them, it is important to note why this has been the case.

On one level, this difference reflects the contrast between the cultural position of psychoanalysis on the continent and in English-speaking societies; as has frequently been observed, there is a particularly clear contrast between France and the United States. In the latter, the longstanding institutionalisation of psychoanalysis has been marked by a heavy clinical emphasis and a conservatism in theory and practice. In France, however, psychoanalysis was not incorporated into mainstream medical practice and it remained weakly established until Lacan's work began to have an impact after the second world war. Since then, his project of 'recovering' a Freud purged of his biological assumptions has had a dramatic effect upon psychoanalytic thinking in France and, especially in the last ten years, much more widely.<sup>37</sup> In the meantime, a new Marxist interest in psychoanalytic theory was stimulated by the work of Althusser and specifically by his appropriation of Lacan's theory of the constitution of the subject in order to reformulate the concept of ideology. This second 'recovery', of a non-economistic Marx, coincided with and provided a central impetus to the endeavour to construct a Marxist theory of the oppression of women by feminists from the early seventies. These two theoretical developments, of French readings of German language texts as one commentator has remarked,<sup>38</sup> were

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36. See for example, Reiche, *op. cit.* (quoted above, p. 47, n.96), and Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family*, New York, 1978. The point is well made about Poster by Ellen Ross in her review, "Rethinking 'the Family'", *Radical History Review*, No. 20 (Spring/Summer 1979), pp. 76-84.

37. A useful overview of the cultural context in which psychoanalysis has developed in France, and of the impact of Lacan's work, is Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, Freud's French Revolution, New York, 1978.

crucial to Mitchell's undertaking in Psychoanalysis and Feminism, published in 1974. Her attempt to establish the centrality of psychoanalytic theory to the feminist critique of gender was enormously influential in the women's liberation movement and it provided feminists with the first substantial demonstration of the theoretical potential of Freudo-Marxism.

Her study also had a distinct, though lesser, impact upon the gay movement. Yet the relevance of her argument to the question of the psychology of homosexual men was by no means clear and English-speaking activists have not produced a comparable examination of psychoanalytic theory. Only the journal, Gay Left has shown a continuing, though general, interest in exploring the significance of the feminist debate over Freudo-Marxism for a social theory of homosexuality. In this regard, it is interesting to note the career of an Australian journal which was first published in Sydney as Gay Liberation Press in 1974. Its five issues in that year covered fairly typical concerns of the early gay movement, though with an increasing emphasis upon the lack of forthcoming theoretical analysis of homosexual oppression and a distinct pessimism about the direction of the movement which was becoming more diverse and which had lost much of its earlier radical vigour. For these reasons, it attempted to broaden its scope in the following year under the title, GLP: A Journal of Sexual Politics. In effect, this meant the inclusion of articles on cultural issues not specifically related to homosexuality but this exacerbated the problem of the journal's focus. In 1976, it appeared as Working Papers in Sex, Science and Culture and the first two issues were exclusively concerned with Mitchell's thesis and the Freudo-Marxist project, but not with its possible application to homosexuality. One reason for this was that the project stood at the intersection of many theoretical strains and work in related areas was proliferating,

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38. Jeffrey Mehlman, "Translator's Introduction" to Jean Laplanche, Life and Death in Psychoanalysis, Baltimore, 1976, p. vii.

particularly in France. Thus the third and final issue of Working Papers included articles on Foucault, Barthes and Derrida. Though the journal's stated interest was the analysis of patriarchy with particular reference to sex, power and subjectivity, its concern in practice was the more pluralist one of developments within various schools of contemporary French theory.

It is ironic that what was originally a gay liberation journal should have evolved into more or less the Australian equivalent to the British journal, Ideology & Consciousness. In the process, its initial interest in the specific analysis of homosexuality was lost, a fact which seemed to be underlined by the quite uncritical review of Hocquenghem's book which was published in a collection of articles which followed the demise of Working Papers.<sup>39</sup> The English-speaking movement, then, had to wait until the translation of the two European works for an example of a sustained attempt to utilise Freudian categories. But by that time, activists were in a peculiar position from which to respond to them. On the one hand, both books were obviously dated, most clearly in their voluntarism, and Hocquenghem's in particular did not excite as much interest as it would had it been translated earlier. On the other, activists have found it difficult to come to terms with their Freudianism, since a gay liberationist debate about psychoanalytic theory has never materialised. Generally speaking, the reviews in the gay press have reflected this unpreparedness.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore essential to assess

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39. Trevor Johnston, "Book Review: Guy Hocquenghem, Le désir homosexuel", in Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (eds.), Language, Sexuality and Subversion, Sydney, 1978, pp. 193-96.

40. For example, the following reviews of Hocquenghem's Homosexual Desire, though critical to varying degrees, did not address the specific theoretical assumptions of the repression hypothesis: Barry Adam, "Freedom from psychiatry", The Body Politic, No. 51 (March/April 1979), p. 36; Tim Carrigan in Gay Changes, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn 1979), pp. 30 ff; Philip Derbyshire, "Odds and Sods", Gay Left, No. 7 (Winter 1978/79), pp. 18-19; and John de Witt, "The Charming Passivity of Guy Hocquenghem", Gay Left, No. 9 (1979), pp. 16-19.

The same may be said of the reviews of Mieli's Homosexuality and

these authors' use of psychoanalytic theory and to ask whether their weaknesses might not point towards a more profitable approach to that theory.

## (iii)

Hocquenghem's hundred page essay is an energetic polemic written in an aphoristic and theatrical style. It shares this with the source upon which it relies most heavily, Anti-Oedipus by Deleuze and Guattari which was published in the same year.<sup>41</sup> They rejected psychoanalysis on the grounds that it situated its theory of human sexual development within the context of the family and therefore ignored the ways in which consciousness was determined by particular historical situations. The upheaval in France in May 1968 in particular demonstrated for them, and Hocquenghem, the necessity of a radically different conception of desire. The spontaneity of that eruption appeared to express the fact that desire was "an element in the social field, an active participant in social life, not just an element in the individual's psyche".<sup>42</sup> But the events of 1968 produced only a short-lived radical homosexual grouping and it was not until 1971, the year before Hocquenghem published his book, that the Front Homosexuel d'Action Revolutionnaire was formed, explicitly modelled on the gay liberation fronts in the United States. Thus Hocquenghem addressed himself with enormous optimism to a very new gay movement and he was essentially concerned to establish the significance of homosexuality within a framework which broke from both classical and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

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Liberation, for example, Dennis Altman, "Beyond the Obvious", The Body Politic, No. 67 (October 1980), pp. 34-35; and Craig Johnston, "Separate but Superior", Gay Information, No. 5 (Autumn 1981), pp. 20-21. A brief pertinent comment on the repression hypothesis was made by Jeffrey Weeks, "Eros Denied, or the Revolution Betrayed", Gay Left, No. 10 (June 1980), p. 32.

41. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus (Vol. 1 of Capitalism and Schizophrenia), New York, 1977 (1972). Jeffrey Weeks provides a very useful orientation towards this impenetrable text in his "Preface" to Homosexual Desire.

42. Ibid., pp. 17-18. Some interesting comments upon the political

Hocquenghem sought to analyse the phantasies and rationalisations of the heterosexual world on the subject of male homosexuality. He argued that advanced capitalist societies were characterised by a pervasive anti-homosexual paranoia and that this reaction could only be understood in terms of the mechanisms of the oedipal family which repressed homosexual desire in childhood. In this connection he recognised a very important point, namely the historical specificity of 'the homosexual': "The establishment of homosexuality as a separate category goes hand in hand with its repression",<sup>43</sup> and he argued that capitalist societies manufactured homosexuals just as they produced proletarians. The term 'homosexual' had only been coined in 1869<sup>44</sup> and the significance of the new category lay in the fact that,

... up to the end of the eighteenth century, people who denied the existence of God, could not speak or practised sodomy, were locked up together in the same prisons. The advent of psychiatry and mental hospitals manifests society's ability to invent specific means for classifying the unclassifiable ... 45

Hocquenghem drew this very briefly stated idea from Foucault's Madness and Civilization and it was explicitly emphasised in the latter's The History of Sexuality.<sup>46</sup> Its recognition in the English-speaking gay movement was a watershed in the effort to advance a social theory of homosexuality and an indispensable insight if an essentialist conception of homosexuality was to be avoided.<sup>47</sup>

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character of French intellectual developments after 1968 are made by Peter Dews, "The 'New Philosophers' and the End of Leftism", Radical Philosophy, No. 24 (Spring 1980), pp. 2-11.

43. Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 41.
44. The term was coined by the Hungarian doctor, Károly Mária Benkert (1824-1882); see Steakley, op. cit., pp. 10-12.
45. Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 37.
46. Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, London, 1970 (1961); The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction, London, 1978 (1976).
47. See Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit.; he also referred to Foucault, but drew his argument more explicitly from Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role", Social Problems, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 1968), pp. 182-92.

From this starting point, three central interests may be discerned in Hocquenghem's work. First, there are the reasons for the new categorisation of homosexuality, though he did not develop these in any detail. Second, there is the question of the character of desire, and for this he extended Freud's definition of infantile polymorphous perversity. And finally, in relation to the problem of the production of homosexuality, he insisted upon a distinction between homosexual desire and oedipalised homosexuality. Regarding the latter, however, and this is the crux of his argument, he claimed that homosexuality "expresses something - some aspect of desire - which appears nowhere else, and that something is not merely the accomplishment of the sexual act with a person of the same sex".<sup>48</sup>

He argued that the nineteenth century urge to categorise 'homosexuality' was connected, though not mechanically, to the fact that capitalist societies were tending increasingly towards 'decoding', towards a loss of social control and shared meanings. He referred to the growing 'imperialism' of these societies which sought to attribute a social status to everything, and he maintained that at a time "when capitalist individualisation is undermining the family by depriving it of its essential social functions, the Oedipus complex represents the internalisation of the family institution".<sup>49</sup> Since the place of the family was "now less in the institutions and more in the mind",<sup>50</sup> capitalist societies had the means to continue to reproduce themselves and their characteristic oedipal relations with the otherwise threatening homosexual desire transformed into a guilty, neurotic, individualised secret. At the same time, these societies were increasingly sexualised but such

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48. Hocquenghem, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 79.



permissiveness merely translated desire into a marketable transgression. The latter notion is clearly reminiscent of Marcuse and indeed the rigidity of the concept of repressive desublimation also characterises Hocquenghem's framework. Not only does it deny that any genuine liberalisation of sexual life has occurred, it is difficult to see what change the framework could recognise as in any way significant short of the eruption of unfettered desire.<sup>51</sup> The problem here is that Hocquenghem's attempt to relate the ideological structure of sexual repression to economic and political developments in capitalist societies is so sketchy that the two are theoretically collapsed together. Thus of the role of the phallus in the Oedipus complex, he wrote:

It is the detached, complete object which plays the same role in our society's sexuality as money does in the capitalist economy: the fetish, the true universal reference-point for all activity. ...

The phallus draws on libidinal energy in the same way that money draws on labour. 52

This metaphorical conjunction of Oedipus and Capital produces a monolithic structure and with this conception Hocquenghem posited various glib parallels such that capitalism "turns its homosexuals into failed 'normal people', just as it turns its working class into an imitation of the middle class". 53

It is worth noting at this point that Mieli similarly collapsed sexual repression and capitalism into a unitary system. For him, the sublimation of Eros was 'substructural' in that it underlay the entire economic system of capitalist societies:<sup>54</sup> both guilt and the marketing of perversions fuelled the economy, just as the repression of

51. Like Altman, Hocquenghem has expressed dismay at the modern 'integration' of homosexual men, particularly in the United States, and a romantic longing for the underworld of Genet. See for example, "We All Can't Die in Bed", Semiotext(e), Vol. 3, No. 2 (1978), pp. 28-32.

52. Hocquenghem, Homosexual Desire, op. cit., p. 81.

53. Ibid., p. 80.

54. Mieli, op. cit., p. 216.

homosexuality served to "stupefy the people, to maintain a neurotic and submissive 'calm'".<sup>55</sup> Conversely, the liberation of sexuality would by definition mean the advent of communism.

... given the very important functional role for the perpetuation of capitalism of the subordination of women and the sublimation of certain 'perverse' erotic tendencies in labour, the (re) conquest of trans-sexuality will coincide with the fall of capitalism and the rejection of alienated and alienating labour ... 56

This is the most glaringly inadequate part of Mieli and Hocquenghem's argument. In terms of a social analysis however, both also make some more restrained claims regarding the effects of repression, and these will be considered shortly.

For Hocquenghem, the most important tool at society's disposal for "classifying the unclassifiable" was psychoanalysis. The unclassifiable was desire and strictly speaking the notion of homosexual desire was meaningless and a fallacy of the imaginary: "Just like heterosexual desire, homosexual desire is an arbitrarily frozen frame in an unbroken and polyvocal flux."<sup>57</sup> This was expressed in Freud's concept of polymorphous perversity by which the child's desire was undifferentiated and ignorant of the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality. However, psychoanalysis was both the discoverer of the mechanisms of desire and the organiser of their control, for no sooner had Freud asserted the universality of homosexual desire,

... than he enclosed it, not geographically but historically, within the Oedipal system. The "Leonardo da Vinci" text, is in this respect, self explanatory. Freud presents two facts about male homosexuality as unquestionable: mother fixation, and the fact that in Freud's words "every human being is capable of making a homosexual object-choice" and has made it, either keeping to it or shielding himself from it. 58

55. Ibid., p. 82.

56. Ibid., p. 38. Mieli's Marxism drew upon Jacques Camatte and not Gramsci, from whom he might have constructed a less mechanistic argument.

57. Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 36.

58. Ibid., p. 65.

Mieli made the same point,<sup>59</sup> and this discrepancy in Freud's conception certainly has to be resolved if his theory is to explain the differentiation of the polymorphously perverse infant into the homosexual or heterosexual adult. Hocquenghem was not interested in the details of this question and as a solution to Freud's inconsistency he insisted upon a radical separation of homosexual desire as a universal phenomenon from the entire psychoanalytic formulation of the child's endogenous development and final oedipal resolution.

The route from homosexual desire to homosexuality starts with a primary, an-Oedipal homosexuality and finishes with a secondary homosexuality which is neurotic, perverse and Oedipalised. 60

Hocquenghem accused psychoanalysis of consistently surrendering its discovery of desire to a recuperative interpretation. Desire was 'non-human sex' in the sense that the libido existed in an impersonal flux and to encounter desire was "first of all to forget the difference in the sexes".<sup>61</sup> Yet in psychoanalysis, the component instinct's relationship to the component object such as the breast or penis was retrospectively defined as a relationship to the whole person, and particularly the mother. In this way, desire lost its autonomy and was interpreted through a grid of similarity, difference and absence. The homosexual in particular was characterised by his fear of the absence of the penis (in the mother), or his fear of losing it (to the father). Consequently, the "produced homosexual has only to come and occupy the place reserved for him"<sup>62</sup> as could be seen in Freud's case study of Schreber who "experiences homosexuality as a heterosexual would imagine it to be experienced".<sup>63</sup> For in his delusional system, Schreber was both an abject sexual object and the world's redeemer which corresponded to the

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59. Mieli, op. cit., p. 44

61. Ibid., p. 116.

63. Ibid., p. 70.

60. Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 134

62. Ibid., p. 68.

poles of the whore/madonna stereotypes of women. Hocquenghem summarised his critique of Freud by claiming that what he described he constructed at the same time: "we only find in the Oedipalised homosexual libido what we have put there in the first place."<sup>64</sup> Central to this was the widespread influence of the psychoanalytic explanation: the popular account of homosexuality came down to either the chromosomes or vulgar analysis.

There is a certain force to this argument and Hocquenghem adeptly pointed to the struggle of psychoanalysts to define homosexuals as differing from the heterosexual norm only to reduce their difference to a similarity. This effort must surely have found its ultimate expression in Ferenczi's convoluted statement that,

It must be further remarked that many inverts are by no means quite unsusceptible to the endearments of the female sex. It is through intercourse with women (i.e. their like) that they dispose of what may be called the homosexual component of their sexuality. <sup>65</sup>

Yet Hocquenghem's critique raises the question of how an authentic desire can be perceived from beneath its oedipal distortions, that is, of how it is possible to know the original character of desire beyond Freud's description of infantile sexuality. For if nothing remains of polymorphous desire in the oedipalised adult, then it is difficult to maintain that Freud subordinated his discovery to the Oedipus complex in the way that Hocquenghem would have it.<sup>66</sup>

His argument depends upon the significance of anal desire for homosexual men: this was the "aspect of desire - which appears nowhere else".

64. Ibid., p. 67

65. Ibid., p. 112., quoted from Sandor Ferenczi, "The Nosology of Male Homosexuality (Homo-Erotism)", in First Contributions to Psychoanalysis, London, 1952, pp. 296-97.

66. Hocquenghem partly relied upon literary references, in particular to Proust, Mann (Death in Venice) and Musil (Young Törless), to illustrate the existence of polymorphous desire, though they cannot of course 'prove' the existence of such desire. He also appeared to overlook the fact that the characters Aschenbach and Törless did not in fact act upon their homosexual desire; they do not therefore 'test' his hypothesis.

Anal desire confronted the despotic role of the phallus in the Oedipus complex: only the phallus confirmed the individual's sexual identity as its presence or absence determined the boy's castration anxiety and the girl's penis envy. Capitalist societies were so phallic that men experienced sexual intercourse without ejaculation as a failure, and the social relationships within these societies were organised on the pyramidal model of the Oedipus complex with the father-phallus at the pinnacle. Hocquenghem's point was that whereas the phallus was essentially social, the anus was private. It had "no social position except sublimation" and "no social desiring function left, because all its functions have become excremental: that is to say, chiefly private".<sup>67</sup> Thus the constitution of "the private, individual, 'proper' person is 'of the anus'; the constitution of the public person is 'of the phallus'".<sup>68</sup> Homosexuals, however, challenged anal sublimation because they alone made constant libidinal use of the anus and as a result they had a confused identity.

It is no longer I who am speaking when the desiring use of the anus asserts itself. The problem here is not one of activity or passivity (which, according to Freud, become differentiated precisely at the anal stage). Homosexuality is always connected with the anus, even though - as Kinsey's precious statistics demonstrate - anal intercourse is still the exception even among homosexuals.

All homosexuality is concerned with anal eroticism, whatever the differentiations and perverse re-territorialisations to which the Oedipus complex subsequently subjects it. The anus is not a substitute for the vagina: women have one as well as men. <sup>69</sup>

Hocquenghem concluded that when homosexuals publicly and collectively rejected the definition of homosexuality as an individual problem, and reinvested the desiring use of the anus, they would be rejecting Oedipus and its constitution of the dichotomy between private and public, between the individual and the social. He looked forward to a primary

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67. Hocquenghem, *op. cit.*, p. 82

68. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

sexual communism and suggested that traces of this were evident in homosexual baths and in 'scattering' or sexual pick-ups "in which polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis".<sup>70</sup>

As Weeks observed in his preface to Homosexual Desire, Hocquenghem's claims for anal desire encounter two empirical objections and his thesis cannot be taken literally. Not only do only a minority of homosexual men engage in anal intercourse (assuming that Kinsey's findings are still applicable), but historically the taboo against sodomy, at least in Britain, seems to have weakened as the new categorisation of homosexuality was taking place.<sup>71</sup> Weeks suggested that the anal may nonetheless be seen as an important metaphor for challenging the primacy of reproductive sexuality. It may be added that Hocquenghem described a patriarchal ideology which sees homosexual temporality as directed towards the past, to the Greeks for example, and homosexuals as serving no utilitarian purpose beyond a minor artistic one. Homosexuality is thus conceived to be a regressive neurosis and "the homosexual is incapable of facing his future as an adult and a father".<sup>72</sup> This may be taken as a useful caution against the ready assumption that the separation of sex from reproduction leads to the validation of homosexual relationships.

The empirical difficulties also indicate a theoretical dilemma in Hocquenghem's claim that homosexuality can be linked to an-oedipal desire. Since only a minority of homosexual men engage in anal intercourse, the majority presumably being thoroughly oedipalised in this regard, and since anal intercourse may still be inscribed with oedipal meanings, as he admitted, then the connection between homosexuality and non-personal desire

70. Ibid., p. 117.

71. Weeks noted that in Britain, "sodomy carried the death penalty until 1861, but it was after the reduction of this penalty (to between ten years and life) that the real process of social definition, and an increase in social hostility, began" ("Preface", op. cit., p. 25).

72. Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 94.

is very tenuous. Despite Hocquenghem's rhetoric, it is never clear when anal desire is an-oedipal. He certainly needs a more compelling argument than the one that anonymous sex was not neurotic because it did not relate to a face and was outside the sphere of the ego.<sup>73</sup> His fundamental difficulty lies in the concept of the anal-sadistic phase of the child's sexual development. It was here that Freud located the differentiation of the active and passive aims with which the child would pursue its oedipal interests, and he also firmly associated the origins of male homosexuality with this phase. Hocquenghem used this argument to make a link between homosexuality and the analbut, at the same time, he tried to transcend Freud's broader framework. Nonetheless, it was the 'passive' homosexual in particular whom he wished to rescue from the oedipal formulation, the homosexual, that is, who had 'retained' his anal desire. Hocquenghem of course protested that anal desire was not a matter of activity or passivity but that was all he did. He did not, for example, explain what originally differentiates the minority of homosexuals who engage in anal intercourse from the majority who do not nor, for that matter, did he explain what differentiates the development of homosexual men generally from that of heterosexual men.

Freud criticised the theory that homosexuals constituted a 'third sex' by insisting upon the universality of homosexual desire. Despite the inconsistency in his theory that Hocquenghem highlighted, it is clear that either homosexuality must be conceived to be an outcome of the same dynamics which produce heterosexuality (however those dynamics might be theorised), or homosexuality represents, in some sense, a third sex. Hocquenghem in effect is caught between these two possibilities. He tried to translate the idea of the 'passive' homosexual into that of the third sex, or, at least, the 'authentic' sex. Thus he argued that, however approximate the formula might be, "what is repressed in homosexuals is not the love of women as a particular sexual object but the entire

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73. Ibid., p. 135.

subject-object system which constitutes an oppression of desire".<sup>74</sup> And he defended anonymous sex against the claims of romantic love as "immensely superior, precisely because everything is possible at any moment: organs look for each other and plug in, unaware of the law of exclusive disjunction".<sup>75</sup> Hocquenghem saw the third sex theory as a threat to the oedipal system and that Freud's struggle against the theory entailed the universalisation of Oedipus: "... it arouses the danger of letting more than two sexes coexist side by side, of giving up the simple binary system. If there are three sexes, why not more?"<sup>76</sup>

The logic of Homosexual Desire suggests that it should have embraced a third sex theory more wholeheartedly. As it is, the central emphasis upon anal desire leaves it trapped within the Freudian framework and ultimately within the oedipal meanings it is determined to reject.

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Mario Mieli's work does not aspire to the same theoretical rigour as Hocquenghem's does and as an example of the use of the repression hypothesis it is closer to Altman's argument. In many ways, Homosexuality and Liberation is a classic statement of the early gay movement, despite the fact that it was published in 1977. Mieli had been an activist in the London GLF in the early seventies and was subsequently involved in the founding of Fuori! ("Come Out!") in Milan in 1972. Since then, the Italian gay movement has been able to sustain its initial revolutionary stance to a much greater degree than has the English-speaking movement. As David Fernbach suggested in his introduction to the book, this difference reflects both the polarising influence of the Catholic Church in Italy (though the occasional piece of Catholic imagery appears in Mieli's text), and the vigorous character of the extra-parliamentary left. Theoretically, Mieli was more interested in a critical use of psychoanalytic

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74. Ibid., p. 125.

75. Ibid., p. 117.

76. Ibid., p. 107.



theory than in rejecting it, though his approach was distinctly eclectic and owed something to Jung and Norman O. Brown. The following discussion concentrates upon how his use of psychoanalytic theory differs from that of Hocquenghem and it will then turn to a more general appraisal of the repression hypothesis.

Mieli's Freudianism is essentially 'humanist'. He was not interested in the idea that desire should not relate to a face, but rather that once desire, or Eros as he termed it, was freed from repression, then it would naturally recognise all faces. The aim of sexual liberation was the recovery of 'trans-sexuality' which referred to the,

... infantile polymorphous and 'undifferentiated' erotic disposition, which society suppresses and which, in adult life, every human being carries with him either in a latent state, or else confined in the depths of the unconscious under the yoke of repression. 77

Using Freud's postulate of constitutional bisexuality, Mieli argued that the core of human sexuality was a physical and mental hermaphroditism and that homosexuality was congenital in everyone. He subscribed to Brown's belief that it was "in our unconscious repressed desires that we shall find the essence of our being", and that "the essence of repression lies in the refusal of the human being to recognise the realities of his human nature".<sup>78</sup> Altman also referred to Brown to urge "an acceptance of our basic androgyny",<sup>79</sup> but while he suggested that exclusive homosexuality was as much an outcome of repression as was exclusive heterosexuality, Mieli seemed to think there was no such symmetry.

Homosexuals were "aware more than straight people of the identification with both parents, of the existence within us of both sexes"<sup>80</sup> and he asserted that homosexual men could, and should, have sexual relationships with women. Particularly since "we gays do not treat women as sexual

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77. Mieli, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

78. Ibid., pp. 119, 167. The references are to Brown, op. cit., pp. 23, 24.

79. Altman, Homosexual, op. cit., p. 102.

80. Mieli, op. cit., p. 45.

'objects' ... a woman and a gay man can make love in a way that it outside the usual pattern of the homosexual couple".<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the strength of repression is quite vague in Mieli's conception and surely no gay liberationist has expressed such optimism about the ability of 'queens' to seduce heterosexual men and subvert their masculinity. He in fact decided it was better to speak of "quasi-repression".<sup>82</sup>

Unlike Hocquenghem, Mieli attempted to differentiate between the psychological development of exclusive heterosexuality and homosexuality. With regard to the former, he argued that in the 'complete' Oedipus complex, whereby the boy desired not only his mother but his father as well, the father rejected this desire and the boy replaced his erotic interest by an identification with the masculine father. Through this identification, he projected onto his mother and other women the 'feminine' component of his psyche because he had learnt to associate this with his homosexual desire. Referring to Jung, Mieli argued,

Male heterosexuality, therefore, as it presents itself today, is based on the repression by the man of his 'femininity' and the renunciation of the gay desire, and as such it represents a form of alienated sensuality, founded on the estrangement of the human being from himself. Male heterosexuality involves a misconception of self, and hence also a misconception of the other. By projecting his 'femininity' onto the woman, the man no longer recognises either the woman or his own 'femininity'.<sup>83</sup>  
 ... the man forces on her both his masculinity (a condensation of alienated homosexual desire) and his own 'femininity'.<sup>84</sup>

The obvious problem with this formulation, as Freud frequently insisted in his disagreements with Jung, is that it assumes 'masculinity' and 'femininity' to be original complementary components of the psyche. For Freud, the libido was not differentiated between the sexes. Mieli's formulation therefore takes heterosexuality for granted which is readily apparent when it is used to define constitutional bisexuality. For a

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81. Ibid., p. 187.

82. Ibid., p. 200.

83. Ibid., p. 37.

84. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

same-sex choice is then said to be either the 'feminine' aspect of a man seeking the 'masculine' in another man, or vice versa. He was actually aware of this problem and he urged that the psycho-biological hermaphroditism of human beings should not be understood as bisexual but as polysexual or trans-sexual.<sup>85</sup> However, he did not mean an unclassifiable desire in Hocquenghem's sense and his argument in fact remained within the framework of bisexuality. He suggested, for example, that heterosexual men desire not a 'real' woman but a disguised homosexual phantasy of a 'woman'. This was revealed by the character of the pornographic depictions of woman, such as in Playboy, in which the model was frequently posed and photographed by homosexual men, and he asked:

What is the source of this desire by the gay photographer to depict, and by the heterosexual man to desire, a stiff, erect, firm body, such as is rarely met with in reality, if not the secret intention on the gay man's part to display a male body, stiff and hard like an erect penis, and the secret desire for this on the heterosexual's part? 86

This reads like a parody of Ferenczi's remark that a homosexual man's sexual relationship with a woman was basically homosexual because he was similar to her in the first place. But whereas Ferenczi assumed gender inversion on the part of the homosexual so that his sexual relationship with a woman might as well be termed 'lesbian', Mieli believed the repressed 'femininity' and homosexual desire of the heterosexual man was responding to the 'masculine' woman. This would seem to be an attempt to reverse the heterosexual bias of the bisexuality thesis, but it ends up by affirming it. Opposites attract - and on a truly conspiratorial level.

Mieli encountered similar problems when he attempted to explain the origins of exclusive homosexuality in terms of oedipal dynamics. He agreed with Freud's claim that homosexuality could not be reduced to a simple matter of gender inversion and objected to his somewhat inconsistent emphasis upon mother fixation for at least a high proportion of homosexual

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85. Ibid., p. 39.

86. Ibid., pp. 56-57.

men.<sup>87</sup> He advanced the hypothesis that adult homosexuality was a result of the lack of repression of the boy's 'negative' Oedipus complex, that is, his love for his father:

... those who become homosexual, thanks to the particular richness of their predisposition to homoeroticism, fail to renounce the male (father) object. ... the strength of the congenital homosexual disposition is reinforced by a certain tendency (whether conscious or not) on the part of the parent of the same sex to establish a homoerotic relation with the child, a special emotional bond. ...

The renunciation of 'objects' of the 'opposite' sex would follow from a lack of need to identify with the same-sex parent, and hence with his heterosexual behaviour, as well as from ... the social condemnation of homosexuality, which leads the homosexual to feel guilty and hence unworthy of the choice defined as 'normal', i.e. an impossible candidate to please people of the other sex. 88

While this is not totally implausible, one major difficulty is immediately clear. Since Mieli was following Freud's argument that the complete Oedipus complex was resolved by the child identifying with one parent and thereby preserving the object relation to the other parent, it follows that the boy who preserves his father as his choice also identifies with his mother. Thus for Mieli (and for Freud, at least in this instance), homosexuality represented a simple gender inversion: a woman-identified man sought a masculine object. Mieli qualified this conclusion only to the extent that he emphasised the strength of a congenital homosexual disposition. Though Freud also entertained this idea, he was certainly more circumspect about it, and for the reason that he wished to oppose the theory that homosexuals constituted a third sex. Like Hocquenghem, Mieli endorsed the idea of the oedipal production of homosexuality but perceived this as a distortion of an original homosexual desire. Homosexuals therefore comprised the 'authentic' sex: there was more continuity in their development than in that of heterosexual men because for Mieli homosexuals did not have to repress their 'femininity', just as for

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87. Ibid., pp. 29-30, 45.

88. Ibid., pp. 48-49.

Hocquenghem some at least have retained their original anal desire.

This argument reveals the central weakness of the repression hypothesis: its basic terms are assumed rather than demonstrated. This is most obvious in the Jungian conception of masculinity and femininity as original complementary components of the psyche for this has the effect of defining the sexual instinct as 'heterosexual' regardless of the choice of object. The instinct has two naturally given objects corresponding to its own dualistic composition so that the problem to be explained is not the socially constructed difference between 'men' and 'women' but the distortion of that difference. The questions of gender inequalities and homosexual oppression are thus seen in terms of how the complementary elements of masculinity and femininity have become unbalanced in the process of repression. Freud was emphatically opposed to this conception of the sexual instinct, though his own lack of success in defining the relationship between bisexuality and masculinity and femininity may well have encouraged Mieli to turn to Jung. The alternative formulations of the repression hypothesis, by which the sexual instinct is said to be naturally polymorphously perverse, androgynous or a flux of undifferentiated desire, do avoid the specific difficulties of the bisexuality thesis. Yet they are little more than assertions derived from a selective reading of Freud. It is imperative that this conception of the instinct as a pre-social, already constituted force be thoroughly documented if it is to be of any theoretical use. For it is with this assumption that the proponents of the repression hypothesis go on to advance explanations of the construction of exclusive sexual orientations and of the origins of homosexual oppression.

The attractiveness of the idea of a given polymorphous perverse sexuality to gay liberationists is obvious. It offers the prospect of locating homosexual desire in an original condition and so of avoiding Freud's endogenous model of sexual development in which a homosexual object-choice is necessarily seen in terms of fixation or regression. Despite its

appeal however, the assumption that homosexual desire is a component of a sexual essence entails enormous constraints upon the kinds of explanations which are then built upon it, and the fundamental one is that it takes the category of homosexuality for granted. Ironically, the repression hypothesis is designed precisely to avoid this conclusion. A widely accepted priority within the gay movement from the very first was that of challenging the rigid definitions of sexual identities and behaviours. Altman remarked that he regretted that "The End of Homosexuality" had not been the title of his book, rather than of its last chapter<sup>89</sup> and similarly, activists were convinced that an extension of sexual meanings and experiences was crucial to the aims of gay liberation. Thus the repression hypothesis has been intended to establish that the category of homosexuality is ultimately an arbitrary and severely restrictive one. Yet in the search for the origins of 'repression', the category of 'homosexuality' is pushed backwards to infancy where it is said to be a natural, inherent part of the sexual constitution. That the object of analysis is then defined as polymorphous perversity or an-oedipal desire matters little since this character of the sexual instinct is not effectively demonstrated.

The essentialist nature of this conception of homosexuality is underlined by the explanation which is then advanced of the construction of an exclusive homosexual orientation. For Fernbach, as noted earlier, and for Altman, the mechanism of repression sometimes misfired or failed thus allowing homosexuality to emerge, though neither explained why this should happen. Only Mieli suggested a reason, that of the original strength of congenital homosexuality. This is the logical explanation to be made in terms of the repression hypothesis and for him it related to a preponderance of 'femininity' in the infantile libido. For Hocquenghem, on the other

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89. Dennis Altman, "Interview with Chris Hector" (1973), in Coming Out in the Seventies, op. cit., p. 24.

hand, repression failed only to the extent that the homosexual at least potentially retained his an-oedipal anal desire. The primary focus of the repression hypothesis, then, is on the category of 'homosexuality' in its natural, infantile form which is assumed to be diametrically opposed to repressed, oedipalised 'heterosexuality'. Ultimately, the repression hypothesis constitutes homosexual men as a third sex which, when the goal of de-repression is achieved, will become the one authentic sex. At a fundamental level, this argument fails to make a social analysis of the infant's sexual development. Instead, it makes the romantic assumption that an original broad-ranging, free, playful sexual instinct is subsequently repressively forced into the familiar heterosexual mould. Under these conditions, the homosexual minority is oppressed.

The basic aim of the repression hypothesis is to extend a psychological theory into a social explanation of homosexual oppression and, more broadly, into an explanation of the social construction of some of the dominant patterns of sexuality. In other words, it is an attempt to derive a social psychology from Freud. The problems which this endeavour encounters are myriad. That it breaks with Freud's conception of sexuality without defending its reformulation has been indicated in general terms and will be substantiated in the following chapter. But its cavalier use of psychoanalytic theory also severely limits its subsequent social analysis. Apart from the utterly unsophisticated conjunction of sexual repression and capitalist relations of production, the more specific claims of the repression hypothesis about the dynamics of homosexual oppression rely upon an hydraulic conception of the sexual instinct. The social denial of homosexual desire is proportional to the oppression of the minority which expresses that desire so that anti-homosexual paranoia, as Hocquenghem described it, represents a return of the repressed. This contention relies upon a mechanistic understanding of the libido which is assumed to contain a fixed quantity of energy which

either cathects various objects or, if repressed, struggles to do so in the disguised form of paranoia.

The ensuing explanation of oppression draws upon the psychoanalytic concept of negation: "To negate an 'object' of desire ... is a particular way of affirming it", Mieli declared.<sup>90</sup> Yet it is an unjustified extension of the concept to maintain that hostility towards homosexuality necessarily expresses a disguised desire. This claim depends upon the idea that masculinity "is simply the neurotic and cumbersome introjection by men of a homosexual desire for one another which is both very strong and tightly censored",<sup>91</sup> so that this is the source of hostility towards homosexuality among heterosexual men. This explanation, which is explicit in Hocquenghem and Mieli's argument and somewhat qualified in Altman's, therefore implies that repression is the cause of gender inequalities on the grounds that it produces a crippled masculinity which is oppressive of women and homosexuals.<sup>92</sup> Given the lack of substantiation of the repression of an original homosexual desire in the first place, this is a particularly inadequate form of reductionism. And it has the effect of creating a conceptual distance between homosexual men and masculinity and thus of readily reinforcing the idea of homosexuals as gender inverts. 'Masculine' men are said to be naturally antagonistic towards their opposites, 'feminine' men. At the same time, Altman and Mieli along with many other gay liberationists, stressed the ways in which some homosexual men benefit from the social privileges which are attendant upon masculinity.

It should be emphasised that the question of the perception governing the hostility towards homosexuals needs to be distinguished from that of the

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90. Mieli. op. cit., p. 167.

91. Ibid., p. 127.

92. Altman wrote that "women's liberation is primarily concerned with sex roles, gay liberation with sexuality, and though the two are interconnected they are not synonymous" (Homosexual, op. cit., p.218). He made the interconnection, if tentatively, in terms of the effects upon masculinity of the repression of bisexuality.



character of the homosexual psychology and its production. That is, if an imputation of femininity is a central element in oppressive attitudes, it should not be assumed that that perception is correct in any simple sense.<sup>93</sup> The antagonism of heterosexual men towards femininity can be explained without the assumption that it is simply the negation of their own homosexual desire. There is no question that masculinity necessarily exists in a relationship to femininity, but an understanding of this relationship requires an analysis of the psychological construction of gender differences and their social elaboration.

It is essential to explore the connections between gender and sexual orientation in a way which neither reduces the question of gender inequalities to an effect of the repression of an original homosexual desire, nor reduces exclusive homosexuality to a simple matter of gender inversion. With the repression hypothesis, it is difficult to avoid these conclusions. Hocquenghem and Mieli in particular were really concerned with the 'queen': the effeminate homosexual alone was seen to embody the challenge of the gay movement. Though other activists have too easily supposed a simple unity to exist among homosexual men, this reproduction of the gender dichotomy clearly affirms rather than questions the patriarchal conception of the binary sexual system. Both are unable to focus upon questions of gender, for these questions are subsumed under the repression hypothesis, while at the same time an assumption about

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93. Similarly, it is very easy to find conservative views which appear to underline the validity of the repression hypothesis. Hocquenghem and Mieli quoted the same educationalist whose remark was tailor-made for them:

Were homosexuality to receive, even in theory, a show of approval, were it allowed to break away even partially from the framework of pathology, we would soon arrive at the abolition of the heterosexual couple and of the family, which are the foundations of the Western society in which we live (Andre Morali-Daninos, Sociologie des relations sexuelles, in Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 46, and Mieli, op. cit., p. 54).

All three authors share the assumptions that the family is the foundation of society and that sexuality contains an inherent force.

gender covertly defines the object of their argument, the 'feminine' homosexual.

The social analysis of the repression hypothesis then, is seriously flawed. Having assumed such a neat fit between the dynamics of repression and the interests of capitalism, it proceeds to use psychoanalytic categories in an extended, collapsed and metaphorical sense in order to make its social analysis. The result does violence to Freud's theory and produces a shrunken conception of the social.

To take the concept of aggression: it is a fundamental one in psychoanalysis and is ultimately linked to Freud's controversial formulation of the death instinct. But whatever the difficulties in the concept, it emphatically cannot be reduced to being a symptom of repression.

Conversely, a lack of violence or aggression (which Altman suggested was characteristic of self-accepting homosexual men) cannot, with any justice to psychoanalysis, be attributed to freedom from repression. Most obviously, Freud's description of women as passive and unaggressive was predicated precisely upon the enormous repression which he considered to be constitutive of femininity. To take another example: in the repression hypothesis, there is no clear distinction made between the 'repression' and 'sublimation' of homosexual desire. For Freud however, sublimation was at least distinct in that it was successful: it was not the expression of a regressive symptom but a diversion of part of the sexual instinct to non-sexual aims, especially artistic and intellectual activity. Moreover, his theory of sublimation was hardly definitive and it has been characterised in one thorough discussion as "one of the lacunae in psycho-analytic thought".<sup>94</sup>

Quite apart from these conceptual problems, the suggested link between repression, aggression and hostility towards homosexuality cannot stand

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94. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1973 (1967), p. 433.

by itself as an adequate social theory. It is classically one of methodological individualism whether in the claim that sublimation provides the group identification in all-male institutions or that aggressive masculinity is founded upon repression. Social phenomena are therefore explained in terms of the psychology of the individuals who comprise the group.<sup>95</sup> Though it is doubtful whether the proponents of the repression hypothesis would want to defend this assumption philosophically, they are nonetheless caught in it because they have made no prior effort to define psychosexual dynamics in relation to the economic and political dimensions of advanced capitalist societies.

(v)

The weaknesses of the repression hypothesis have the merit of indicating fairly clearly those questions which need to be resolved if psychoanalysis is going to be of any use to the theoretical priorities of the gay movement. The basic question, as Hocquenghem and Mieli insisted, concerns Freud's inconsistency in defining homosexual desire as a universal characteristic of human sexuality and at the same time proposing an endogenous model of sexual development whereby a homosexual object choice is a fixation or regression.

This raises two tasks. First, it is necessary to consider the nature of infantile sexuality and to ask whether psychoanalytic theory necessarily accepts this as a natural, pre-social endowment. Second, it needs to be asked whether the child's development can be understood in terms other than those of a biologically ordained propulsion. The difficulty in using Freud to discuss the origins of a homosexual orientation is that he did not address the question systematically: his references are scattered

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95. Alan Ryan provides a clear discussion of the assumptions of methodological individualism in The Philosophy of the Social Sciences, London, 1970, pp. 177 ff.

and the question is entangled in other unresolved theoretical issues. One of these is his postulate of bisexuality. He did not define what he meant by this idea though he used it particularly in his considerations of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, the whole question of the psychical differentiation of the sexes was in large measure shelved by Freud as part of the 'riddle' of sex. Yet it is precisely on this riddle that a discussion of the origins of a homosexual orientation needs to concentrate: the question is how a child constructs a sexual identity on the basis of its biological sex and its inculcation of the socially constructed meanings of gender within the context of the heterosexual family.

As has been seen, the early gay movement's attempts to use the feminist analysis of gender were largely unsuccessful. But for all the naivety which characterised these attempts, both in terms of the idealism of their theoretical assumptions and the voluntarism of their practice, they nonetheless have a distinct strength over the abstractness of the repression hypothesis. They at least offer the promise of a more thoroughly social theory of homosexuality since they link homosexuality immediately to the gender order. In particular, they emphasise the position of male homosexuals as men as well as homosexuals, and they open up the question of their masculinity and of how it should be distinguished from orthodox masculinity. It will be argued in the following chapter that Freud's account of the child's development is certainly open to an interpretation which is more consistent with a thoroughly social analysis. That is, the infant's sexuality originates in a process of interaction with significant others, and in particular with the unconscious phantasies of its parents. Thus there is not an 'original' condition which is repressed, but a range of psychic conflicts in which a major role is played by the parents' contradictory attitudes and by the exclusive relationships which characterise the family. The child resolves these conflicts through various defences, including repression.

It is not then correct to say that the repression of homosexuality sometimes 'fails'. Rather, homosexuality is produced by the dynamics of the gender order embodied in the family; among men, homosexuality is a resolution to some of the conflicts contained within hegemonic masculinity.

CHAPTER THREE

PSYCHOANALYTIC ISSUES

An assessment of the way in which psychoanalytic theory overall has dealt with homosexuality would be an enormous project. There are three tasks which a thorough assessment would need to undertake. The first of these, which will be the primary focus of the following discussion, is to ask how Freud himself conceived of the psychological dynamics underlying a homosexual object-choice and, more broadly, of the significance of homosexuality in the erotic lives of all people. Beyond this, there is the matter of how the various schools within institutionalised psychoanalysis have treated these questions (both in theory and practice) in relation to Freud's unsynthesised observations. He indeed readily admitted that psychoanalysis had not solved the 'mystery' of homosexuality and many later analysts have been more than eager to do so. Finally, the question of homosexuality would need to be considered in the light of the systematic reformulation of psychoanalytic theory by Lacan, and the radical critiques of the theory (and of Lacan's reading) by such writers as Deleuze and Guattari as well as Luce Irigaray and other recent feminist theorists.<sup>1</sup>

The first task, however, that of addressing Freud's own writing on the subject, has not yet been done adequately. The major proponents of the repression hypothesis, in fact, have had a markedly idiosyncratic approach to Freud's work as distinct from broadly defined psychoanalytic theory. Altman, from his reliance on Marcuse, concentrated upon Freud's metapsychological theory in order to suggest the social repercussions of sexual repression; Hocquenghem used the controversial critique by Deleuze and Guattari to define the subversive potential of homosexual desire; and Mieli drew upon Jung to indicate the repressed essence of

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1. See for example, Luce Irigaray, "That Sex which is not One", in Foss and Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-171; and for a survey of intellectual developments in French feminism, Elaine Marks, "Women and Literature in France", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer 1978), pp. 832-842; and, in the same issue, Carolyn Greensteinburke, "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement", pp. 843-855.

'trans-sexuality'. Each of these attempts to use psychoanalytic theory to further a gay liberationist argument contains some more or less explicit criticism of what Freud wrote, but they do not engage with his arguments in any detail. Instead, they advance alternative formulations; and whether they should be termed 'psychoanalytic' is highly questionable, for they do not come to terms with the matter of the child's unconscious sexual development. This question is largely avoided by positing the existence of a homosexual essence in infantile sexuality and by then asserting a direct lineage from this original condition to adult homosexuality. Freud, on the other hand, explicitly maintained that,

... there is no distinction between perverse and normal sexuality other than the fact that their dominating component instincts and consequently their sexual aims are different. In both of them, one might say, a well-organized tyranny has been established ... 2

While, as Hocquenghem and Mieli insisted, Freud also contradicted this claim regarding the close relationship between 'perverse' and 'normal' sexuality by defining homosexuality as a regression or fixation, he nonetheless firmly opposed the idea of an essential homosexuality as entailed by the third sex theory. As is well known, he found great methodological value in examining the perversions for their illumination of the general patterns of sexual life. By this means he demonstrated that normality was a rather precarious ideal, for it was intimately related to both the perversions and the neuroses. This was the claim which Freud intended to establish in his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, but since it is not properly recognised by the proponents of the repression hypothesis, they have been unable to address the real difficulties in his conception of homosexuality which are subsequent to it.

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2. Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1916-1917), S.E., Vol. XVI, p. 323. (Quotations are from James Strachey (ed.), Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 24 Vols, London, 1953-1973; references are abbreviated as S.E.)



These difficulties are not specific to the subject of homosexuality but are fundamental to Freud's general theory of sexual development. The following discussion isolates three related problems whose solution is essential if Freud is ultimately to be of any use to a social theory of homosexuality. These are his model of endogenous sexual development, his account of gender differentiation, and his theory of the oedipal resolutions whereby the child consolidated the basis of its sexual orientation. It will be argued that the logic of the Three Essays, whereby the sexual instinct has no given relationship to a particular object so that the well organised tyrannies of adult homosexuality and heterosexuality are the final result of a long and tortuous process of development from infancy, means that the question of the production of male homosexuality should be located firmly within the dynamics of the construction of masculinity. To do this, however, it is necessary to break with the model of endogenous development, to understand gender differentiation in terms other than as a psychical consequence of the anatomical distinction between the sexes, and to interpret the oedipal resolutions leading to homosexuality as not being a simple matter of gender inversion.

Freud's position in relation to each of these questions was deeply ambiguous. The following discussion attempts to resolve these ambiguities by extending the implications of Freud's radical propositions about the character of the sexual instinct and the child's sexual development. By this means, it offers an immanent critique of Freud's conception of homosexuality.

The argument of this chapter is therefore a provisional one inasmuch as it does not endeavour to assess the validity of the fundamental tenets of Freud's theory. The most obvious of these is the existence of the unconscious and of infantile sexuality. It also accepts what

are for many sexual liberationists the more contentious questions of the theory of the Oedipus complex and the associated concepts of the fear of castration in men, and penis envy in women. The latter idea in particular remains highly contentious for many feminists who have not been convinced by Juliet Mitchell's explicit defence of Freud on this issue. This debate will not be considered directly; but her much noted remark that "psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one"<sup>3</sup> is clearly inadequate as a starting point for the reappraisal of Freud. His failure to resolve a number of basic questions means that psychoanalysis is precisely a recommendation for a patriarchal society, though it should not be reduced to being that alone. Within his theory of sexual development there is room to extend his more critical insights in a way which is consistent with some of his central theoretical intentions.

One of these, Freud expressed in his preface to the third edition of the Three Essays in 1914 where he claimed that "the present work is characterised not only by being completely based upon psycho-analytic research, but also by being deliberately independent of the findings of biology".<sup>4</sup> This touches on the heart of the problem for any attempt to derive a social psychology from psychoanalytic theory: despite his stated intentions, biological assumptions pervade Freud's work, including the Three Essays. The most energetic attempt to purge his theory of these assumptions has been carried out by the Lacanian school and this reading of Freud informed Mitchell's argument as it has much subsequent feminist work on psychoanalytic theory.<sup>5</sup> The following discussion too

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3. Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, op. cit., p. xv.

4. Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), S.E., Vol. VII, p. 131.

5. The usefulness of an alternative source, that of the object-relations school, has been demonstrated by Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, Berkeley, 1978.

draws a general orientation from this school, and specifically from the work of Jean Laplanche. It does so primarily to address the problem of Freud's endogenous model of sexual development and it will be argued that the direction of the reformulation which Laplanche advances is clearly indicated by Freud himself on numerous occasions. Beyond this, however, the present discussion does not draw upon Lacan: his own interest in recovering a non-biologistic Freud stops short at a critical point in that he reproduces the latter's phallocentrism.<sup>6</sup>

The first task of this discussion is to summarise Freud's theory of infantile sexual development and then to define more precisely how it bears on a theory of homosexuality and what problems arise.

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Freud emphasised on a number of occasions that homosexuality should not be classified as an illness. Indeed, in the one published case history of a person who came to him because of her homosexuality alone (having been persuaded to do so by her parents), Freud recorded that the analysis made only limited headway. This was partly because of "the facts that the girl was not in any way ill (she did not suffer from anything in herself, nor did she complain of her condition) and that the task to be carried out did not consist in resolving a neurotic conflict".<sup>7</sup>

6. For example, Lacan has argued that,

... the fact that the penis is dominant in the shaping of the body-image is evidence of this autonomous gestalt structure. Though this may shock the sworn champions of the autonomy of female sexuality, such dominance is a fact and one moreover which cannot be put down to cultural influences alone (Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego", The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Vol. XXXIV (1953), p. 13).

For an early feminist criticism of Lacan, and of Mitchell's use of his theory, see Teresa Brennan et. al., "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", Working Papers in Sex, Science and Culture, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1976), pp. 15-45. A more sustained critique of Mitchell, and of the patriarchal bias of Lacan, is made by Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Gross, "Little Hans: The Production of Oedipus", in Foss and Morris, op. cit., pp. 99-122.

7. Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), S.E., Vol. XVIII, p. 150.



The task in fact was to convert one variety of genital organisation of sexuality into the other, and Freud considered this to be just as difficult as it would be to change a fully developed heterosexual person into a homosexual.<sup>8</sup>

Thus later psychoanalytic definitions of homosexuality as an illness, and even therapeutic optimism that the condition could be cured, find no explicit justification in Freud's work. Nonetheless, Freud advanced a normative conception of the child's sexual development which clearly invalidates an adult homosexual object choice: in terms of the path to genital heterosexuality, homosexuality could only represent a fixation or regression of the libido. In this sense it was defined as infantile. The way was then open for therapeutic enthusiasts (a description which can rarely be applied to Freud) to tackle homosexuality as a pathology to be cured.<sup>9</sup> In this they have remained quite unconcerned about the fact that they have neatly reproduced the popular conception of sexual instinct as a biological impulse which is sometimes perverted from its natural path. Such a notion was, of course, precisely what Freud energetically argued against in his Three Essays, although how successfully he established his case in this work is another question.

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8. Ibid., p. 151. Freud advised the young woman's parents that "if they set store by the therapeutic procedure it should be continued by a woman doctor", though he doubted they would follow such advice, "the reasons for which are obvious" (p. 164). Presumably they feared that it would compound their daughter's 'problem'.
9. Among the many statements of this view, see Irving Bieber et. al., Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study, New York, 1962; L. Hornstra, "Homosexuality", The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Vol. 48 (1966), pp. 394-402; L.J. Hatterer, Changing Homosexuality in the Male, London, 1970; and C.W. Socarides, Homosexuality, London, 1978.

Freud, on the other hand, wrote towards the end of his life:

However much the analyst may be tempted to become a teacher, model and ideal for other people and to create men in his own image, he should not forget that that is not his task in the analytic relationship, and indeed that he will be disloyal to his task if he allows himself to be led on by his inclinations. If he does, he will only be repeating a mistake of the parents who crushed their child's independence by their influence, and

Published in 1905 and amended through successive editions until 1925,<sup>10</sup> Freud's essays were concerned with the nature of the sexual instinct and with contradicting the popular conception of it as a biological instinct<sup>11</sup> which is sometimes perverted from its natural course. At the beginning of the first essay he wrote that the sexual instinct,

... is generally understood to be absent in childhood, to set in at the time of puberty in connection with the process of coming to maturity and to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; while its aim is presumed to be sexual union, or at all events actions leading in that direction. 12

Freud had already concluded from his treatment of hysterical patients that their symptoms were a substitution for certain sexual ideas, phantasies or memories which had been repressed in childhood. Such symptoms, however, did not only or even primarily relate to "the so-called normal sexual instinct" but also "to instincts which would be described as perverse in the widest sense of the word if they could be expressed directly in phantasy and action without being diverted from consciousness".<sup>13</sup> He argued that these perverse components of the instinct could not be explained away as being degenerate or exceptional; on the contrary, they were precisely what constituted childhood sexuality. Mature or genital sexuality was therefore achieved "at the cost of perverse sexual impulses".<sup>14</sup>

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he will only be replacing the patient's earlier dependence by a new one (An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (1938), S.E., Vol. XXIII, p. 175).

10. Various central concepts were added to the Three Essays after its original edition. These include the pregenital organisations of the libido (added in 1915); the Oedipus complex (1920), though this had been postulated in 1897; and the differential development of boys and girls (from 1915).
11. The distinction between the Freudian conception of an instinct ('Trieb') and an hereditary behaviour pattern ('Instinkt') is a fundamental one. Though there is good reason for translating 'Trieb' as 'drive', the word 'instinct' is retained in conformity with the practice adopted by the translators of the Standard Edition. 'Trieb' also suggests the idea of 'growth' and 'unfolding'.
12. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 135.
13. Ibid., p. 165
14. Ibid., p. 232.

Freud described the original sexual disposition of the child as a complex one in which the component instincts were not organised but were all striving, independently, for satisfaction. The child was polymorphously perverse. The sources of the component instincts were the erotogenic zones (for example, the oral and anal zones) and these determined the instinct's aims, such as that of incorporation during the oral phase. The sexual aim was defined as "the act towards which the instinct tends",<sup>15</sup> and the aims of the component instincts included voyeurism and exhibitionism, masochism and sadism; while the sexual object was defined as "the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds"<sup>16</sup> (though indeed it need not be a person), and both sexes were chosen in accordance with the bisexual disposition of the child. Moreover, the child was without a sense of shame, disgust or morality; so it would, for example, readily show an intense interest in its own and other people's excreta. It was with such characteristics in mind that Freud, in his case study of five-year-old Little Hans, remarked that the child "seems to be a positive paragon of all the vices".<sup>17</sup>

The child's pursuit of pleasure and love was not subject to reason: "Childhood love is boundless; it demands exclusive possession, it is not content with less than all".<sup>18</sup> Yet its sexual aims were successively thwarted, initially in the loss of its first object, the breast, so that the child would later reproach its mother for not suckling it long enough,<sup>19</sup> and later in the necessity to give up its faeces on demand instead of gaining pleasure through their retention. It was from these

15. Ibid., p. 136.

16. Ibid., p. 135.

17. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909), S.E., Vol. X, p. 15. When Little Hans reintroduced himself to Freud in 1922, fourteen years after the conclusion of the analysis, he had forgotten all details of the episode. In typical fashion, his sexuality of those early years had succumbed to "infantile amnesia". Thus Freud often compared the practice of psychoanalysis to an archeological project: it was the unearthing of a "prehistoric epoch".

18. Freud, "Female Sexuality" (1931), S.E., Vol. XXI, p. 231.

19. Ibid., p. 234.

experiences that the child formed the idea of a narcissistic injury through the loss of part of itself and they were therefore, for the boy, the precursors of that threat of the greatest possible loss of all, that of his penis.<sup>20</sup> The child also met frustration in its desire both to give and to have a baby. Although it might be supposed that it is not possible for a child to have a very precise idea of how a baby is produced, such a desire was commonly substantiated in analysis, and it is notable that Freud considered "perhaps [the] most unassailable feature" of his study of Little Hans, the fact that, "in complete contradiction to his official speeches - he knew in his unconscious where the baby [his sister] came from and where it had been before".<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the birth of a younger brother or sister not only demonstrated the power of others to produce a baby but also presented the child with a rival for the love and care of its parents. Intense love, jealousy, rivalry and hatred were endemic in the child's universe.

The discovery of the character of the child's sexuality enabled Freud to formulate the nature of the sexual instinct. He warned that the habit of assuming a natural link between the libido (the energy of the sexual instinct) and the object which it cathected was unwarranted. In fact, it was probable that the instinct was independent of its object among children and that its origin was not due to the inherent attractions of any specific object. The object, as Laplanche and Pontalis characterise it, is contingent.<sup>22</sup> Freud emphasised this in a footnote added to the Three Essays in 1915:

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20. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization (An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality)" (1923), S.E., Vol. XIX, p. 144, n. 2. Freud insisted, however, that these experiences should not be included as part of the castration complex.
21. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", op. cit., p. 129 (this sentence is italicised in the original).
22. Laplanche and Pontalis, op. cit., p. 45.

Thus from the point of view of psycho-analysis the exclusive interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature. 23

Indeed, he stated the point more dramatically:

Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character. ... it has been found that all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious. Indeed, libidinal attachments to persons of the same sex play no less a part as factors in normal mental life, and a greater part as a motive force for illness, than do similar attachments to the opposite sex. 24

Likewise, although the normal sexual aim was assumed to be the union of the genitals in sexual intercourse, this was hardly the case in childhood and neither was it so in adult life. The sexual aim was more diverse for there were always present sexual activities which extended to regions of the body other than the genitals and also sexual activities which delayed the act of intercourse. Any of these, if developed, would become perversions. Among the extensions to the sexual aim in the second category, Freud emphasised sadism and masochism, for they "occupy a special position among the perversions, since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life".<sup>25</sup> As will be seen, Freud attempted to account for this contrast by the hypothesis of bisexuality.

Freud's aim throughout the Three Essays was to demonstrate the intimate relationship between the perverse, normal and neurotic. He summed up his argument in an article which he wrote in the same year:

By pointing out the infantile elements in sexuality I was able to establish a simple correlation between health, perversion and neurosis. I showed that normality is the result of the repression of certain component instincts and constituents of the infantile disposition and of the subordination of the remaining constituents under the

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23. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 146, n.

24. Ibid., p. 145, n.

25. Ibid., p. 159.



primacy of the genital zones in the service of the reproductive function. I showed that perversions correspond to disturbances of this coalescence owing to the over-powering and compulsive development of certain of the component instincts, while neuroses can be traced back to an excessive repression of the libidinal trends. Since almost all of the perverse instincts of the infantile disposition can be recognized as the focus concerned in the foundation of symptoms in neuroses, though in a state of repression, I was able to describe neurosis as being the 'negative' of perversion. 26

Having argued energetically against the popular conception of a biological sexual instinct, Freud nonetheless did posit a norm in the concept of genitality, and the criteria which he used to establish it raise immediate problems. He considered it essential that the component instincts should be organised and subordinated "under the primacy of the genital zone in the service of the reproductive function" so that the individual's desires were focussed upon a single object of the opposite sex. This was "the course of development laid down for civilized men".<sup>27</sup> Conversely,

... the essence of the perversions lies not in the extension of the sexual aim, not in the replacement of the genitals, not even always in the variant choice of the object, but solely in the exclusiveness with which these deviations are carried out and as a result of which the sexual act serving the purpose of reproduction is put on one side. 28

Here, Freud was deferring to the conventional legitimation of sex by which it is confined to marriage for the purpose of procreation.<sup>29</sup> In the case

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26. Freud, "My views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses" (1905), S.E., Vol. VII, p. 277.

27. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 189.

28. Freud, Introductory Lectures, op. cit., p. 322.

29. Freud's sexual attitudes were in fact quite liberal. He argued that the repression demanded by civilisation was excessive and he was distinctly pessimistic about the prospects of sexual satisfaction for the great majority of people, and not least of all women. See, for example, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness" (1908), S.E., Vol. IX, pp. 179-204. Freud's attitudes towards homosexuality were similarly quite advanced for the time. He signed a petition advocating the decriminalisation of male homosexuality in Germany and Austria; he also argued, against Ernest Jones, that homosexual analysts could be admitted to the Psychoanalytic Association. See the translation of the relevant documents in Herb Spiers and Michael Lynch, "The Gay Rights Freud", The Body Politic, No. 33 (May 1977), pp. 8 ff.

of homosexuality, he later confirmed that the genital organisation as such had been attained;<sup>30</sup> as well, the aim of reproduction must be constituted during the individual's sexual development, a fact which was certainly obvious to him in his later work on femininity.

The general difficulty with Freud's conception of genitality is well put by Laplanche and Pontalis, who write:

Are we to conclude that Freud returns to the normative conception of sexuality that he emphatically challenged at the outset of his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality - basing it now on genetic criteria? Does he end up by categorising as perversions exactly what has always been so categorised? 31

It would appear that he did, yet he was not arguing in any simple fashion that reproduction was the given function of the sexual instinct. The norm of genitality had its full meaning in relation to the psychosexual crisis by which each child gained its knowledge of the meaning of masculinity and femininity: as these authors go on to observe, "the transition to the complete genital organisation implies for Freud that the Oedipus complex has been transcended, the castration complex assumed and the prohibition on incest accepted".<sup>32</sup> If this transition was successfully accomplished it consolidated the psychological basis of the boy's future heterosexual masculinity. Thus Freud located in this achievement a number of characteristics of adult masculinity, such as a sense of independence; but he noted as well a tendency for men to debase their love object (revealed in the erotic split between the sacred and profane and the dual image of women as madonna and whore), and he also observed the very high resistance which men expressed against adopting passive attitudes towards other males (something which is clearly linked to their fear of male homosexuality).

30. Freud, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis, op. cit., p. 156.

31. Laplanche and Pontalis, op. cit., p. 308.

32. Ibid., p. 308.

Freud's insights here, as in many other contexts, are striking; but his account of the child's sexual development based on the norm of genitality can hardly be accepted uncritically, no matter how persuasive his descriptions. On one level, though his theory should not be reduced to this, his normative model provides an elaborate rationalisation of patriarchal relations. The original anarchic existence of the components of the sexual instinct is successively organised through the oral, anal and phallic phases. At the latter the boy is confronted with the threat of castration which he comes to accept as real; he thereby transcends his oedipal relationships and makes an identification with his father. Though Freud was at pains to stress the tortuous and uncertain nature of this progress from polymorphous perversity to the beginnings of heterosexual masculinity, his theory nonetheless strongly invites a reading in endogenous terms. It appears to be the process of physical maturation which propels the boy along the path to genital heterosexuality, even though he clearly intended to disprove this conclusion. In particular, the importance of his penis to the boy remained unproblematic for Freud. Yet it is this importance which underlies the boy's infantile theory of the phallic mother, his perception of female genitals not as different from his own but as absent, and finally his fear of his own castration by the father which forces his oedipal resolution. Moreover, Freud wrote that it was "the high esteem felt by the homosexual for the male organ which decides his fate".<sup>33</sup> Given his ready acceptance of the natural importance of the penis to all boys, it could be wondered why heterosexuality should occur at all.

The problems involved in Freud's conception of sexual development will initially be considered in two steps. First, it is necessary to consider the question of the origin of the infantile sexual constitution and to ask whether the postulate of bisexuality means that the infant has a naturally given sexuality. Freud provided some valuable clues regarding

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33. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", *op. cit.*, p. 109.

the origins of sexuality, and though they hardly solve what is obviously a highly complex issue, it is essential to establish a firm orientation towards this question if an understanding of sexual development in social terms is to be a possibility. This leads directly to the question of the child's seemingly endogenous development. How can the child's movement along the path to genital heterosexuality be understood in non-biological terms? At issue, for example, is the selection of the erotogenic zones (mouth, anus and genitals) and the setting up of the oedipal relationships in which the phallus has such overwhelming importance.

The latter question introduces the second major problem, that of the psychical differentiation of the sexes. This was the riddle which so perplexed Freud and which he largely shelved pending a more exact understanding of his postulate of bisexuality. For the most part, he wished to deny that masculinity and femininity were the discrete properties of men and women respectively; yet, in his theory, it is with the resolution of the Oedipus complex by the boy, and the acknowledgement of 'castration' by the girl, that their appropriate gender identities are established. Freud could only explain this development, and its apparent suddenness, as being biologically determined, though this evidently dissatisfied him. But, as a result, he tended to explain homosexuality in terms of a simple gender inversion, a conclusion which Mieli quite logically produced from his discussion of the 'complete' Oedipus complex.

With each of these problems, it is a matter of insisting upon a thoroughly psychological explanation, for as Freud himself declared, "I regard it as a methodological error to seize upon a phylogenetic explanation before the ontogenetic possibilities have been exhausted".<sup>34</sup> It is very significant that on occasion he nonetheless felt compelled to depart from psychological considerations in search of a final cause

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34. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1914), S.E., Vol. XVII. p. 97.

and that he then made his explanations in phylogenetic, teleological and biological terms. Though he was sometimes dissatisfied with these conclusions, and cautioned that they should not be assumed to explain psychological dynamics, he still resorted to such arguments at important moments in his theory, in part because of his longing for a positivist underpinning to his new science. These extra-psychological conclusions point to absences in his account of sexual development and reflect various unquestioned patriarchal assumptions. As such, they are useful signposts in the task of reformulating aspects of his theory, and they are used in the following argument to open up the question of the production of male homosexuality as an outcome of the conflicts in which the psychological foundation of masculinity is embedded. In these terms, an adult homosexual object-choice becomes not a fixation or regression but another solution to the tensions which all boys confront in the patriarchal family in a particular historical context.

## (ii)

In this section it is argued that Freud's thesis of bisexuality is a central element of his endogenous model of infantile sexual development. Bisexuality is linked to the child's object-choices but, while it illustrates them, it does not explain them. It underlines the notion of a spontaneous movement along a predetermined path by positing a natural sexuality in the child, that of auto-erotism. Elsewhere, however, Freud explicitly addresses the question of the origins of sexuality and describes the way in which the sexual instinct gains its independence from the biological instinct. Here, auto-erotism is not an original objectless state. Yet, again within the endogenous model, auto-erotism takes first place in the procession of narcissism, homosexual object-choice and, ideally, heterosexual object-choice. In order to break with this biological account, it is necessary to remember that it accompanies two other theoretical emphases which Freud brings

to bear on the question of infantile sexuality. The Oedipus complex, which he elaborated relatively late in his career, offers a more dynamic picture, but it too relies upon biological and phylogenetic assumptions. His first approach, the seduction or trauma theory, did not recognise the existence of pre-pubertal sexuality and he abandoned it in 1897. Nonetheless, Freud continues to assert the importance of seduction and it becomes a universal phenomenon of childhood, pre-eminently in terms of the erotic character of parental care. Indeed, his whole account of the construction of femininity is largely an explanation of the seductive nature of the mother's love for the child. The perspective gained by taking account of Freud's attention to the importance of seduction is the essential step in reformulating the endogenous model. The explanation of object-choice in terms of bisexuality is no longer necessary.

Throughout his life, Freud held tenaciously to the postulate of bisexuality as a universal human phenomenon. He based it in the first instance, drawing from Wilhelm Fliess, upon the traits of anatomical hermaphroditism evident in the two sexes: bisexuality was an organically founded, innate disposition. The precise meaning of this hypothesis was never clarified, but it nonetheless remained a central feature in Freud's overall conception of human sexuality. In the Three Essays, he regarded it as "the decisive factor, and without taking bisexuality into account I think it would scarcely be possible to arrive at an understanding of the sexual manifestations that are actually to be observed in men and women".<sup>35</sup> Of one such manifestation he later wrote that "in boys the Oedipus complex has a double orientation, active and passive, in accordance with their bisexual constitution: a boy also wants to take his mother's place as the love-object of his father - a fact which we describe as the feminine attitude".<sup>36</sup> Nor was this ambivalence peculiar to childhood,

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35. Freud, Three Essays, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

36. Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925), *S.E.*, Vol. XIX, p. 250.

for in "all of us, throughout life, the libido normally oscillates between male and female objects".<sup>37</sup> As these comments illustrate, it was the manifestations of bisexuality upon which Freud often remarked: the origins and substance of this disposition remained a biological unknown. This was explicit in the Three Essays where he wrote that "a bisexual disposition is somehow concerned in inversion, though we do not know in what that disposition consists, beyond anatomical structure";<sup>38</sup> and the same vagueness characterised his interesting argument, made on a number of occasions, that an object-choice may combine the character of both sexes: "there is, as it were, a compromise between an impulse that seeks for a man and one that seeks for a woman ... Thus the sexual object is a kind of reflection of the subject's own bisexual nature."<sup>39</sup>

Freud considered bisexuality to be a defining characteristic of the infantile sexual constitution. Among other things, it was revealed in the child taking either parent as its object and similarly in identifying with either. The hypothesis implied that the child's object-choices occurred endogenously, and this is one distinct perspective in the Three Essays. The picture was one of a given sexuality which in time was naturally directed towards a preordained object, either male or female. The bisexual child then, marked by ambivalence, took either the mother or father as its object regardless of their sex, for prior to the phallic stage, "before a child has arrived at a definite knowledge of the difference between the sexes, the lack of a penis, it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother".<sup>40</sup> Freud seemed to emphasise

37. Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", op. cit., p. 158.

38. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., pp. 143-44 (emphasis added).

39. Ibid., p. 144 (emphasis added). Freud also argued that hysterical phantasies commonly expressed both a masculine unconscious sexual phantasy and a feminine one, thus revealing a homosexual impulse; see his "Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality" (1908), S.E., Vol. IX, pp. 155-66. Interestingly, this article was originally published in Magnus Hirschfeld's new journal, Z. Sexualwissenschaft, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1908), pp. 27-34.

40. Freud, The Ego and the Id (1923), S.E., Vol. XIX, p. 31, n. 1.

the naturalness of the infant's sexuality by such remarks as that "the new-born baby brings sexuality with it into the world, certain sexual sensations accompany its development as a suckling and during early childhood".<sup>41</sup> This was the period of auto-erotism.

It was obviously crucially important to Freud to insist upon the reality of infantile sexuality: it was a discovery which he expected to be strongly resisted, as it has been. Yet this claim is distinct from the question of whether the child is actually born a sexual being. Writing in contexts other than that of bisexuality, Freud suggested the complexities involved in understanding the origins of sexuality. There was a point, for example, at which the sexual instinct gained its independence:

The child's lips, in our view, behave like an erotogenic zone, and no doubt stimulation by the warm flow of milk is the cause of the pleasurable sensation. The satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated, in the first instance, with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later. ... The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment. ... 42

As a rule the sexual instinct then becomes auto-erotic, and not until the period of latency has been passed through is the original relation restored. There are thus good reasons why a child suckling at its mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it. 43

These passages from the Three Essays are highly significant. They underlined Freud's central intention of contradicting the popular conception of the sexual instinct as a biological force. He argued here that the instinct was originally attached to the self-preservative functions (the biological instinct) and only later existed independently. Thus auto-

41. Freud, "The Sexual Enlightenment of Children. (An Open Letter to Dr M. Furst)" (1907), S.E., Vol. IX, p. 133.

42. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., pp. 181-82.

43. Ibid., p. 222. Freud developed this idea in terms of a distinction between 'anaclitic' or attachment and narcissistic types of object-choices in "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), S.E., Vol. XIV, pp. 87-91.



erotism was not an original, objectless state, but a secondary stage characterised by the loss of the object; and the refinding of the object from puberty was not the object of the biological instinct, the mother's milk, but the object of the sexual instinct, the breast. As noted earlier, Freud maintained from his discussion of the perversions in his first essay that the origin of the instinct was not due to the inherent attractions of a specific object. Yet his postulate of bisexuality suggested a process of endogenous development towards alternative objects. In the passages above, however, he strengthened his basic thesis considerably by arguing that the origin of the instinct as such lay in fact in a process of detachment from the vital functions; with the loss of the breast, the sexual pleasure which had been bound up with feeding was pursued independently. As a prototype of sexual pleasure, the lost object thus introduced phantasy into the child's psychic life. In other words, it was the intersubjective relationship with the mother which explained the origin of the infant's sexuality, not the assumption of an original germ of sexuality which in time naturally sought an object in terms of a bisexual constitution. These brief comments do not do justice to the full implications of Freud's insights into the origins of sexuality,<sup>44</sup> but they are sufficient to establish a basic point for the purposes of this discussion. By the fact of infantile sexuality, Freud did not mean that the child possessed an already constituted sexual instinct which was either objectless or naturally directed towards a given object.

Though in the Three Essays, Freud tended to classify the whole of infantile sexuality as auto-erotic, he later introduced the concept into

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44. The preceding discussion draws on a general level from Jean Laplanche and J. -B. Pontalis, "Fantasy And The Origins Of Sexuality", The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Vol. 49, No. 19 (1968), p. 16. See also Jean Laplanche, Life and Death in Psychoanalysis, Baltimore, 1976 (1970), Ch. 1.

the temporal sequence of the child's sexual development: auto-erotism preceded the stage of narcissism. This passage, from the case history of Schreber, reveals the gamut of problems which the endogenous model raises for the question of homosexuality.

There comes a time in the development of the individual at which he unifies his sexual instincts (which have hitherto been engaged in auto-erotic activities) in order to obtain a love-object; and he begins by taking himself, his own body, as his love-object, and only subsequently proceeds from this to the choice of some person other than himself as his object. This half-way phase of narcissism between auto-erotism and object-love may perhaps be indispensable normally; but it appears that many people linger unusually long in this condition, and that many of its features are carried over by them into the later stages of their development. What is of chief importance in the subject's self thus chosen as a love-object may already be the genitals. The line of development then leads on to the choice of an external object with similar genitals - that is, to homosexual object-choice - and thence to heterosexuality. People who are manifest homosexuals in later life have, it may be presumed, never emancipated themselves from the binding condition that the object of their choice must possess genitals like their own; and in this connection the infantile sexual theories which attribute the same kind of genitals to both sexes exert much influence. 45

All boys then were 'homosexual' for a period in the sense that they held to the infantile theory of the phallic mother. Though Freud did not dwell on the point, it would seem that each of the boy's object-choices were 'homosexual' until his oedipal resolution, for only then did he recognise that his own genital was not universal. And those who failed to achieve this unconscious recognition, those who remained fixated in the narcissistic demand that their object possess the same genital, therefore became homosexual in adult life. This formulation begs the questions of why the penis is so important to the boy in the first place, why he upholds the theory of the phallic mother and why some boys should remain fixated and not others. In his elaboration of the Oedipus complex, Freud scarcely raised, let alone resolved, these questions. In order to redress the deficiencies of the endogenous model,

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45. Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)" (1911), S.E., Vol. XII, pp. 60-61.

it is necessary first of all to take account of the other shifting theoretical emphases on the general question of the child's sexual development in Freud's work.

Until 1897, prior to his discovery of infantile sexuality and his major psychological works, Freud held to the trauma or seduction theory of sexuality; at the same time as he explicitly repudiated this theory, and as a result of his self-analysis, he advanced the importance of the Oedipus complex. Yet he did not fully integrate this theory into his account of sexual development until as late as 1923 when he outlined the phallic phase of libidinal organisation.<sup>46</sup> His model of endogenous development occupies, in a sense, the middle period of his career and received its principal, though far from unqualified, statement in the Three Essays. This is not to suggest that the seduction theory, the endogenous model and the Oedipus complex are three discrete theories, but they do contain significantly different emphases. Thus Freud's elaboration of the Oedipus complex achieved a far more dynamic picture of the child's development than did the idea that there was a spontaneous movement from auto-erotism via a homosexual object-choice to a heterosexual one. The concept of the 'complete' Oedipus complex,<sup>47</sup> whereby the boy chose both parents as objects and also identified with each, together with Freud's sharper realisation at about the same time of the asymmetrical development of boys and girls,<sup>48</sup> served to highlight quite dramatically the various contingencies in the boy's development. In particular, this perspective emphasised the problematic nature of masculinity and femininity. It was during this period of the early twenties that Freud displayed his most sophisticated grasp of the complexities of the boy's construction of his gender identity and sexual orientation. Yet, just as he integrated the concept of auto-erotism into the endogenous model, so he ultimately explained the boy's Oedipus complex and its resolution in

46. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization", op. cit.

47. Freud, The Ego and the Id, op. cit.

48. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), S.E., Vol. XIX, pp. 171-79.

phylogenetic and biological terms. Specifically, he accepted the importance of the penis to the boy as a natural phenomenon.

What is striking about the evolution of Freud's thinking on the question of sexual development is that although it reveals different emphases and an increasing sophistication, there are also remarkable continuities. This is evident not only in the theory of the Oedipus complex which was first postulated in 1897, was central to the analysis of Little Hans in 1909 and finally integrated more fully into a general theory from 1923, but also in the original seduction theory.

With this theory, Freud attempted to explain the repression of sexuality and its neurotic consequences on the basis of two scenes which were separated by puberty.<sup>49</sup> In the first instance, a child experienced a sexual advance on the part of an adult; typically, this was reported as the father making an approach to his daughter. Though this scene had a sexual meaning for the adult, for the child it was 'presexually sexual', since the latter did not have the physical or psychical maturity to respond to the advance in the same way. The child therefore did not repress the experience and it only gained a traumatic effect after a second scene. This did not necessarily have an intrinsic sexual meaning and, in itself, could be quite banal. However, the later experience revived the memory of the first via an associative link and its sexual implications could then be understood by the young adult. The original memory was thus repressed because of the excessive excitation which the scene in puberty triggered off. Within a few years, however, Freud had to face his own rather traumatic realisation that though actual incest, and incestuous attempts, were not rare, his two scene model could not explain sexual repression. It was impossible to disentangle truth from fiction in the stories of seduction since such a distinction was not recognised in the unconscious, and he discovered that his patients had strong motives for advancing their phantasies as real events. He later wrote that,

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49. See for example, the case of Emma in Freud, "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), *S.E.*, Vol. I, pp. 352-56.

In the period in which the main interest was directed to discovering infantile sexual traumas, almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father. I was driven to recognize in the end that these reports were untrue and so came to understand that hysterical symptoms are derived from phantasies and not from real occurrences. It was only later that I was able to recognize in this phantasy of being seduced by the father the expression of the typical Oedipus complex in women. 50

Thus the active desire of the girl for the father had been transformed into a phantasy of seduction by the father in which her role was completely passive. Having officially abandoned the seduction theory with its assumption of the sexually innocent child, Freud began to explore, not so much the Oedipus complex, as infantile sexuality and its apparently endogenous determination.

Along with the supposed frequency of seduction in childhood, I ceased also to lay exaggerated stress on the accidental influencing of sexuality on to which I had sought to thrust the main responsibility for the causation of illness ... and the factors of constitution and heredity necessarily gained the upper hand once more; but there was this difference between my views and those prevailing in other quarters, that on my theory the 'sexual constitution' took the place of a 'general neuropathic disposition'. 51

Nonetheless, while Freud dismissed his original theory, he continued to assert the importance of seduction in the child's early life and, indeed, its occurrence could not be reduced to the 'accidental'. The idea of seduction became, not necessarily an empirical event to be painstakingly exhumed from ever further back in childhood, but an effect of the parents' unconscious desires. Though Freud sometimes stated this quite forcefully, and it was also implicit in other parts of his work, he did not attempt a coherent synthesis of the various aspects of this perspective and certainly did not formulate a new seduction theory. His

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50. Freud, "Femininity", in New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1933), S.E., Vol. XXII, p. 120. Though Freud suggested here that he only later recognised the Oedipus complex behind the stories of seduction, he had written to Fliess on 15 October 1897 that "we can understand the riveting power of Oedipus Rex ... the Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognises because he feels its existence within himself" (Letter 71, "Extracts from the Fliess Papers" (1892-1899), S.E., Vol. I, p. 265).
51. Freud, "My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses", op. cit., pp. 275-76.

consistent emphasis upon seduction, however, deserves to be considered carefully for, within his writing on sexuality, it is the clearest counter-balance to the endogenous model.<sup>52</sup>

It should be noted first of all that Freud continued to stress the importance of external contingencies upon the child's development, including that of actual seduction. "I have gone beyond that theory", he wrote in 1901, "but I have not abandoned it; that is to say, I do not today consider the theory incorrect, but incomplete".<sup>53</sup> It was incomplete not because he had exaggerated the frequency or importance of seduction, but because those experiences did not necessarily have pathogenic consequences; constitutional factors had to be taken into account as well.<sup>54</sup> In effect, Freud's view of seduction changed from it having the determining role in the aetiology of the psychoneuroses to being a universal phenomenon of childhood. The child was an erotic plaything for its parents,<sup>55</sup> and it was "one of the commonest things - psychoanalyses are full of such incidents - for children's genitals to be caressed, not only in word but in deed, by fond relatives, including even parents themselves".<sup>56</sup> The universality of seduction had its full import beyond specific events and in the general context of the erotic character of parental care. Freud insisted upon this from his Three Essays until his work on femininity towards the end of his life.

A child's intercourse with anyone responsible for his care affords him an unending source of sexual excitation and satisfaction from his erotogenic zones. This is especially so since the person in charge of him, who, after all, is as a rule his mother, herself regards him with

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52. See the discussion by Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality", op. cit.; and Laplanche, op. cit., Ch. 2.
53. Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1901), S.E., Vol. VII, p. 27, n.1.
54. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 190.
55. Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love" (1912), S.E., Vol. XI, p. 181.
56. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", op. cit., p. 23, n. 2.

feelings that are derived from her own sexual life: she strokes him, kisses him, rocks him and quite clearly treats him as a substitute for a complete sexual object. ... the sexual instinct is not aroused only by direct excitation of the genital zone. What we call affection will unfailingly show its effects one day on the genital zones as well. 57

In the early thirties, Freud set this observation in relation to his original seduction theory. He wrote of young girls, though the general point also applied to boys, that,

... now we find the phantasy of seduction once more in the pre-Oedipus prehistory of girls; but the seducer is regularly the mother. Here, however, the phantasy touches the ground of reality, for it was really the mother who by her activities over the child's bodily hygiene inevitably stimulated, and perhaps roused for the first time, pleasurable sensations in her genitals. 58

The fact that the mother thus unavoidably initiates the child into the phallic phase is, I think, the reason why, in phantasies of later years, the father so regularly appears as the sexual seducer. When the girl turns away from her mother, she also makes over to her father her introduction into sexual life. 59

It should be emphasised that this is a significant qualification of the endogenous model: the phallic phase was introduced, not by the appropriate moment of physical maturity, but by the mother's care for the child. Indeed, Freud's account of the construction of femininity, prefigured by his remark in the Three Essays that the mother treats her child "as a substitute for a complete sexual object", is overwhelmingly an explanation of the seductive character of her love.

Finally, a version of the seduction theory also reappeared in Freud's case history of the Wolf Man. Here, the two scenes were no longer separated by puberty for there was of course no question of the boy being sexually innocent. The 'scene' which triggered his infantile neurosis at the age of four and a half was the wolf dream; behind this,

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57. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 223.

58. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 120.

59. Freud, "Female Sexuality", op. cit., p. 238. Here, as on many other occasions, Freud was determined to exonerate the father; see below, pp. 161-66; 182.

Freud constructed a primal scene, the boy's observation of his parents' sexual intercourse when he was one and a half. As will be demonstrated, the case is of considerable interest, for the Wolf Man's dilemma lay in his inability to resolve his passive love for his father in terms of the usual oedipal resolution which would have resulted either in his becoming homosexual or else in repressing that attachment.

To return to the question of object-choice, it is now evident that Freud offered an explanation which was quite independent of the hypothesis of bisexuality. In the context of his first theory of the instincts, in which he posited an opposition between the self-preservative or ego-instincts and the sexual instinct, he compared the way in which the sexual instinct was originally attached to the self-preservative functions with the child's selection of an object. Here, Freud made a distinction between the child's 'affectionate' and 'sensual' currents whose union was necessary to successful sexual love in adult life (an ideal, incidentally, which was never attained since men universally tended to debase their sexual object).

The affectionate current is the older of the two. It springs from the earliest years of childhood; it is formed on the basis of the interests of the self-preservative instinct and is directed to members of the family and those who look after the child. From the very beginning it carries along with it contributions from the sexual instincts ... It corresponds to the child's primary object-choice. We learn in this way that the sexual instincts find their first objects by attaching themselves to the valuations made by the ego-instincts, precisely in the way in which the first sexual satisfactions are experienced in attachment to the bodily functions necessary for the preservation of life. 60

Put more simply, Freud affirmed that the child found its way to its object via those who cared for it which, given the predominant pattern of parenting, of course meant the mother. Thus in discussing the pleasure which Little Hans found in excretion, he explained that he

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60. Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love", op. cit., pp. 180-81.



had "obtained this pleasure from his erotogenic zones with the help of the person who had looked after him - his mother, in fact; and thus the pleasure already pointed the way to object-choice".<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere, Freud remarked that vacillation in object-choice "is first brought to the child's notice by the time-honoured question: 'Which do you love most, Daddy or Mummy?'"<sup>62</sup>

It is worth noting that Hans' desire was omni-directional: he wanted to sleep with his mother, he stressed his love for his father, he wished to go downstairs to sleep with fourteen-year-old Mariedl, Fritzl was his favourite 'girl', he was enamoured with the little girl from the same apartment, he wished to be the father of the Gmunden children and so on. He also had an intense interest in 'widdlers', not only his own and his parents' but in those of inanimate objects (he assumed a train was widdling) and animals. Indeed, part of Hans' interest in widdlers lay in distinguishing animate from inanimate objects: he hardly had a natural bisexual desire towards a given object.

The idea of the child's object-choice being motivated by its bisexual constitution also obscures the asymmetry of its relationship with each parent. It is readily understandable that the mother is likely to be the object of the child's strongest attachment, but what of the father? Certainly there are motives for the child to direct its libidinal interest to him. As well as the parental jealousy underlying the question, "which do you love most, Daddy or Mummy?", there is also the fact that the child is frustrated in its wish to have a baby with the mother, a phantasy well to the fore in Little Hans, for example. However, it is not possible simply to substitute the father for the mother. In The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud quoted from an analysis reported by Ernest Jones in which a man recalled that,

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61. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", op. cit., p. 108. Similarly, Freud, Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1909), S.E., Vol. XI, p. 47.

62. Freud, "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" (1909), S.E., Vol. X. p. 238.

... at the age of three and a half he had had a double phantasy concerning the birth of a younger sister - namely that she was the child, firstly, of himself and his mother, and secondly, of the doctor and himself. Thus in this phantasy he played both a masculine and a feminine part. 63

The boy's desire then, for his parents is differentiated (in this case the doctor being substituted for the father), though as Freud argued elsewhere, it is incorrect to define these respective sexual aims as masculine and feminine. Rather they are active and passive and will not correlate to the former pair until the boy fully acknowledges the difference between the sexes with his oedipal resolution.<sup>64</sup> In Jones' case, the boy's desire for the doctor was determined by the fact that many of the doctor's female patients (including the boy's mother) found him very attractive and he actually married one of them; the boy also saw him as a source of sexual knowledge. And the boy substituted the doctor for his father because of his intense jealousy of the latter.

Neither Jones in this case, nor Freud elsewhere, properly explained the differentiation of the boy's desires for his parents, and in particular why a passive attitude was adopted towards the father. In his discussion of the Wolf Man, Freud merely remarked of the boy's passive aim towards his father: "It would naturally not have been so easy to achieve an active attitude in the sadistic phase towards his all-powerful father."<sup>65</sup> This clearly implies that the boy did have some significant knowledge of the difference between the sexes<sup>66</sup> and it is this knowledge which

63. Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901), S.E., Vol. VI, p. 196.

64. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", op. cit., p. 47.

65. Ibid., p. 27.

66. The apparent contradiction here of Freud's statement noted earlier that it is not until a boy has acknowledged the threat of castration that he distinguishes between his father and mother, is at least partly explained by the fact that the Wolf Man had received such a threat from his Nanya, that he had given up his masturbation and that his sexual organisation had regressed to the anal-sadistic stage (ibid., pp. 24-28). Nonetheless, the boy's precise understanding remains obscure in Freud's account, a point to which this discussion will return.

underlies the asymmetry of a boy's oedipal desires for his mother and father. In contrast to the implications of the hypothesis of bisexuality, therefore, not only does a child find its way to object-choice via its interaction with its parents, but its differentiated sexual aims too are determined by the quality of that interaction.

The question of the boy's knowledge of sexual difference introduces the problem of his construction of his gender identity. Here again, Freud sought to employ the idea of bisexuality.

(iii)

Freud attempted to explain the antithesis between masculinity and femininity in the mental life of all human beings by the hypothesis of bisexuality. However, his formulation encountered insuperable difficulties and late in his life he admitted that the theory of bisexuality was "still surrounded by many obscurities and we cannot but feel it as a serious impediment in psycho-analysis that it has not yet found any link with the theory of the instincts".<sup>67</sup> Freud's struggle with the question of the psychical differentiation between the sexes lay in rejecting the popular biological explanation and moving uneasily between two other biological accounts, the bisexuality hypothesis and the argument summed up in his notorious assertion that anatomy was destiny. The issue can only be resolved by acknowledging the social determinants of gender differentiation and, moreover, an important strand within his thinking implicitly points to this solution.

Freud's central insight, and the radical thrust in his approach to the question of psychical differentiation, was the rejection of the simple, popularly accepted explanation. It was not the case that the biological distinction between 'masculine' and 'feminine' in terms of the function of

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67. Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (1930), S.E., Vol. XXI, p. 106, n.

the sex cells, the 'active' spermatozoa and the 'passive' ova, corresponded to a neat anatomical distinction between the sexes and that this in turn determined the psychical traits of masculinity and femininity. He objected to this explanation because of the evidence of physical hermaphroditism in the two sexes which meant that their anatomical distinction was not absolute and, most importantly, because,

... pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or biological sense. Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex; and he shows a combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones. 68

... pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content. 69

In line with this view, Freud also argued that the conflict which led to repression was not one between masculine and feminine tendencies. He criticised Fliess and Adler for 'sexualising' the process of repression, that is for explaining it on biological rather than psychological grounds. Instead, the ego put repression into operation for the benefit of one of the sexual tendencies in order to protect its narcissism, so that "both in male and female individuals masculine as well as feminine instinctual impulses are found, and that each can equally well undergo repression and so become unconscious".<sup>70</sup>

In explaining the phenomenon of psychical differentiation between the sexes, Freud was concerned to define the relationship between three pairs of factors, these being masculinity and femininity, the anatomical distinction between the sexes, and the postulated constitutional forces of activity and passivity (otherwise termed masculine and feminine

68. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 220, n.

69. Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" op. cit., p. 258.

70. Freud, "'A Child is Being Beaten' (A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions)" (1919), S.E., Vol. XVII, p. 202. See Also Freud's two studies, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", op. cit., pp. 110-11; "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), S.E., Vol. XXIII, pp. 250-51. In the latter however, Freud also contradicted his maxim against 'sexualising' repression, a point which will be taken up at the end of this section.

instinctual impulses).<sup>71</sup> Because masculinity and femininity appeared in combined and reversed forms in individuals of both sexes, such contingencies denied a direct relationship between the psychic traits and the existence of male and female genitals. Similarly, the male and female genitals could not be simply the respective embodiments of the underlying forces of activity and passivity. Freud therefore used the hypothesis of bisexuality to propose that masculinity and femininity reflected a combination of the underlying forces. In other words, the hypothesis acted as a wedge between these forces and the fact of anatomical distinction so that the destiny of gender was not determined by anatomy, but by the underlying combination of activity and passivity. By this means, Freud attempted to explain the characteristic contingencies involved in the psychical differentiation of the sexes, as were to be found in some of the oedipal resolutions.

Analysis very often shows that a little girl, after she has had to relinquish her father as a love-object, will bring her masculinity into prominence and identify herself with the father (that is, with the object which she has lost), instead of with her mother. This will clearly depend on whether the masculinity in her disposition - whatever that may consist in - is strong enough. 72

Thus the masculine and feminine instinctual impulses remained a biological unknown. Freud in fact declared that psychology had been unable to solve the "riddle of femininity" and that the explanation "must no doubt come from elsewhere, and cannot come till we have learnt how in general the differentiation of living organisms into two sexes came about".<sup>73</sup> In the meantime, the hypothesis of bisexuality was taken to explain the manifestations of masculinity and femininity, just as it was to explain the character of the child's object-choices.

Freud's account could hardly rest at this point. The bisexuality hypothesis maintained the substance of psychical differentiation (in

71. The following criticism of the hypothesis of bisexuality draws on a general level from Lynn S. Levine, "Contradictions in Freud's Conception of Masculinity and Femininity", New Haven, 1976 (unpublished paper).

72. Freud, The Ego and the Id, op. cit., p. 32 (emphasis added).

73. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 116.

terms of activity and passivity) but denied its connection with the fact of anatomical distinction. Clearly, despite the evident combinations and reversals of masculinity and femininity in individuals, the distribution of these traits was far from being wholly arbitrary. Yet to admit that males and females, by virtue of their anatomical distinction, had respectively a constitutional tendency towards activity and passivity immediately underlined the irrelevance of the bisexuality hypothesis. And Freud did argue for precisely this tendency. Regarding the instance of a post-oedipal girl's assertion of her masculinity, he concluded that it was due to "a constitutional factor, a greater amount of activity, such as is ordinarily characteristic of a male".<sup>74</sup> Moreover, he connected the typical passivity of the oedipal girl "with the stunted growth of her penis",<sup>75</sup> a remark which, regardless of its sexism, is certainly the swan song for the notion of bisexuality. This line of thought, which conceived of the male and female sexual organs as the embodiments of constitutional activity and passivity, also threatened a cardinal principle in psychoanalysis.

It would not be surprising if it were to turn out that each sexuality had its own special libido appropriated to it, so that one sort of libido would pursue the aims of a masculine sexual life and another sort those of a feminine one. But nothing of this kind is true. There is only one libido, which serves both the masculine and the feminine sexual functions. To it itself we cannot assign any sex ... 76

The alternative explanation of the psychical differentiation between the sexes in Freud's work lies in his account of the sexual development of the child and its ultimate oedipal resolutions.

Both sexes seem to pass through the early phases of libidinal development in the same manner. It might have been expected that in girls there would already have been some lag in aggressiveness in the sadistic-anal phase, but such is not the case. Analysis of children's play has shown our women analysts that the aggressive impulses of little girls leave nothing to be

74. Ibid, p. 130.

75. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", op. cit., p. 179.

76. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 131. Freud continued: "... if,

desired in the way of abundance and violence. With their entry into the phallic phase the differences between the sexes are completely eclipsed by their agreements. We are obliged to recognize that the little girl is a little man. 77

Though he did not present the explanation which followed from this observation as distinct from the hypothesis of bisexuality, it is clear that he advanced it with relatively little reference to underlying masculine and feminine instinctual impulses. Instead, it was the importance of the penis to both boys and girls and the issue of who possessed it and the fear of losing it which determined the basis of their gender identities. In these terms, Freud attempted to explain the psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes, and his late admission of the obscurities surrounding the bisexuality hypothesis seems to have accompanied his hardening conviction that anatomy was destiny.

In the phallic phase, the boy had two sexual objects and, correspondingly, two 'possibilities' of gaining satisfaction from the Oedipus complex.

He could put himself in his father's place in a masculine fashion and have intercourse with his mother as his father did, in which case he would soon have felt the latter as a hindrance; or he might want to take the place of his mother and be loved by his father, in which case his mother would become superfluous. 78

Both the positive and negative forms of the complex were confronted with, and resolved by, the threat of castration, which for the boy was "the greatest trauma of his life".<sup>79</sup> In the first case it arose as a punishment and in the second it was a necessary precondition. The threat of castration imposed upon the boy the necessity to make a choice between his incestuous desires for his parents and his narcissistic valuation of his penis. He might experience the threat of castration in a literal

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following the conventional equation of activity and masculinity, we are inclined to describe it /the libido/ as masculine, we must not forget that it also covers trends with a passive aim" (p. 131).

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

78. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", *op. cit.*, p. 176.

79. Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, *op. cit.*, p. 155. Freud compared his case studies of Little Hans and the Wolf Man and observed that "both forms of the Oedipus Complex, the normal, active form and the inverted one, came to grief through the castration complex" (*Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1925), *S.E.*, Vol. XX, p. 108).

sense: not only masturbation, but also thumb-sucking and bed-wetting could lead his mother to threaten him with the loss of his penis (or perhaps his hand) if these activities did not cease, for which she invoked the authority of a powerful male, typically the father. However, it was more likely that the threat would be made covertly:

... it is highly improbable that children are threatened with castration as often as it appears in the analyses of neurotics. We shall be satisfied by realizing that the child puts a threat of this kind together in his imagination on the basis of hints, helped out by the knowledge that autoerotic satisfaction is forbidden and under the impression of his discovery of the female genitals. 80

These hints comprised the many ways in which his parents denied the existence of the boy's sexual desires. At the basis of their disapproval of his bed-wetting, for example, was their suspicion that it was evidence of his undue concern for his penis and, Freud thought, "they are probably right".<sup>81</sup> Similarly, parents saw in the boy's habitual sucking the pursuit of illicit pleasure. Behind the parents' vigilance was their repression of their own childhood sexuality, which would have succumbed to infantile amnesia, so that their love for their child did not admit the existence of infantile sexuality. For their love was characterised by the overvaluation which was the hallmark of the transformation of primary narcissism: "they are under a compulsion to ascribe every perfection to ... 'His Majesty the Baby'",<sup>82</sup> including the 'perfection' of sexual innocence. To admit otherwise flew in the face of their own repressions.

The boy's castration complex was brought about by his experience of a threat, the reality of which he came to believe once he had observed female genitals and concluded that women had suffered precisely this fate, that they 'lacked' a penis. Part of this new knowledge was that only women could give birth to babies and so the boy abandoned the cloacal

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80. Freud, Introductory Lectures, op. cit., p. 369.

81. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", op. cit., p. 175. Freud reserved his opinion on this point shortly afterwards in "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", op. cit., p. 250.

82. Freud, "On Narcissism", op. cit., p. 91.



theory whereby both sexes gave birth.<sup>83</sup> Little Hans, for example, having been told that mothers alone gave birth and that this involved a great deal of pain, declared shortly afterwards that "I should so like to have children; but I don't ever want it; I shouldn't like to have them".<sup>84</sup>

The efficacy of the castration threat was the crucial factor in determining the boy's masculinity. The question which must be raised about Freud's account is why the penis has such significance for the boy in the first place. The problem is that he accepted the boy's high valuation of his penis as unproblematic and that, in fact, he considered the penis to be intrinsically superior to the clitoris. Of the young boy, he wrote:

It is natural for him to assume that all other living beings, human and animals, possess a genital like his own; indeed, we know he looks for an organ analogous to his own in inanimate things as well. This part of the body, which is so easily excitable, prone to changes and so rich in sensations, occupies the boy's interest to a high degree and is constantly setting new tasks to his instinct for research. 85

Freud's patriarchal assumption was even more evident when he described "the momentous discovery" which little girls were destined to make:

They notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis. ...

She makes her judgement and decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it. 86

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83. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization", op. cit., p. 145; and Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908), S.E., Vol. IX, pp. 219-20.

84. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", op. cit., p. 93 (emphasis added; the whole sentence is italicised in the original). Freud explained Hans' denial only in terms of his jealousy of other children (p. 93, n. 2); see the discussion by Campioni and Gross, op. cit., pp. 105-06.

85. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization", op. cit., pp. 142-43.

86. Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", op. cit., p. 252.

That the boy attributed the possession of a penis to everyone, including females and especially his mother, merely reflected the normal sexual constitution in which, Freud wrote, "already in childhood the penis is the leading erotogenic zone and the chief auto-erotic sexual object; and the boy's estimate of its value is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like himself who is without this essential constituent".<sup>87</sup>

Apart from his assumption of its natural superiority, Freud advanced two other explanations of the importance of the penis to the boy. He endorsed Ferenczi's teleological argument that the penis "owes its extraordinarily high narcissistic cathexis to its organic significance for the propagation of the species".<sup>88</sup> At the same time he was unhappy with this as a solution to the problem at hand and noted that "to leave the standpoint of individual psychology is not of any immediate help in clarifying this complicated situation".<sup>89</sup> His other explanation of the importance of the penis at the phallic stage was made in endogenous terms. The idea of a narcissistic injury to the body had already been formed in the boy from "the experience of losing his mother's breast after sucking, from the daily surrender of faeces and, indeed, even from his separation from the womb at birth".<sup>90</sup> These experiences of loss were precursors of the threat of castration. Freud argued that for a variety of reasons there existed an unconscious equivalence between the concepts of faeces, baby and penis (each was seen as something small which could be removed from the body), and in the course of normal development the interest in faeces was transferred to the penis.<sup>91</sup>

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87. Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children", op. cit., pp. 215-16.

88. Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", op. cit., p. 257; similarly, see Freud, "Fetishism" (1927), S.E., Vol. XXI, p. 153.

89. Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", op. cit., p. 257.

90. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization", op. cit., p. 144, n. 2.

91. Freud, "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism" (1917), S.E., Vol. XVII, pp. 131-32. Freud similarly gave an explanation in endogenous terms of the importance of faeces to

However, Freud also stressed the particular regard which the mother had for her son and her motives for privileging his penis as the primary object of desire. There was firstly the general effect of her care of her children's hygiene, so that little girls for example,

... necessarily received their first, or at any rate their strongest, genital sensations when they were being cleaned and having their toilet attended to by their mother ...  
/they/ enjoy these sensations and try to get their mothers to make them more intense by repeated touching and rubbing. 92

The mother's specific role in relation to her son was illustrated in the case of Little Hans. He attempted to seduce her while in her bed by repeating a remark he had overheard: "Do you know what Aunt M. said? She said: 'He has got a dear little thingummy.'"<sup>93</sup> This incident is significant in that the model for this attempted seduction came from an adult and the Aunt's remark also reads like a sexual overture. In addition, it was not Hans alone who wished to sleep with his mother for, as his father reported: "Hans always comes in to us in the early morning, and my wife cannot resist taking him into bed with her for a few minutes."<sup>94</sup> And in this, the mother was not deterred by either her husband's objections or Freud's authority.

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the child, the importance being transferred from the oral zone ("From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", op. cit., p. 108). Laplanche generalises about the erotogenic zone:

It is a kind of breaking or turning point within the bodily envelope, since what is in question is above all sphincteral orifices: mouth, anus, etc. It is also a zone of exchange, since the principal biological exchanges are borne by it (the prime example is again feeding, but there are other exchanges as well). This zone of exchange is also a zone for care, namely the particular and attentive care provided by the mother. These zones, then, attract the first erotogenic maneuvers from the adult. An even more significant factor if we introduce the subjectivity of the first 'partner': these zones focalize parental fantasies and above all maternal fantasies, so that we may say, in what is barely a metaphor, that they are the points through which is introduced into the child that alien internal entity which is, properly speaking, the sexual excitation (op. cit., pp.23-24).

92. Freud, "Female Sexuality", op. cit., p. 238.

93. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", op. cit., p. 23.

94. Ibid., p. 39. It is worth noting that Hans was very often allowed to accompany his mother to the toilet, an event in which he found great pleasure. It might be presumed that the pleasure was mutual (pp. 57, 63). See also the discussion by Campioni and Gross, who write:

The child's erotic life therefore existed in a highly inconsistent context. The parents' love, which was full of hints which forbade the child's auto-erotic satisfaction, also acted as a massive contradiction to this: seduction was followed by prohibition.<sup>95</sup> Freud noted that the mother was alarmed to realise that the boy's sexual excitation related to herself, as well she might be for this was something which immediately called her own innocence into question. In fact, the mother was the child's first seducer. This needs to be understood both in the context of the ambiguity which typically marked her relationship with her husband, and also in terms of the particular significance which a son had for her.

Her narcissistic overvaluation of her children was likely to be particularly strong: given her tendency to a narcissistic type of object-choice,<sup>96</sup> she was able to find in her son (a part of herself) a greater opportunity for object-choice than that afforded by her husband.<sup>97</sup> For she typically transferred to her husband the resentment which was originally directed towards her own mother, and this occurred in the following way. As well as the grievances which the girl shared with the boy, there was a crucial additional factor: as Freud put it, it was, "a surprise to

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It is clearly not only Hans' one-way desire which is operating but also the desire of the other which is decisive. Aunt M, Hans' mother and father all give him the cues to assume the primacy of the penis as an object of desire, rather than Hans intuiting its natural significance (op. cit., p. 109).

95. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 124.

96. Freud described women as wanting to be loved rather than to love, such self-sufficiency being narcissistic. Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that the woman is "seeking to reproduce the child's relationship to the mother who feeds it - an aim which according to Freud is a defining characteristic of the anaclitic object choice". They argue that nothing is gained theoretically by separating the two 'types' of choices as Freud attempted to do in his paper on narcissism (The Language of Psycho-Analysis, op. cit., p. 259).

97. Freud, "On Narcissism", op. cit., pp. 89-90.

learn from analyses that girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for being thus put at a disadvantage".<sup>98</sup> The realisation of her 'lack' led to a repression of her active sexuality, the replacement of the clitoris by the vagina as her dominant erotogenic zone, and a change of object from mother to father, all in all a process to which Freud referred as a catastrophe<sup>99</sup> (though in his eyes, an inevitable one if femininity was to be attained). Typically the girl's pre-oedipal attachment to her mother was not completely overcome and her childish ambivalence affected her later relationship with her husband.

The hostility that has been left behind follows in the train of the positive attachment and spreads over on to the new object. The woman's husband, who to begin with inherited from her father, becomes after a time her mother's heir as well. 100

The narcissistic wound which the girl suffered upon realising that she was 'castrated' could only be assuaged by a baby, for Freud argued that it was crucial in the girl's development to femininity that her original penis envy be transformed into a desire for a child. Her satisfaction and love for the child would be all the greater, therefore, if it brought with it the desired penis; indeed, Freud remarked that the relationship between mother and son was "altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships".<sup>101</sup>

In this alternative account to the bisexuality hypothesis, Freud stressed the equivalent development of boys and girls until their experience of

98. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 124.

99. Freud, "Female Sexuality", op. cit., p. 239.

100. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 133. Chodorow emphasises the continuing importance of the mother to her daughter: "Most women emerge from their oedipus complex oriented to their father and men as primary erotic objects, but it is clear that men tend to remain emotionally secondary" (op. cit., p. 193).

101. Freud, "Femininity", op. cit., p. 133. Freud reiterated this observation on a number of occasions, for example in his Introductory Lectures, op. cit., p. 206, and Civilization and its Discontents, op. cit., p. 113. Furthermore, to the extent that the transition from a wish for a penis to a wish for a baby had

the castration complex in the phallic phase. While they did not naturally intuit the importance of the penis, it was nonetheless its inherent superiority which underlay their different reactions to the complex and their subsequent formation of different gender identities. Via the mother's mediation, the boy came to understand his superiority to females and the girl her inferiority to males. For Freud, it was inevitable that the boy would realise that women 'lacked' a penis: fearful of his own castration by the threatening father, he would ultimately be forced, quite literally, to face the facts. The clitoris was a stunted penis, to Freud as much as to the boy who abandoned his belief in the phallic mother. With his resolution of the positive Oedipus complex there was a dramatic shift in his family constellation: the father, with whom the boy then identified, was influential as he had never been before, while the importance of the mother was diminished. This meant that the attitude proper to the opposite sex, passivity towards other males, had succumbed to repression. Similarly, with the young girl's acceptance of her 'castration', her penis envy was transformed into a wish for a baby. However, Freud realised that the repression of the attitude proper to the opposite sex was not symmetrical in boys and girls and he returned to the idea of the character of the sexual constitution.

In the girl's case, Freud found it strange how often "the wish for masculinity has been retained in the unconscious and, from out of its state of repression, exercises a disturbing influence".<sup>102</sup> Thus the repression of the attitude proper to the opposite sex in girls as well as boys was marked by the repudiation of femininity. He described this

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not been effected, the woman would resent her husband's possession of a penis, and Freud mentioned the case of one newly-married woman whose dream revealed the wish to castrate her husband ("The Taboo of Virginity" (1917), *S.E.*, Vol. XI, p. 205; see also, "On Transformations of Instinct", *op. cit.*, p. 130).

102. Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", *op. cit.*, p. 251.

as a remarkable feature in the psychic life of human beings and found it bewildering in analytic practice.

We often have the impression that with the wish for a penis and the masculine protest we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock. The repudiation of femininity can be nothing else than a biological fact, a part of the great riddle of sex. 103

In this paper, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", written two years before his death, Freud advanced an argument which was the clearest contradiction of the bisexuality thesis. It appeared that there was, after all, a psychic conflict between masculine and feminine instinctual impulses. Far from the hypothesis that a combination of these forces readily co-existed in the lived forms of masculinity and femininity, he now suggested a constitutional bias against the passive impulses in both sexes. The biological fact behind the repudiation of femininity could only be a predominance of activity in both sexes, the 'masculine' libido which they shared.

Indeed, the upshot of his previous work on femininity reinforced this conclusion. Despite his acceptance of female 'castration' as a straightforward fact, he found the contingencies which accompanied the attainment of femininity more pronounced than those which characterised the development of masculinity. And while he expressed the teleological view that it was the female reproductive function which ultimately determined the nature of femininity and its attendant level of repression, this led to a very peculiar kind of functionalist argument. In the sexual development of women, he wrote, "once more the constitution will not adapt itself to its function without a struggle".<sup>104</sup> Nature had taken less account of the demands of femininity than of masculinity because

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103. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

104. Freud, "Femininity", *op. cit.*, p. 117.

"the accomplishment of the aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women's consent".<sup>105</sup> The universal repudiation of femininity therefore revealed a conflict between the sexual constitution and the reproductive function.

But the conflict was more pronounced in women.

In males the striving to be masculine is ego-syntonic from the first; the passive attitude, since it presupposes an acceptance of castration, is energetically repressed, and often its presence is only indicated by excessive overcompensations. In females, too, the striving to be masculine is ego-syntonic at a certain point - namely in the phallic phase, before the development to femininity has set in. <sup>106</sup>

This development could only be due either to the girl's genital inadequacy, the clitoris being ultimately unable to express the same activity as the penis, or to the demands of the reproductive function which necessitated the repression of her activity just as it promoted that of the boy. Thus the asymmetrical character of the repression of the attitude proper to the opposite sex produced a final dilemma which Freud did not recognise. The universal repudiation of femininity implied that masculinity was the natural outcome of the predominantly active sexual constitution whereas femininity was the outcome of its repression: men were born but women were made.

At this point, Freud had exhausted the non-social determinants of the psychical differentiation between the sexes. Beginning with the observation that masculinity and femininity were not the exclusive properties of men and women respectively, he had rejected the conventional equation between biological activity and passivity, the male and female genitals, and the psychic traits of masculinity and femininity. The hypothesis of bisexuality, however, was not a solution to the question of the relationships between these elements: by denying the connection of the psychic traits with the fact of anatomical distinction and instead

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105. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

106. Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Intermittent", *op. cit.*, pp. 250-51.



linking them to the postulated forces of activity and passivity, it implicitly exaggerated the randomness of the distribution of masculine and feminine traits among men and women. Though Freud also periodically described the male and female genitals as the respective embodiments of constitutional activity and passivity, he did not stress this determination and for the good reason that it takes the entire question of psychological differentiation back to the point from which his thinking began. Finally, largely setting aside the idea of underlying forces, the content of psychological differentiation, he explored the connection of that differentiation with the fact of anatomical distinction. This exercise led to an impasse. He despaired at being able to discover any real content behind the antithesis of masculinity and femininity,<sup>107</sup> he sought to explain the repudiation of femininity in both sexes as a conflict between what seemed to be a predominantly active sexual constitution and the demands of the reproductive function, and he ultimately dubbed the whole problem of psychological differentiation as a riddle to be solved by biology. In effect, Freud's emphasis upon the reproductive function was a final effort to define the content of psychological differentiation. It appeared to explain the contingencies in the development of the girl, but it left the boy's development as a natural phenomenon and the combinations and reversals evident in lived masculinity unexplained.

The reproductive function, which prescribed a predominance of activity for males (and emphatically denied passive attitudes towards other males), and a predominance of passivity for women, was not in itself a psychic factor. For Freud, it impinged upon the psychic life of human beings in terms of the significance of the phallus. Both the girl's penis envy

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107. For example, Freud wrote:

Psycho-analysis has a common basis with biology, in that it presupposes an original bisexuality in human beings (as in animals). But psycho-analysis cannot elucidate the intrinsic nature of what in conventional or in biological phraseology is termed 'masculine' and 'feminine': it simply takes over the two concepts and makes them the foundation of its work.

which had to be transformed into a wish for a baby and the bearer of a penis, and the boy's fear of losing his penis and his struggle against passivity, meant that both sexes finally adopted the appropriate attitude towards reproductive sexuality. The girl was reconciled to motherhood though, for Freud, with surprising residual resentment, and the boy to the position of being his father's heir. Yet in Freud's account, it is striking that while the phallus had its significance in the child's development through its inherent superiority, it achieved its determining role only through a variety of processes of noticing and recognition which surrounded the castration complex.<sup>108</sup>

This then is a very peculiar manifestation of natural law: the determination of the phallus was neither automatic, nor was the outcome of its inherent superiority assured. The boy's acknowledgement of the possibility of castration was hesitant and unwilling; having laughed at the threat, the observation "which finally breaks down his unbelief is the sight of the female genitals".<sup>109</sup> Even then, he had previously refused to recognise that his mother's genitals were different to his own. Similarly, the girl noticed the difference between her own genitals and those of males but this "does not by any means imply that she submits to the fact easily".<sup>110</sup> She recognised not just a difference but its significance, "the superiority of the male and her own inferiority; but she rebels against this unwelcome state of affairs".<sup>111</sup> Indeed, she might "refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she does possess a penis, and may subsequently be

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When we attempt to reduce them further, we find masculinity vanishing into activity and femininity into passivity, and that does not tell us enough ("The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", *op. cit.*, pp. 171-72; similarly, Freud, "Femininity", *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15).

108. This point is well made by Levine, *op. cit.*

109. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", *op. cit.*, p. 175.

110. Freud, "Femininity", *op. cit.*, p. 125.

111. Freud, "Female Sexuality", *op. cit.*, p. 229.

compelled to behave as though she were a man".<sup>112</sup> This might result in homosexuality. With the boy too, as will be demonstrated later, homosexuality is an outcome of the processes of recognition, both on his part and the way in which others recognise him.

These contingencies are inexplicable from the point of view that the genitals act as a determinant force in themselves. Freud's stress upon the processes of recognition means that masculinity and femininity are not the immediate or inevitable result of anatomical difference and that these psychic traits have to be achieved. The combinations and reversals of masculine and feminine traits in both sexes are therefore a result of the variable processes of recognition. This variability is not comprehensible if what is being recognised is the inherent superiority of the penis but only if what the child recognises is an idea, a signification which is embodied in the sexual organs. Within Freud's own framework, the only possible conclusion about the psychical differentiation of the sexes is that it is determined by the superiority of men and the inferiority of women which is socially grounded in their anatomical difference.

There is also a level on which Freud did acknowledge the social determinants of the psychical differentiation between the sexes. Its theoretical status is a central issue for any assessment of the psychoanalytic account for it needs to be asked whether this acknowledgement is already part of his theory or, if not, how difficult it is for it to become so. Freud discussed, for example, the idea that passive aims were characteristic of femininity on the basis of women's role in reproduction.

But we must beware in this of underestimating the influence of social customs, which similarly force women into passive situations. ... The suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially favours the development of powerful masochistic impulses ... 113

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112. Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", *op. cit.*, p. 253.

113. Freud, "Femininity", *op. cit.*, p. 116.

This prefigures his later argument concerning the conflict for women between their active sexual impulses and the reproductive function (the constitutional prescription for passivity in this passage referring not to a predominance of passive impulses but to their 'destiny' as mothers). Here, then, Freud posited the importance of social customs but did not attempt to specify their relative determination; he did not connect them to the pre-oedipal dynamics in the girl's sexual life with which he was otherwise concerned so that they appear subsidiary and peripheral to her family experiences.

The point is, however, that in this argument it is impossible to distinguish 'social customs' from non-social determinants. The girl was not of course born with the wish to be a mother: this aim had to be achieved, a process which was always tortuous and often enough had a contrary outcome. Nor did the boy originally regard women as castrates. Freud was driven to the position that both the penis-baby transformation, the mark of femininity, and the boy's repudiation of femininity, were determined by the functional demands of society for the reproduction of the species. Similarly, in the bisexuality hypothesis, because the postulated constitutional forces of activity and passivity were a biological unknown, it is impossible to distinguish biological from social determinants. An initial conclusion about Freud's account then, is that it does not in principle exclude the possibility of explaining psychical differentiation in social terms. Furthermore, because his functionalist argument about the demands of reproduction readily invites a translation into one about the oppression of women in the context of a patriarchal society, the question is whether it should also be concluded that Freud actually offers a social psychology of the construction of the gender dichotomy. This is certainly tempting and it was Mitchell's interpretation, though without any criticism of the bisexuality thesis or the endogenous model of sexual development.

Indeed, Freud's observations in other contexts offered an even more tantalising promise of a social theory. In his paper on "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness", he noted the effect of the double standard of sexual morality upon women and emphasised the injurious results produced by the strict demand for abstinence. The 'civilised' education of women directly frustrated the aims of marriage and "the cure for nervous illness arising from marriage would be marital unfaithfulness".<sup>114</sup> And in the case history of Dora, Freud provided his most compelling illustration of the neurotic consequences of the double standard upon the psychic life of women.<sup>115</sup>

Yet while it is clear that the social determinants of psychical differentiation were obvious to Freud on one level, they are not theoretically integrated into his account of the child's sexual development.<sup>116</sup> Thus Marcuse's claim that "Freud's individual psychology is in its very essence social psychology"<sup>117</sup> and Mitchell's implicit endorsement of this view (despite her summary dismissal of Marcuse as economic), is not upheld in an examination of Freud's struggle with the question of the origins of masculinity and femininity. On the contrary, the complex reformulations by which he attempted to solve this question precisely reflect the fact that social determinants did not have a place theoretically within his various accounts. The theoretical exclusion of these determinants meant that Freud's endeavour could not be successfully concluded. Nothing illustrates this impasse more clearly than the movement of his thought from one biological formulation to another, and

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114. Freud, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness", *op. cit.*, p. 195.

115. Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria", *op. cit.* See the discussion of the case of Dora and the paper cited above by Elizabeth Janeway, Between Myth and Morning: Women Awakening, New York, 1974, pp. 96-110.

116. A similar point is made by R. W. Connell in the context of a more general discussion of the potential of psychoanalysis to contribute to a critical social theory ("Doctor Freud and the Course of History", Arena, Nos. 47-48 (1977), pp. 120-132).

117. Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

his recurrently expressed belief that it was a lack of biological knowledge which stood in the way of a satisfactory solution.

The child's recognition, then, of the presence and absence of the penis and the reactions accompanying this perception should be understood as a recognition of the social constitution of sexual difference, that is, of the superordinate position of males and subordinate position of females. The penis in this sense is not merely a metaphor to the child, as Firestone argued for example.<sup>118</sup> As the one distinguishing attribute of the male it has its own determinant force, not as the expression of natural law but as the result of a social logic which explains sexual difference as given by nature.<sup>119</sup> For Mitchell, this kind of argument did a massive injustice to Freud. She contended that his account of the significance of the penis to the child was already one of its psychological effect within a patriarchal culture: "in 'penis-envy' we are talking not about an anatomical organ, but about the ideas of it that people hold and live by within the general culture".<sup>120</sup> Firestone and other feminist critics of Freud, she argued, had attempted to reduce psychoanalysis to the social realities from which its psychological constructs were deduced.<sup>121</sup> Mitchell defended Freud's work as a valid description of patriarchal culture and his apparently biologicistic formulations as an account of the processes of cultural transmission. But this led her to abstract the Oedipus and castration complexes from any concrete family context<sup>122</sup> and to explain cultural transmission in terms of the inheritance of the id.<sup>123</sup> She was obliged to explain the 'origins' of women's oppression in terms of the myth of the primal father which Freud expounded in Totem and Taboo.<sup>124</sup>

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118. Firestone, op. cit., pp. 53-55.

119. Levine, op. cit., p. 28.

120. Mitchell, op. cit., p. xvi.

121. Ibid., p. 347

122. Ibid., pp. 63-64, 74.

123. Ibid., p. 72. Freud argued for this in The Ego and the Id, op. cit., p. 38.

124. These remarks are not intended to be an appraisal of Mitchell's work

It must be granted to Mitchell, however, that the child's recognition of the social constitution of sexual difference is not a matter of a simple, conscious appreciation of its mother's subordination to the father. Freud's account should not be forced to yield a social psychology in the sense that the child is said to construct a gender identity on the basis of a direct 'reflection' of the patriarchal relations in its family. Rather, the need is for an adequate psychoanalytic formulation of the psychical differentiation between the sexes which explains in detail how the child comes to understand the significance of sexual difference. Though Freud did not achieve this, it will be argued later in this chapter that outside of his formal exposition of the castration complex, his account clearly suggests that that experience does not introduce the child's gender identity; on the contrary, the child's incipient sense of gender is a precondition of the castration complex and of the oedipal resolutions.

(iv)

The social character of the determinant recognitions which establish and resolve the castration complex is implicitly underlined in Freud's account by the fact that it is not only the child's recognitions which are important, but also the ways in which others recognise the sex of the child. The significance of this is revealed on a general level by Freud's description of the mother's relationship with her son and its effect of privileging his penis as the primary object of desire. But there is also considerable scope to exploit the explanatory power of this observation in reading his case histories. These provide only

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but merely to indicate very generally the theoretical alternatives open in an assessment of Freud's biological formulations. One avenue open to Mitchell, since she drew upon Lacan, was to ask whether his theory of the mirror-stage may be understood as the beginning of the process of psychical differentiation in the child. For a brief attempt to do this, see Campioni and Gross, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-18. For criticisms of Mitchell's argument about cultural inheritance, see Brennan *et. al.*, *op. cit.*; and a review of her work by Elizabeth Long in Telos, No. 20 (Summer 1974), pp. 183-89.

hints of the variable outcome of the mother's recognition of her child and even less of the father's role (he being the silent partner of the oedipal drama). However, in such cases as Little Hans,<sup>125</sup> the young homosexual woman<sup>126</sup> and, above all, the Wolf Man, this dimension is essential if the dynamics involved in the attainment of masculinity and femininity are to be grasped. The way in which others recognise the child is so important that their failure to respond appropriately to the boy as the possessor of a penis will deprive him of his masculinity. As one critic has observed, in "the notion of the 'castrating woman' is expressed very clearly the idea that the absence of a determinate recognition of the penis is equivalent to its loss as a material object".<sup>127</sup>

Freud's study of the Wolf Man is the most detailed and perhaps the most important of his case histories. It is of particular interest here since a central factor in the patient's infantile neurosis was the repression of his homosexual desire. Though Freud's account is undeniably subtle and skillful, he did not finally resolve the theoretical issues which the case revealed, nor did his analysis succeed in overcoming the Wolf Man's repression. The following discussion aims to draw out the fact that underlying his repression and ensuing neurosis was his inability to acknowledge the social constitution of sexual difference and, at the same time, that his repression was predicated upon some knowledge of that difference. As noted earlier, the boy's recognition of the social distinction between the sexes, a recognition of who has and who does not have the phallus, is

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125. Maud Mannoni has argued, though with perhaps a rather liberal interpretation of the available evidence, that Hans' mother desired that he should not be the master of his masculine desire, that he should forever be an 'innocent' child (*The Child his 'Illness', and the Others*, Harmondsworth, 1973 (1967), pp. 7-10, 27-33).

126. Freud briefly acknowledged the parents' unconscious motivation in this case; see below, pp. 165-66.

127. Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 25.



expressed in the differentiation of his sexual aims towards his parents. The Wolf Man's attitude towards his father was a passive one, which Freud found only to be expected. This attitude, however, needs to be explained particularly since, in this case, Freud argued that the father's position as castrator was determined phylogenetically. A related question is why the boy should uphold the theory of the phallic mother, a belief which does not however inhibit his active aims towards her, and this too is able to be usefully considered in relation to the Wolf Man.

More generally, Freud's account underscores the theoretical bankruptcy of the hypothesis of bisexuality. He resorted to the notion only briefly and at a point where a final answer to the mystery of his patient's dilemma seems to have eluded him. Of far greater theoretical significance in the case is Freud's use of the concept of deferred action. In fact, the crux of his analysis was the relationship between two 'scenes' in the Wolf Man's childhood, the first gaining its significance only after the occurrence of the second. Thus Freud returned to the schema of his old seduction theory.

The Wolf Man was a Russian aristocrat whose first analysis lasted from 1910 until 1914. Freud's case history drew from this analysis, though he conducted a second, much shorter one after the war; later, the Wolf Man also consulted Ruth Mack Brunswick.<sup>128</sup> When the Wolf Man came to Freud at the age of twenty three, his sexual activity had been with women but his mental health had broken down five years earlier when he had contracted a gonorrhoeal infection. He had classed this as castration and Freud's analysis revealed an unresolved attachment to his father.

The case was complex and Freud's interpretation of the dream particularly intricate and these details need not be reproduced here. It will be

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128. Ruth Mack Brunswick, "A Supplement to Freud's From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Vol. IX (1928), pp. 439 ff. This article, along with a considerable amount of other material, including the Wolf Man's memoirs, is reprinted in Muriel Gardiner (ed.), The Wolf-Man and Sigmund Freud, Harmondsworth, 1973.

sufficient to keep in mind the following events in the Wolf Man's childhood. At the age of one and a half the boy witnessed his parents engaged in anal intercourse;<sup>129</sup> about a year later he attempted to seduce the family maid, Grusha; at three and a quarter he was seduced by his sister and shortly afterwards made a sexual overture to his old peasant nurse, his Nanya but was rebuffed by a castration threat; and when he was four years old the wolf dream occurred which reactivated the primal scene. Freud described the boy's erotic interests prior to the dream:

Since his seduction [by his sister] his sexual aim had been a passive one, of being touched on the genitals; it was then transformed, by regression to the earlier stage of the sadistic-anal organization, into the masochistic aim of being beaten or punished. ... He had travelled, without considering the difference of sex, from his Nanya to his father; he had longed to have his penis touched by his Nanya, and had tried to provoke a beating from his father. 130

However, the dream occasioned a major act of repression:

The operation of the dream, which brought him under the influence of the primal scene, could have led him to make the advance to the genital organization, and to transform his masochism towards his father into a feminine attitude towards him - into homosexuality. But the dream did not bring about this advance; ... in fact, owing to the opposition of his narcissistic masculinity, this relation was thrown back to an even more primitive stage. It was displaced on to a father-surrogate, and at the same time split off in the shape of a fear of being eaten by the wolf. But this by no means disposed of it. On the contrary, we can only do justice to the apparent complexity of the state of affairs by bearing firmly in mind the co-existence of the three sexual trends which were directed by the boy towards his father. From the time of the dream onwards, in his unconscious he was homosexual, and in his neurosis he was at the level of cannibalism; while the earlier masochistic attitude remained the dominant one. All three currents had passive sexual aims; there was the same object, and the same sexual impulse, but that impulse had become split up along three different levels. 131

Corresponding to this state of repression, the Wolf Man simultaneously held contradictory attitudes to the reality of the threat of castration:

129. This primal scene was actually a deduction on Freud's part and he worried at some length about whether it had in fact occurred.

130. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", *op. cit.*, p. 46.

131. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

In the end there were to be found in him two contrary currents side by side, of which one abominated the idea of castration, while the other was prepared to accept it and console itself with femininity as a compensation. But beyond any doubt a third current, the oldest and deepest, which did not as yet even raise the question of the reality of castration, was still capable of coming into activity. 132

The third current was the masochistic one which represented a regression to the anal phase and in which the rejection of castration "really involved no judgement upon the question of its existence, but it was the same as if it did not exist".<sup>133</sup>

Freud argued that the resolution of the Oedipus complex in boys via the threat of castration required more than a repression: "It is equivalent, if it is ideally carried out, to a destruction and an abolition of the complex. ... If the ego has in fact not achieved much more than a repression of the complex, the latter persists in an unconscious state in the id and will later manifest its pathogenic effect."<sup>134</sup> With the Wolf Man, while the threat of castration certainly had an impact, he was unable to consolidate an identification with either his father or his mother in a way which would preserve one object-choice and replace the other.

The Wolf Man's childhood was "marked by a wavering between activity and passivity".<sup>135</sup> He expressed the latter attitude in his belief that he was his father's child while his sister was his mother's. He also wished to be sexually satisfied by his father, a fact expressed in many ways including his passive reaction of passing a stool in the primal scene, his anal erotism and, for a time, his identification with Christ and his father with God. In line with these wishes, he was ready to give his father a baby and was accordingly jealous of his mother. Freud wrote that "these wishes complete the circle of his fixation upon his father. In them homosexuality has found its furthest and most intimate

132. Ibid., p. 85

133. Ibid., p. 84.

134. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", op. cit., p. 177.

135. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", op. cit., p. 118.

expression".<sup>136</sup> At the same time the Wolf Man refused to accept the castration which these wishes entailed, and expressed a contrary sexual aim in various ways. He was jealous that his mother had loved another child besides himself; he identified with his father in his attempted seduction of the maid, Grusha; and he assumed that the primal scene was an act of violence and that his mother's illness, which continued throughout his childhood, was caused by what his father had done to her.<sup>137</sup>

Before the dream, the Wolf Man pursued his passive aim, to a significant degree at least, without regard for the sex of his object: he moved easily from his Nanya to his father. But in the year between his attempted seduction of Grusha in which he expressed an active aim and his adoption of a passive attitude towards his father, some knowledge of sexual difference is evident. The threat of castration from his Nanya was followed by hearing a variety of further allusions to castration and these "awoke and cast doubt on the 'cloacal theory'"; they brought to his notice the difference between the sexes and the sexual part played by women".<sup>138</sup> This new insight became the powerful motive for keeping the whole process of the dream under repression; he thereby defended himself against the knowledge that his mother was 'castrated' and that this was likewise the condition upon which he could achieve his aims with his father. From the time of the dream onwards, he "decided in favour of the intestine and against the vagina" so that his fear of castration was able "to exist side by side with an identification with women by means of the bowel".<sup>139</sup> In particular, his later frequently expressed lament,

136. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

137. This was related to his fear of his father as revealed in the wolf phobia and other instances, and towards the end of his childhood they became estranged (his father obviously preferring his talented elder sister).

138. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

"I cannot go on living like this", reflected an identification with his mother who had used the same words before his dream in complaining of an intestinal disorder.<sup>140</sup> The Wolf Man's refusal to accept the reality of the threat of castration, and thus his inability to accommodate the social fact of sexual difference, was also revealed in something which Freud found astonishing. For the boy not only feared his father as castrator, but also "regarded his father as the one who had been castrated and as calling, therefore, for his sympathy".<sup>141</sup> This was prompted by his father's illness.

One of the Wolf Man's complaints which Freud interpreted at the end of the analysis summed up his unresolved oedipal desires. He described the world as being hidden from him by a veil and that he only felt well and saw the world clearly when, as a result of an enema administered by a man, he had a bowel movement. He associated the veil with the caul with which he had been born and Freud concluded that the stool "was the child, as which he was born a second time, to a happier life"<sup>142</sup> and that the complaint actually comprised the dual wishful phantasy to return to the womb and to be reborn. He explained the link between the two phantasies:

There is a wish to be inside the mother's womb in order to replace her during intercourse - in order to take her place in regard to the father. The phantasy of re-birth, on the other hand ... is a wish to be back in a situation in which one was in the mother's genitals; and in this connection the man is identifying himself with his own penis and is using it to represent himself. Thus the two phantasies are revealed as each other's counterparts: they give expression, according as the subject's attitude is feminine or masculine, to his wish for sexual intercourse with his father or with his mother. We cannot dismiss the possibility that in the complaint made by our present patient and in the necessary condition laid down for his recovery the two phantasies, that is to say the two incestuous wishes, were united. 143

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140. Ibid., p. 77.

141. It was also traced back in the analysis to the boy's association with a number of cripples and Jews (which implied circumcision and hence castration) in his early childhood and ultimately to the primal scene, once again, where he had felt compassion for his father as he observed the disappearance of his penis.

142. Ibid., p. 100.

143. Ibid., pp. 101-02.

The phantasy then, was a bisexual expression of the complete Oedipus complex in which both the positive and negative aspects rejected the threat of castration which would, in other circumstances, have brought about a resolution eliminating the attachment at one or other of the ends of the oedipal continuum.

Freud did not provide a final explanation of the Wolf Man's irresolvable dilemma. He described his account as incomplete and, for obvious reasons, it was not able to include the kind of detail which emerged from the analysis of Little Hans. Freud attributed the boy's passive aims to his seduction by his sister and, beyond that, to the impact of the primal scene. The fact that the baby had passed a stool on that occasion was evidence of his congenital passivity.<sup>144</sup> Yet such a construction is not very helpful, for it can only refer the question to a hypothetical bisexual constitution and, obviously, whatever the origins and strength of the boy's passivity, those aims were unable to lead to a homosexual resolution of his oedipal wishes. The editor's introduction to the case history comments that its chief clinical finding was "the determining part played in the patient's neurosis by his primary feminine impulses. The very marked degree of his bisexuality was only a confirmation of views which had long been held by Freud".<sup>145</sup> However, Freud did not stress this determination. It is striking that he referred to bisexuality explicitly only once in the case and then to caution against an interpretation of his patient's conflict in terms of the opposition between masculine and feminine tendencies. Nonetheless, Freud's faith that the substance of the infantile bisexual disposition would ultimately be discovered seems to have constrained him from even clearly posing the question of the source of the Wolf Man's peculiar development.

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144. *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 109.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 6. Similarly, Brunswick referred to "the primary bisexuality of this patient, obviously the cause of his illness" (*op. cit.*, p. 331).

While so many strains in the analysis led back to the witnessing of the primal scene, that experience in itself had no necessary repercussions: it was, as Freud said, something commonplace and banal. The effect of the dream, on the other hand, was analagous to a seduction.<sup>146</sup> The primal scene therefore had an effect by the process of deferred action: it was reactivated in the wolf dream, two and a half years later. Thus it can only be the boy's sexual experiences in the intervening period which explain his rejection of castration. An explanation of the Wolf Man's conflict needs to take due account of the character of the seductive desires of his parents, his Nanya and his sister prior to the dream.

The case offers little detail of the mother's relationship with her son, in part because her chronic illness meant that she had relatively little to do with her children. It does reveal that later, the mother liberally indulged her son's demands for money despite his unjustified reproaches. Apart from his mother, the Wolf Man's Nanya had a deep affection for him, a son of her own having died young. After her castration threat, however, the boy turned from her to his father, and moreover he gave her up with an ease which is unexplained especially since her threat had little immediate impact. His sister was not an acceptable object for him either and he resisted her seduction. Two years his senior, she flaunted her intellectual superiority and was obviously a rival for their parents' love; with regard to the father, she was ultimately the victorious one. As for his father, the Wolf Man remembered their relationship as being very affectionate in the early years of his childhood. Yet the father also was periodically ill from bouts of depression which led to his absence from home. As already noted, after the dream the boy pitied his father for being castrated and, as well, there had been a number of other men in the household for whom he had similarly felt compassion.

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146. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", op. cit., p. 109.

It may be suggested then, that the great difficulty which the Wolf Man had in finding an acceptable object lay in the elusiveness of the desires of the others around him. This would seem to be what Mannoni has in mind when she writes:

The Wolf Man was ... blocked at an early age by death in the desire of the Other; Freud throws light in this case on the unconscious wish of the patient to know nothing, not only about the castration problem but also about all forms of desire. The denial went so far that we see the subject disappear into his fantasy constructions. ...

For Freud, the revealing factors were the mother's words, the effects of the unsaid on a human destiny, and the fashion in which all sexual curiosity was prematurely foreclosed in the Wolf Man (i.e. any position of the subject towards desire). The Wolf Man was to his old Nanny the substitute for a son who had died very young. It was in the likeness of that dead child that he maintained himself in his desire. He was blocked in by a depressive father and a mother preoccupied with abdominal pains ("I cannot go on living like this"). He did not detect any desire to live in the adults. He was desired by the Other to be without desire, and he became petrified in non-desire between the ages of four and five." 147

Clearly, the Wolf Man did not receive the cues to assume the primacy of the penis as the object of desire as did Little Hans, for example. Ultimately, his inability to recognise sexual difference was due to the failure of others to recognise him. Thwarted in his active aims, his passive ones towards his father were not able to be realised, and indeed such a resolution to the Oedipus complex would seem to be especially difficult. Schreber, for example, accepted his castration, but not until his delusional system had established God as the being to whom he was to submit. Likewise, for a period, the Wolf Man's piety expressed a readiness to forfeit his masculinity to God.<sup>148</sup>

The refusal to accept castration is the major outstanding theoretical problem in the case of the Wolf Man: his repudiation of femininity was that 'bedrock' which Freud found so perplexing. He insisted that

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147. Mannoni, *op. cit.*, pp. 83; 84-85, n. 14.

148. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.



his patient's repudiation should not be seen as "so much the triumph of a masculine current, as a reaction against a feminine and passive one. It would be very forced to ascribe the quality of masculinity to this reaction".<sup>149</sup> By this Freud meant that the characteristic opposition of the anal phase between activity and passivity and that of the phallic phase between phallic and castrated, was not understood as masculine and feminine until the boy's acknowledgement of the threat of castration and his oedipal resolution. This was precisely what the Wolf Man was unable to achieve, as his libido was split up and operated on three different levels. Nonetheless, Freud's explanation of the Wolf Man's extraordinary repression did invoke the 'quality' of masculinity.

The motive force of the repression seems to have been the narcissistic masculinity which attached to the boy's genitals, and which had come into a long-prepared conflict with the passivity of his homosexual sexual aim. ...

Of the two conflicting sexual impulses one was ego-syntonic, while the other offended the boy's narcissistic interest; it was on that account that the latter underwent repression. 150

Thus the ego was intent only upon protecting its narcissism: it was not a conflict between an active current and a passive one in the sense of an inherent opposition between masculine and feminine tendencies as conceived by Fliess and Adler. Yet, in the light of the Wolf Man's dilemma, it should be asked when a boy's active current would not be ego-syntonic and so would be repressed leaving the passive one. If the supposed congenital passivity in this case was insufficient to establish the passive current as ego-syntonic, under what circumstances would it be sufficient? As has been noted, Freud in fact later wrote that in males,

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149. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 110. Similarly, in a later work, Freud referred to the Wolf Man's transformation of his passive attitude towards his father into the fear of being devoured by a wolf, as the "expression of a wish which was not able to subsist in the face of his masculine revolt" (Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, *op. cit.*, p. 108).

"the striving to be masculine is completely ego-syntonic from the first".<sup>151</sup>  
By this he did not mean that exceptions did not occur, but he was obviously impressed by their rarity.

The general conclusion to be drawn from Freud's confusion would seem to be that since both the active and passive currents were necessarily confronted with the idea of castration, the Wolf Man's conflict was one between the two currents inasmuch as he understood the passive one to entail an unacceptable narcissistic injury and the active one to mean an unacceptable loss of his homosexual object. If his narcissistic valuation of his penis is understood not as a natural phenomenon but as stemming from the fact that "that organ is a guarantee to its owner that he can be once more united to his mother",<sup>152</sup> then this points to the differentiation of his desire for each parent and an underlying knowledge of the significance of their difference. Since the castration complex "inhibits and limits masculinity and encourages femininity",<sup>153</sup> its outcome cannot be explained by the 'balance' of active and passive currents, nor by the inherent significance of the penis, but only by the boy's already existing knowledge of sexual difference which constitutes his incipient sense of gender. It is this basic understanding of the meaning of his sex which will determine whether his active or passive currents are ego-syntonic, an understanding achieved by an appreciation of the ways in which others recognise the significance of the presence and absence of the penis. The answer to the riddle of the repudiation of femininity in boys would seem to be that the child's knowledge of sexual difference begins earlier than Freud realised. It begins, not literally "from the first", but arguably accompanies the early sense gained by the boy that he is distinct from his mother.<sup>154</sup> With the Wolf Man, this

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151. Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Intermittent", *op. cit.*, pp. 250-51.

152. Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

153. Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", *op. cit.*, p. 256.

154. The mother's unconscious desire for the phallus means not simply

knowledge of sexual difference, which entailed his narcissistic investment in his penis, was sufficient for him to resist castration in terms of an identification with his mother but, on the other hand, not sufficient for him to identify with his father and thus preserve only the object from the positive Oedipus complex.

The boy's emerging awareness of the meaning of sexual difference underlies his differentiated aims towards his parents. This issue has already been noted in relation to the question of the original selection of an object where it was argued that the hypothesis of bisexuality obscures the asymmetry of the child's relationship with each parent. It is now readily apparent that the child does distinguish in value between its father and mother well before a final knowledge of sexual difference. This issue will be considered in relation to the boy's infantile theory of the phallic mother and then in terms of his experience of his father as castrator.

Freud contended that when children first see female genitals, they "disavow the fact and believe that they do see a penis, all the same".<sup>155</sup> In this view, it was simply the boy's high estimation of the penis which "is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like himself

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that she prefers her son to her daughter (though she may), but that she typically regards him as distinct from herself in a way which differs from her reaction to her daughter. Chodorow writes:

Mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves. Correspondingly, girls tend to remain part of the dyadic primary mother-child relationship itself. This means that a girl continues to experience herself as involved in issues of merging and separation, and in an attachment characterised by primary identification and the fusion of identification and object-choice. By contrast, mothers experience their sons as a male opposite. Boys are more likely to have been pushed out of the preoedipal relationship, and to have had to curtail their primary love and sense of emphatic tie with their mother. A boy has engaged, and been required to engage, in a more emphatic individuation and a more defensive firming of experienced ego boundaries. Issues of differentiation have become intertwined with sexual issues (op. cit., pp. 166-67).

155. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization", op. cit., pp. 143-44.

who is without the essential constituent".<sup>156</sup> Granted the importance of this estimation, it is still necessary to ask why the boy is constrained from recognising a difference and is instead compelled to disavow his perception of an 'absence'.<sup>157</sup> In the case of the Wolf Man, Freud offered a somewhat different account of the boy's disavowal. It was only with the dream that the four-year-old boy realised that women 'lacked' a penis and "he behaved as children in general behave when they are given an unwished-for piece of information ... He rejected what was new". This realisation, however, had been preceded by allusions to castration which had cast doubt on his typical infantile assumption that sexual intercourse was anal and had "brought to his notice the difference between the sexes and the sexual part played by women".<sup>158</sup> If the boy's act of disavowal and belief in the phallic mother is understood in these terms, it implies that the difference between the sexes is already an issue for him and that he is gender-oriented. If, as Freud said, women "whom he respects, like his mother, retain a penis for a long time",<sup>159</sup> then this is not a matter of an original "neglect of the difference between the sexes"<sup>160</sup> as part of the normal sexual constitution; on the contrary, it is some kind of recognition of the difference between the sexes and indeed of their respective positions of superiority and

156. Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children", op. cit., pp. 215-16.

157. Laplanche and Pontalis raise the objection that if what is being disavowed is not castration itself but the perception that women 'lack' a penis, then "how can we speak of a 'perception' being disavowed when an absence is only a fact of perception in so far as it is related to a possible presence?" (The Language of Psycho-Analysis, op. cit., p. 168).

158. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", op. cit., p. 79.

159. Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization", op. cit., p. 145.

160. Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children", op. cit., p. 215. This is also suggested in Freud's development of the concept of disavowal in his later paper on fetishism. For the fetishist, the woman does have a penis but its importance is transferred to something else so that in varying proportions the fetish represents both the disavowal and acknowledgement of her 'castration'. ("Fetishism", op. cit., p. 157).

inferiority, for the boy is refusing to downgrade his mother. This is particularly evident if the boy distinguishes between his phallic mother and other 'castrated' women. Thus Brunswick's formulation seems to be more insightful than Freud's when she wrote that the image of the phallic mother appears,

... to insure the mother's possession of the penis, and as such probably arises at the moment when the child becomes uncertain that the mother does indeed possess it. Previously ... it seems more than probable that the executive organ was the breast; the idea of the penis is then projected back upon the active mother after the importance of the phallus has been recognised. 161

Therefore it is not that the boy is unable to imagine a person like himself to be without a penis as Freud suggested, but on the contrary, his fear that his mother is not like himself and his refusal to denigrate her accordingly that gives rise to his disavowal and belief in her phallic status.

This belief depends then upon both the fact that the boy's penis has been privileged as his special possession and also his incipient knowledge of the difference between the sexes. The boy's resistance to regarding his mother as inferior has of course been well established: her omnipotence has been founded upon the particular character of her love for him in the context of her exclusive care (given the typical absence of the father both in Freud's time and ours). Moreover, the mother will not want, unconsciously, to admit her own 'castration' to her son, given the continuing importance to her of the phallus. And indeed, consciously, she must know that this "most perfect of human relationships" will be disturbed soon enough as of course it will, usually by the boy's identification with the father and his subsequent choice of other women. The mother's resistance to admitting to her son the difference between his genitals and her own appears to be confirmed in the case of Little Hans. He, never having seen his mother's genitals, expected her to have a large widdler proportionate to her size. When he explained that "I was only looking to see if

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161. Ruth Mack Brunswick, "The Preoedipal Phase of the Libido Development", Psycho-Analytic Quarterly, Vol. IX (1940), p. 304, quoted by Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, op. cit., p.311.

you'd got a widdler too'", she replied evasively, "'Of course. Didn't you know that?'"<sup>162</sup> What Hans did not know was what either of his parents' genitals looked like and it was finally his father who explained to him, not that female genitals were different, but that his mother had no widdler.<sup>163</sup>

Prior to the boy's fear that his mother is not like himself and the concomitant infantile theory of the phallic mother, it is to be expected that the boy could accept the fact that female genitals are simply different from his own. Campioni and Gross argue that the Little Hans case provides evidence of this. Hans' interest in widdlers extended to his baby sister, and his father asked:

- I : "... You know what Hanna's widdler looks like, don't you?"  
 He : "It'll grow, though, won't it?"  
 I : "Yes, of course. But when it's grown it won't look like yours."  
 He : "I know that. It'll be the same" (sc. as it now is) "only bigger." 164

Given that Hans had established two basic principles for himself, that all living things had widdlers and that they were proportionate to the size of the person or animal, then his reaction to his sister was quite logical:

Freud argued that Hans' avowal of his little sister's 'lovely widdler' is disingenuous and probably said mockingly. However, given these two basic principles, it seems more likely that he perceived Hanna to have a small but different widdler. ... The boy seems to have no difficulty in accepting the difference between male and female genitals as simply different and as such to be unproblematic. 165

Thus Little Hans initially had a knowledge of difference in that he could accept unproblematically that fact of female genitals. In addition, he

162. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", op. cit., pp. 9-10.

163. Ibid., p. 31. Campioni and Gross comment on the father's enlightenment of his son: "In its context it is (unconsciously) designed to introduce only two poles of sexuality (masculinity and femininity) and then not just their difference but also for the opposition between them, and the power of representation invested in their polarization" (op. cit., pp. 104-05). Chodorow makes a similar observation (op. cit., pp. 182-83).

164. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia" op. cit., p. 62.

165. Campioni and Gross, op. cit., p. 104.

did not make his object-choices randomly: they were primarily his mother and other females, but he was also able to choose male objects without experiencing this as a conflict. It was his father (and Freud) who introduced the idea of opposition between the sexes with the information that females have no widdlers and that mothers alone give birth, and painfully, so that Hans then rejected his former wish to have babies. The Wolf Man, while he acknowledged the idea of difference between the sexes, was unable to reconcile himself to the idea of opposition. This distinction between the ideas of difference and opposition is upheld in another discussion of the pre-oedipal period which argues that "the child does not know the difference between man and woman (phallic-castrated), but he does know the difference between father and mother (aggressive-submissive)".<sup>166</sup> This is certainly applicable to the Wolf Man and agrees with his reaction to the primal scene. Indeed, a child would scarcely need such an experience to form the knowledge of his difference between its parents. In particular, the boy receives his mother's deferential attitude to the father, as Chodorow observes:

Although fathers are not as salient as mothers in daily interaction, mothers and children often idealize them and give them ideological primacy, precisely because of their absence and seeming inaccessibility, and because of the organization and ideology of male dominance in the larger society. 167

This helps to answer the question of why the Wolf Man's sexual aim towards his father should have been a passive rather than an active one. Finally, it should be noted that the infantile theory of the phallic mother is precisely designed to resist the translation of the mother's difference into terms of opposition, an opposition to the father and the boy which will mean such a catastrophic upheaval to the constellation of the latter's familial relationships.

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166. Gad Horowitz, Basic Repression and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich and Marcuse, Toronto, 1977, p. 96.

167. Chodorow, op. cit., p. 181.

It is these terms of opposition, the imposition of exclusivity, which shape and finally resolve the triangular relations of the boy's Oedipus complex. The demand to finalize, once and for all, the interlocking issues of who possesses the mother, who commands the allegiance of the son, and who has and does not have the phallus together underline the traumatic character of the conflict. The boy's desires, and the over-determination of the conflict, must be understood in the context of the parents' resolutions of their own Oedipus complexes; the intrusion of their unconscious phantasies into the child's world means that what is involved is actually a series of oedipal relationships linked back through generations.<sup>168</sup> The resolution of the issues involved reveals the characteristic relations within the patriarchal family: the father has exclusive rights to the mother, the mother does not possess the phallus and her importance is diminished accordingly, and the boy is reconciled to his position as "the heir to the throne"<sup>169</sup> and is now free, unlike the Wolf Man, of the fear of being punished by the father upon the condition that he respects his father's prerogatives.

The exclusivity of his oedipal relations does not originate from the boy but from the desires of his parents in the context of the nuclear family and the differentiated effect of the ideology of monogamy upon men and women. The mother's role has been sufficiently remarked upon already: that the boy experiences his father as a rival is partly determined by the fact that the mother sees him in just that way and indeed, because of her ambivalence toward her husband, the boy is the favoured rival. The father's part in Freud's account, on the other hand, was relatively neglected and in effect he was repeatedly exonerated.<sup>170</sup> More precisely,

168. *Ibid.*, p. 161; and Laplanche, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

169. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", *op. cit.*, p. 26.

170. With regard to seduction, Freud finally allowed some truth to the girl's phantasies in relation to the mother but not to the father ("Female Sexuality", *op. cit.*, p. 238). Indeed, in the original seduction theory, Freud and Breuer had sometimes substituted 'uncle'



his motives remained obscure and Freud was led to argue that the fact that the threat of castration was regularly referred to the father was determined phylogenetically. With reference to the Wolf Man, he wrote:

We are often able to see the hereditary schema triumphing over the experience of the individual; as when in our present case the boy's father became the castrator and the menace of his infantile sexuality in spite of what was in other respects an inverted Oedipus complex. 171

But just as Schreber had 'reason' to fear his psychiatrist, Flechsig, who had reported his success in treating psychological disorders by actual castration,<sup>172</sup> so the oedipal boy has genuine reasons to fear his father, even if actual castration is not a possibility. It is certainly not necessary to take refuge in the hypothesis of phylogenesis.

It is clear that little Hans's father was jealous of his son's relationship with his mother and that he resented the alliance against him. Hans insisted that his father was cross and therefore scolded him<sup>173</sup> despite the father's insistence that he was only interested in curing Hans of his 'nonsense'; Hans also declared that his father had hit him, which the latter denied though it may well have happened in phantasy. The boy seemed to perceive his father's jealousy and tried to placate him: "Why did you tell me that I'm fond of Mummy and that's why I'm frightened, when I'm fond of you?"<sup>174</sup> Moreover, the father saw

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for 'father' in their reports of their female patients' stories. Again, Freud mentioned the fear in boys of being devoured by the father but, unlike the girl's fear of the mother, he did not suggest that there was any basis to it and explained it anyway as being maternal in origin (*ibid.*, p. 237). Not surprisingly then, Freud did not link the father's desires to the establishment of the boy's negative Oedipus complex. See the discussion of this general issue by Chodorow (*op. cit.*, pp. 160-63). Elsewhere, she points to evidence that "fathers sex-type their children more than mothers. They treat sons and daughters more differently and enforce gender role expectations more vigorously" ("Feminism and Difference: Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective", *Socialist Review*, No. 46 (July-August 1979), pp. 63, 69, n. 14).

171. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", *op. cit.*, p. 119.

172. Morton Schatzman, *Soul Murder*, Persecution in the Family, Harmondsworth, 1976 (1973), p. 106.

173. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", *op. cit.*, p. 82.

174. *Ibid.*, p. 44. See the discussion by Campioni and Gross, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-07.

his authority flouted by the mother who insisted upon allowing Hans into bed with her. The father's disinterested stance throughout the case was implicitly endorsed by Freud: in many ways the account is one of their alliance against the other.

The important point is that the father's exclusive possession of the mother which he expressed by his jealousy, privileged Hans' desire for her. As Campioni and Gross argue,

... the primacy of the child's major concern with his singular possession of the mother is based on his acceptance, substantiated by social practices, that the mother is 'owned' by the father. This is to say, that the fear of losing the mother is neither an intrinsic fear, nor one prefigured in the sexual organisation of the child, as Freud argues. It is dependent on the structurally ordered and singularly fixated determinations of the nuclear family where children do lose their security as a result of the 'monogamy' demanded in husband/wife relationships (and the fact that the mother is principally responsible for the upbringing of the child and his siblings). 175

Thus, in the words of another commentator, castration "is interpreted as a catastrophe only because the little boy's sexuality has become entirely focused on his penis and because he has learned that without a penis he cannot love his mother",<sup>176</sup> to which it is necessary to add, as the father does. It is the father's possession of the mother as his alone which forces the boy to compete on the same terms and finally to submit, one way or another. The contradictions in the father's life, his inability to duplicate the mother-child bond and his fear of being usurped by the son both in infancy and later manhood, underlie his insistence that the son withdraw in his favour.<sup>177</sup>

175. Ibid., p. 111.

176. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 102. As Laplanche observes, the boy has to identify with the position of the father in order to achieve his aims (op. cit., p. 80).

177. Chodorow argues that,

... fathers consider their growing sons as rivals, and therefore begrudge and fear the virility they at the same time bequeath them. When a father has to restrict his aggressive impulses toward his son because of his superego demands, especially while restricting libidinal impulses toward his daughters ... he conveys to this son that any impulses which arise in him may be very dangerous. The strength of a son's castration fears, therefore, correspond to the

There is also the factor of the father's unconscious homosexual desire for his son and the high probability that he will find it necessary to defend himself against such wishes (whereas the mother, of course, will not). In certain versions of the Oedipus legend the father, Laius desired Chrsippus, son of King Pelops and he kidnapped or raped him.<sup>178</sup> Laius learnt of his punishment in the prophesy of the subsequent events which he tried to avert by attempting to kill his own son, Oedipus. If the conflict for Laius revolved around a homosexual phantasy of loving a boy, his defence against this wish may be interpreted along the lines indicated by Freud's analysis of Schreber's paranoia: "I do not love him - I shall kill him because HE WISHES TO KILL (PERSECUTE) ME".<sup>179</sup> This dimension of the legend has the virtue of focusing attention upon the father's unconscious desires in contrast to Freud's exoneration of the father. However, he did suggest that Schreber's paranoia was connected to a homosexual privation. His marriage was childless "and in particular it brought him no son who might have consoled him for the loss of his father and brother and upon whom he might have drained off his unsatisfied homosexual affections".<sup>180</sup>

Freud rarely followed up this line of thought: while he was ready to describe the mother as the child's first seducer, he failed even to raise the question of whether the boy's negative Oedipus complex was established in response to the father's desires. This is an obvious question to ask of the Wolf Man, for example. Freud noted that the father had indulged

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strictures of the parental superego, which are based, in turn, on the father's own fears of punishment (The Reproduction of Mothering, op. cit., p. 162).

178. G. Devereaux, "Why Oedipus Killed Laius, A Note on the Complementary Oedipus Complex in Greek Drama", The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, Vol. 34 (1953), p. 133, quoted by Schatzman, op. cit., p. 102.
179. Ibid., p. 103. For Freud's discussion of Schreber, see "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia", op. cit., p. 63.
180. Ibid., p. 57.

in "affectionate abuse" of his son and that he had possibly threatened to "gobble him up".<sup>181</sup> Again, he wrote of Little Hans that "the first person who had served Hans as a horse must have been his father; and it was this that enabled him to regard Fritzl as a substitute for his father".<sup>182</sup> Freud had no doubt as to the sexual nature of the children's game, but might not the same be said of the father's part in the game in both cases?<sup>183</sup>

The motives of each of the three parties in the oedipal conflict must be given due weight if the child's manoeuvres are to be understood. Freud often regarded the latter as a discrete question and saw the father's position in the triangle as static: his role as castrator was pre-ordained and the boy was ultimately confronted with this fact in the course of his endogenous development. In a rare instance, however, that the case of the young homosexual woman, Freud did comment briefly upon the unconscious motivation of both parents. The young woman was in love with an older 'society lady' and she both confided in her mother about her passion and contrived to appear in public with her friend where the father would see them.

It was remarkable ... that both parents behaved as if they understood their daughter's secret psychology. The mother was tolerant, as though she appreciated her daughter's

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181. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", *op. cit.*, p. 32. Had the father both desired his son (thus contributing to his negative Oedipus complex) and resisted this wish (thus contributing to the Wolf Man's castration fears), this would help to explain the indeterminacy of his oedipal resolution. Freud of course had only a limited amount of information about the Wolf Man's father but this would certainly seem to be a more profitable line of investigation than the postulation of congenital passivity.

182. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", *op. cit.*, pp. 126-27.

183. In relation to the son's perception of his father's desires, it might be noted that Freud believed that there was "good reason for asserting that everyone possesses in his own unconscious an instrument with which he can interpret the utterances of the unconscious in other people" ("The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis" (1913), *S.E.*, Vol. XII, p. 320).

'retirement' as a favour to her; the father was furious, as though he realized the deliberate revenge directed against himself. 184

His daughter's revenge was prompted by the fact that her mother had had another child. But Freud referred to the father's motivation, that is his incestuous desires, merely as "something about his daughter's homosexuality that aroused the deepest bitterness in him".<sup>185</sup>

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Despite the fundamental importance he accorded the Oedipus complex, Freud never gave a systematic account of its resolution. The homosexual resolutions in particular have to be inferred from a variety of scattered references. Schematically, he described the dissolution of the complete Oedipus complex in terms of a continuum with,

... the normal positive Oedipus complex at one end and the inverted negative one at the other, while its intermediate members exhibit the complete form with one or other of its two components preponderating. At the dissolution of the Oedipus complex the four trends of which it consists will group themselves in such a way as to produce a father-identification and a mother-identification. The father-identification will preserve the object-relation to the mother which belonged to the positive complex and will at the same time replace the object-relation to the father which belonged to the inverted complex: and the same will be true, mutatis mutandis, of the mother-identification. 186

Once again, he invoked the hypothesis of bisexuality to explain these alternatives: "the relative strength of the masculine and feminine dispositions is what determines whether the outcome of the Oedipus situation shall be an identification with the father or with the mother".<sup>187</sup> Yet the hypothesis served Freud's purposes here in an even more limited way than it did on the other occasions which have been

184. Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", op. cit., p. 160.

185. Ibid., p. 149.

186. Freud, The Ego and the Id, op. cit., p. 34.

187. Ibid., p. 33.

discussed. It defined homosexuality as a matter of simple gender inversion and this was an idea he often opposed in the form of the third sex theory (albeit without discussing the possibility that congenital factors might play a part). He insisted, for example, that physical sexual characteristics, masculine and feminine attitudes, and object-choice each "up to a certain point, vary independently of one another, and are met with in different individuals in manifold permutations".<sup>188</sup>

An even more unsatisfactory conclusion lurked behind the idea of bisexuality if its implications were to be endorsed wholeheartedly, though at this point Freud, unlike Fliess and Jung, was very cautious: the hypothesis took heterosexuality for granted. When Freud wrote to Fliess in 1899 that "I am accustoming myself to regarding every sexual act as an event between four individuals",<sup>189</sup> the clear implication was that sexual object-choice proceeded in terms of the attraction of opposites: the masculine and feminine disposition of one individual responded to the same dualism in another. Freud did not, on the whole, argue for this very strongly as he believed that the idea of bisexuality rested, as yet, on too uncertain a foundation.<sup>190</sup>

The following discussion will describe some of the general dynamics in the oedipal resolutions able to be discerned in Freud's account, keeping in mind the various issues that have been raised in the preceding sections of this chapter.

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188. Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", op. cit., p. 170.

189. Freud to Fliess, 1 August 1899, cited in The Ego and the Id, op. cit., p. 33, n. 1.

190. Mitchell seemed quite unaware of these implications of the bisexuality hypothesis when she wrote that "what Freud meant was that both sexes in their mental life reflected this great antithesis; that in the unconscious and preconscious of men and women alike was echoed the great problem of this original duality". The concept of bisexuality became "a complex notion of the oscillations and imbalance of the person's mental androgyny" (op. cit., pp. 50, 51).

The 'normal' resolution of the positive Oedipus complex meant that the son withdrew in favour of the father. While he forfeited his sexual love for his mother, his choice was a triumph for his narcissism for it guaranteed his possession of his penis. The vehicle for this resolution was his acknowledgement of the opposition between the sexes which was accompanied by his identification with his former rival. This identification meant that the son was compensated for his withdrawal by the knowledge that in the future he would, like his father, find a 'mother' of his own. It also meant that he had internalised the oedipal conflict: its 'heir' was the super-ego. Freud wrote that the relation of the super-ego to the ego,

... is not exhausted by the precept: 'You ought to be like this (like your father).' It also comprises the prohibition: 'You may not be like this (like your father) - that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative.' 191

The father's superiority was established for the son, as was the inferiority of the mother: he had recognised the respective positions of men and women which are socially grounded in their anatomical distinction. The legacy of the Oedipus complex in men, as Freud put it, "is a certain amount of disparagement in their attitude towards women, whom they regard as being castrated".<sup>192</sup> The boy now knew that passive aims were feminine and active ones masculine. This was the consolidation of his repudiation of femininity and he would henceforth strongly resist the expression of passive attitudes towards other males, since it signified castration, and would far more readily display a passive or masochistic attitude towards women.<sup>193</sup>

Freud referred to the boy's experience of the threat of castration as the greatest trauma of his life and this description deserves to be taken

191. Freud, The Ego and the Id, op. cit., p. 34.

192. Freud, "Female Sexuality", op. cit., p. 229.

193. Freud, "'A Child is Being Beaten'", op. cit., p. 197.

seriously. His primary tie with his mother must be ruthlessly repressed in order to effect an identification with his father. This points to the critical tension within adult heterosexual masculinity: the man's desire to reproduce the mother-son bond, that most perfect of human relationships, is vitiated by his disparagement of women, his sense of them as opposite to himself, his compulsion to debase his love-object.

For the threat of castration to be able to form a wedge between the boy's incestuous love for his mother and his narcissistic valuation of his penis, some prior knowledge of sexual difference is necessary and much of Freud's account implicitly endorses this interpretation. The boy must be prepared to accept the opposition between the sexes: his castration complex is not introduced merely by the combination of a threat and the observation of female genitals. The origin of the boy's sense of gender is to be found in his early differentiation from the mother and is determined by her particular regard for him; it is a precondition of his oedipal resolution.<sup>194</sup> This elementary knowledge of sexual difference, for example in terms of submission and aggression, is then expressed in the boy's sexual aims towards his parents. In particular, his passive aims towards his father in the negative Oedipus complex is determined both by the mother's deference and by the character of the father's desires. Unlike the mother, the father's sense of superiority to his son is not tempered by the same desire for the phallus and hence as seeing him as opposite to himself. The boy expresses a clearer knowledge of sexual difference with his theory of the phallic mother. He is now afraid that the mother's difference is problematic and in his disavowal he is refusing to downgrade her.

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194. This is also argued by Janeway (*op. cit.*, p. 104), and Chodorow (*op. cit.*, p. 151). Chodorow cites a range of contemporary psychoanalytic research and in particular the work of Robert Stoller (*ibid.*, pp. 236-37, n. 46, n. 48).



It is thus the boy's growing awareness of the issue of sexual difference which explains the efficacy of the threat of castration. It is only this awareness which makes it possible to understand why the outcome is usually the demolition of the attitude proper to the opposite sex. It follows from this that the conflict which is brought to a head in the castration complex is one between masculine and feminine tendencies (though not between masculinity and femininity proper). Freud's vacillation on this point is highly significant. On the one hand he asserted that the ego merely defended its narcissism by repressing the tendency which was incompatible: in both men and women either the masculine or feminine tendency could be repressed. On the other, Freud was struck in his analytical practice by coming upon that psychological 'bedrock' in men, their struggle against passive attitudes to other men. His basic contention was that the conflict between masculine and feminine tendencies was not an inevitable opposition based on the biological distinction between 'masculine' and 'feminine'. In this he was obviously correct, for there are clearly combinations and reversals of masculine and feminine characteristics to be found in men and women. However, Freud did not look for early signs of differentiation between the sexes in the pre-oedipal period but concentrated upon its most dramatic expression in the castration complex.<sup>195</sup> Here it appeared to be the recognition of anatomical difference alone which determined psychical differentiation, rather than the idea of sexual opposition which is socially grounded in anatomy. This recognition is something which has long been prepared for, so that the child's conflict does lie precisely in reconciling its masculine and feminine tendencies in relation to a sense of gender. The conflict is obviously not inherent in the

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195. Yet Freud was aware of the need to pay attention to the pre-oedipal period and wrote that "everything that is to be seen upon the surface has already been exhausted; what remains has to be slowly and laboriously dragged up from the depths" ("Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", op. cit., p. 249).

different tendencies themselves if they are understood to mean activity and passivity; rather, it is generated by the contradictory desires of the parents and the meaning which they invest in those tendencies.

The tensions within the process of the boy's psychical differentiation are now apparent. These tensions produce many resolutions of the Oedipus complex which depart significantly from the ideal form, and some lead to homosexuality. The foregoing discussion makes it possible to locate the production of a homosexual object-choice firmly within the dynamics of the construction of masculinity. While Freud was theoretically opposed to any dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality and demonstrated how an exaggeration of a 'normal' aspect of psychical life could lead to homosexuality, his endogenous model of sexual development and his lack of success with the question of psychical differentiation were major constraints upon his understanding of homosexuality. It remained insufficiently related to more general sexual dynamics. His tendency to regard homosexuality as the result of a simple gender inversion, on the other hand, merely rendered it as the symmetrical 'opposite' to heterosexuality.

Given the cues which a boy typically receives to privilege his penis as the object of desire, it is readily understandable that with his recognition of the opposition between the sexes he might give up his mother, not just as the father's prerogative for the time being, but permanently. His narcissism leads him to confine the threat of castration to women and to insist that his future sexual objects possess a penis. He therefore identifies with his father and his repudiation of femininity is merely an exaggerated version of the latter's attitude.<sup>196</sup> Freud classified such homosexuals as "'object homo-erotics', who are completely masculine and who have merely exchanged a female for a male object".<sup>197</sup>

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196. Freud, "Female Sexuality", op. cit., p. 229.

197. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 147. n.

Despite their identification, however, the masculinity of these men would seem to be distinguished by a continuing fear of the father, as Freud noted in this case: "In his imagination all women belonged to his father, and he sought refuge in men out of submission, so as to retire from the conflict with his father."<sup>198</sup> Freud also observed a heterosexual form of the same pattern where a man could only love a woman who was somehow attached to another man and which reflected the fact that in childhood, "the mother belonging to the father becomes an inseparable part of the mother's essence".<sup>199</sup>

Freud argued that the development of the libido progressed along the line of auto-erotism, narcissism, homosexual object-choice to heterosexuality, and he wrote of the homosexual:

In his childhood he chooses women as his sexual object, so long as he assumes that they too possess what in his eyes is an indispensable part of the body; when he becomes convinced that women have deceived him in this particular, they cease to be acceptable to him as a sexual object. He cannot forgo a penis in any one who is to attract him to sexual intercourse; and if circumstances are favourable he will fix his libido upon the 'woman with a penis', a youth of feminine appearance. Homosexuals, then, are persons who, owing to the erotogenic importance of their own genitals, cannot do without a similar feature in their sexual object. In the course of their development from auto-erotism to object-love, they have remained fixated at a point between the two. 200

They were comparable to Little Hans: "Hans was a homosexual (as all children may very well be), quite consistently with the fact ... that he was acquainted with only one kind of genital organ - a genital organ like his own."<sup>201</sup> Yet it is quite clear that even if, for a period, the

198. Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", *op. cit.*, p. 159, n. 1. Freud also pointed out here that the same retiring could take place in relation to a brother. He later observed that this development could be a solution to sibling rivalry; it was therefore in complete contrast to the development of paranoia, as in the case of Schreber, "in which the person who has before been loved becomes the hated persecutor, whereas here the hated rivals are transformed into love-objects" ("Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality" (1922), *S.E.*, Vol. XVIII, p. 231).

199. Freud, "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men" (1910), *S.E.*, Vol. XI, p. 169.

200. Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia", *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10.

201. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

boy regards both parents as sharing the same kind of genitals, he nonetheless makes a basic distinction: his active aims towards his mother are not inhibited by her phallic status whereas they are by his father's.

The description of Hans as 'homosexual' is extremely misleading for it suggests a greater continuity between infantile sexuality and adult homosexuality, the latter being a fixation, than between infantile sexuality and heterosexuality. But in both cases, the boy has to negotiate the socially constituted polarity between the sexes and whether this leads to a change of object, a change of identification, or to both of these, it is very difficult to see how one represents a more direct line of development from infantile sexuality than the other. Moreover, it makes little sense to describe boys as 'homosexual' if they only uphold the theory of the phallic mother when they have reason to fear that their mother's genitals imply her inferiority.

Homosexuality, rather than being understood as a fixation or regression along an endogenous path of libidinal progression, the libido being forced to flow backwards because of some obstacle, for example,<sup>202</sup> is instead more usefully seen as a result of the recognition of the opposition between the sexes. For in this oedipal resolution, the boy refuses to accept castration as a possibility for himself and therefore fails to integrate his recognition of sexual opposition. The revelation of the mother's inferiority renders her totally unacceptable to him. Factors which would contribute to such a resolution include the intensity of the boy's love for his mother and the strength of the threat from the father, which are really the reverse of each other, as well as the extent of the father's disparagement of women. In this case, the competing forces in the oedipal conflict have developed to an extreme point.

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202. Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia", op. cit., pp. 61-62.

The greatest difficulty with this oedipal resolution would seem to be the boy's absolute surrender of the mother: an alternative resolution enables him in one sense to preserve that original choice. Here the homosexual is a "subject homo-erotic"<sup>203</sup> for there is an inversion of the subject, via an identification with the mother, rather than of the object alone; this, in Freud's view, was the typical process in the origin of male homosexuality.<sup>204</sup> In this resolution the boy endeavours to ignore the threat of castration and continues to believe unconsciously in the phallic mother so that the conflict between his narcissism and incestuous desires is averted. Freud adopted the general view that the Oedipus complex had to be superseded if only because the boy's demands could not be met: "the continued denial of the desired baby, must in the end lead the small lover to turn away from his hopeless longing."<sup>205</sup> The solution which the boy adopts in this case is not to give up his love object either temporarily or permanently, but instead to become more like that object. Freud illustrated this outcome in his study of Leonardo da Vinci where he wrote that after an initial, intense attachment to his mother,

The boy represses his love for his mother: he puts himself in her place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love. In this way he has become a homosexual. What he has in fact done is to slip back to auto-erotism: for the boys whom he now loves as he grows up are after all only substitutive figures and revivals of himself in childhood - boys whom he loves in the way in which his mother loved him when he was a child. 206

Therefore, while the mother is 'lost' as the object, she is also 'retained' by being introjected into the ego, and if this identification

203. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 147, n.

204. Freud, "Some Neurotic Mechanisms", op. cit., p. 230.

205. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", op. cit., p. 173.

206. Freud, Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood (1910), S.E., Vol. XI, p. 100. Freud frequently repeated this argument; see for example the later works "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", op. cit., p. 158, n. 1; and Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921), S.E., Vol. XVIII, pp. 108-09.

"enables the son to keep true to her, his first object",<sup>207</sup> it just as much enables the mother to preserve her relationship with her son. In this case then, the homosexual is unable to recognise the fact of the opposition between the sexes. Whatever his later conscious knowledge of sexual difference, his mother does not suffer that diminishment of her importance which characterises an identification with the father. As Freud remarked, the "originally equal value attached to the two sexes as sexual objects may persist, and this will lead to a tendency in adult life to homosexual activity".<sup>208</sup>

The question remains as to how, in this resolution, it is possible to refuse to acknowledge the threat of castration. Although this attitude is reminiscent of the Wolf Man, in his case the reality of the threat was resisted because it was the penalty to be paid for loving the father. The result of his being unable to adopt a final attitude either way to the threat was ultimately a strong tendency towards delusional psychosis, the first signs of which were evident in Freud's account,<sup>209</sup> and this is a very clear indication that the homosexual who identifies with the mother could not possibly ignore the father as castrator altogether. For as Laplanche argues, drawing on Melanie Klein,

... starting with the first relations - even if they are 'dual', with the mother alone, and the father absent (and indeed he is almost totally absent for the nursing infant) - a certain presence of a third element begins to play a role. In this sense, the father is present from the beginning, even if the mother is a widow: he is present because the mother herself has a father and desires a penis ... 210

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207. Freud, "Some Neurotic Mechanisms", *op. cit.*, p. 230.

208. Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

209. Freud related that at the age of five, the Wolf Man had an hallucination in which he had cut off his finger ("From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", *op. cit.*, p. 85). Further instances occurred in Brunswick's account (*op. cit.*).

210. Laplanche, *op. cit.*, p. 46. As already noted, the mother's desire for her son is certainly not straightforward. Laplanche sums up her contradictory attitude, which will convey the idea of castration.

In the case of mothers, we invariably find a double resistance: simultaneously against the notion of infantile sexuality

Freud clarified this attitude to castration to some extent by arguing that, when faced with a conflict between an instinctual desire and the prohibition of reality, the child could attempt to satisfy both at once instead of making a choice of one or the other.

On the one hand, with the help of certain mechanisms he rejects reality and refuses to accept any prohibition; on the other hand, in the same breath he recognizes the danger of reality, takes over the fear of that danger as a pathological symptom and tries subsequently to divest himself of the fear. 211

The price to be paid for this "very ingenious solution" is that the ego is split and it will be expected that, as in the other oedipal resolution, the homosexual will display some symptom which is an acknowledgement of the danger of castration.<sup>212</sup>

Finally, if in the negative Oedipus complex the boy pursues the alternative possibility of gaining satisfaction, the outcome is also a subject homo-erotic. In this case the boy's narcissism is defeated: he keeps his father as his object, accepts castration as a precondition of his choice and consolidates his identification with his mother. The knowledge that his passive sexual aims are feminine constitutes a wound to his narcissism which he shares with the oedipal girl; he will deprecate himself (and women) and will also perhaps display an ambiguous attitude to those men who are his sexual objects and who possess the phallus which he has given up. This is the 'feminine' homosexual, the opposite in most respects from the 'masculine' one described above. In this case the idea of the opposition between the sexes is recognised. Of all the resolutions open to the boy this one is the most difficult

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and against its manifestations. Which is to say that they affirm simultaneously these two contradictory propositions; the child is sexually innocent, and since he isn't, he should be condemned (p. 29).

211. Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1938), S.E., Vol. XXIII, p. 275.

212. Freud believed that fetishism was the clearest illustration of the splitting of the ego and it is notable in the present context since it constitutes a reaction to the threat of castration which is an 'alternative' to homosexuality ("Fetishism", op. cit., p. 154).

and both the Wolf Man and Schreber resisted it; they displayed that 'bedrock' which is evidence of a very early sense of gender. With Schreber, after an apparently normal resolution, a passive homosexual phantasy appeared with Dr Flechsig as its object and it provoked an intense resistance in the form of a delusion of persecution. Schreber's solution to this conflict was to replace Flechsig as his persecutor by God, so that his ego "found compensation in his megalomania while his feminine wishful phantasy made its way through and became acceptable".<sup>213</sup> The success of this oedipal resolution will depend partly upon the boy's fear of the father and, conversely, upon the father's defence against his own homosexual desires. If the Wolf Man had reason to fear his father, Schreber had even more for his father's child rearing methods were extraordinarily harsh.<sup>214</sup>

Two further aspects of this resolution are noteworthy, these being the significance of anal erotism and a sense of inferiority, both of which are connected to the acceptance of the idea of castration. Freud believed that a stressing of "anal erotism in the pregenital stage of organization leaves behind a significant predisposition to homosexuality in men".<sup>215</sup> It was of course a form of erotism common to all children, but when they had accepted the prohibition against gaining pleasure through the retention of their faeces, what was 'anal' remained "the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life".<sup>216</sup> This included the repudiation of femininity for "the organ which, more than any other, represents the passive sexual aim is the erotogenic mucous membrane of the anus".<sup>217</sup> Thus the deprecation of women and the resistance to expressing passive attitudes towards males, these being characteristic of the oedipal

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213. Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia", op. cit., p. 48.

214. Schatzman, op. cit., Ch. 3.

215. Freud, "The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis", op. cit., p. 322.

216. Freud, Three Essays, op. cit., p. 187, n. 1.

217. Ibid., p. 198.



resolutions in which the threat of castration was acknowledged and the father chosen as the figure of identification, went hand in hand with a repudiation of the anal. Conversely, in the 'feminine' homosexual resolution particularly, anal erotism was retained. It was a central feature of the psychic lives of both Schreber and the Wolf Man, for it was the vehicle by which they expressed their identification with women and their passive attitude towards other men.

The difficulty of this oedipal resolution points to the sense of inferiority and guilt which accompanies anal erotism in that it signifies castration. Inasmuch as the idea of castration is acknowledged but neither completely accepted nor repudiated, it will be played out in a tension between the ego and the super-ego. As the 'heir' to the Oedipus complex, the boy's super-ego represented the internalisation of that conflict and it was formed on the basis of his father's super-ego which would have guided his education of his son.<sup>218</sup> In the ideal heterosexual resolution of the Oedipus complex, the boy secured his narcissism: having averted the threat to his bodily unity by identifying with the castrating father and accepting the prohibition on his chosen object, he was confident in his love of his ego. He would be independent in that he would prefer loving to being loved and he would display the aggressiveness and activity that accompanied a predominance of narcissism.<sup>219</sup> Aggressiveness was an integral part of the oedipal conflict and its subsequent direction to external objects typified the narcissistic character type. The obsessional character type, on the other hand, internalised his aggressiveness so that there was a marked conflict between his ego and super-ego, much of that conflict being unconscious.<sup>220</sup> Here, the father's castration threat lived on in the boy's fear of conscience.

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218. For Freud, the mother's super-ego was weaker as in her childhood she had less urgent reasons for a definite resolution of her Oedipus complex than had the boy. See for example, "Femininity", *op. cit.*, p. 129.

219. Freud, "Libidinal Types" (1931), *S.E.*, Vol. XXI, p. 218.

220. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Freud did not connect his delineation of character types to the different oedipal resolutions and, in reality, there is undoubtedly no ready connection between a heterosexual resolution and a narcissistic character type, and a homosexual one and an obsessional character type. Nonetheless, he saw a firm relationship between a continuing fear of castration and a sense of guilt and inferiority so that it does not seem speculative to suggest that when a boy fails to achieve a decisive attitude to his father's threat, as would seem to be the case to varying degrees in each of the homosexual resolutions, then his psychic life will be marked by a conflict between his ego and super-ego. The imperative of the castration complex is that the boy should be either like his father or like his mother: in a homosexual resolution the boy can attempt either possibility, but neither can be achieved in a clear cut fashion. The former implies either a future choice of women as objects or a continuing fear of, or deference to, the father; the latter implies a complete acceptance of castration, and this even the oedipal girl is unable to achieve. His recognition of the socially constituted opposition between the sexes leaves the homosexual in a more or less ambiguous position.

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It is important to admit the limitations of this schematic presentation of the paths to a homosexual object-choice. Just as Freud added the reminder that his distinction between subject homo-erotics and object homo-erotics was an ideal one and that in reality the two would be found in combination in many homosexuals, so too the resolutions to the Oedipus complex which have been outlined in this discussion should not be assumed to be applicable to individual histories in any straightforward fashion. Typically, homosexual men will contain within their psychic lives elements of each of the resolutions including the 'normal' one. Similarly, the path to heterosexuality is also a compromise and one of Freud's most

important discoveries was that a significant measure of unconscious homosexuality could be detected in all people.

It should be emphasised that this phenomenon is a result of the child's sexual development: there is no direct lineage from a natural 'homosexuality' in infantile sexuality to the repressed homosexuality in heterosexual people. Whether repressed or not, homosexual desire is a product of the ways in which a boy achieves a sense of gender through his relationships with his parents; all boys confront the necessity of negotiating their position in the family in which there is an opposition between the mother and father. Here then, is the solution to the contradiction in Freud's thought between positing homosexual desire as universal and a homosexual object-choice as a fixation or regression. It is not, as Hocquenghem and Mieli argued, that Freud could not tolerate the implications of the first proposition. The critical weakness of his formulation lies in the biological assumptions of his endogenous model, for this model excludes a recognition of the social determinants of the child's sexual development.

The kind of psychoanalytic account of homosexuality which can be derived directly from Freud's work is limited. His theoretical claims were modest and he admitted that there was much in the psychodynamics of homosexuality which remained obscure. In particular, many strains in his thought point to the importance of the pre-oedipal period in understanding the boy's construction of an incipient sense of gender and it would be necessary to assess later psychoanalytic work to gain a more adequate understanding of the processes involved. At the same time, some indispensable insights of a general kind into the psychodynamics of homosexuality can be derived from the Freud's work. By taking seriously his opposition to a dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality, it is possible to understand the production of a homosexual orientation as an outcome of the tensions within the construction of masculinity within the patriarchal family.

Freud's account suggests a number of hypotheses which, though in need of further theoretical and empirical validation, are a far more valuable starting point than what is advanced in crude psychoanalytic formulations.

The three oedipal resolutions leading to a homosexual object-choice which have been discussed may be referred to as 'masculine', 'narcissistic' and 'feminine'. The first of these is the only one in which there is an identification with the father and it suggests some of the traits which homosexual and heterosexual masculinity have in common. These include, most notably, a deprecation of women and a sense of gender which is understood to be rigidly non-feminine. The difference between them, however, is that while the heterosexual boy is compensated for the loss of his mother as his object by the knowledge that he will ultimately take his father's place, this consolation is qualified for the homosexual boy. His masculinity is marked by a continuing fear of the father in whose favour he has had to withdraw absolutely, rather than provisionally as in the case of his heterosexual counterpart. In this resolution, the oedipal tension between love for the mother and fear of the father have developed to an extreme point and the homosexual's masculinity may, perhaps, display the "excessive overcompensations"<sup>221</sup> which Freud connected with an energetic repression of the passive attitude in males.

For the 'masculine' homosexual resolution, as well as the two others, an original intense attachment to the mother is a central feature. This was Freud's one certainty about the origin of male homosexuality. It is a persuasive argument though it can easily be overstated and it is undoubtedly the most popular cliché on the subject. As important as the intensity of this attachment are the motives of the parents, the mother's part in the relationship and the father's reaction; for as Freud admitted, "the number of cases of our homosexual type in which it is possible to

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221. Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", op. cit., p. 251.

point to the determinants which we require far exceeds the number of those where the deduced effect actually takes place".<sup>222</sup> Further, this attachment can have a variety of results. It is quite apparent from Freud's general account (though not from his formal presentation of the oedipal resolutions), that the attachment does not necessarily lead to a simple gender inversion. In fact, only with the 'feminine' homosexual resolution is this clearly the case and this, it should be emphasised, is the most difficult of all of the resolutions to consolidate. Here, the boy's Oedipus complex takes the negative form and the mother's importance is not as his object but as the figure of identification. The object of course is the father, and his role in setting up his son's attachment is one of the most glaring absences in Freud's account.

His exoneration of the father was tireless: "it almost seems as though the presence of a strong father would ensure that the son made the correct decision in his choice of object, namely someone of the opposite sex."<sup>223</sup> Yet both the 'masculine' and 'feminine' homosexual resolutions are inexplicable if the active intervention of the father is ignored. In the latter case of the negative Oedipus complex, it is difficult to imagine that the boy chooses his father randomly when in the positive Oedipus complex he is given a multitude of cues by which to choose his mother. Indeed, the effect of a 'strong' father is quite unpredictable in Freud's general account. The Wolf Man, after all, regarded his sickly father as castrated so that it is possible that a more robust figure could have been an acceptable homosexual object for him. In the 'masculine' resolution, on the other hand, it is precisely a 'strong' father who forces the boy to give up his mother permanently. The crude Freudian explanation of male homosexuality points to the overbearing mother and the weak ('castrated') father. Freud's own material suggests that the forceful presence of the father can be just as significant as his absence.

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222. Freud, Leonardo da Vinci, op. cit., p. 101.

223. Ibid., p. 99.

For all of the oedipal resolutions, both homosexual and heterosexual, it is perhaps not so much the physical presence of the father which is important as the mother's conscious and unconscious representation of him to her son. For the child's care is of course typically the mother's responsibility and the father's literal presence is unlikely to match hers. Thus in a culture where women exclusively care for children, where the sexual division of labour renders the father remote, idealised and superior, where the ideology of monogamy penalises women while allowing men relative sexual freedom, in this context the sexual and emotional tensions within a family can be intense. It is within this framework that the boy has to come to terms with the issue of the polarity between the sexes.<sup>224</sup>

His dilemma lies in the fact that while his mother is likely to promote his incipient sense of gender, the development of his masculine identity ultimately leads him to break his primary tie with her and to identify with his father whose deprecation of women he then shares. This transition is at the heart of the psychological predicament of homosexual men. Freud's account suggests that the 'masculine' homosexual resolution leads at best to an uneasy truce with the father, while the 'feminine' one leads to a resentful defeat.<sup>225</sup> Both of these also involve an unconscious recognition of women as inferior, though in the former resolution this recognition is not integrated so that castration remains an issue, while in the latter the recognition is accepted not only for women but also for the homosexual. It is the 'narcissistic' resolution (for Freud the typical process) which seems to demonstrate most clearly the problematic nature of the homosexual's gender identity. For in this case the boy fails

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224. These remarks touch upon the general problem of setting the psychoanalytic account within a social context. This is of course the classic difficulty for any attempt to use psychoanalysis to further a social theory and some further discussion of this problem is included in the following chapters.

225. The 'feminine' homosexual resolution illustrates Proust's 'tragedy' of a man loving another man who loves a woman; see Hocquenghem, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

to achieve an unconscious recognition of sexual difference. In his identification with the mother, she is not a castrate but phallic; his object-choice is not the father but an image of what he once was to his mother.

Taken together, these three oedipal resolutions underline the anomalous position of homosexual men in terms of gender. The psychoanalytic account advanced here does not deny the common elements in homosexual and heterosexual masculinity, nor does it reduce homosexuality to a simple matter of gender inversion. On a general level, it suggests that the dichotomy of gender is the axis of the production of homosexuality. This means that a homosexual orientation is not a legacy of infantile sexuality in the sense in which the proponents of the repression hypothesis thereby seek to give it an 'authenticity'. It is directly comparable to heterosexuality in that both are compromises resulting from the tensions which characterise the construction of masculinity. It is different in that it represents a failure in a variety of ways to achieve the determinant recognitions of the opposition between the sexes which constitute the orthodox pattern of masculinity.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPROACHES TO MALE  
HOMOSEXUALITY WITHIN SOCIOLOGY



Sociological work which deals with homosexuality is quite recent; the bulk of it has come from sociologists in the United States and its interest has been overwhelmingly with male homosexuals.<sup>1</sup> Most of this work has appeared during the last fifteen years and the fact of its novelty is itself an important sociological question. It is, for example, hardly a coincidence that the recognition of 'homosexuals' as an object of sociological inquiry largely coincided with the resurgence of homosexual activism. Though only very few of these studies have been concerned with the gay movement,<sup>2</sup> there is nonetheless a clear historical connection between the two. The greater volume of sociological work was generated by a reorientation within the discipline represented by the 'new deviancy perspective' and, on a general level, this was a response to the cultural upheaval of the sixties in Britain and North America.<sup>3</sup> As will be seen, the self-conscious liberalism of the new perspective was in marked contrast with the orthodox sociological approach to 'social deviance'. The emergence of the new deviancy perspective then, and the advent of the contemporary gay movement, both need to be understood in the context of broader historical questions concerning the

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1. In its lack of interest in lesbianism, this work is continuous with the long tradition of psychological theorising about, and categorising of, male homosexuality. For a critical discussion of the small amount of recent sociological work on lesbians, see Lenore Manderson, "Self, Couple and Community: Recent Writings on Lesbian Women", *Hecate*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1980), pp. 67-79; and Annabel Faraday, "Liberating Lesbian Research", in Kenneth Plummer (ed.), *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, London, 1981, pp. 112-129.
  2. For example, some brief, descriptive commentary appeared in Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation, Englewood Cliffs, 1972; and Joseph Harry and William B. DeVall, *The Social Organization of Gay Males*, New York, 1978. Much other commentary has trivialised the gay movement: Paul Rock, for example, distinguished between "expressive, politicized and entrepreneurial deviants" which became the "queen role", the Gay Liberation Front member and the hustler in the case of homosexuals (*Deviant Behaviour*, London, 1973, p. 93); and John H. Gagnon and William Simon wrote that the movement "seeks both change in the general image of homosexuality and an improved self-image for the homosexual" (*Sexual Conduct, The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*, London, 1974, p. 290).
  3. See the discussion by Stanley Cohen, "Criminology and the Sociology of Deviance in Britain", in Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh (eds.), *Deviance and Social Control*, London, 1974, pp. 26 ff.

changing nature of both the category of 'homosexuality' and the self-conceptions of 'homosexuals'. This chapter and the following one form a critical discussion of the ways in which various sociologists and gay liberationists first recognised, and then began to explore, these problems.

The new deviancy perspective was barely established when rapidly growing numbers of homosexuals, they being one of the most commonly cited groups in deviance studies, began to advance their own analysis of their social position. As a British sociologist, Laurie Taylor observed, there are occasions when "deviants who have been denied full consciousness of their activities have nevertheless come to assert their authority over their behaviour and have successfully challenged the imputation of alternative and more deterministic vocabularies of motive by more powerful others".<sup>4</sup> This was highly unusual, however, in that no other group defined as deviant has been able to articulate a conception of itself to anything like the same extent,<sup>5</sup> and few sociologists were able to respond to this development. For their part, gay activists have not had very much more to say about the burgeoning sociological work. Some critical commentary upon particular studies has appeared in the gay press, but the general direction and assumptions of this work have not been addressed systematically.<sup>6</sup> This chapter examines the most important sociological statements on homosexuality published since the late sixties and notes more briefly the theoretical contours of some other work.

A debate between gay liberationists and sociologists has been constrained by both similarities and differences in the two approaches. An important

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4. Laurie Taylor, "The Significance and Interpretation of Replies to Motivational Questions: The Case of Sex Offenders", Sociology, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Jan. 1972), p. 35.
  5. This is not to imply that groups such as juvenile delinquents, prostitutes, drug users and so on - as well as homosexuals - share some quality which allows them to be usefully grouped together under the rubric of 'deviance'. Perhaps what they do share on the whole is the inability of 'talk back' to the professionals who are studying them.
  6. For a short, sharp critique see Dennis Altman, "Deviance, Society and Sociology", in A.R. Edwards and P.R. Wilson (eds.), Social Deviance in Australia, Melbourne, 1975, pp. 264-78.

point of departure which they shared was the conviction that homosexuality should not be defined as a psychological condition. Both highlighted the dominant psychiatric and psychoanalytic definitions of mental illness as politically retrograde and theoretically bankrupt. Gay liberationists had no doubt on this score from the start, whereas some sociologists and social psychologists have continued slowly to document the equivalent 'adjustment' of homosexual and heterosexual samples of the population and to establish the similarities rather than the differences between the two.<sup>7</sup> Some gay liberationists have argued that the latter has denied the specificity of homosexual oppression;<sup>8</sup> but the sociological work has most often been received within the movement as benevolent or, at worst, irrelevant. This has been the case in the United States particularly, where sociological interest in homosexuality has been far more pronounced than elsewhere; and where, as well, gay liberationists have not pursued a social analysis with much vigour after the initial phase of activism. The dominant liberal tenor of gay politics in the United States therefore parallels in many ways the political assumptions of the work being produced by sociologists in that country.

The lack of any real meeting point between gay liberationists and sociologists reflects, more centrally, the very different theoretical positions from which the two began to argue that homosexuality needed to be conceptualised in social terms. The initial concern within the movement was with why homosexuals are oppressed, and specifically with the social effects of rigid gender categories, with how the family was related to the economic development of capitalist societies, and with deriving a social psychology from Freud. These were not the kinds of questions usually posed by sociologists.

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7. The foremost recent example is Allen Bell and Martin Weinberg, Homosexualities, A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women, New York, 1978.
  8. See for example the review of the Bell and Weinberg volume by Michael Lynch, "The Uses of Diversity", The Body Politic, No. 47 (Oct. 1978), p. 37.

In 1956, in one of the first small scale empirical studies, two North American sociologists remarked that "the subjection of homosexuals to legal punishments and social condemnation has produced a complex structure of concealed social relations which merit sociological investigation".<sup>9</sup> From this kind of starting point, later investigations have very often been of concealed social relations, with the emphasis upon what was 'concealed'. Becker, who edited the journal Social Problems from 1961 until 1964 and did much to establish the new deviancy perspective, was impressed by a study that revealed that many male prostitutes did not identify themselves as homosexual; he exclaimed with typical ingenuousness: "How many other varieties of homosexual behavior await discovery and description? And what effect would their discovery and description have on our theories?"<sup>10</sup>

There has subsequently been a good deal of discovery and description but little theoretical refinement. In fact, the interstices of the male homosexual subculture have seemed inexhaustible, as these titles alone illustrate - "Cruising the truckers: sexual encounters in a highway rest area",<sup>11</sup> "The Male House of Prostitution",<sup>12</sup> "Life in a parking lot: an ethnography of a homosexual drive-in",<sup>13</sup> "Gay Baths and the Social Organization of Impersonal Sex".<sup>14</sup> This kind of work begs to be satirised, and something of the breathless excitement experienced by the novice sociologist in the subculture has been captured in a recent, best-selling gay thriller. The protagonist, posing as a homosexual and soon to have an identity crisis,

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9. M. Leznoff and W.A. Westley, "The Homosexual Community", Social Problems, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1956), p. 257.

10. Howard S. Becker, Outsiders, Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, New York, 1973 (1963), p. 168. He was referring to Albert J. Reiss, "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers", Social Problems, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Summer 1961), pp. 102-20.

11. J. Corzine and R. Kirby, in Urban Life, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 1977), pp. 171-92.

12. D.J. Pittman, in Trans-Action, Vol. 8, Nos. 5 and 6 (March-April 1971), pp. 21-27.

13. M.R. Ponte, in J. Jacobs (ed.), Deviance: Field Studies and Self Disclosures, Palo Alto, 1974, pp. 7-29.

14. Martin S. Weinberg and C.J. Williams, in Social Problems, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Dec. 1975), pp. 124-36.

has just arranged to work in a gay bar in New York:

Noel gulped down the rest of his beer, unable to hide his excitement. He'd been here less than half an hour, and he'd actually witnessed a key social ritual of this society - a sexual pickup - from inception to consummation. First time out, and he'd struck pay dirt! If only he'd been able to hear what they'd said to each other! Loomis was right. He felt as though he'd parachuted into New Guinea and witnessed a once-a-century ceremony never before seen by a white man. 15

Researchers have, however, also addressed themselves to sociological questions of more importance. There has been some concern to measure the degree of social condemnation of homosexuality and with both the individual and collective reaction among homosexuals to this condemnation. Yet the question of why such oppression exists in the first place has rarely been coherently formulated or systematically investigated; the sociological focus has overwhelmingly been upon individual attitudes, reactions and self-conceptions.

The first substantial study to break with this emphasis was Kenneth Plummer's Sexual Stigma, published in 1975.<sup>16</sup> It was remarkable as an attempt to establish homosexuality as a sociological question of general significance and to explore a theoretical approach to the problems which it raised. Plummer formulated a set of questions regarding the origins of oppression; and he argued with force and subtlety that neither the lives of individual homosexuals, nor the homosexual subculture, could be understood apart from an appreciation of the effects of the oppressive culture in which they existed. Given this general approach, it was not surprising that he acknowledged a debt to the gay movement.

This study was one of the first indications of the possibility of a more intimate connection between the arguments of sociologists and gay liberationists, and it became more explicit in Barry Adam's The Survival of

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15. Felice Picano, The Lure, New York, 1979, p. 67.

16. Kenneth Plummer, Sexual Stigma: An Interactionist Account, London, 1975.

Domination<sup>17</sup> and in Plummer's recent compilation of articles, The Making of the Modern Homosexual. This is a distinctly marginal development within sociology, for the number of studies which reveal a general theoretical sensitivity to the gay movement remains very small. Nonetheless, Plummer's second volume is the most thoughtful effort to date to advance a social theory of male homosexuality and to explore, as the title suggests, the historical construction of 'homosexuals' and of 'homosexuality'. It represents a convergence of 'sociological' and 'gay liberationist' concerns which would have been very difficult to imagine during the first phase of the movement. The distinction between the two is of course only a formal one: gay liberationists have, from the outset, attempted to produce a sociology. The convergence really refers to the fact that there has been some refinement in both approaches and that questions regarding homosexuality have finally begun to be placed within radical social theory in a more general sense.

The construction of an historical perspective on homosexuality has proven to be a slow and uneven process. Before considering the major steps towards it within the new deviancy perspective, it will be useful to consider an example of the kind of sociological work which the perspective was reacting against, namely that of structural-functionalism.

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Prior to the fifties, most research into 'deviant' behaviour which might broadly be said to have a social character was conducted by criminologists and those sociologists concerned with practical solutions to what were perceived as social problems. They shared assumptions which led them to describe and search for the causes of the individual pathology which was

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17. Barry D. Adam, The Survival of Domination, Inferiorization and Everyday Life, New York, 1978. This is a phenomenological study of the oppression of Jews, blacks and gay people. It describes the strategies of resistance and accommodation adopted by these groups. Adam offers some useful insights but there is a difficulty in treating the three together. The idea of 'domination' remains too abstract and the impetus to resistance obscure.

taken to underlie deviant behaviour and to propose ameliorative strategies. Their approach was unselfconsciously moralistic and relied upon an unproblematic conception of the 'adjusted' individual and the 'normal' society.<sup>18</sup> After the second world war, however, the structural-functionalists paid explicit attention to deviance, having in fact introduced the term into sociology in the United States in opposition to what they considered to be the unscientific notions of maladjustment and social pathology. They attempted to distinguish the 'functional' and 'dysfunctional' consequences of deviance for the 'social system', and Merton interpreted Durkheim's concept of anomie to explain variations in the rates of deviant behaviour as the outcome of a particular structural disjunction. They classified deviance as a 'social problem' (by which, they emphasised, they did not mean to imply a moral judgement) which society necessarily attempted to control.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, having gone some way in attempting to provide the notion of deviance with some theoretical rigour, the functionalists' approach did not readily lend itself to the empirical investigation of particular deviant groups. It was largely left to psychiatrists, criminologists and social workers to consider the specific groups more closely. Unlike later sociologists, the functionalists were not particularly concerned with the questions of the subjective reality of deviants, or with the interactions within such groups or between them and the larger society.

'Pure' functionalist accounts of homosexuality are therefore rare. The most notable is a short piece by Kingsley Davis, published in 1966 and revised in 1971.<sup>20</sup> It provides a classic illustration of the major

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18. See a famous early critique by C. Wright Mills, "The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists", American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Sept. 1943), pp. 165-80.

19. For example, Talcott Parsons, The Social System, London, 1951.

20. Kingsley Davis, "Sexual Behavior", in Robert K. Merton and Robert Nisbet (eds.), Contemporary Social Problems (3rd ed.), New York, 1971, pp. 313-60.

difficulties confronted not only by conservative functionalist arguments but also by radical ones. The article is also of historical interest. It represents a statement from a prominent sociologist in the United States and it appeared at a time when the orthodoxy of his perspective was just beginning to be significantly challenged from within the discipline. Davis was then professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley and his career had been a conventionally distinguished one.<sup>21</sup> His article was published in a volume edited by Merton and Nisbet, Contemporary Social Problems, a major sociological textbook which went through three editions. In the first, published in 1961, Davis' argument was confined to prostitution; in the second, it was expanded under the title of "Sexual Behavior" and it included homosexuality in the context of a broader consideration of sexual norms; and in the final version in 1971 it added premarital sexual relations. Davis' developing interests seem to have matched popular concern with specific sexual 'problems'. The following discussion will refer to the final version. It should be noted that nothing of substance was added regarding homosexuality: he cited hardly any work to have been produced by the new deviancy perspective and he did not engage in any argument with it. The most obvious change was that his conservative attitude towards homosexuality had hardened and he was particularly dismissive of the aims of the new gay movement.

Davis was basically concerned with what he believed to be the social disorganisation revealed in sexual behaviour within modern industrialised societies. This breakdown of standards, or anomie, was expressed in various ways. He concentrated upon the rising rate of premarital sexual relations, which he linked to the declining percentage of men who patronised prostitutes (both of these trends having been documented by

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21. Davis graduated from Harvard University and taught at Princeton and Columbia where he was professor of sociology before moving to Berkeley in 1955. He has also been president of the American Sociological Association. His major works are studies of population and urbanisation.



Kinsey), and upon an apparent increase in homosexual behaviour. He attempted to explain these changes in terms of the universal principles around which sexual behaviour had to be organised if social chaos was to be avoided. As the notion of chaos suggests, his view was predicated upon the conservative, psychoanalytically derived idea of the inherent power of the sexual drive ('drive' in this case, clearly meaning a biological instinct).

Nonetheless, all sexual activity had to be learned and the sexual drive was capable of a very wide range of situational and emotional conditioning. The problem for society was precisely this plasticity of the drive together with the fact that it was "inherently unstable and anarchic":<sup>22</sup> erotic interest was liable to be ephemeral and competition was rife so that sexual life could readily produce paranoia, homicide and suicide. It was therefore necessary to regulate the powerful drive in order to benefit the community and to minimise disruption. The regulation of sex was achieved in all societies by a balance between two normative principles. First, marriage and the family had a position of primacy. This established the legitimacy of children, the incest taboo (thus eliminating overt sexual rivalry within the family), the widespread pre-occupation with premarital relationships, and the different ways in which sexual norms were applied to men and women. These norms could vary, for example in the scope of the incest taboo and in the tolerance of premarital sex, yet overall sexual norms were subordinate to the family.

Second, departures from the familial structure of these norms were determined by the political and economic differentiation of societies. Since sexual desirability was an asset, a scarce, perishable good in fact, sexual access could be exchanged for political and economic advantages. Within the limits imposed by the primacy of the family, such as the

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22. Ibid., p. 317.

protection of minors, a system of sexual bargaining was established so that it was possible "for members of a higher stratum (usually males) to command the favours of the lower stratum (usually females)".<sup>23</sup> Such bargaining resolved the social problem inherent in the fact that the sexual attractiveness of youth rarely coincided with the economic and political advantages which accrued to men later in life. This bargaining system was also compatible with a class system since marriage did not tend to be part of the bargain in sexual relationships where the woman was from a lower class: the bargain could then be struck on other terms.

At this point, it sounds as if Davis would agree with Engels that the institution of bourgeois marriage was a form of prostitution. He acknowledged that there was a fine line, but the difference for him was that whereas a wife traded sexual access for economic support in the context of a stable marriage, the prostitute traded promiscuously. Indeed, he argued that the structure of the family depended upon prostitution.<sup>24</sup> It was an escape valve for pent-up male sexual energy since it was a relationship of far more limited liability than other forms of sexual bargaining: the "exacting requirements of attracting and persuading a female, or perhaps getting entangled with her in courtship or even marriage, are unnecessary".<sup>25</sup> Societies condemned prostitution, though different forms of it to varying degrees, precisely because of the difficulty of linking the sexual drive to a system of stable relationships.

A far more pressing social problem, given the functional consequences of prostitution, was the rise of premarital intercourse in industrialised societies.<sup>26</sup> Davis argued that there had been a breakdown in the old

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23. Ibid., p. 322.

24. Ibid., p. 350.

25. Ibid., p. 346.

26. Among American women born before 1900, 14 per cent had had premarital intercourse by the age of 25, whereas for those born between 1910 and 1929, this had risen to 39 per cent; see Alfred Kinsey et. al., Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 339.

sexual bargaining system and that this had resulted in very high levels of sexual intimidation and rape, and in rising rates of illegitimate births, 'forced' marriages, divorce and venereal disease. As a conservative criticism of the 'sexual revolution' this argument has some force and, from a different standpoint, many sexual liberationists have made similar observations. Some also share his functionalism and it is instructive to note how close the two approaches can become in trying to explain the social proscription of homosexuality.

Davis objected to the liberal claim that the homosexual taboo in industrialised societies was excessive: the behaviour was accepted as ineradicable and it in fact received considerable tolerance. All societies condoned a certain amount of homosexual behaviour (especially when it was institutionalised), but did not hold it in high esteem. The universal reason for this was that,

Homosexual intercourse is obviously incompatible with the family and the sexual bargaining system. The norms and attitudes required to support these institutions as a means of getting the business of reproduction and sexual allocation accomplished tend to downgrade homosexuality. 27

He made a distinction here between transitory homosexual encounters and homosexual relationships. The former were less threatening to the dominant sexual structure but they nonetheless contradicted the normative intent of linking the sexual drive to stable social relationships and sentiments.

Yet if prostitution poses precisely the same threat and still ultimately has functional consequences for the family, the same might be said of homosexual behaviour. In Davis' terms, there is no obvious incompatibility between homosexual intercourse and the sexual bargaining system.

His real concern was with homosexual relationships, with the 'true' or 'dedicated' homosexual, as he variously termed it. These relationships

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27. Davis, op. cit., p. 354.

competed with and threatened heterosexual marriage and family ties. The latter were particularly valued under the anomic conditions of industrialised societies and, despite the general deterioration of sexual control, the "complementarity of sex roles shows a surprising persistence".<sup>28</sup> Thus popular antipathy was directed particularly towards the homosexual who adopted "the physiologically inappropriate role".<sup>29</sup> This remark, however, was confined to a footnote, and the basic point for Davis was that homosexual relationships were unregulated and were typified by instability, violence,<sup>30</sup> and promiscuity. (Homosexuals personify the anarchic character of the sexual drive itself.) This instability was partly because the relationships were not reinforced by other social bonds. And they would not gain the same normative status as heterosexual relationships by the eradication of prejudice (he pointed out to the gay movement),<sup>31</sup> but only if the "distribution of that scarce resource - youthful homosexual attractiveness" was subject to rules and bargaining and "linked with economic and social rights and obligations in much the same way as heterosexual bargaining".<sup>32</sup> This, he almost suggested, would not be a very exciting prospect; at any rate, homosexual relationships would be significantly altered.

The social disapproval of homosexuality, as well as the power of normative control and the malleability of the sexual drive, emphasised the question

28. *Ibid.*, p. 355

29. *Ibid.*, p. 354, n. 90.

30. One of the extra-sociological asides added to the 1971 edition of his article was the following: "No one knows how many murders occur in homosexual quarrels, but the circumstances in newspaper accounts suggest that they are fairly frequent." *Ibid.*, p. 359.

31. A good part of the gay movement would of course agree with him, and also with his remark that homosexuals were unlikely to gain public recognition as a 'minority' since ordinarily membership of such groups was acquired by birth and subsequent socialisation (*ibid.*, p. 360). Even if homosexuals are recognised as deserving of liberal freedoms, they still pose the anomaly of being a 'minority' with very poorly defined boundaries; the group is 'unstable' inasmuch as it is impossible to predict who will belong to it.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

of why exclusive homosexuality should occur at all. Davis was not puzzled by Kinsey's statistic that 37 per cent of white males had had a homosexual experience to the point of orgasm: the frequent segregation of men and women suggested that the figure was surprisingly low. As for the question of exclusive homosexuality, he entertained a range of possibilities, the two main ones being seduction<sup>33</sup> and the general trend towards social disorganisation. The first, that exclusive homosexuality exists because of 'recruitment' from the youthful heterosexual population, only serves to underline the now well established need for a clear distinction between homosexuality as a form of behaviour and as a component of identity or self-conception. It is the domino theory of homosexuality and may well explain Davis' belief that it was increasing. He found this strange, particularly since with greater heterosexual freedom he expected that homosexual behaviour, like prostitution, might diminish. But he in fact isolated this greater freedom as the second and major cause of exclusive homosexuality.

Relations between men and women tend to involve obligations and performance; they are caught up in a network of institutionalized expectations. To some persons, as a consequence, heterosexual satisfactions seem almost unattainable, or attainable at too high a price. By contrast, homosexual relations are less institutionalized; they seem less complicated and thus provide an escape from the demands of male-female involvement. ...

The rise of heterosexual freedom is in part a function of social disorganization rather than reorganization; if so, it gives rise to personal anomie and encourages retreat into homosexual relations ... 34

This is patently not an answer to the question of the occurrence of exclusive homosexuality. As a minimal requirement, Davis should be able to explain why it is that homosexuality, given his stress upon its negative social evaluation, should nevertheless appear less complicated than heterosexuality. Indeed, he used the notion of social disorganisation to

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33. He also asserted that male prostitution frequently leads to exclusive homosexuality, despite the intentions of the prostitute (*ibid.*, p. 358). However, the conclusion of a study by Reiss (*op. cit.*) was precisely the opposite.

34. Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 356, 358.

cover all aspects of sexual change. He did not address the question of change in industrialised societies in any systematic way and merely included scattered references to the dramatic lowering of the death rate so that the old rules tying sex to reproduction had become obsolete; to the greater economic independence of women and the widespread use of artificial methods of contraception; and to the social mobility and anonymity associated with the rise of large industrial cities.

The ahistorical character of this kind of argument has already been noted with reference to Fernbach, Altman and Marcuse: their Freudianism is in many ways a simple reversal of the formulation outlined here. Davis focussed primarily upon the importance of the sexual normative structure; he saw this structure, not as an historical product, but as a universal system designed to perform the essential, if difficult, task of controlling the sexual drive. The latter was accepted unquestioningly as a natural force. Since the drive was an historical given, sexual change was confined within very narrow parameters. For Davis, there could be some adaptation of the sexual norms in terms of the intrusion of extra-familial sexual bargaining, but this could very quickly result in social disorganisation. There was little room for societies to move between the successful control of the drive and a normative breakdown, at which point the drive wreaks havoc; and there is no room in the model for historical analysis. The radical version of the argument is similarly constrained by a view of traditional sexual repression and the power of the drive to transform social relations once the repressive barriers were removed. Politically, the two arguments end up sharing a pessimistic view of sexual change: the first, because the social order is threatened or disintegrating, the second because the social order has found ever more ingenious ways of subverting real change. The latter conclusion is seen in Marcuse's concept of repressive desublimation and in the frequent conclusion of sexual liberationists that their political stance

has been 'co-opted' (an idea which recurs even when functionalist arguments have been ostensibly rejected).

The general similarities between the functionalism of the social control and repression hypotheses are familiar enough, but their specific arguments also share a surprising amount of common ground. This is not to deny their very different points of departure, but it is to suggest the ways in which their formulations are equally non-social. Thus, despite the gay liberationist arguments that to be homosexual is to experience socially constructed oppression - indeed, despite the very existence of a selfconsciously revolutionary movement which should certainly be accepted as evidence of the social construction of sexuality and of the possibility of change - attempts to arrive at a social analysis of homosexuality can easily founder.

Both the conservative and radical arguments posit the necessity for society to control or repress homosexuality and variously refer to its threat to the dominant structure of sexuality, to its propensity to break through psychological barriers or to otherwise increase. This is to locate 'homosexuality' within a biological conception of sexuality: whether this is described as infantile bisexuality or an indiscriminating, anarchic drive, homosexuality is accepted as a natural phenomenon, as either a hidden threat or a repressed potential.

The 'force' of homosexuality, its urge to find expression, is therefore an aspect of the generally powerful character of the sexual drive. It is important to emphasise that this is a very difficult position from which to make any analysis of gender differences. Since sexuality is never experienced in any generalised or abstract form but only in a gendered form, it becomes very likely that a conception of the inherent force of the drive will, when used in a social analysis, slide into a description of masculine sexual behaviour. Fernbach's argument about

the necessity for the state to proscribe homosexuality in fact referred to the "pressure of pent-up sexual energy ... male in particular".<sup>35</sup> And, as has been seen, one result of the repression hypothesis is to obscure questions of gender differences and even to reduce them to being an effect of repression.

In Davis' account, it is particularly evident that the powerful drive is characteristic of men and not of women. Thus while he remarked upon the sexual division of labour and the double standard of morality, he saw the occurrence of prostitution and premarital intercourse in terms of the effects of men's sexual drive.<sup>36</sup> Issues of gender could not emerge as a sociological question because the asymmetry of the social positions of men and women was assumed from the beginning. The sexual normative structure was precisely designed to protect women from men, to ensure that a 'fair' bargain was made. It followed that homosexual behaviour was overwhelmingly a question of men's behaviour. His references to lesbians were incidental, and the major ones occurred in the same context as a discussion of induced homosexual behaviour in rats.

The repression and control hypotheses are also unable to make a clear distinction between homosexuality as a form of behaviour and as a basis of self-conception. In these accounts, the necessity for repression or control arises because the behaviour produces homosexual people. Davis held this view unquestioningly, but it also underlies the kind of argument which Fernbach made. If the nineteenth century British state was obliged, objectively, to proscribe homosexual behaviour in order to re-inforce the psychological barriers among working class men against homosexuality, what exactly was it that was threatening to break through? It surely could not have been an incipient homosexual person, but only

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35. Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory", op. cit., p. 5.

36. Davis, op. cit., pp. 345, 331.



a propensity for homosexual behaviour which would produce such a person. But there are societies in which it is accepted that a man will have a sexual relationship with a youth until he can afford to marry.<sup>37</sup> The question then for Fernbach might very well be why the state could not accept homosexual behaviour as having functional consequences for industrial capitalism.

One of the most eccentric pieces on homosexuality in the entire sociological literature argued for exactly this conclusion. Ashworth and Walker claimed that whenever the access of members of one sex to members of the other was consistently obstructed, there would be a high incidence of homosexual behaviour and a relatively tolerant attitude towards it.<sup>38</sup> They conclude that homosexuality had functional consequences for the social system since it provided a solution for disadvantaged groups of men who could not compete on the same terms as others in the sexual bargaining system. They too accepted the idea of a strong male sex drive but, importantly, they rejected Davis' characterisation of homosexual relationships and argued that they were relatively stable. It could be wondered whether they would also argue that the nineteenth century laws were just a terrible mistake. Had they wished to argue against the kind of account which Fernbach gave, they could have observed that many homosexual men in the nineteenth century were married.<sup>39</sup>

The counter claims about whether or not homosexuality has functional social consequences depend upon an abstract hypothesis of 'society's'

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37. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), Toward an Anthropology of Women, New York, 1975, p. 181.
38. A.E. Ashworth and W.M. Walker, "Social structure and homosexuality: a theoretical appraisal", British Journal of Sociology, Vol. XXIII, No. 2 (June 1972), pp. 146-58.
39. Weeks noted that "most men brought before the courts for homosexual offences in the nineteenth century were married" (Coming Out, op. cit., p. 41).

objective interests and, among other things, this obscures a definition of homosexuality as a social phenomenon. Functionalist arguments claim to be predictive in the sense that a certain kind of social system or normative structure is said to require a certain kind of sexual behaviour. In fact, these arguments work 'backwards': because a form of sexuality appears to meet with either hostility or relative tolerance, because it appears to be neurotic or well adjusted, it is then designated as either functional or dysfunctional for the social system. This says more about the personal evaluation being made of homosexuality than it does about the normative structure. If, then, it was believed in the nineteenth century that homosexual behaviour produced a homosexual person, this does not refer to a given fact which obliged the state to take a particular course of action. Instead, the belief is a new feature of the normative structure and it is the advent of the belief itself which needs to be explained. This problem remains obscure so long as the belief is not placed in its historical context.

A final point of comparison between the control and repression hypotheses concerns the question of homosexuality as a threat. The precise tension behind the threat does not emerge in Davis' account. The way in which homosexual relationships 'compete' with heterosexual ones is not nearly as clear as is his underlying theme of the many difficulties for men attendant upon the system of sexual bargaining. This implies that the fundamental reason for hostility towards homosexuals is that of envy. His reiteration of these difficulties very strongly suggests that it reflects a tension within his own sense of the expectations made by hegemonic masculinity. As a psychological focus for hostility among heterosexual men towards homosexual men, this is a point worth exploring. At any rate, Davis' main theoretical claim was that homosexual relationships are 'outside' of society: as one critic of the functionalist account

put it, the deviant is understood to be "without morality".<sup>40</sup> In these terms, deviance is a residual category to be explained by a failure in socialisation.<sup>41</sup>

With the repression hypothesis, homosexuals are said to represent what is otherwise absent, the homosexual desire which society represses. Here too, the homosexual expresses some kind of failure in socialisation and in this sense is again outside of society. Similarly, in other gay liberationist arguments, the threat posed by homosexuals arises simply because they are said to be outside of the family or the gender system. It should also be noted that these radical and conservative arguments 'talk to' each other to a considerable degree and in this way appear to find confirmation of their arguments.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these criticisms, Davis and the repression theorists achieve a breadth in their social analysis which is important; they do not conceive

40. Alvin W. Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, New York, 1970, p. 426.

41. Similarly, Merton made a distinction between 'non-conforming' and 'aberrant' deviant behaviour. Though both involved the infringement of social norms, the non-conformer could ultimately claim social legitimacy (for example, a pacifist), whereas the aberrant sought only to satisfy private interests (for example, a draft dodger). Thus the latter was 'outside' of society or beyond an assumed moral consensus. This distinction very clearly depends upon the judgement being made of the particular behaviour; it has no analytical value. (See Robert K. Merton, "Social Problems and Sociological Theory", in Merton and Nisbet, op. cit., p. 831.) Schofield argued that homosexuals should be classified as non-conformers on the basis of their psychological adjustment and capacity for stable relationships. This is only another way of claiming that homosexuality has functional consequences and that the author approves of it. (See Michael Schofield, Sociological Aspects of Homosexuality, London, 1965, p. 189.)

42. Conservative critics concerned with the 'decline' of the family have not infrequently cited declarations by sexual liberationists that they intend to 'smash' the family. Conversely, the London GLF Manifesto quoted a psychiatrist who had written: "Our values in Western civilisation are founded upon the sanctity of the family ... Property acquisition and worldly success are viewed as distinctly masculine aims. The individual who is outwardly masculine but appears to fall into the feminine class by reason of his preference for other men denies these values of our civilisation." (Op. cit., p. 6.) See also Hocquenghem and Mieli above, p. 90, n.93.

of homosexuality as a discrete or individual phenomenon but are concerned with the way in which sexuality in general is socially structured and with how homosexuality stands within this arrangement. In much of the work to have come out of the new deviancy perspective, this ambition has been abandoned.

## (ii)

One sympathetic survey of the new deviancy perspective suggested that it has been distinguished by four broad intentions.<sup>43</sup> There has been a concern to establish the study of deviance as a general rather than marginal sociological problem. Becker, for example, observed that for theorists such as Durkheim, "problems of deviance were problems of general sociology".<sup>44</sup> A second intention has been to challenge the orthodox proposition that deviance necessitates social control; Lemert, in particular, urged the view that control and societal reactions produce deviance.<sup>45</sup> Third, there has been a marked interest in the subjective reality of individuals perceived as deviant and a conviction that this factor must have some prominence in any theory of deviance. Becker advocated "unconventional sentimentality",<sup>46</sup> or a humanistic and empathetic concern for deviant groups. Finally, there has been some recognition of, and debate over, the political significance of the very category of 'deviance' which has meant that varying conceptions of power have become an important element in an explanation of the phenomenon.<sup>47</sup>

43. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 3-6.

44. Howard S. Becker (ed.), The Other Side, Perspectives on Deviance, New York, 1964, p. 1.

45. Edwin M. Lemert, Human Deviance, Social Problems and Social Control, Englewood Cliffs, 1967, p. v.

46. Becker (ed.), op. cit., p. 5.

47. See, for example, John Lofland, Deviance and Identity, Englewood Cliffs, 1969, p. 9; Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, Harmondsworth, 1968 (1963), pp. 169-70; Szasz, op. cit., pp. xxv - xxvii; and Plummer, Sexual Stigma, op. cit., p. 23.

The new deviancy perspective has been shaped most strongly, though by no means exclusively, by symbolic interactionism. Working in the tradition of the Chicago School, the interactionists have stressed the importance of understanding deviance within a relativist framework. The central sociological problem, in the words of one exponent, "is not to decide a priori which phenomena are deviant and which ones are not but rather to discover why this property is conferred upon a person when it is".<sup>48</sup> And, as another has remarked, meanings, including the meanings of deviance, "arise out of interaction and not the other way around".<sup>49</sup> Deviance, in other words, was not to be understood as the inherent property of a psychological state, of any particular form of behaviour, or of any designated form of social organisation.

In general terms, symbolic interactionism insists that while deviant behaviour at least commonly involves the violation of social norms, it is an impossible task to define those norms precisely. Deviance is not merely a matter of the infringement of norms, for they not only contradict each other but different groups and individuals express conflicting judgements of their relative importance. Accordingly, the enforcement of social norms, whether by formal laws or informal sanctions, is a variable process. Deviance, then, is constituted by the interaction between a person who commits a particular act (or who is believed to have done so) and other people who respond to that act; it is a form of collective activity, the outcome of which must at all times be considered problematic. Typically, interactionist studies make a distinction between primary deviance, which is a casual occurrence with "only marginal implications for the status and psychic structure of the person concerned",

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48. Robert A. Scott, "A Proposed Framework for Analysing Deviance as a Property of Social Order", in R.A. Scott and J.D. Douglas, (eds.), Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance, New York, 1972, p. 14.

49. J.D. Douglas (ed.), Understanding Everyday Life, London, 1973, p. 295.

and secondary deviance, in which the deviant status is central to the person's identity so that previous "socialisation is categorically affected".<sup>50</sup> The notion of a deviant 'career' underlines the fact that with secondary deviance, a person's life and identity are organised around particular forms of deviance, such as juvenile delinquency, prostitution, drug use and homosexuality. Interactionists are especially concerned to examine the stages and dynamics of the passage between primary and secondary deviance; the strategies which a person adopts in the assumption or denial of a deviant identity (or in the reassumption of a non-deviant identity) are processes which lead these sociologists to emphasise the importance of the subjective understanding of the person concerned.<sup>51</sup>

It was with such considerations in mind that Becker formulated his much quoted definition of deviance:

... social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label. 52

The crucial point for most interactionists is not that the behaviour itself is 'caused' by labelling (though it may certainly be reinforced by such processes), but that "the meaning of the behavior (including its characterisation as deviance) and its place in the social order is produced through this process of reaction".<sup>53</sup>

It is important to distinguish between interactionism as a theory and

50. Lemert, op. cit., p. 40.

51. These processes are stressed by Lofland, op. cit.

52. Becker, Outsiders, op. cit., p. 9.

53. Edwin M. Schur, "Sociological Factors in Homosexual Behavior", 1969 (unpublished paper), quoted by Plummer, op. cit., p. 95.

as a perspective. In the work of many interactionists, it is by no means clear what kind of theoretical claims are being made, though few have explicitly argued that they have produced a theory of deviance.<sup>54</sup> As a theory, the claims would seem to be that deviance is caused by labelling processes; that deviance may be identified only in terms of the application of labels (a process independent of the actual behaviour); and that the nature of deviance is such that it has no independent existence but is a purely subjective phenomenon.<sup>55</sup> Such a theory is one of radical idealism. As a perspective, interactionism is more a sensitising approach; Plummer has suggested that it aims to draw out the complexities of such questions as the nature of deviant labels, how they arise, under what conditions they are attached to the behaviour of individuals, and the consequences of such labelling for individuals and for the society in which they live.<sup>56</sup> The following discussion will be concerned with the way in which interactionism has been used as a perspective and to define the limits of its usefulness to a social theory of homosexuality. The first two sociological statements to be considered did not identify themselves very closely with interactionism, although they both made use of the general idea of labelling.

Two influential articles, "Homosexuality: The Formation of A Sociological Perspective" by John Gagnon and William Simon, and "The Homosexual Role" by Mary McIntosh, were published in the United States in 1967 and 1968 respectively.<sup>57</sup> Both commented upon the paucity of sociological work on

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54. One who has argued the case for an interactionist theory is Ronald A. Farrell, "Societal Reaction to Homosexuals: Towards a Generalized Theory of Deviance" (Ph. D. thesis, University of Cincinnati), University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1972; and, with James F. Nelson, "A Causal Model of Secondary Deviance: The Case of Homosexuality", The Sociological Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 109 - 20.

55. These claims are drawn out and criticised by Bob Fine, "Labelling theory: an investigation into the sociological critique of deviance", Economy and Society, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May 1977), pp. 166-93.

56. Kenneth Plummer, "Building a sociology of homosexuality", in Plummer (ed.), op. cit., p. 20.

57. William Simon and John H. Gagnon, "Homosexuality: The Formation of

homosexuality and stressed the need to understand it in social terms in opposition to the prevailing clinical definitions. Gagnon and Simon objected that the study of homosexuality,

... is ruled by a simplistic and homogeneous view of the psychological and social contents of the category 'homosexual', and at the same time it is nearly exclusively interested in the most difficult and least rewarding of all questions, that of etiology.

... from a sociological point of view ... the patterns of adult homosexuality are consequent upon the social structures and values that surround the homosexual after he becomes or conceives himself as homosexual rather than upon original and ultimate causes. 58

McIntosh argued that,

In the first place, if homosexuality is a condition, then people either have it or do not have it. Many scientists and ordinary people assume that there are two kinds of people in the world: homosexuals and heterosexuals. Some of them recognize that homosexual feelings and behavior are not confined to the persons they would like to call 'homosexuals' and that some of these persons do not actually engage in homosexual behavior. This should pose a crucial problem ...

The vantage point of comparative sociology enables us to see that the conception of homosexuality as a condition is, in itself, a possible object of study. 59

These articles have been important as attacks upon the essentialist assumption that homosexuality is the singular property of a discrete group of individuals. They also expressed an important difference in their theoretical approach. Gagnon and Simon focused upon the contingencies of the homosexual career and stressed that this needs to be understood as an outcome of complex, interactive relations and not of fixed, static ones. McIntosh, on the other hand, used the idea of the homosexual role in a structuralist sense and argued that it should be understood as the

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a Sociological Perspective", Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Vol. 8 (1967), pp. 177-85; references are to the revised version of this article in Gagnon and Simon, op. cit., Ch. 5.

Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role", Social Problems, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 1968), pp. 182-92.

58. Gagnon and Simon, op. cit., pp. 132, 136 (emphasis added).

59. McIntosh, op. cit., pp. 182, 183.



historical product of a particular culture. Her argument has had little influence upon subsequent work in the United States but it has had much more in Britain.

McIntosh used the idea of a homosexual role to draw out the sociological significance of Kinsey's discovery of the incidence of male homosexual behaviour. Kinsey had written that,

... there is only about half of the male population whose sexual behavior is exclusively heterosexual, and there are only a few percent who are exclusively homosexual. Any restriction of the term homosexuality to individuals who are exclusively so demands, logically, that the term heterosexual be applied only to those individuals who are exclusively heterosexual; and this makes no allowance for the nearly half of the population which has had sexual contacts with, or reacted psychically to, individuals of their own as well as of the opposite sex. Actually, of course, one must learn to recognize every combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality in the histories of various individuals. 60

One of his major conclusions was that the term 'homosexual' should not be used substantively or descriptively to refer to a discrete category of individuals, but should be restricted to refer to the nature of overt sexual relations or erotic stimuli. Yet this argument is contradicted by the subjective reality of individuals who consider themselves to be unquestionably 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual', and it was significant that Kinsey was compelled to continue to use these terms (albeit in inverted commas) to refer to particular individuals despite his assertion of their irrelevance.<sup>61</sup>

In effect, McIntosh used the idea of a homosexual role to overcome this difficulty. The role did not refer to a sexual behaviour pattern but to a set of social expectations; while there was not a dichotomy between homosexual and heterosexual behaviour, there was one between homosexual and heterosexual social roles. The important point was that a homosexual role was recognised in only a few societies. It had developed in England

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60. Alfred Kinsey *et. al.*, Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male, Philadelphia, 1948, p. 617.

61. See Paul Robinson's discussion of Kinsey in The Modernization of Sex, New York, 1976.

from the end of the seventeenth century, when "references to homosexuals as a type and to a rudimentary homosexual subculture, mainly in London, began to appear".<sup>62</sup> The expectations regarding homosexuality were that it was a matter of exclusive feelings and behaviour, that such men would be effeminate, that they would relate to all other men in sexual terms and particularly to boys and youths. It followed that debates about whether earlier historical figures were 'homosexual' attempted the impossible task of trying to apply the modern stereotype to a culture where it was absent. Indeed, the role was absent in many societies so that while there may have been a considerable amount of homosexual behaviour in them, there were no 'homosexuals' as such. Again, where the role did exist, its content could be very different from the expectations established in England. The commonest form was institutionalised transvestism, as among the Mojave Indians of California and Arizona where the berdache took over the role of the opposite sex.

McIntosh expected that the component of exclusivity within the homosexual role had the effect of a self-fulfilling prophesy, but she maintained that the relationship between the role and actual behaviour had to be established empirically. Ideally, this would involve a comparison between societies in which the role existed and others in which it was absent but, given the lack of sufficient data regarding the latter kind of society, she used Kinsey's statistics to make comparisons within the United States. These revealed that, proportionately, more 'homosexuals' engaged in heterosexual activity than did 'heterosexuals' in homosexual activity.

This indicates that the existence of the despised role operates at all ages to inhibit people from engaging in occasional homosexual behavior, but does not have the effect of making the behavior of many 'homosexuals' exclusively homosexual. 63

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62. McIntosh, op. cit., p. 187.

63. Ibid., p. 191.

This conclusion qualifies Kinsey's emphasis upon the random distribution of homosexual behaviour<sup>64</sup> and at least indicates the grounds upon which a distinction between 'homosexuals' and homosexual behaviour might be made.

The achievement of this short article was to suggest the establishment of the homosexual as a specific type of person in seventeenth century England (and, by extension, in other comparable societies), and to link this development to the emergence of a subculture. This opened the way for considering the fact of a homosexual identity as a peculiarly modern historical phenomenon. McIntosh's argument was therefore a major advance in conceptualising homosexuality in social terms and it may be usefully contrasted with Kinsey's, whose implicit defence of homosexuality was that the behaviour was widespread and hence 'natural'. The existence of a homosexual role, on the other hand, undeniably pointed to social factors.

Exactly what these factors were remained unexplored and, indeed, the idea of a social role inhibits such an historical investigation.<sup>65</sup>

McIntosh used the idea to refer to much more than the expectation of exclusivity and acknowledged that it was a form of shorthand.

It refers not only to a cultural conception or set of ideas but also to a complex of institutional arrangements which depend upon and reinforce these ideas. These arrangements include all the forms of heterosexual activity, courtship, and marriage as well as the labeling processes - gossip, ridicule, psychiatric diagnosis, criminal conviction - and the groups and networks of the homosexual subculture. 66

This extension of meaning underlines the analytical limitations of the

64. Gagnon and Simon made a more precise statistical qualification; they claimed that a reanalysis of Kinsey's figures reveals that, among college educated males, only 12 per cent had a homosexual experience to the point of orgasm after the age of twenty (op.cit., pp. 71, 131).

65. For a general critique, see R.W. Connell, "The Concept of Role and What to Do With It", Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Nov. 1979), pp. 7-16.

66. McIntosh, op. cit., p. 189.

idea of a social role: it merely stands for an historical unknown, for a set of factors which would explain the evolution of sexual meanings including the conception of homosexuality as an individual condition. Instead of opening up an historical analysis, the idea of a role fore-closes it, in this case by a functionalist explanation in terms of the mechanisms of social control. McIntosh argued that the creation of a specialised, proscribed role acted "to provide a clear-cut, publicized and recognizable threshold between permissible and impermissible behavior", thereby making it relatively difficult to drift into homosexuality; and that it also served to segregate homosexuals from the rest of the population thereby keeping society pure.<sup>67</sup> This is quite a common functionalist argument and it is clearly unable to explain why the new conception of homosexuality emerged, claiming instead that it had functional consequences for the task of social control.<sup>68</sup>

McIntosh objected to the traditional conception of homosexuality as a condition, which posits it as the characteristic of a particular type of person, and suggested that the homosexual role was characteristic of a particular type of society. In this sense, the two views share a positivism which assumes the problem instead of explaining it.

Whereas McIntosh attacked the essentialist conception of homosexuality by pointing to the historical specificity of the homosexual as a type of person, Gagnon and Simon emphasised the elements which the lives of homosexual and heterosexual people had in common. They argued that an explanation of how some people become homosexual would require an adequate theory of the origins of heterosexuality and, more generally, that,

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67. Ibid., pp. 183-84.

68. Szasz argued for this in relation to homosexuality (op. cit., ch. 13); and Weeks borrowed the idea from McIntosh (Coming Out, op. cit., pp. 3-4). For an orthodox functionalist statement of the argument, see Lewis A. Coser, "Some Functions of Deviant Behavior", American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Sept. 1962), pp. 172-82; and for one from within the new deviancy perspective, see Lofland, op. cit., pp. 302-03.

Not only are there as many ways of being homosexual as there are of being heterosexual, but the individual homosexual, in the course of his everyday life, encounters as many choices and as many crises as the heterosexual. ...

The problem is to locate the homosexual life within a context of both the pedestrian and the seemingly exotic. It is only at the intersection of these individual and situational forces that we can examine the contingencies of the homosexual career. 69

The authors developed this perspective largely by a description of the major elements within the 'life cycle' of the homosexual. They pointed to the existence of legal sanctions as a primary force shaping the character of a homosexual life and discussed the incidence of homosexuals who were arrested. The legal and social status of homosexuality thus determined the self-hatred on the part of many homosexuals, an attitude comparable to that found within other minority groups. Nonetheless, they found a surprisingly low level of serious pathology among homosexuals, given these constraints. They also discussed a number of stages and components of the homosexual career: the process of self-recognition or coming out, the problems associated with aging in a society oriented towards youth, the importance of the subculture in reducing problems of guilt and sexual access, problems encountered at work and with families, and the religious beliefs of homosexuals.

Many of these observations now appear unremarkable and commonsensical. They were, however, explicitly directed against the psychiatric conception of homosexuals as a homogeneous group whose characteristics were a direct expression of their psychological condition. Gagnon and Simon stressed the elementary, though indispensable, sociological point that it is essential "to move away from an obsessive concern with the sexuality of the individual, and attempt to see the homosexual in terms of the broader attachments that he must make to live in the world around him".<sup>70</sup> Indeed, fifteen years later, too many sociologists remain oblivious to this

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69. Gagnon and Simon, op. cit., pp. 143, 165.

70. Ibid., p. 142.

observation as they ferret about in the sexual subculture. The authors' emphasis upon what homosexuals share with heterosexuals has some importance in that, unlike the functionalism of both Davis and many gay liberationist arguments, homosexuals are not conceived to be 'outside' of society.

But their argument is essentially reactive: they replaced the medical model by a new description rather than by new questions or explanations<sup>71</sup> and their approach quickly becomes facile. With such claims as that the heterosexual equivalent to coming out is the process of gaining a proper understanding of the content of the word 'sexual', and that a homosexual's high level of sexual activity when first mixing in the subculture is comparable to a heterosexual honeymoon,<sup>72</sup> their interest in turning the exotic into the pedestrian has got the better even of common sense. Their insights into the effects of an anti-homosexual society need to be reconciled with their assertion that homosexuals encounter as many choices in their lives as do heterosexuals; as it is, homosexuality threatens to evaporate as a question of sociological enquiry as its apparent similarities with heterosexuality overwhelm any differences.

One of the similarities between homosexual and heterosexual men which Gagnon and Simon touched upon was that of gender. They were firmly opposed to the idea that homosexuality is a form of gender inversion<sup>73</sup> and appeared to believe that homosexual men conform to conventional patterns of masculinity in their sexual and non-sexual lives; and they explicitly argued that such gender congruity characterised lesbians.<sup>74</sup> Yet this is simply a flat contradiction of the psychoanalytically derived stereotype

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71. In the first two chapters of their book, they did attempt to sketch a non-Freudian theory of sexual socialisation in terms of the learning of sexual 'scripts'. The kinds of criticisms made below of Plummer's account of the construction of a homosexual identity are also applicable to their argument; see pp. 230-33.

72. Ibid., pp. 145, 147.

73. Ibid., p. 134.

74. Ibid., p. 178.

of homosexuals as feminine men and masculine women, and their assertion that there is no necessary relationship between the development of sexual orientation and masculinity and femininity is no more helpful than some of the early gay liberationist claims that homosexuals transcend the gender dichotomy.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, the historical perspective which McIntosh achieved with the idea of a homosexual role highlights the expectations of effeminacy which were attached to male homosexuality, so that in eighteenth century London there seems to have been no distinction made between homosexuality and what is now known as transvestism. These expectations of gender inversion have since changed to some extent, but such a perspective should be enough to alert sociologists to the ways in which homosexuality continues to be defined and experienced in terms of gender, albeit unorthodox ones.

The point which escaped Gagnon and Simon is that it is essential to focus upon gender meanings if homosexuality is to be related to broader questions of sexual power. The idea of a homosexual role, particularly in the wide sense in which McIntosh employed it, clearly introduces a dimension of power, even if it remained undefined. On the other hand, a simple emphasis upon the experiences which are common to homosexuals and heterosexuals necessarily plays down questions of power. Gagnon and Simon failed to pose the question of why hostility exists towards homosexuality and, moreover, their account has the effect of questioning the very existence of oppression as a consequence of the social organisation of sexuality. They give a new resonance to Isherwood's description of liberal tolerance of homosexuality as "annihilation by blandness".<sup>76</sup>

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75. Gagnon and Simon attempted to explain the adoption of drag and effeminacy of some homosexual men who have just come out: "During this period one of the major confirming aspects of masculinity - that is, nonsexual reinforcement by females of masculine status - has been abandoned, and it is not surprising that the very core of masculine identity should be seriously questioned" (*ibid.*, pp. 147-148).

76. Christopher Isherwood, A Single Man, London, 1978 (1964), p. 21.

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The interactionist perspective opens up questions of power by paying attention to those who are able to apply stigmatising labels to other people. It has been heavily preoccupied with the question of how to conceptualise social norms and to define the limits of their variability. Becker argued that the labelling process involved four relevant categories. There were those people whose behaviour broadly conforms to social norms and who are not labelled deviant, and those whose behaviour does violate norms and who consequently are labelled. In addition, people may be falsely accused and labelled for an act which they did not commit, so that they then have to negotiate this imputation; and others may commit an act which is not detected and so escape public labelling. He referred to this last category as secret deviance,<sup>77</sup> and he has been accused of contradicting himself in that this defines an act as deviant prior to a label being applied which denies the contingent and processual character of the creation of deviance upon which he otherwise insisted.<sup>78</sup> The thrust of this criticism is that deviance should, after all, be defined in terms of the infringement of social norms. This has an immediate importance with regard to homosexuals since it is evident that the majority of them have not been publicly labelled; indeed, homosexuality would seem to be the classic instance of secret deviance. Becker's subsequent defence of this category was that the people themselves label what they do as deviant, either because they believe it to be so, or they know that others would label them were the activity to be discovered: "... secret deviance consists of being vulnerable to the commonly used procedures for discovering deviance of a particular kind."<sup>79</sup> However, while it is clear that for the interactionist perspective, the internalisation of

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77. Becker, *Outsiders*, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

78. Jack P. Gibbs, "Conceptions of Deviant Behavior: The Old and the New", *Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 1966), p. 13.

79. Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 187.



labels is a central feature of the production of deviance, this highlights rather than resolves the question of how social norms should be conceptualised. This question is basically an historical one and it recurs in a particularly clear way in Plummer's Sexual Stigma.

Plummer's study was derived from a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of London in 1973. As an interactionist account of male homosexuality, it drew upon a small amount of the author's own fieldwork, but its main concern was in "assembling existing sociological materials into an orderly but entirely unfinished statement".<sup>80</sup> This work deserves serious attention for a number of reasons. Most importantly, it attempted to apply the interactionist perspective in a systematic fashion; and while Plummer repeatedly emphasised the need for further research into a range of questions, he did not assume, as have other sociologists in the area, that research itself would generate theory, or that existing theoretical problems were the result of a lack of empirical studies.<sup>81</sup> In addition, he provided a relatively sophisticated exposition and application of the interactionist perspective and his claims for it were modest inasmuch as he did not present it as a fully developed theory. He

80. Plummer, op. cit., p. 46.

81. Becker, for example, expressed his faith in empirical research in extraordinarily naive terms:

I take it that all social scientists agree that, given a question and a method of reaching an answer, any scientist, whatever his political or other values, should arrive at much the same answer, an answer given by the world of recalcitrant fact that is 'out there' whatever we may think about it (op. cit., p. 198).

However, he is by no means alone in the assumption that research will generate theory. Carol A.B. Warren, for example, advanced the phenomenological approach as "theoretic sociology", which involved standing back and reviewing the phenomena which would "generate theory grounded in empirical data" ("Observing the Gay Community", in J.D. Douglas (ed.), Research on Deviance, New York, 1972, p. 140).

Finally, Scott, in a relatively sophisticated theoretical essay, wrote:

The task that the sociologist must confront initially is to discover what he can do about this natural phenomenon [of deviance]:

was aware of at least some of its weak points and he attempted to defend it theoretically. Finally, and again unlike the majority of other sociologists, he acknowledged the literature of the early gay movement and made explicit his disagreement with aspects of its theoretical orientation.

With regard to the United Kingdom and the United States, Plummer wrote that,

The single most important factor about homosexuality as it exists in this culture is the perceived hostility of the societal reactions that surround it. From this one critical factor flow many of the features that are distinctive about homosexuality. It renders the business of becoming a homosexual a process that is characterized by problems of access, problems of guilt and problems of identity. It leads to the emergence of a subculture of homosexuality. It leads to a series of interaction problems involved with concealing the discreditable stigma. ...

Given the importance of 'reactions' in shaping the nature of homosexual experiences, it is surprising that most studies of homosexuality perform what would have appeared to be the impossible: they divorce homosexuality from the societal context, take for granted the existence of 'reactions', and study homosexuality as an individualistic phenomenon. But I am arguing that the homosexual experience is very much a social product, variable between cultures and historical periods, and that it simply cannot be comprehended apart from the broader societal context in which it is enmeshed. 82

He was concerned with three main problems: the nature and source of the social hostility towards homosexuality; the individual reaction to stigmatisation, that is, the character of a homosexual identity and the dynamics of the homosexual career; and the collective reaction as expressed in the homosexual subculture.<sup>83</sup> He recognised that the first of these

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what it consists of, how and when 'the natives' use it, what its place is in the life of the community, and so on. As these questions are answered, scientific concepts will then begin to emerge to account for them (op. cit., p. 12).

82. Plummer, op. cit., p. 102.

83. These problems form a case-study within the wider context of Plummer's exposition and defence of symbolic interactionism; his argument that this perspective should inform the sociology of sexuality (which, he noted, was a much neglected area); and his application of the labelling approach to sexual deviance. He wrote:

problems was the most important and, it should be added, that its clarification is a prerequisite for dealing adequately with the other two.

Plummer began by arguing that sexual meanings are assigned and are not inherent in human physiology; he endorsed Gagnon and Simon's view that "the sexual area may be precisely that realm wherein the superordinate position of the sociocultural over the biological level is most complete".<sup>84</sup> Further, since from the interactionist perspective, deviance was not conceived as objectively given within any society but was viewed as subjectively problematic, sexual meanings and reactions should similarly be understood as emergent, negotiated and shifting. He therefore objected to the assumptions upon which other sociological explanations of hostility to homosexuality relied, including those of the early gay movement: not only that there exists "an all-powerful, energy-conserving sexual drive in need of control", but also that the child is inherently bisexual so that there is "an ever-present tendency for such repressed bisexuality to erupt into 'homosexual panic'"; that "global laws of hostility exist independently of man's construction"; and that hostility emerges through personality malfunction.<sup>85</sup>

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A distinction needs to be drawn between the new deviancy perspectives as (1) a general orientation, (2) a specific theoretical stance and (3) a much narrower concern with problem areas and specific propositions. For clarity, I refer to the first as the 'new deviancy perspectives', the second may refer to any specific stance - in this case the 'interactionist stance' - and the third may refer to any problem area - for example, the labelling problem (*ibid.*, p. 205, n. 10).

84. Gagnon and Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

85. Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-16. He did not discuss the issues involved here in any detail and he was basically sceptical of the 'absolutism' which they share. He referred to Kingsley Davis, to the 'left' Freudian tradition running through Reich, Marcuse and Altman, and to G.R. Taylor.

While adhering to the basic tenets of interactionism, Plummer was keenly aware that it was untenable to extend them to a position of extreme relativism, to one of solipsism and idealism as he put it,<sup>86</sup> and he wished to defend the perspective against such a charge. Sexual norms or meanings were clearly subject to certain cultural constraints: drawing on Berger and Luckmann, he posited "a dialectical relationship between the externally coercive, reified and objectified society, and the ever-changing, emergent, historical forces of men in action".<sup>87</sup> This meant that in sexuality, as in all other areas of social experience, there were three dialectical moments: individuals created sexual meanings, internalised them, and in turn were created and defined by them. Yet whatever the apparent strength or force of sexual meanings, they did not have an ontological status apart from the human experience which produced them. On a very general level, this formulation avoids the extreme position of conceiving sexual meanings as being in a Heraclitean flux, which was one of his explicit worries, but he did recognise two difficulties which remained for interactionist explanations generally.

Pointing to Kinsey's findings, Plummer argued that even though sexual behaviour was widely differentiated, only a minimal amount of it was publicly labelled deviant, and he readily admitted that this outcome was not one of pure contingency. He distinguished between 'societal deviance' and 'situational deviance'. The former was defined by the public, reified and sometimes contradictory value system and was perceived as absolute by the majority of people; the latter arose in interpersonal encounters and was capable of considerable relativity.<sup>88</sup>

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86. Plummer, op. cit., p. 12.

87. Ibid., p. 47. The Social Construction of Reality by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (New York, 1966) has been quite influential within the new deviancy perspective. Plummer and Scott (op. cit.) repeatedly acknowledged it, and Lofland (op. cit.) and Warren also drew upon it (see the latter's Identity and Community in the Gay World, New York, 1974).

88. Plummer, op. cit., p. 26.

Societal deviance did not necessarily elicit public reactions or labelling since it could go undetected, although it would certainly inform self-reactions. Homosexuals, for example, might reject the imputation of 'deviance' but they were still aware of their stigmatisation. In both categories of deviance, it was reactions (from the self and other people) which effected the movement from primary to secondary deviance, and the alteration in self-regarding attitudes which this entailed led interactionists to speak of the 'self-lodging' and 'commitment' of the deviant.<sup>89</sup> At this point, the account of the production of deviance has moved a considerable way from the assumption of it being subjectively problematic. As Plummer observed:

One of the paradoxes of the interactionist perspective is that simultaneously with viewing society as emergent, problematic, etc., the notion of a solid, stable world is reintroduced through the backdoor with the notion that is central to phenomenology - the 'natural attitude'. Men, in their 'natural attitude', do not find the world as problematic as the sociologist renders it for them. 90

He made a further distinction between 'deep' and 'surface' rules. The latter were the objectified rules involved in societal deviance which have concerned functionalist explanations, for example; 'deep rules', on the other hand, referred to tacit, shared understandings and these "may cut across the surface divisions of pluralism, which regulate day to day, face to face interaction".<sup>91</sup> He tentatively suggested that, in the sexual sphere, the socially constructed meanings regarding gender

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89. Of 'self-lodging', Plummer wrote: "... while identification processes have to be negotiated at the outset, they may ... become recurrent and established ... Empirical indicators ... include personal names, styles of speech, modes of dress". 'Commitment' referred to "an investment of energy in particular lines of action which make it increasingly costly to follow alternative paths" (*ibid.*, p. 16).

90. *Ibid.*, p. 204, n. 5.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 51. Plummer wrote: "... as a society becomes increasingly large-scale and differentiated, the content is likely to become more ambiguous, shifting and pluralistic" (*ibid.*, p. 49).

might be an example of such rules. Again, this raised a difficulty:

The notion of 'deep rules' also seems to be predicated upon a notion of absolutism, which is otherwise anathema to interactional studies. There is a paradox here: sociologists have escaped from a surface world of consensus and absolutism, to a world of emergence and relativism; only to find that this world after all may be bounded by deeply regulative rules. 92

Plummer relegated both of these statements regarding the 'paradoxes' which the interactionist perspective confronted to footnotes and, while they had a significant effect upon his argument about homosexuality, he did not discuss their implications for an interactionist explanation any further. The idea of the homosexual's commitment or natural attitude (which comes close to that of a role in the sense in which McIntosh used it), as well as that of deep rules, such as gender meanings, both point to the need for an historical explanation. He did insist upon the importance of an historical analysis of the emergence of the 'objectified' sexual reality, but it becomes apparent that he was unable to demonstrate that the interactionist perspective is adequate for this task.

With regard to the question of the origins of social hostility towards homosexuality, Plummer considered the direct and indirect elements of the 'objectified' sexual reality. First, the existing empirical research, though inadequate, revealed widely held negative stereotypes of homosexuals;<sup>93</sup>

92. Ibid., p. 209, n. 18.

93. J.L. Simmons, for example, found that homosexual men were considered more deviant and were tolerated less than drug addicts, prostitutes, criminals and other deviant groups ("Public Stereotypes of Deviants", Social Problems, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall 1965), pp. 223-32). Other studies, however, have revealed a higher level of tolerance; for example, John Kituse, "Societal Reaction to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method", Social Problems, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Winter 1962), pp. 247-56. The general weakness of these kinds of studies, as Plummer commented, is that not only do they "suffer from an oversimplified notion of attitude, most of them fail to take into account the discrepancy that is likely to arise between words, deeds and feelings" (op. cit., p. 113).

there existed "a vast superstructure of beliefs and imagery which help to conceal an underlying relationship by which dominant heterosexual groups tacitly but persistently oppress and attack homosexual groups".<sup>94</sup> This relationship could therefore be viewed as a political one.<sup>95</sup> Second he argued that the 'objectified' sexual reality needed to be understood in terms of the 'world-taken-for-granted' views such as the meanings attached to the family and the gender system: both, while not in themselves condemning homosexuality, "may implicitly provide a model that renders the homosexual experience invalid".<sup>96</sup> He continued:

Such a reality must be accounted for as the end-product of a series of historical incidents, incidents which do not necessarily reflect systematic conflicts or possess underlying logic. Indeed, given the complexities of modern society, it seems unlikely that they should display any rational fit. ... The only way to comprehend the 'objectified reality' of homosexual oppression is to take each of the elements ... and to trace their historical emergence - an emergence which may take one through analyses of economic conflicts, status conflicts, personal interests, philosophical debates, religious quarrels, chance outcomes, government reports, pressure-group politics, organizational dilemmas and rational decision-making. 97

Yet the crucial question remains as to how these components have shaped homosexual oppression. All that he appears to offer at this point is an empiricist model of historical analysis which assumes that the question will be understood once the total number of relevant 'facts' have been assembled.

The results of this approach are demonstrated in Plummer's brief discussion of the legal origins of homosexual oppression and in particular the

94. Ibid., p. 114.

95. However, Plummer argued that whether homosexuality was conceived as a 'heresy', as a 'sickness', or as a 'political relationship', these were all 'accounts' and were relative in the sense that each had ultimately to be understood as a social product: "... in a society with growing political consciousness, hostility then enters that area of debate" (ibid., p. 115).

96. Ibid., p. 116.

97. Ibid., pp. 116-17.

Labouchere Amendment of 1885 (which, for the first time in English law, legislated against male homosexual behaviour per se as opposed to sodomy alone). He opposed interpretations of this as an instance of systematic oppression, and he argued that the Amendment was peripheral to a bill which was primarily concerned with female prostitution, that it was not the result of an intensive moral crusade, and that the government itself was unaware of the significance of the change. This suggests that the criminalisation of male homosexual behaviour was largely fortuitous. Such a conclusion does not follow from whatever can be discerned of the legislators' intentions; though he may well be correct in his interpretation of these intentions,<sup>98</sup> he would clearly agree that, from the interactionist viewpoint, selfconsciousness alone does not explain historical events. The criminalisation of male homosexual behaviour coincided with its definition as a psychiatric illness and this should pose a crucial problem. It is certainly not necessary to invoke the notion of a heterosexual conspiracy, but to imply that these nineteenth century developments were fortuitous denies that there is any historical problem to be explained. Instead of stating that the 1885 Act was concerned with prostitution and only peripherally with homosexuality, and assuming that this is an historical fact which speaks for itself, it should be asked whether their association is of any significance. This question will only emerge if an historical approach is adopted which is sensitive to the evolution of sexual meanings in the nineteenth century. Plummer's recommendation simply of an examination of various conflicts, decisions and accidents, each of which may well have had some part in shaping the formal contours of homosexual oppression, obscures the question.<sup>99</sup>

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98. The interpretation is upheld, for example, by F.B. Smith, "Labouchere's Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill", Historical Studies, Vol. 17, No. 67 (Oct. 1976), pp. 165-73.

99. The issues involved here are discussed further in chapter five.



Not surprisingly, he was dissatisfied with the depiction of 'objectified' realities as being merely the outcome of criss-crossing interests and chance factors, and he returned to the question of power. He argued that although power was not equally distributed, domination should not be conceived as automatic and all-encompassing. Nonetheless, in the sexual sphere, he agreed that "men have constantly dominated women" and that heterosexuals have dominated homosexuals as has been argued in the contemporary feminist and gay liberation movements.<sup>100</sup> Dominant political groups, he continued, uphold certain public, standardised categories which the majority of people take for granted. Homosexuality, unless it could be accounted for, existed as a potential disruption for at least two of these sets of categories. First, the family, marriage and romantic love were assumed to be universal, and the family in particular provided individuals with one of their central statuses; homosexuality was a threatening anomaly for it revealed that "people do not have to live in family units, do not have to have children, do not have to 'fall in love' with one partner alone, indeed do not even have to 'fall in love'".<sup>101</sup> Second, homosexuals challenged the category of gender. It was assumed that there were only two sexes, 'male' and 'female', and the homosexual "stands as an example that the world may not be quite so dramatically simple - there may be shades of gender, rather than absolute entities".<sup>102</sup> This argument very strongly suggests that the condemnation of homosexuality generated by the family and the gender system is not merely implicit in these institutions.

Significantly, Plummer finally explained the sources of hostility towards homosexuality not in interactionist terms but in functionalist ones: "The

100. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 120. By 'male' and 'female', Plummer clearly meant 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

system comes under attack: order is threatened";<sup>103</sup> "... homosexual hostility may become necessary in situations of ambiguity in order to sharpen some boundaries of normality".<sup>104</sup> With concepts such as 'the system' and 'the natural order' he resorted to a level of abstraction and determinism which he otherwise wished to avoid, and their nature and mode of operation remained unexplained other than to say that they were deeply conservative and resistant to change. To add the caveat that "a man-made order becomes mystified as a Natural Order",<sup>105</sup> or that reality becomes 'objectified' is only to pay lip-service to the interactionist perspective; once again, he confronted 'deep rules' and 'natural attitudes' which appeared to be outside of history. His use of a functionalist argument does, of course, underline his resistance to casting sexual meanings in a framework of extreme relativism. However, it is at the expense of his previous emphasis upon the importance of an historical analysis of the emergence of the 'objectified' sexual reality, for now deviance becomes a given feature of society. He wrote that especially in complex societies, some experiences "will always arise that fall outside of the prevailing system, and which thereby serve as a threat to the stability of that order";<sup>106</sup> or, as he put it even more emphatically: "There must always be 'deviants' for there to be definitions of normality".<sup>107</sup>

The difficulties for the interactionist perspective in conceptualising sexual power in relation to homosexual oppression recur in Plummer's discussion of the second major problem with which he was concerned, that

103. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 120. Plummer acknowledged this, in a footnote, but ignored the issues which it raised for an interactionist argument (p. 219, n. 16). As he noted, other interactionists similarly resorted to functionalist arguments while being highly critical of them elsewhere; see for example, J.D. Douglas (ed.), Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings, London, 1970, pp. 4-5.

105. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

of the stages and dynamics of the homosexual career. The issue here is the construction of a homosexual identity and, more generally, the ways in which sexual meanings are acquired for, as he wrote: "Without an adequate understanding of the general process of sexual socialization, little progress can be made in understanding the more limited case of becoming sexually deviant."<sup>108</sup> He suggested that Freudian theory, with its focus upon the emotional preconditions for sexual development and such processes as introjection and identification, and behaviourist theories, with their stress upon stimulus-response learning, might both contribute to an understanding of sexual socialisation. He was not concerned to criticise either of these theoretical approaches in any detail, apart from taking immediate objection to the different kinds of determinism upon which they may be based, but he insisted that from the interactionist perspective, individuals must be conceived of as self-conscious 'reactors' rather than as passive 'receptors'.<sup>109</sup> While sexual meanings and identities could become stabilised, this should not obscure the "'essential openness of personality structure'" and "'freedom of action'" which characterised human behaviour.<sup>110</sup> Above all, interactionism was concerned to discover how particular experiences come to be interpreted as 'sexual' in the first place. From this perspective, the role of meanings, symbols and significant others were crucial; moreover, their importance was not confined to childhood but continued throughout the lifespan of the individual.

One cannot see the individual 'automatically' and 'intrinsically' 'knowing' that he is a homosexual - as the simple interpretation of prior elements. Rather, one must analyse the social situations and interaction styles that lead to an individual building up a particular series of sexual meanings, a particular sexual identity. <sup>111</sup>

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108. Ibid., p. 56.

109. Ibid., p. 131.

110. Ibid., p. 15.

111. Ibid., p. 135.

Plummer was concerned less with the aetiological factors of primary deviance<sup>112</sup> than with the processes involved in the stabilisation of secondary deviance. He outlined four stages of the homosexual career. He observed that there existed a wide range of potential sources for homosexual identification and labelling which could act as an initial 'sensitization' of an individual to the meanings of homosexuality.<sup>113</sup> This experience could subsequently become heightened, a stage he referred to as 'signification' and 'disorientation'; at this point, the individual had a high degree of awareness about the meaning of the label and varying degrees of anxiety and confusion. He then described the stages of 'coming out', in which the individual identified as homosexual through interaction with others in the subculture, and that of 'stabilization', in which for various reasons the individual was both unwilling and unable to leave the homosexual role.<sup>114</sup> This was a description of the homosexual career in ideal terms and an individual's progression from one point to another was by no means automatic; it was a trajectory in which the individual confronted a series of interaction problems which were resolved as best as circumstances permitted. The description serves to underpin sharply Plummer's basic contention that homosexual socialisation, which results in a particular identity, can only be understood in terms of the hostile social context with which the individual interacts.

He did not claim to provide a theory of sexual socialisation but instead

112. He offered a thorough critique of the extraordinary range of psychological causes of homosexuality which have been advanced (*ibid.*, pp. 123-31), though he added that "I suspect there is more than a modicum of truth in the idea that overidentification with the mother figure precipitates homosexuality in many instances" (*ibid.*, p. 129). This passing comment underlines his evasion of the relationship between homosexuality and gender meanings, a point which will be taken up shortly.

113. Thus, in the most general terms, "any actor who commits a genital act (e.g. masturbation) with a member of the same sex, who develops a strong emotional attachment to a member of the same sex, or who spends time daydreaming of his own sex in fictional erotic encounters, develops an apparent source for subsequent ponderings over potential homosexuality" (*ibid.*, p. 135).

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-52. Plummer used 'role' not in a structural

restricted his task to defining the principles and general direction for further research. However, even on this level of generality a number of problems arise. The first involves the question of "why, when so many people are potentially available for homosexual experiences and identification, do so few enter stable homosexual roles?"<sup>115</sup> Plummer argued that many individuals construct 'accounts' of their homosexual behaviour by which they repudiate the label 'homosexual' and that these explanations were accepted by supportive reference groups.<sup>116</sup> He suggested that control theory explained why individuals need these accounts, for it reversed the conventional assumptions regarding the search for a cause of homosexuality and instead asked why, "when there are so many potential sexual roles available, do so many elect for heterosexuality as a predominant mode of sexual experience?"<sup>117</sup>

... most individuals might become attached and committed to heterosexual groups because of the way society is organized, and such commitments may become increasingly difficult to sever. This being so, 'accounts' have to be provided to justify homosexual acts, and attachments to reference groups become not only sources of support, but also barriers to further interaction with new groups. 118

Yet this is merely a shorthand, descriptive statement: the question remains as to exactly how society is so organised and how this should be

sense, but a 'dramaturgical' one; see his discussion, pp. 18-19.

115. Ibid., p. 137.

116. For example, Reiss (op. cit.) discussed the accounts of male prostitutes; G L Kirkham those of prisoners ("Homosexuality in Prisons", in J M Henslin (ed.), Studies in the Sociology of Sex, New York, 1971); and Ned Polsky those of Greenwich Village Beats (Hustlers, Beats and Others, Harmondsworth, 1971 (1967)). Actually, Polsky claimed that the Beats accepted homosexual experiences almost as casually as heterosexual ones and that few defined themselves as homosexual. But he did not suggest why this should be the case beyond claiming that this trait came originally from negro Beats and that negro culture was traditionally tolerant of sexual ambiguity (pp. 161-62). It should be noted that Polsky readily drew upon both interactionist and functionalist explanations.

117. Plummer, op. cit., p. 128.

118. Ibid., pp. 140-41.

explained. Control theory implies some notion of power, but at the same time Plummer stressed the interactionist assumptions of individual consciousness and freedom which, once again, brings his argument to an impasse.

He was, then, unable to explain why the wide range of potential sources for homosexual 'sensitization' did not lead more often to a homosexual identity; in interactionist terms, he explained the passage from primary to secondary deviance not on a theoretical level, but only on a descriptive one. This is illustrated further in his discussion of secondary deviance and in particular the reasons for the 'stabilization' of the homosexual role. Apart from some commonsense observations to the effect that the role has its own attractions and that after a certain stage it affords the homosexual more security than would a heterosexual role, he considered the factor of sexual stereotypes. He believed that "in a restrictive complex society individuals learn sexual stereotypes which have a tendency towards simplification" so that, for example, it was assumed that "homosexual men cannot like women". Because of the rigidity of such stereotypes, "any early sexual cues become translated in a distorted and restrictive way".<sup>119</sup> This observation, though limited, casts doubt upon the idea of there being a wide range of available sexual roles and it clearly raises the question of the origin of these stereotypes.

The most blatant stereotypes are those relating to gender, and while Plummer made a number of references to gender meanings, he did so unsystematically and did not draw out their significance. For example, male prostitutes and prisoners interpreted their homosexual behaviour with 'accounts' which denied any suggestion of effeminacy or emotional commitment, so that their masculinity was not compromised. Again, in considering the wide range of potential sources of homosexual identification,

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119. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

his examples revealed conflict over gender identity: a fragile boy might perceive his physique as inappropriate to the social definition of masculinity, and a boy with certain artistic interests might experience a similar conflict.<sup>120</sup> Finally, he discussed the reasons for the 'signification' and 'disorientation' which characterised the homosexual career. Apart from those factors which were a simple corollary of the stigmatisation of homosexuality (hence the problems of secrecy, guilt and sexual access), he noted:

Homosexual sensitivity touches upon a core identity. In our society, the positive elements of the societal reaction stress the importance of gender distinctions, of appropriate male-behaviour and female-behaviour, and such gender identities become ... 'master-determining status traits'. ... The sensitivity to being a potential homosexual thus goes right to the very heart of the matter of identity. 'Who am I?' becomes a key problem that leads to signification. 121

This comment is highly suggestive but it remained undeveloped. It is difficult to see what is at stake in the conflict which homosexuality produces so long as gender meanings are not related to the power which characterises sexual relations between men and women, and so long as the anomalous position of homosexuals in terms of gender expectations remains undefined. In each of the instances noted above, Plummer regarded the question of gender as being merely one additional factor, just as he relegated it to being one cause, and an indirect one at that, of hostility towards homosexuals.

There are three unresolved and related problems in Plummer's account of the homosexual career: why the acquisition of a homosexual identity is not more common; the origins of the sexual stereotypes which act to stabilise secondary deviance; and how gender meanings shape the conflict surrounding the experience of homosexuality. Underlying these problems are the theoretical assumptions of individual freedom and choice, and of cultural pluralism, upon which symbolic interactionism is based. The

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120. Ibid., pp. 135-36.

121. Ibid., p. 146.

question of the determinacy of sexual meanings is never clarified, even though Plummer struggled to refine the issue throughout his study. This is not to doubt the tenet that sexual meanings are created through 'interaction'; however, this simple proposition does not in itself lead to an understanding of how the meanings are acquired, of their strength or their dynamics.

The final major issue which Plummer discussed was the homosexual subculture, and this may be dealt with relatively briefly. Whereas the dominant view in the gay movement at about the same time dismissed the subculture as simply conservative and riddled with self-oppressive attitudes, he argued that,

... as one moves progressively into the subculture, so one gains readier access to sexual and social partners, to a series of legitimations about homosexuality, and strengthened sense of identity.

Those in the sexual subculture may thus have clearer, more stable self-conceptions of themselves as homosexuals than homosexuals who do not become so involved. 122

Further, he quite properly located the gay movement itself as part of the subculture in a broad sense, and suggested that the advent of a more militant homosexual activism might be explained in terms of the thesis of relative deprivation.

At those times of severe oppression - when the laws are hostilely rigid, when the literature is censored and discussions are taboo - the homosexual is willing to put up with that little bit of security that he can carve for himself in the gay world; at those times when oppression becomes less severe - when it is publicly spoken about and accepted in many groups - the homosexual may feel his oppression to a greater degree. He can articulate the oppression more readily. 123

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122. *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 164. This point has frequently been made in sociological studies of the subculture; see for example Leznoff and Westley (*op. cit.*); Evelyn Hooker, "The Homosexual Community", in William Simon and John H. Gagnon (eds.), *Sexual Deviance*, New York, 1967, pp. 178-79; and B.M. Dank, "Coming Out in the Gay World", *Psychiatry*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (May 1971), pp. 180-97.

123. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 172.



This kind of argument could also be used to help explain the rapid expansion of the subculture, particularly on the commercial level, which has taken place largely since Sexual Stigma appeared.

Plummer argued that the subculture should be understood both as a solution to the particular problems faced by homosexuals, those of guilt, sexual access and identity, and in terms of societal reactions which acted to amplify initial homosexual experiences and to segregate homosexuals from wider involvements.<sup>124</sup> He stressed that there was a dialectical relationship between subculture and society: the solutions to some problems gave rise to new ones, so that the subculture was not simply a static response to oppression. Yet Plummer's description of the subculture did not properly exploit this principle. He did not attempt to extend McIntosh's insights about the historical specificity of a homosexual subculture but was more concerned to emphasise what it shared with the society in which it was located. It had developed largely by incorporating elements of the dominant culture: the 'hip' masculinity of the counterculture, for example, had influenced the homosexual subculture.<sup>125</sup> More generally, the values within the subculture were "really only those values commonly associated with courtship in the heterosexual culture".<sup>126</sup> Thus while sex figured prominently in the homosexual subculture, it had a similar importance in many heterosexual male groups. Up to a point this

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124. This again broaches on a functionalist explanation; as Plummer wrote of sexually deviant subcultures in general, "... the subculture may serve to segregate the deviant from the wider population and may also thus contain and control it" (*ibid.*, p. 87). There is a sense in which functionalist accounts are relevant: Plummer quoted a police chief who was happy to have the 'perverts' in the subculture and not elsewhere so that they would not cause trouble.

125. This point is developed by Laud Humphreys, "New Styles in Homosexual Manliness", in McCaffrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-83.

126. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

is uncontentious; but since heterosexual sexuality is structured around the ideal of monogamous marriage and across the division of gender, it is certainly logical to explore the different ways in which homosexual sexuality is structured. It is particularly important to examine such differences, both sexual ones and in other areas, to see how the sub-culture acts as a point of resistance to the dominant culture.

It would seem that Plummer's inability to define the sources of oppression constrained him from posing this question. The issue here is to specify the anomalous social position of homosexuals in a way which neither renders them 'outside' of society (as happens in both conservative and radical functionalist arguments), nor reduces the difference of their position to being a simple reflection of the heterosexual norm.

(iv)

Sexual Stigma isolated three basic, interrelated questions regarding a social theory of male homosexuality. It focussed upon the origins of oppression, the dynamics of a homosexual identity and career, and the significance of the existence of a subculture. In discussing these problems, Plummer demonstrated a political and theoretical strength in the interactionist perspective which should not be undervalued. The perspective is highly sensitive to the experience of individuals and does not crudely force that experience into abstract and deterministic categories. In using it to challenge the positivism of traditional approaches to homosexuality, Plummer's achievement was to highlight the fact that the homosexual's experience is thoroughly shaped by hostile society.

Homosexuality in this culture is a stigma label. To be called 'homosexual' is to be degraded, denounced, devalued or treated as different. It may well mean shame, ostracism, discrimination, exclusion or physical attack. It may simply mean that one becomes an

'interesting curiosity of permissiveness'. But always, in this culture, the costs of being known as a homosexual must be high. 127

In these terms, Sexual Stigma forms an interesting parallel with a prominent line of argument in the early gay movement's literature. And it has a strength over many activists' arguments in that it does not assume that oppression is all-encompassing or invariable. This is very important, for fluctuations in the level of oppression and specific mobilisations of hostility towards homosexuals (as happened in the famous scandal in the town of Boise in Idaho in 1955),<sup>128</sup> should provide a means for furthering the historical analysis of their social position. A static conception of oppression readily invites a functionalist explanation whereas this is less likely to happen when oppression is viewed in more dynamic terms. For the same reason, it is important to develop the explanation, which Plummer touched upon, of the rise of contemporary gay activism.

His peculiarly urgent loyalty to interactionism arose from his perception of homosexuality as a political issue and this led him (both explicitly and implicitly) to expose the limitations of the perspective. He thus threw into relief some of the problems involved in constructing an adequate sociological account of homosexuality. These problems are contained within the three broad issues upon which he concentrated, and they are ultimately historical ones. While Plummer demonstrated the usefulness of

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127. Ibid., p. 175. To anyone with even a general familiarity with the gay movement, this statement may not seem remarkable. But few sociologists have made any comparable observations. Edwards and Wilson, for example, in their introduction to a collection of articles on deviance - and one distinctly above the average standard of such collections - appeared to equate the 'oppression' experience by homosexuals, Black Panthers and embezzlers (A.R. Edwards and P.R. Wilson, "The Concept of Social Deviance: An Interactionist Perspective", in Edwards and Wilson (eds.), op. cit., p. 27).

128. John Gerassi, The Boys of Boise, New York, 1968 (1966).

interactionism for an examination of the processes of the construction and disavowal, maintenance and reversal of social stigmas, it was with the larger ambitions of the perspective that a series of impasses arose. He was unable to offer an alternative historical approach to the questions which gay liberationists had tackled, even though his passing criticisms of their arguments were perceptive (and could easily have been extended). In fact, his comments about the ways in which the family and the gender system generated hostility towards homosexuality were distinctly weaker than some of the gay liberationist arguments.

There is an acute tension throughout Plummer's account between an emphasis upon the individual negotiation of sexual meanings and reactions, and an acknowledgement of the wider social constraints upon this process. The following passage is typical.

... it is not global laws, universal norms, omnipresent law-enforcement agencies or media stereotypes which 'react' against deviants: rather it is individual people, sensitive to certain abstract rules and constraints, who negotiate their reactions with deviants in face-to-face encounters. Often what goes firmly against the law may be tolerated or condoned in certain interpersonal contexts. ... The 'deviant', of course, may see the global and abstract rules as all-constraining, and in that sense they are extremely important for analysis. But in his day to day world, he is much concerned with what people say and do to him as with these global meanings. 129

This last point, incidentally, is surely a matter for empirical investigation, and Plummer seemed to shift his emphasis when he later wrote that a demonstration "that specific direct labelling has little impact misses the point; it is the whole weight of cultural hostility that counts".<sup>130</sup>

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129. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 50. This tension recurred throughout his study, for example, pp. 36, 40, 48, 85, 118.

130. Plummer, "Building a sociology of homosexuality", *op. cit.*, p. 22. He was referring to a study which revealed that a 'less than honourable discharge' from the army on the grounds of homosexuality did not necessarily have negative consequences for the individuals concerned; see C.J. Williams and M.S. Weinberg, Homosexuals and the Military: A Study of Less Than Honorable Discharge, New York, 1971. The importance of the weight of cultural hostility is one of the points to emerge from Laud Humphrey's study of impersonal sex. Many of the men interviewed did not identify as homosexual and actually supported more police surveillance of casual homosexual encounters;

This tension between individual negotiation and societal constraints is accompanied by another between individual negotiation and psychological constraints. Plummer employed a four-cell model to distinguish between male homosexuality in terms of whether it occurred in an individual or group situation, and whether it was an instance of primary or secondary deviance. Thus it could be a casual encounter, as in youthful 'experimentation'; it could appear as a deep attachment between two people who did not identify themselves as homosexual; it could occur in an institutionalised form, as in schools or prisons; and it could form a 'way of life', in which it was a central component of sexual identity.<sup>131</sup> Sociologically, these distinctions are essential, but as a model of homosexuality the differences between the four forms are blurred. Both statistically and psychologically, there are dramatic differences between homosexuality as primary deviance (in casual encounters and within an institution), and as secondary deviance (in a particular relationship and as a 'way of life'). In de-emphasising the importance of psychological factors, Plummer's model failed to grasp these differences. And when he stressed the importance of appreciating the complex ways in which particular experiences come to be understood as 'sexual', he noted that "there are deeply regulative rules surrounding sexuality that link it very firmly to the genitals".<sup>132</sup> In the light of psychoanalytic theory, this is startlingly naive (though to be fair, it is a question which many psychoanalysts would take to be self-evident).<sup>133</sup>

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they could be seen as 'moral crusaders'. See Tearoom Trade: A Study of Homosexual Encounters in Public Places, London, 1970, p. 141.

131. Plummer, Sexual Stigma, op. cit., pp. 98-100.

132. Ibid., p. 206, n. 21; and similarly, p. 207, n. 28.

133. It would be gratuitous to criticise the interactionist approach to sexuality for its ignorance and rough handling of psychoanalytic theory in any detail. Plummer's comments, like those of Gagnon and Simon (op. cit.) upon whom he drew, were in part a reaction against the crude Freudian formulations which have been particularly widespread in the United States. But both failed to address the

These considerations suggest where interactionism stops short theoretically and where it should be located as a theoretical tool in the task of constructing a social theory of homosexuality. On the one hand, the perspective indicates the need for a depth psychology concerned with the development of the foundations of sexual orientation and gender identity; on the other, it points to the importance of historical analysis. It cannot, by itself, perform these tasks and it cannot be a substitute for them. But it can set down requirements for both kinds of explanation.

A depth psychology is essential to an explanation of why the acquisition of a homosexual identity is not more common. Such an account need not be deterministic in the sense to which Plummer repeatedly objected. He is right to stress that sexual socialisation is not confined to childhood experiences but continues through adolescence in particular and beyond. At the same time, the psychoanalytic conception of infantile sexuality and the unconscious, the common observation that gender identities are a fundamental element of personality structures and have their origin in very early experiences, and the claims by many homosexual people that they knew that they were homosexual (or at least 'different' in a quite basic way) from a very early age, all point to the importance of a depth psychology. A vitally important task then, is to articulate the kind of psychoanalytic account outlined in the preceding chapter with the insights afforded by Plummer and other interactionists.

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psychoanalytic formulation of infantile sexuality and the unconscious, and at the same time reproduced other Freudian insights as their own. More generally, they did not recognise at all clearly the problems for which psychoanalytic theory might be useful, such as the acquisition of gender identities. Cohen has remarked upon the "philistine distrust which greets ... the whole work of Freud" within sociology generally (*op. cit.*, p. 22).

The claims of a non-biological psychoanalytic explanation of sexual development can be that the basis of a child's sexual orientation and gender identity is typically established via its family experiences at the age of say, five or six. A child's experience and understanding of its sexuality at this age is of course limited: the bulk of conscious conflict over sexual orientation and gender identity, in terms of an understanding of both general societal prescriptions and the more variable attitudes of particular individuals, certainly lies in the future. Quite obviously, the homosexually oriented boy has everything to learn about the possibilities of living an adult homosexual life; he has to learn the specific meanings attached to homosexuality and to reconcile his own sense of identity with this knowledge.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, he has much to learn about specific gender expectations and there is clearly room for conscious negotiation in the 'presentation' of self in these terms after the basis of gender identity has been formed.

It is, then, certainly not the case that homosexuality should be conceived to be simply a psychological orientation, as Whitam has argued;<sup>135</sup> but neither is it helpful to begin with the view, summed up by Plummer, that "homosexuality is a complex, diffuse experience that anyone may have".<sup>136</sup>

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134. Some research has found that there is on average an interval of six years between the first suspicion of being homosexual and then adopting a homosexual identity; see Dank, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

135. Frederick L. Whitam, "The Homosexual Role: A reconsideration", *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Feb. 1977), pp. 1-11; "The Prehomosexual Male Child in Three Societies: The United States, Guatemala, Brazil", *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (April 1980), pp. 87-99. The first of these articles argued against McIntosh (*op. cit.*) but in a particularly crude fashion. Whitam appeared to be content to dissolve the entire question of a social theory of homosexuality and to take the debate back to the traditional psychiatric framework, minus only the judgement of pathology.

136. Kenneth Plummer, "Homosexual categories: some research problems in the labelling perspective of homosexuality", in Plummer (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 57. Plummer went on to argue for a synthesis of the orientation and identity construct models of the formation of a homosexual identity.

Quite patently, 'anybody' does not have it. Even in behavioural terms, this statement would be more accurately applied to heterosexuality since proportionately more homosexuals have some heterosexual experience than vice versa.

While the experience of homosexuality is negotiated, this happens under specific historical conditions. These conditions have created the various facets of homosexual oppression and the phenomena of a homosexual identity and subculture which together shape the present experience of homosexuality. This is not to imply that there is an already existing role which will necessarily engulf either the 'pre-homosexual' person or the person unable to ward off the label of 'homosexual'. Such an assumption is denied by the interactionists' insights into the processes of individual choice, negotiation and contingency. The very substantial challenge of this perspective is to integrate its insights into an historical account of the emergence of the homosexual as a specific type of person, an account which will not depict homosexuals as being the passive victims of oppressive structures. Unlike Plummer, many sociologists writing within the interactionist framework have completely lost sight of the question of the origins of 'reactions' in their effort to distance themselves from forms of positivistic determinism. However frustrating this might be, it would be no advance to jettison their sensitivity to the particular experiences of individuals in favour of an investigation of the abstract origins of oppression. 'Oppression' should not be apostrophised as a tidy, relentless structure; it must be understood as a complex system of forceful constraints which the individual resists, accommodates and changes.



CHAPTER FIVE

HISTORICAL ISSUES

Between 1975 and 1980, ten issues of Gay Left were published in London by a collective of gay men. During this period, it was the major gay liberation journal to promote a Marxist analysis of homosexual oppression and to explore the relationship between the priorities of gay socialists and those of other groups and parties on the revolutionary left. Without being theoretically modish, Gay Left investigated questions of socialist theory and practice in a fashion which was remarkable for its patience and accessibility. At the same time, its scope was ambitious: apart from paying attention to current theoretical debates surrounding the potential for an historical materialist analysis of sexuality, the journal consistently had a number of other concerns. These included the work of homosexual men and women within trade unions, the representation of homosexuals in films, literature and other art forms, and issues such as fascism and paedophilia which have been a focus of political debate in Britain since the late seventies. Throughout its career, the journal was marked by a continuing commitment to the sexual liberationist tenet that the personal is political. Some of its articles drew out the social significance of individual experiences of coming out, of being openly gay at work, and of the various masculine self-images of homosexual men.

The most important theoretical contribution of Gay Left was arguably its efforts towards conceptualising the emergence of 'homosexuals' as a modern historical phenomenon. It was consistently critical of essentialist assumptions about homosexuality, and it directly influenced other historical work which has addressed the question of the construction of the category of 'homosexuality'. This was, of course, a central concern of Jeffrey Weeks (a member of the collective) in his history of homosexual politics in Britain since the nineteenth century, Coming Out. This chapter considers the major theoretical issues raised by his study as well as by some later, briefer statements by him and others.

It should be stated at the outset that the theoretical status of Marxism in this historical project is problematic. While it undeniably contributed to the anti-essentialist conception of homosexuality which has now been quite firmly established, the possibility of its more specific application to questions of sexual change remains distinctly uncertain. As was seen in the first chapter of this thesis, there are enormous problems inherent in any attempt to draw a simple correlation between varying levels of homosexual oppression and the economic and political changes within industrial capitalist societies. And such an attempt has not been made in the work to be considered here. Nonetheless, Weeks in particular has consistently tried to further an account of homosexuality which will ultimately be compatible with historical materialism.

A crucial question in this enterprise concerns its implications for Marxist theory: there are clear signs of strain, despite the non-economistic reformulations of Marxism which have been undertaken over the past decade. As Weeks himself has remarked, this is not an argument for a further attempt at the epistemological purification of Marxist theory at the expense of historical work on homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> But there is certainly an epistemological challenge to that theory in the very idea of a 'gay Marxism': as the Gay Left collective modestly put it in the final issue of the journal, "we still feel there is a relevance to the label which goes beyond the fact of being both gay people and socialists".<sup>2</sup> To state the point more emphatically, if that apparent hybrid 'gay Marxism' does not survive, the implications of the failure may very well be more serious to Marxism than to gay liberationist theory. The two could, conceivably, benefit from their

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1. Jeffrey Weeks, "Discourse, desire and sexual deviance: some problems in the history of homosexuality", in Plummer (ed.), op. cit., p. 111.
  2. Gay Left Collective, "Democracy, Socialism and Sexual Politics", Gay Left, No. 10 (June 1980), p. 2.

theoretical juxtaposition, but it would mean some far-reaching reformulations, and not least for historical materialism.

A sketch of the theoretical evolution of Gay Left indicates what is at stake here. The journal never attempted the philosophical excursions to be found in Working Papers or m/f, but it did try to construct a gay socialist perspective in the context of some of the theoretical debates within recent Marxist work. The point of this exercise is not to criticise the journal's various approaches to Marxist theory but to observe the shifts in its perspective and hence its own criticism.

(i)

During its first two years, Gay Left tried to extend the typical early gay liberationist conviction that homosexual oppression was linked to the role of the family and the subjection of women, and that these were functional for the capitalist mode of production. At the same time, it was argued from the first issue that the failure of socialists to take up the issue of sexual oppression was a result of a long economic tradition.

It represents, above all, a theoretical failure to grasp that a ruling class perpetuates itself not only through the economic and ideological forms of exploitation and oppression, but also through the character structures, the emotional formations, of its members. Certain issues, particularly male/female sexual relations and characteristics, are implicitly seen as beyond time and history, not subject to historical processes and social transformation. 3

Homosexual oppression, then, stemmed from the discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation which was generated by the family.

Oppression was rooted in capitalist relations of production because of two sets of functions performed by the family.<sup>4</sup>

The first of these was economic and involved the split between the

3. Jeffrey Weeks, "Where Engels Feared to Tread", Gay Left, No. 1 (Autumn 1975), p. 3.
4. Gay Left Collective, "Collective Statement", Gay Left, No. 1 (Autumn 1975), p. 2.

extra-familial, publicly valued labour of men and the de-valued, domestic labour of women. Industrial capitalism had created this split and sharpened the social differentiation between men and women by taking paid labour out of the home and into the factory system. The economy therefore benefited from the changed role of the family because women remained as a pool of cheap labour which could be drawn upon when required, and also because women raised and cared for children, the workers of the future, at no expense to the industrial system. The second function of the family was ideological. It not only reproduced the class position of its members but also defined the subordination of women to men in economic, social and emotional terms. More specifically, the family fulfilled a critical function by moulding the gender of children: "Many aspects of 'masculinity' are synonymous with the personal elements necessary to succeed within capitalism ... The expression of feminine characteristics [in boys] runs counter to male supremacy, the family and fundamental values of capitalism".<sup>5</sup> Thus, the family rejected "homosexuals, transvestites, transexuals: people who do not conform to the social expectations that are needed to perpetuate the capitalist economy".<sup>6</sup>

In the fifth issue of Gay Left, the collective returned to this argument, and to the question of economism. This attention was partly a political response to changes that had "revolutionised the possibilities of leading an openly gay life".<sup>7</sup> It was not that state harassment or media attacks had lessened, but that the rapidly expanding commercial subculture was readily able to exist within, while being shaped by, a consumerist and sexist society. Indeed, the movement itself had contributed to these developments: "Gay liberation prized open the crack, but gay commercial

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5. Gay Left Collective, "Love, Sex and Maleness", Gay Left, No. 4 (Summer 1977), p. 3.

6. Gay Left Collective, "Collective Statement", op. cit., p. 2.

7. Gay Left Collective, "Why Marxism?", Gay Left, No. 5 (Winter 1977), p. 2.

interests rushed to pour in".<sup>8</sup> All of this implied that the journal's earlier argument about the direct relationship between capitalism and homosexual oppression had been far too simple.

On a theoretical level, the collective was also responding to the work of Althusser and Mitchell, and to the renewed interest in Gramsci. They argued that the sexual liberation movements had revealed "new areas of struggle against patriarchy and capitalism to which Marxism had to respond. We reject, however, the concept of a 'Gay Marxism' as a special variant. We are anxious, on the contrary, to identify certain absences in the Marxist tradition".<sup>9</sup> The area of sexuality was a prime example. The working class struggle could not be conceived in economic terms alone but had to take account of exactly that area:

A worker's position is also a result of a structure of social relations which are initially inculcated through the family and reinforced through bourgeois ideology. Thus gender roles as defined in the family are central to the male/female dichotomy of work relations. Economism ignores this whole dynamic and suggests that social relations will be naturally transformed in a post-revolutionary situation. 10

Drawing upon Althusser's formulation of the relative autonomy of the ideological level, the collective went on to argue that male homosexual oppression largely took an ideological form. The general point was that questions of gender and sexuality could not be simply derived from the economic level of the social formation.

In retrospect we probably overstressed the purely economic aspects of the family and mechanically assimilated homosexual oppression to it. But the stress on the family must still be central for it is here that in each generation the boy-child and the girl-child enter into the rules of social life. Here also is where the dominance of reproductive sexuality is maintained. In our culture these rules closely regulate gender-identity to a particular form of sexual expression. ...

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8. Gay Left Collective, "Within These Walls ...", Gay Left, No. 2 (Spring 1976), p. 1.
9. Gay Left Collective, "Why Marxism?", op. cit., p. 2.
10. Ibid., p. 3.

The fight for gay liberation is ... an aspect of a wider struggle against male domination. 11

The final major statement by the collective continued in this direction of insisting upon the specificity of homosexual oppression while reiterating that Marxism offered no ready explanation of it. Writing in the political context of the Thatcher Government, they observed the strategic and organisational incoherence of responses by the left and an apparent dissonance within Marxist theory.

The existing forms of socialism fail to speak clearly to people's needs and in that failure abandon the political and social terrain to domination by reactionary images, models and philosophies. The continued repetition of slogans calling for example for a general strike, is limited and idealist in so far as it fails to connect to how people really see their lives. 12

The crucial point for socialist theory and strategy to recognise was that capitalism was not a single entity but a highly complex set of economic, social, geographical, ethical and gender relations. There was "no unitary determination of beliefs, behaviour, ideology or sexual forms",<sup>13</sup> and a variety of struggles arose at all points of power within the complex structure of capitalism.

In effect the collective was arguing that there was a crisis in Marxist theory and practice and that this highlighted the significance of gay politics. The sexual liberation movements had politicised sections of the population untouched by traditional socialist organisations by demonstrating that "our 'private' lives, our selves and our desires, are targets for intervention by social forces - definitions, models, rules, woven in ideology and lived by us".<sup>14</sup> In the process, the liberation

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 4. This line of thought was expanded upon by Keith Birch, "Politics and Ideology, An Introduction to Althusser, Mitchell and Lacan", *Gay Left*, No. 5 (Winter 1977), pp. 10-14. Another positive reaction to Mitchell's reappraisal of Freud was contained in Chris Jones, "A Cure for Psychiatry?", *Gay Left*, No. 6 (Summer 1978), pp 25-27.

12. Gay Left Collective, "Democracy, Socialism and Sexual Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

movements had revealed that apparently homogeneous categories, such as 'homosexuality' or 'gay men', were split up in complex ways by divisions of gender, class, race and age. In many ways, the gay movement provided a model for the socialist project because it spoke with a sensitivity to the felt needs of homosexual people and to the felt restriction of those needs. The struggles around sexuality,

... have underlined the vital importance of understanding the ways in which the different forms of power shape and inform individual meanings and identities. Secondly they illuminate the determined ways in which individuals can resist and begin to transform oppressive definitions. There is a third point: in our very marginalisation we have attempted to work out different ways of living relationships and sexuality which question many basic attitudes that cement existing patterns. Feminist and Gay politics provide a subversive challenge to conventional ideologies and aspirations, and socialism cannot grow without such challenges. 15

In an important way, the theoretical conclusions reached by the Gay Left collective are comparable to those able to be drawn from Plummer's Sexual Stigma. Indeed, at one point, the collective had paid explicit attention to the interactionist perspective in trying to grasp the complex issues involved in sexual socialisation.<sup>16</sup> Thus the journal's editorial statements repeatedly argued for the need for an historical perspective on the evolution of sexual meanings which remained sensitive to individuals as active agents in the construction of their own identities. The final statement of the significance of gay politics to the broader socialist project also reflected the influence of Foucault, particularly in its stress upon the complex divisions of power within capitalist societies. He emphasised the importance of the politics of 'marginal' groups; and, as a non-Marxist social theorist, his work highlighted the need to pay attention to a wide variety of social practices and discourses otherwise neatly categorised as ideological, whatever their 'relative autonomy'.

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15. Ibid., p. 4.

16. Gay Left Collective, "Love, Sex and Maleness", op. cit., pp. 2-6.



The challenge to Marxist theory represented by a gay socialist perspective is therefore part of a broader questioning of socialist orthodoxies. Most obviously, comparable issues are at stake in the Marxist feminist enterprise, but they also arise from the interactionist perspective and other phenomenologically influenced sociological work inasmuch as it asks historical questions as well as describing the construction of subjective realities. The challenge is similarly made by Foucault. And this indicates the path followed by Gay Left over five years: while insisting upon the need to make political and theoretical sense of personal experience and, conversely, defending itself against criticism that it had not produced a simple strategy for gay socialists, the journal questioned both early gay liberationist arguments about the relationship between homosexual oppression and capitalism and current formulations of Marxist theory. In the process, it drew upon the insights afforded by the interactionist account of homosexuality and finally upon Foucault. (This trajectory has also characterised Weeks' historical work on homosexuality.)

For all its energy, Gay Left did not finally succeed in defining the theoretical contours of a Marxist analysis of homosexual oppression. To understand this, it is instructive to note some of the broad differences between its attempts and those of Marxist feminists. Though the success of the latter enterprise continues to be hotly debated, it has been marked by a vigorous engagement with Marxism. The Gay Left collective, on the other hand, displayed considerable theoretical caution. This is partly due to the fact that the project of constructing a gay Marxism has necessarily been much more modest. While its scope is comparable to Marxist feminism, the number of gay liberationists committed to this project has been small. Indeed, Gay Left has been the only gay liberationist journal to explore consistently the possible application of Marxism to homosexuality.<sup>17</sup>

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17. In this regard, it is interesting to note a recent collection of articles with a socialist perspective from the United States: Pam Mitchell (ed.), Pink Triangles, Radical Perspectives on Gay

More importantly, the two attempts from within the sexual liberation movements to redefine the traditional field of Marxist analysis have begun from quite distinct theoretical positions. One difference between them is defined by gender: the Marxist feminist concern with the economic significance of housework obviously can not be duplicated in relation to homosexual men. Another seems to be an historically defined difference in attitudes to psychoanalysis, this being the second major avenue explored by Marxist feminists. Though feminists have had a range of fundamental objections to the way in which psychoanalysis in general has dealt with women's sexuality, they have still engaged in a long-running debate with it. And some, particularly since Mitchell's work, have been convinced of its usefulness for a critique of patriarchal culture. By contrast, there has never been any comparable debate with psychoanalysis by homosexual men. Freud's references to homosexuality are brief and unsystematic; and, more crucially, many later analysts have adhered to the idea of pathology, completely dispensing with Freud's important qualifications of this view in the process.

It was obviously critical that gay liberationists should reject the medical model of homosexuality, including its most sophisticated expression by a variety of therapists influenced by psychoanalysis. But except for Hocquenghem and Mieli, gay Marxists have not shown any great readiness to readdress Freud's writings on homosexuality. For different reasons, then, they have not explored either of the two main lines of theoretical argument taken up by Marxist feminists. And, having rejected the early functionalist accounts of homosexual oppression, it proved very difficult to find another way into Marxist theory. This explains something of the theoretical reserve

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Liberation, Boston, 1980. This volume reprinted some Gay Left material; but its general eclecticism was the result of a lack of clear theoretical direction. There also seemed to be a lack of contributors, and it included Fernbach's "Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation" (op. cit.), then seven years old.

in the approach of Gay Left; and also, perhaps, why Foucault seemed to be such a welcome point of departure, despite the problematic nature of the task of integrating his work into a Marxist framework.<sup>18</sup>

## (ii)

Various kinds of historical work have figured prominently in the gay movement's literature. For many activists, a central element in the affirmation of a more defiant consciousness has been discovering the history of homosexuality, of its oppression and of earlier forms of resistance. Gay liberationists, for example, have done much to publicise the fact that tens of thousands of homosexuals were imprisoned and killed during the Third Reich. Other substantial work has provided documentation of the homosexual movement in Germany from the late nineteenth century to the 1930's, of homosexuality in American life since the sixteenth century, and of the relatively militant activism in the United States after the second world war which was largely repressed by McCarthyism. There is a very real sense in which such history has been ignored and forgotten.<sup>19</sup>

The new interest in gay history also raises some important methodological questions. These are at the centre of the more general problem of developing the history of sexuality. Gay liberationists' recovery of 'their' history has often meant an indiscriminate search for homosexual people in any culture and in any historical period, based upon the assumption that homosexuals form a discrete group which has been oppressed to a greater or lesser extent throughout the ages.<sup>20</sup> In the first issue of

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18. The collective's most positive reaction to Foucault was in Gay Left Collective (ed.), Homosexuality: Power and Politics, London, 1980.

19. James D Steakley, The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany, New York, 1975; Johnathan Katz, (ed.), Gay American History, Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A., New York, 1976; John D'Emilio, "Dreams Deferred", The Body Politic, Nos. 48-50 (Nov. 1978 - Feb. 1979).

20. This is at least more democratic than the traditional, hagiographical approach to the history of homosexuality, the result being a growing list of great historical figures. The most notable recent example is A.L. Rowse, Homosexuals in History: A Study of Ambivalence in Society, Literature and the Arts, London, 1977.

Gay Left, Weeks drew on McIntosh and argued that this approach falls within the 'third sex' tradition of homosexual historiography. It tries to fit its subjects into the present social definitions of gender, for the question of whether a particular person was homosexual is assessed in terms of the contemporary belief that homosexuality is an exclusive orientation characterised by cross-gender traits.

The conservatism of this approach lies both in its acceptance of gender differences as natural and unchanging, and in the corresponding belief that homosexuals constitute a minority group which, having finally emerged from historical obscurity, should struggle to gain equality with the heterosexual majority. Weeks stressed that the importance of the idea of a 'homosexual role' was in its historical specificity, so that the central task was to explain its emergence. The late nineteenth century in Britain provided some vital clues since it was a period of harsh homosexual oppression and also saw the beginnings of organised resistance. He pointed to "the emergence of the concept of the exclusive homosexual, which acts both as a protection for the heterosexual norm, and by a dialectical process, as a coherent identity for the homosexual".<sup>21</sup>

This was the germ of the argument which Weeks developed two years later in Coming Out. His interest lay in historicising the personal experience of 'coming out', in explaining the processes behind the modern phenomenon of a homosexual identity. He wanted to draw out the ways in which homosexuals have not just passively endured oppression but have creatively responded to the experiences of legal and medical labelling. Coming Out is primarily an account of the homosexual reform groupings, from late nineteenth century pioneers such as John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter to the contemporary gay liberation movement. This discussion, however,

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21. Jeffrey Weeks, Review of Frank Pearce and Andy Roberts, 'Dangerous Deviants ...', Who Screws Who?, Gay Left, No. 1 (Autumn 1975), p. 15.

will concentrate upon Weeks' accompanying exploration of the social context which stimulated the early reformers. They were reacting against a climate of sharpened hostility:

The massive impact of industrialization and urbanization on family patterns, the gradual exclusion of women from the primary work force in the nineteenth century, the creation of a mass, propertyless working class, whose labour power was reproduced and serviced in the bosom of the family, had profound and still unexplored effects on the socially ascribed gender roles of men and women. What is apparent is that, as social roles became more clearly defined, and as sexuality was more closely harnessed ideologically to the reproduction of the population, so the social condemnation of male homosexuality increased. ...

The result of these changes was the emergence in a recognizably modern form of concepts and meanings which are now commonplaces of public discussion: for example, the notion of 'the housewife', 'the prostitute', 'the child'; and the concept of the 'homosexual'. 22

The new conception of homosexuality was coloured by the traditional Judaeo-Christian condemnation of all forms of non-procreative sex, by its concern with male sexuality (lesbianism was low on the list of medieval sins), and by its association of sexual unconformity with other forms of social unorthodoxy. The essential element in the conception established by the late nineteenth century, however, was that homosexuality was the inherent property of a particular type of person.

Sodomy was a capital offence under English civil law from the 1533 Act of Henry VIII until 1861. But there was no concept of the 'homosexual' in law and Weeks argued that, on the contrary, sodomy was seen to be a potential in all sinful creatures. Prosecutions under the law were erratic, but it is notable that the law against sodomy was tightened up in 1826, an occasion when the death penalty was abolished for over a hundred other crimes.<sup>23</sup> There is evidence that the meaning of sodomy and buggery were

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22. Weeks, *Coming Out*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6, 2.

23. Under the new law, it was necessary only to prove that penetration had occurred, and not emission (*ibid.*, p. 13).

not always clear and they were used on occasion to refer to artificial methods of birth control. Nevertheless, "indulgence in buggery was assumed to be the characteristic feature of what we would now call a homosexual".<sup>24</sup> The significant legal change of the late nineteenth century was the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 which made all male homosexual acts illegal whether committed in public or private.<sup>25</sup> And in 1898, the Vagrancy Act extended the law to cover all forms of soliciting and importuning for immoral purposes. The scope of these laws was such that while it was not illegal to 'be' homosexual, the distinction was purely academic. As Weeks demonstrated, the threat of prosecution played a central part in defining the modern male homosexual consciousness and law reform was the primary aim of pre-gay liberation activism.

The second major thrust in the modern labelling of homosexuality which Weeks described came from the medical profession. Whereas the sodomite had committed a crime and a sin, the homosexual was not only more vulnerable in his behaviour before the law but was conceived to be suffering from a disease. From the middle of the eighteenth century in Western Europe, as Foucault has argued in relation to the new conception of madness,<sup>26</sup> ideas of mental disease became differentiated from those of individual sinfulness; and a hundred years later there was a new scientific interest in all forms of non-procreative sex, particularly in Germany.<sup>27</sup> The perversions were

24. Ibid., p. 14.

25. Section 11 of the Act read:

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour (ibid., p. 14).

26. Foucault, Madness and Civilization, op. cit.

27. Steakley described an article by Carl von Westphal, published in 1869, as the first psychiatric study of homosexuality and as an almost imperialistic expansion of psychiatry's interests. The article argued for the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Prussia so that more cases would "come to the attention of doctors - in whose area they belong" (op. cit., p. 9).

classified, their manifestations listed, and their causes closely investigated; and various forms of treatment were proposed and tested.<sup>28</sup> The impetus for this with regard to homosexuality came particularly from the new criminal codes: the pressing questions were whether homosexuals could be physically identified for the courts and whether they were to be held legally responsible for their behaviour. The issue of responsibility revolved around the problem of whether homosexuality was acquired or congenital, for if the latter was the case, was punishment justifiable? The psychiatric and criminological view of homosexuality increasingly contradicted popular explanations made in terms of moral depravity and degeneration and insisted that the condition was deeply rooted in the individual's make-up. Weeks argued that as a greater number of cases of homosexuality were revealed, including some who were apparently otherwise normal middle class people, "it was often important to demonstrate that homosexuals were not entirely corrupt: sickness in this light was preferable to wickedness".<sup>29</sup>

The impact of the medical model upon the emerging male homosexual consciousness was more gradual than the new legal definitions. Early twentieth century intellectuals such as Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Roger Casement referred to their homosexuality as a crippling misfortune and a disease, but it was "not until the late 1950s, with the debate occasioned by the Wolfenden Report, that a sickness theory became general, in however vague a form".<sup>30</sup>

Weeks sketched a variety of shifts and tensions within Victorian sexual attitudes which formed the context of the new legal and medical definitions

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28. The most radical 'cure' was castration. Weeks noted its use for sex offenders, including homosexuals, from as early as 1898 in Kansas, and as late as 1956 in Denmark (Coming Out, op. cit., p. 31).

29. Ibid., p. 29.

30. Ibid., p. 30.

of homosexuality. It is clear that in the minds of many late nineteenth century propagandists, reformers and legislators, homosexuality was not an isolated form of behaviour but one element in a spectrum of social evils which had to be eradicated, or at least contained. It was linked with prostitution, the essential concern of the Acts of 1885 and 1889, and with masturbation. Masturbation had been regarded with particular horror since the eighteenth century and was thought to cause physical and mental degradation as well as homosexuality.<sup>31</sup> Both issues were made all the more urgent by the rapid expansion of sex-segregated public schools after 1840.<sup>32</sup> The link between the three vices of school boy masturbation, prostitution and homosexuality was stressed by the social purity crusaders of the 1870's and 1880's: they viewed each as an expression of undifferentiated male lust. Thus they attacked the double standard of morality, as expressed by the fact that women alone were legally reprehensible for prostitution, and insisted that men adhere to the same high standards of sexual conduct which were prescribed for women.

A series of homosexual scandals between the 1870's and 1890's underlined the pertinence of the crusaders' goals; each was reported in detail by the developing mass circulation press and in at least one instance provoked a huge demonstration.<sup>33</sup> The social purity crusade also fitted with other

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31. The Swiss physician Tissot, who did much to publicise the dire effects of masturbation in the eighteenth century, argued that "loss of semen weakened the body while the expenditure of nervous energy enfeebled the brain" (*ibid.*, p. 24). And, as Weeks also observed, Freud and Ellis argued the merits of restraining children from masturbating in the 1920's, despite their liberal views.
32. See Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Public School Phenomenon, 597-1977*, London, 1977. The author notes that from 1850, junior boys began to live separately (p. 166), and that by 1900 there was an almost universal segregation by age and house restricting the circle of acquaintance to about ten (p. 179). He also discussed the popular melodrama *Eric or Little by Little* (1858) by Frederick W. Farrar, which graphically depicted the evils of masturbation (pp. 84-88).
33. The demonstration accompanied the Dublin Castle scandal of 1884; the transvestites, Boulton and Park were tried (and acquitted) in 1870; the Cleveland Street scandal erupted in 1889-1890; and most sensational of all were the three trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895.



common preoccupations: there was a growing concern with the family in the context of fears of imperial decline<sup>34</sup> and, after 1900, the eugenics movement argued the merits of scientific breeding precisely to counter the threat. A clear association was made between homosexuality and national decay.<sup>35</sup>

On a broader level, the concept of childhood changed during the nineteenth century. Childhood itself lengthened and the need to protect the assumed innocence of children became an important social issue. The 1885 Act raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen; working class youths were involved in the homosexual scandals; and the controversy about sexual morality in public schools continued. To the extent that homosexuality was not wholly explainable in organic terms, it was a disease which might be contracted by almost anyone and particularly the young. The primary risks were masturbation, seduction and other vices in general. At a time when the innocence of children was emphasised, when the protection of young people from feared sexual exploitation became a public and legislative concern, and when there was a greater consciousness of the importance of the family to a stable society and its empire, homosexuality was reviled as a source of corruption.

Weeks' achievement was to situate the emergence of both the modern conception of homosexuality and the articulation of a modern homosexual identity in the context of the evolution of other sexual meanings and practices. As he stated, however, the precise impact of the broad social changes effected by industrial capitalism upon the family and the gender order remains obscure. His own explanation still ultimately relied upon the framework which Fernbach used. Thus the relative freedom of contemporary homosexuals

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34. In 1885 the issue of Home Rule for Ireland was urgent, Khartoum was lost and General Gordon killed. The Boer War provoked a greater crisis for British imperialism fifteen years later.

35. Josephine Butler, a leader of the social purity crusade, pointed to the fate of Ancient Rome; and Beatrice Webb linked the degeneration of China with homosexuality after a visit there in 1911 (Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit., pp. 18-19).

reflected a relaxation of the grip of the state upon sexual morality as "capitalism no longer demands that sexuality be harnessed solely to the reproduction of labour power".<sup>36</sup> However, it is only a distant echo of Fernbach's argument. Weeks in fact stated the conceptual problem for Marxist theory very clearly:

One of the most difficult and neglected areas of socialist theory precisely concerns the complex relationship between the personal and the political. Socialist theory is based on the assumption that the personality is moulded by social forces, but it has assumed rather than explored this belief. The result is that socialist orthodoxies have concentrated on the external factors and underplayed ways in which these have affected the more individual aspects. Within socialist orthodoxies until recently, as in bourgeois ideology as a whole, certain factors were taken as given - such as the 'natural' basis of the sexual drives, of motherhood, of masculinity and femininity. Under the impact of the women's and gay movements, these beliefs have been questioned but not fundamentally abandoned. 37

The significance of the argument about the modern historical construction of a homosexual identity is that it is just such an example of the personal being shaped by the political, of the personality of particular individuals being moulded by social forces. Clarification of the issues involved would have highly significant implications for the history of sexuality as a whole, and for Marxist theory. The task is clearly enormous, but Weeks' achievement in Coming Out was an important step towards it. Though his history cannot properly be termed 'Marxist', it was nonetheless the questions which he posed as a Marxist which enabled him to establish the broad outlines of the ways in which the experience of homosexuality is defined by particular historical conditions.

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What exactly was the impact of the apparently sharpening hostility towards

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36. Ibid., p. 231.

37. Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit., pp. 235-36. Thus, for example, Weeks avoided most of the functionalism underpinning the argument of Frank Pearce and Andrew Roberts, "The Social Regulation of Sexual Behaviour and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in Britain", in Roy Bailey and Jock Young, Contemporary Social Problems in Britain, Farnborough, Hants, 1973, pp. 51-72.

homosexuality in late nineteenth century Britain? In general terms, the period saw the articulation of a recognisably modern homosexual identity within a subculture. The subculture was the necessary vehicle by which homosexuals could begin to understand themselves as a group with shared interests. It comprised a variety of meeting places, brothels, a particular language, and a camp style which was epitomised in Wilde's work; and it provided some basic skills, such as secret ways in which to recognise other homosexuals and a knowledge of how best to evade detection. Weeks suggested that by the middle of the nineteenth century the subculture in cities such as London and Dublin had become complex and variegated, and that "it was less a single subculture than a series of overlapping subcultures, each part supplying a different need".<sup>38</sup> The evidence of the subcultural forms points to their continuity with male sexual life generally, rather than, for instance, with lesbianism. Those able to take advantage of the subculture tended to be relatively affluent men, and their casual sexual encounters, use of prostitutes and interest in forming relationships with working class men are all comparable with the sexual patterns of heterosexual men in the same social classes. Weeks suggested the steps taken in adopting a homosexual 'way of life':

A young man of the Victorian upper middle class might progress from highly structured sexual encounters in his public schools, to casual sex with a young working class guardsman, to a full absorption into a complex homosexual underworld. This was not an inevitable step, and it was one fraught with increasing danger in the nineteenth century, but for those who did take it it meant involvement in an identity and sub-culture which, with its own system of values and ideologies, is the obvious forerunner of that of the present day. 39

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38. Jeffrey Weeks, "Movements of Affirmation: Sexual Meanings and Homosexual Identities", Radical History Review, No. 20 (Spring/Summer 1979), p. 175; and Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit., p. 37.

39. Ibid., p. 35.

On the other hand, while working class youths were involved in all the major homosexual scandals, and while some did form relationships on the basis of the cross-class ideal, it is more difficult to find evidence of their sexual self image.<sup>40</sup>

The new categorisation of homosexuality does not mean "that those who engaged in a predominantly homosexual life style did not regard themselves as somehow different until the late nineteenth century".<sup>41</sup> This is an important point, for it is impossible to assess the impact of the late nineteenth century changes without knowing as much as possible about how men with same-sex preferences conceived of themselves before this period.

There is a terminological problem here: is it anachronistic to speak of 'homosexuals' before, say, the third quarter of the nineteenth century? It is not a matter of attaching a precise date to the emergence of 'homosexuals' as such, but future historical research must establish when it makes sense to begin to refer to a proportion of men whose understanding of their sexual interests warrants the use of the modern term 'homosexual'. To take an obvious example, it is seriously misleading to apply the term to the Ancient Greeks. Thus Dover's study of Greek homosexuality does not refer to 'homosexuals', but to 'erastes', the active or assertive or dominant partner, and to 'eromenos', the passive or receptive or subordinate one. The distinction was fundamental to the Greek conception of male homosexuality.<sup>42</sup>

The question of terminology is less clear-cut in modern European history. Weeks observed that a number of historians now make a distinction between

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40. Weeks wrote: "We know from other sources that it was precisely at this time that working-class life was consolidating itself into more rigid patterns of gender behaviour, and yet homosexual prostitution was rife" (ibid., p. 40).

41. Weeks, "Movements of Affirmation", *op. cit.*, p. 166.

42. K.J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality, New York, 1980 (1978), p. 16.

homosexuality as a form of behaviour and as an exclusive self-definition, and they also stress that the meaning given to homosexuality is historically specific. At the same time, in writing of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these historians continue "to speak of 'homosexuals' as if they realised a trans-historical nature" and to assume that "the homosexual sub-culture had a natural existence serving the eternal social needs (or at least eternal in the West) of a fixed minority of people".<sup>43</sup> As Weeks pointed out, the term 'homosexual' was coined in 1869 and, along with 'invert', entered English currency only in the 1890's. This is one reason why historians should certainly defend their decision to use the term in discussing homosexuality prior to this time. Yet it would entail a rigid nominalism to proscribe the use of the term in reference to earlier periods simply on the grounds of the date of its invention.

There is no doubt from Week's account that the meaning of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century was changing in some quite fundamental ways. But historical research should also be alert to the possibility of finding significant continuities in both the self-conception of those with same-sex preferences and in the broader social responses towards them. The question here is what kind of 'break' do the late nineteenth century changes represent? In Coming Out, Weeks argued that at this time homosexuality gained its modern configuration as a result of the crystallisation of a number of processes acting upon the bourgeois family and its perceived importance, and hence upon the understanding of gender differences, of childhood and so on. More recently, his emphasis has become sharper.

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43. Weeks, "Discourse, desire and sexual deviance", op. cit., p. 80. He made this criticism partly of Katz (op. cit.), and more particularly of A.D. Harvey, "Prosecution for Sodomy in England at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century", The Historical Journal, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1978), pp. 939-48; and Randolph Trumbach, "London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century", Journal of Social History, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Fall 1977), pp. 1-33.

The late nineteenth century stigmatisation, not of homosexual acts, but of a state of mind,

... is the crucial change, indicating a massive shift in attitudes, giving rise to what is distinctly new in our culture: the categorization of homosexuality as a separate condition and the correlative emergence of a homosexual identity. ...

Westphal's description of the 'contrary sexual instinct' in the 1870s may be taken as the crucial formative moment, for out of it grew the notion of 'sexual inversion', the dominant formulation until the 1950s. 44

The influence of Foucault is evident here. Foucault not only makes very broad generalisations about sexual changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but draws his conclusions in a particularly aphoristic fashion. Referring to Westphal's article of 1870, he declared: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."<sup>45</sup> The point is not to quibble with Foucault over a date, but there is a clear danger of his emphasis being taken up and solidified into something which stands in the way of a more subtle historical appreciation of the changes that were occurring. Frank Mort, for example, in a volume of essays published by the Gay Left Collective, wrote: "We should be aware that the homosexual subject is a socially and culturally constructed category, emerging at a particular historical moment in the late nineteenth century ..."<sup>46</sup> This kind of statement should be taken to be an hypothesis, not a conclusion made evident by existing historical research. For historical work in this area is surely in its infancy. There has been some important conceptual and empirical work published in a relatively short space of time, and the promise of more to come makes it an exciting field.<sup>47</sup> But enormous problems and questions remain.

One of these concerns the early history of the homosexual subculture, and

44. Weeks, "Discourse, desire and sexual deviance", *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

45. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction, London, 1978 (1976), p. 43.

46. Frank Mort, "Sexuality: Regulation and Contestation", in Gay Left Collective (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

a major task of work in this area should be to clarify the nature of the 'break' represented by the late nineteenth century. McIntosh, Weeks and others have pointed to evidence of the existence of a subculture in London from the late seventeenth century. Its emergence is clearly related to the quickening pace of urbanisation, for by that time London provided a degree of anonymity which was vital to any form of social organisation around homosexual interests. The growth of the city during the previous two hundred years had been dramatic: it has been estimated that the population of London rose from 60,000 in 1520 to 200,000 in 1603, and that it had reached 575,000 by 1695.<sup>48</sup> By 1729, one contemporary source claimed that there were about twenty 'houses of male resort' in London.<sup>49</sup> The relative anonymity provided by such cities was not merely a by-product of their size. It should also be related to the declining authority of the family in the urban context. As Weeks commented: "Only with the breakdown of traditional value and status systems does it become possible to live a homosexual 'career', while the town offers the possibility of social institutions developing independently of the family and traditional responses."<sup>50</sup> The very existence of an urban subculture means that a significant number of men were beginning, however tentatively, to organise part of their lives around their proscribed sexual interests; they were expressing an awareness of the meaning of their 'difference'.

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47. Weeks has announced his work on a volume entitled, "Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality 1780-1980"; and Gay Men's Press in London expects to publish Alan Bray, Male Homosexuality and Society in England 1550-1700 in 1982.
48. Peter Clark and Paul Slack, English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700, London, 1976, p. 83. The authors also argue that by 1700, because of the high mortality rate, "about 8,000 immigrants a year were needed to simply maintain the population, and, taking into account the flow of immigrants out of London, the gross total was probably 50 per cent or so higher" (p. 86).
49. Cited by Harvey, op. cit., p. 944.
50. Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit., p. 36. Steakley wrote of the 1860's in Germany: "A strikingly recurrent feature of the medical and criminological literature of the period is the apprehension of homosexuals in the newly created, impersonal space of parks (Schweitzer!) and train stations (Westphal's case histories!)" (op. cit., p. 15).

Its predominant expression seems to have been a high degree of effeminacy and what is now termed transvestism. This cross-gender identification was evident in the identifying words of the period such as 'Nancy-boy', 'Molly', 'Madge-cull' and 'Marianne'.<sup>51</sup> "It is significant", Weeks wrote, "that it is 'effeminacy' that is the most stigmatized form of behaviour, suggesting the deep underlying gender-role strains emerging."<sup>52</sup> This line of thought needs to be developed, for it suggests two lines of investigation. First, it points to a continuity in subcultural forms: effeminacy remains a marked characteristic of the present homosexual subculture, particularly where it exists outside of the largest Western cities. The meaning of this effeminacy will obviously have changed in various ways, but it is an important connection to be explored.<sup>53</sup> Second, it is necessary to enquire into the nature of the "gender-role strains" to which Weeks referred. Does the existence of an incipient effeminate subculture reflect changes and tensions within the broader conceptions of masculinity and femininity? Or, to put it another way, did changes in the general relationship between men and women have implications for the expression of same-sex preferences?

It would be very surprising if historical research into the development of homosexual self-conceptions and subculture in Britain since the seventeenth century did not find marked continuities as well as important breaks and shifts. There are two related questions to be kept in mind in undertaking such work. First, it is necessary to explain the reasons for the emergence of what McIntosh termed the 'homosexual role', that is, the phenomenon of men who made an identification on the basis of their sexual preference, and

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51. McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 188; Weeks, *Coming Out*, *op. cit.*, p. 37. An extensive homosexual argot existed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*ibid.*, p. 42).

52. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

53. Weeks asked, "can one really speak of the courtly or theatrical sub-cultures of the early seventeenth century as if they were the same as the modern sub-cultures of New York or San Francisco?" ("Discourse, desire and sexual deviance", *op. cit.*, p. 80). Well, no - but the same could be said of practically any form of seventeenth century social life.



on a scale which went beyond the institutionalised homosexuality of certain royal courts and monasteries. Second, it is necessary to pursue the reasons for the particular late nineteenth century categorisation of homosexuality. Posing the problem in this way raises the question of whether the new legal and medical definitions were a recognition of something which already existed. This conclusion, Weeks has warned, can fall into the trap of naive empiricism.<sup>54</sup>

Yet in one sense it may be said that the new definitions and sharpening hostility were a reaction to the fact that homosexuality had gained a social presence in a way which it previously had not. It was this presence which provoked a number of mass demonstrations during certain trials and scandals, and which angered the social purity crusaders. More importantly, the psychiatric definition of homosexuality as inversion was not simply a figment of the medical imagination. However objectionable the notion now seems, both theoretically and politically (for indeed, its toll in fuelling therapeutic zeal has been enormous), the conception of inversion did bear some relation to the most obvious expression of homosexuality at the time. Both the concept, and effeminate homosexuality, need to be understood in terms of a particular societal conception of gender meanings.

To say that the late nineteenth century changes were reactive, however, is not to claim an explanation of the new medical and legal discourses: they certainly cannot be reduced to being a simple response to the 'fact' of homosexuality. They were, as both Weeks and Foucault have emphasised, intimately connected to the categorisations of other forms of non-reproductive sexuality and to various tensions within Victorian sexual attitudes (such as the concern with prostitution).

Yet in Weeks' thesis, the late nineteenth century changes in the

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54. Ibid., p. 87.

conceptualisation of homosexuality are being made to carry too heavy an explanatory load. In distancing his account from essentialist assumptions he seems to be in danger of over-emphasising the peculiarly modern character of the idea of the homosexual as a particular type of person. At the very least, it will require much more argument to establish the claim that the new legal and medical definitions (as an expression of other social changes) 'created' the conception of exclusive homosexuality, and that previously, it simply did not exist in any sense. For example, Weeks referred to "abundant evidence until late into the nineteenth century of practices which by modern standards would be regarded as highly sexually compromising" but which, at the time, were not seen in this light.<sup>55</sup> The published evidence, however, is by no means abundant, though the point may well be able to be strengthened.<sup>56</sup> At any rate, an interpretation of the evidence should not be hasty: since there are still many practices whose potentially compromising implications are successfully explained away as non-homosexual, it is to be expected that the same thing would occur in an earlier period where same-sex behaviour was heavily proscribed.

One of the strongest proscriptions related to sodomy, and the significance of this should not be overlooked. Despite the lack of clarity in its definition, sodomy was associated with homosexuality<sup>57</sup> and it remained a capital offence in Britain until 1861. And in Prussia, for example, it was punishable by burning at the stake until 1794 and by imprisonment and lifelong

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55. Ibid., p. 84.

56. Weeks referred to the confusion surrounding the trial of the transvestites, Boulton and Park in 1871, and to their acquittal, despite a mass of highly compromising evidence. His other example was Stone's account of male university students sleeping together without sexual connotations until comparatively late in the eighteenth century. Stone, however, also pointed to fragmentary evidence of a growing concern among upper-class parents about exactly this practice in the eighteenth century; and, more generally, he referred to a distinct rise in the awareness of homosexuality in upper-class society at the time. See Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, London, 1977, pp. 518, 542.

57. Weeks, "Discourse, desire and sexual deviance", op. cit., p. 82.

banishment until 1837.<sup>58</sup> If the penalties for sodomy were not usually carried out to the full extent of the law, as seems to have been the case in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Britain, for example,<sup>59</sup> it might nonetheless be supposed that the existence of these laws had a marked impact upon the self-conceptions of those who were aware of their homosexual interests. This means that a detailed study of the emergence of the modern male homosexual consciousness will require a firm historical perspective. Thus in relation to the shift from the crime of sodomy to the disease of homosexuality, it might be remembered that in 1870 (to take the year of Westphal's new psychiatric definitions), the emerging medical model was not to have its full impact until well into this century; yet in 1846 in England, just twenty-four years earlier, there had been more death sentences handed down for sodomy than for murder.<sup>60</sup> Though these sentences were not implemented, it seems unlikely that the potential penalties for sodomy would have been quickly forgotten.

The real trap of empiricism<sup>61</sup> is not in suggesting continuities in the emergence of the modern category of homosexuality, or in describing the new legal and medical discourses as a reaction to previous developments, but in the assumption that male homosexuality has its 'own' history. As the whole argument about the late nineteenth century makes perfectly clear, it is historical nonsense to posit homosexuality as a discrete phenomenon. Changes in the societal conception and the individual experience of homosexuality will be related to other changes in the social structure of sexuality (pre-eminently shifts in the gender dichotomy), and to changes

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58. Steakley, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Foucault wrote that there was no substantial protest about the practice of burning sodomites until the middle of the eighteenth century (*The History of Sexuality, op. cit.*, p. 101).

59. Harvey (*op. cit.*) argued that prosecutions increased at this time but his figures are in fact surprisingly low; Weeks claimed there was a decline in comparison with the late seventeenth century (*Coming Out, op. cit.*, p. 12).

60. *Ibid.*, p. 247, n. 4 (ch. 1).

61. To put it simply, the assumption that meaning is inherent in the facts of a phenomenon, and independent of a particular theoretical approach to gaining knowledge of it.

in the institutions and practices in which sexual life is experienced. Historians need to apply the general insights gained into the complexities of sexual change in the late nineteenth century to other periods of history. It is particularly important that they should address the question of why homosexuality came to have any kind of social presence in modern Western cultures. Such an investigation need not entail the assumption of an essential homosexuality, or that 'homosexuals' were waiting in the wings of history for the appropriate moment to emerge. The general obstacle in the way of this investigation is the theoretically underdeveloped nature of the history of sexuality generally.

But there is a logic to the way in which historical questions about homosexuality have been posed. The contemporary gay movement began by enquiring, not into the inherent significance of homosexuality, but into the broader questions of sexual power which gave homosexuality its significance. This perspective informed the historical work of Weeks and others, and particularly their interest in the late nineteenth century. There is clearly scope to extend this line of questioning. It suggests that the history of homosexuality should be written in terms of sexual power; such a history would be an indispensable dimension of the history of the gender order.

## (iv)

The issue of power in relation to the history of homosexuality raises the question of Foucault's contribution to this project. The full significance of his work remains far from clear. For one thing, the first in his projected six volume history of sexuality is a short methodological excursus. He has described it as "a prelude in order to explore the keyboard and to somewhat sketch the themes, and to see how people are going to react",<sup>62</sup> and it would be premature to attempt to assess Foucault's

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62. Michel Foucault, "Interview with Lucette Finas", in Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (eds.), Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy, Sydney, 1979, p. 74.

contribution to an understanding of the modern construction of homosexuality on the basis of this volume alone. An assessment would need to wait for the later volumes (assuming they proceed as planned), as well as paying close attention to Foucault's other historical and methodological work and philosophical assumptions.<sup>63</sup> With this in mind, a number of general observations will be made here about The History of Sexuality and one major question will be posed about his conception of power. Some attention will also be paid to the conclusions which others have drawn from his work in terms of political practice.

Throughout his study, Foucault insisted that sexuality is not a stubborn drive which power struggles to control.

It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies. 64

Such strategies could not be reduced to a repression of sex in the service of the reproductive function (as Reich in particular had argued): they were diverse and had no uniform determination. In fact, far from the idea of centuries of repressive silence about sex from which contemporary western societies were beginning to extricate themselves, Foucault argued that from the eighteenth century there had been an explosion of discourses concerned with sexuality. This development was characterised by two tendencies. Heterosexual monogamy came to function as a norm: "The legitimate couple,

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63. At issue, for example, is Foucault's conception of the constitution of the subject in discourse, and his genealogical method which rejects orthodox views of historical causation. For a useful, sympathetic exposition of his work as a whole, see Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault, The Will to Truth, London and New York, 1980.

64. Foucault, The History of Sexuality, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion";<sup>65</sup> and there were a proliferation of discourses largely concerned with extra-familial sexuality. He described four great strategies which "formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex".<sup>66</sup> These were a hysterization of women's bodies, a pedagogisation of children's sex, a socialisation of procreative behaviour, and a psychiatrisation of perverse pleasure. This new preoccupation with sex therefore produced four modern figures: the hysterical woman (the negative image of the Mother), the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult.<sup>67</sup> The woman, child and pervert were pre-eminently the objects of the nineteenth century medical discourses and later of psychoanalysis. The procreative couple too was brought within the reach of medicine (as in the concern with eugenics, for example), but it also represented a fundamental shift in the strategies of power.

From the eighteenth century, "the deployment of sexuality" had been superimposed upon "the deployment of alliance".<sup>68</sup> Of the latter, Foucault wrote:

For a society in which the systems of alliance, the political form of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the value of descent lines were predominant; for a society in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values.<sup>69</sup>

The change had been from this "symbolics of blood" to an "analytics of sexuality".<sup>70</sup>

We, on the other hand, are in a society of 'sex', or rather a society 'with a sexuality': the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used. Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and to sexuality ...<sup>71</sup>

65. Ibid., p. 38.

67. Ibid., pp. 104-105.

69. Ibid., p. 147.

71. Ibid., p. 147.

66. Ibid., p. 103.

68. Ibid., p. 106.

70. Ibid., p. 148.

Thus he referred to 'bio-power', to new economic and political practices with the problem of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing and migration. These practices were linked to the development of capitalism; but it was not merely the old question of the kind of ascetic morality characteristic of capitalist societies: "... this was nothing less than the entry of life into history, that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques".<sup>72</sup>

'Bio-politics' forms the most novel and interesting theme in The History of Sexuality, and these brief comments by no means summarise all of what Foucault has to say about it.<sup>73</sup> He observed, for example, that the two regimes of power represented by the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality have sometimes overlapped. Thus the modern form of racism, as administered by the state, revealed a combination of political practices organised around settlement, the family, marriage, education and so on, and a justification of these in terms of the purity of the blood of a superior race.

Nazism was doubtless the most cunning and the most naive (and the former because of the latter) combination of the fantasies of blood and the paroxysms of a disciplinary power. A eugenic ordering of society, with all that implied in the way of extension and intensification of micro-powers, in the guise of an unrestricted state control (étatisation), was accompanied by the oneiric exaltation of a superior blood; the latter implied both the systematic genocide of others and the risk of exposing oneself to a total sacrifice. 74

It is interesting to speculate about what light this observation throws on the unrivalled obsession with male homosexuality during the Third Reich. Foucault argued that the pervert was the object of a medical discourse

72. Ibid., pp. 141-42.

73. An interesting discussion of this theme is included in a review article by Athar Hussain, "Foucault's History of Sexuality", m/f, Nos. 5 & 6 (1981), pp. 169-91.

74. Foucault, op. cit., pp. 149-50.

concerned both to make the genesis of the 'instinct's' attachment intelligible (thus the notion of inversion) and to define this as pathological in terms of the biological function of sex.<sup>75</sup> In these terms, the pervert was simultaneously produced and disqualified. It might be imagined, then, that the disqualification of the pervert would be amplified when this regime of power is combined with the older one in which blood has a central symbolic significance. For one of the implications of Foucault's argument is that only with a weakening of the deployment of alliance, and hence with a diminution of the importance of family ancestry and heirs, could the homosexual exist as a 'species'. The Nazi attempt to exterminate homosexuals may perhaps be understood in terms of the strengthening of aspects of the deployment of alliance, a strategy of power in which a rigid social hierarchy and the importance of the family were underpinned by the exaltation of a superior race.<sup>76</sup>

Foucault's thesis about 'bio-politics' focuses not only on this macro level of sex as a means of access to the life of the species, but also on a micro one of sex as a means of access to the life of the body. It is here that his formulation of power in relation to sex seems far too generalised. First a word on his approach to psychoanalysis, which he saw as the pre-eminent technique of the micro level of power.

... in the nineteenth century sexuality was sought out in the smallest details of individual existences; it was tracked down in behaviour, pursued in dreams; it was suspected of underlying the least follies, it was traced back to the earliest years of childhood; it became the stamp of individuality ...<sup>77</sup>

Psychoanalysis, then, was firmly within this tradition. Indeed, it was not merely the culmination of the nineteenth century urge to seek the truth

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75. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

76. However, also central to the sexual politics of the Nazis was the construction of gender relations under that regime. See a further comment below, p. 307. As will now be seen, Foucault has very little to say about 'power' in relation to gender.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 146.



in sex but was a secularised form of the longstanding Christian ritual of confession. Polemically, this archeology is intended to diminish the claims of psychoanalysis to originality and to being a scientific discovery; and theoretically, Foucault would appear to be seriously critical of Freud (and of Lacan). Though his genealogical method does not suggest he has any interest in making a critique as such of psychoanalysis, it is notable that his criticism largely takes the form of ironical asides.<sup>78</sup> And this evasiveness seems to be related to his even more striking silence on questions of gender. For the psychoanalytic account of the child's sexual development is centrally concerned with the issue of the psychical differentiation of the sexes, whatever conclusions might be drawn about its success in this enterprise. Foucault, however, saw psychoanalysis as essentially reactionary: it endeavoured "to ground sexuality in the law - the law of alliance, tabooed consanguinity, and the Sovereign-Father, in short, to surround desire with all the trappings of the old order of power".<sup>79</sup> Whatever is made of this view, it is clear that Foucault fails to provide an alternative formulation of questions of gender.

Such questions do surface in his argument. They are evident, for example, in the four 'figures' produced by the new strategies of power which evolved from the eighteenth century. The 'perverse adult' was of course the homosexual man. The homosexual woman has never been the object of medical or other discourses to any comparable degree. This asymmetry should be recognised as central to any explanation of the modern construction of male and female homosexuality.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the medical categorisation of male homosexuality was very much in terms of gender: in Foucault's words,

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78. See Hussain, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-88.

79. Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

80. As Weeks has repeatedly emphasised, "what is needed is not so much a monist explanation for the emergence of a 'homosexual identity' as a differential social history of male homosexuality and lesbianism" ("Discourse, desire and sexual deviance", *op. cit.*, p. 106).

it "appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul".<sup>81</sup> This development can only be understood if 'power' is related to changes within gender relations.

Similarly, the 'masturbating child', whose precocity was thought to "result in sterility, impotence, frigidity, the inability to experience pleasure, or the deadening of the senses",<sup>82</sup> was overwhelmingly the boy rather than the girl. Foucault's account does not deny this but takes it for granted: he referred to the concern with "the sexuality of children", with "adolescents in general", and with "the schoolboy and his sex", without raising the question of why this concern was differentiated by gender.<sup>83</sup> He was, however, careful to point out that the object of this crusade against masturbation was not the proletarian boy but the bourgeois one.<sup>84</sup>

The categorisation of 'the hysterical woman' was also class specific. In fact, the 'idle' woman of the bourgeois and aristocratic family was one of the first figures to be 'sexualised'.<sup>85</sup> But why was this so pre-eminently a feminine categorisation? Freud at least made something of the point that men too could be hysterics, even though he put the question aside as another expression of constitutional bisexuality. Foucault did, however, suggest the complexities of gender definitions in the conception of the hysterical woman. In this discourse, 'sex' was variously defined,

... as that which belongs in common to men and women; as that which belongs, par excellence, to men, and hence is lacking in women; but at the same time, as that which by itself constitutes woman's body, ordering it wholly in terms of the functions of reproduction and keeping it in constant agitation through the effects of that very function. <sup>86</sup>

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81. Foucault, op. cit., p. 43.

82. Ibid., p. 153.

84. Ibid., p. 121.

86. Ibid., p. 153.

83. Ibid., p. 28.

85. Ibid., pp. 120-21.

Given the importance of the body in this categorising process, it should be asked whether the strategies of power constitute women's and men's bodies differently. If this is the case, it would seem to be quite within the scope of Foucault's argument to say something about how the differentiated constitution of 'bodies' in the modern regime of power has changed from that which occurred under the deployment of alliance, where family lineage and heirs had a central importance.<sup>87</sup>

One reason why questions of gender are obscured in this study is that in eschewing a 'history of mentalities' for a 'history of bodies',<sup>88</sup> individual responses to the strategies of power are rendered peculiarly passive. This is particularly evident in the perspective with which Foucault viewed the legitimate couple. From the eighteenth century, heterosexual monogamy came "to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter".<sup>89</sup> As it stands, the legitimate couple is something of a conceptual black hole. Foucault paid no attention, for example, to the discourses around the ideal of voluntary motherhood in the nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup> The expression of this demand, among significant numbers of women in Britain and the United States particularly, signals a dramatic shift in gender relations and should be understood as a contestation of the predominant definition of the 'nature' of women. It was a development which was only subsequently aided by the official sanction of artificial means of birth control and which has led to the present degree of separation of sex from reproduction. The complexity and significance of this change is not captured by Foucault's conception of the strategy of power represented by the socialisation of procreative

87. Foucault wrote that "the purpose of the present study is in fact to show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body" (*ibid.*, p. 151). However, when asked in an interview how his study would develop the question of women, particularly in terms of the 'hystericisation' of their bodies, Foucault was evasive, saying that his ideas were hesitant and unfixed. See Foucault, "Interview with Lucette Finas", *op. cit.*, p. 74.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

90. See, for example, J.A. Banks and O. Banks, Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England, Liverpool, 1964; and Linda Gordon,

behaviour. The emergence of 'bio-politics' on the macro level is clearly relevant to the idea of voluntary motherhood, but this argument is couched in such general terms that it overlooks the forms of resistance to gender categorisations which were involved.

Foucault did observe the rise of a 'reverse' discourse in relation to homosexuality: it "began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories from which it was medically disqualified".<sup>91</sup> In other words, many early homosexual emancipationists accepted the definition of homosexuality as sexual inversion, and argued that because it was a congenital condition it should be decriminalised. In an interview, Foucault remarked that the contemporary sexual liberation movements should be understood as making the apparatus of sexuality "function to the limit; but, at the same time, they are in motion relative to it, disengaging themselves and surmounting it".<sup>92</sup> Yet this comment sits uneasily with Foucault's emphasis upon the complicity of apparently contradictory discourses. Though this argument certainly deserves attention, it underlines the minimal space allowed to human agency in his historical approach; and it raises the question of the significance of any social change short of such epoch marking shifts as that represented by the eighteenth century.

The same vagueness about the possibility of the liberation movements 'surmounting' the apparatus of sexuality characterises Foucault's hints of what might eventually be a substitute for the present 'analytics of sexuality':

... one day, perhaps, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the

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Woman's Body, Woman's Right, A Social History of Birth Control in America, Harmondsworth, 1977.

91. Foucault, op. cit., p. 101.

92. Michel Foucault, "Power and Sex: An Interview with Michael Foucault", Telos, No. 32 (Summer 1977), p. 155.

ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex ... 93

This is an extremely difficult proposition to translate into political practice. Weeks, for example, wrote that the gay movement should not only struggle to validate the rights of homosexuals, but should challenge,

... all the rigid categorisations of sexuality, categorisations which exist not to delineate scientifically one type of person from another but which act to control people's behaviour in very rigid ways.

But more than this, what the challenge to sexual categorisation must also involve is a challenge to the very ideology of 'sexuality', that artificial socially constructed unification of the variety of pleasures of the body, not just genital, but covering the whole sensuous possibility of the human animal. 94

Others have pointed to some dangerous implications in the political practices of the gay movement. Plummer, partly drawing on Foucault though more explicitly on the interactionist perspective, warned that gay radicals have begun to replace the former 'experts' in the regulation of 'homosexuality'. From within their ghetto, homosexuals insisted upon defining themselves as a specific type of person just as much as the traditional medical classifications have done.<sup>95</sup> Watney argued that the early gay movement particularly had made the mistake of thinking it could "'liberate' a mechanism, a way of thinking ourselves, which forces us to abstract and favour one aspect of our social make-up above all others".<sup>96</sup> The real origin of oppression was in the whole theory of 'sexuality' and its ideologies. Finally, and most extraordinarily, Minson cautioned gay liberationists about the political tactic of coming out; he wished to query

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93. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *op. cit.*, p. 159. Similarly, see Foucault's description of the sexual interaction between the hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin, and her school friends, before her 'case' was brought to the notice of the medical profession (Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, New York, 1980 (1978), pp. xiii, xv).

94. Jeffrey Weeks, "Capitalism and the Organisation of Sex", in *Gay Left Collective* (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

95. Plummer, "Homosexual categories", *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

96. Simon Watney, "The Ideology of GLF", in *Gay Left Collective* (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

"the whole conceptualisation of homosexuality as an issue of personality and person identity which can simply be asserted".<sup>97</sup> 'Coming out' ran the danger of being another obligatory ritual of confession in Foucault's genealogy. The problem, and paradox, was: "How to insist upon the public pertinence of the sexual (or some particular facet), whilst simultaneously undermining its overarching, obsessive 'personal' importance?"<sup>98</sup> Such a 'paradox' very strongly suggests that the wrong question has been posed in the first place.

It may certainly be concluded that there is no ready political practice to be drawn from Foucault. This does not, in itself, amount to a theoretical criticism of his argument. Yet its application to gay politics reveals a very abstract, de-gendered conception of power, and something akin to functionalism in the claims that apparently no political stance can escape being contained by the ruses of power. These conclusions should re-direct attention to a closer examination of Foucault's conception of power. If he has replaced the 'hidden hand' which is the mark of functionalist arguments with a multiplicity of hands, he may well indicate very effectively the need to reject solely coercive models of power, though without finally providing an adequate reformulation himself.

(v)

Plummer's observation of the ways in which some homosexuals now rigidly classify themselves as a discrete group appears, on the face of it, to have much in common with Foucault's argument. Though the latter would find this development predictable, whereas Plummer seems to be surprised, both conclude that it is a form of collusion with wider processes of containment. But it is worth considering this convergence of the perspectives offered by

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97. Jeff Minson, "The Assertion of Homosexuality", m/f, Nos. 5 & 6 (1981), p. 19.

98. Ibid., p. 37.

Plummer's interactionism and by Foucault a little more closely. It is true that both share an anti-essentialism: as Weeks said, they "reject sex as an autonomous realm, a natural force with specific effects, a rebellious energy which the 'social' controls".<sup>99</sup> Instead, they argue that sexuality is constructed in particular social contexts. It is also clear that the two approaches make this point in markedly different ways. For Plummer, it is a matter of the individual negotiation of sexual meanings, the outcome of this being determined by a host of variable factors which influence the individual's choices. For Foucault, while power provokes resistance, it is the broad strategies of power centering on sex which are more important than the individual negotiation of sexual meanings.

However, they are not merely making the same point by different means. There is also the coincidence that they achieve their anti-essentialism at the expense of an adequate psychological dimension to their arguments. The ways in which the two approaches recognise social determinants do not provide a means for investigating the psychological production of particular sexual modes; for different reasons, both are very wary of any suggestion of an historically based depth-psychology. Foucault explicitly seeks to write a history of sexuality which is not one of 'mentalities'; and while interactionism draws upon a social psychological framework, its basic distinction between primary and secondary deviance assumes rather than explains the importance of psychological dynamics. Simply stated, the problem is why some individuals come to understand themselves as 'being' homosexual and others do not, a fact which is clearly independent of their sexual behaviour. This lack of an historically based approach to psychological processes underlies Plummer's surprise at the way in which contemporary homosexuals are apparently 'policing' the category themselves.

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99. Weeks, "Desire, discourse and sexual deviance", *op. cit.*, p. 91.

As many social theorists have observed, the task of developing such a psychological account confronts some major difficulties. But its absence also leads to difficulties. One reason why Weeks' emphasis upon the late nineteenth century is trying to explain too much is that it is taking the place of an historical depth-psychology. In Coming Out, he used Plummer's four-cell model to suggest that there was a fine line between homosexual experiences in the form of casual encounters, deeply emotional relationships, institutionalised sexual relationships (each of which need not affect the individual's identity), and homosexuality as a way of life.<sup>100</sup> Whereas the former kinds of homosexual experience were relatively fluid and incurred labelling only as specific acts (if at all), the emergence of homosexuality as a way of life was more structured for it meant the labelling of a state of mind. Weeks explained this change by positing the new medical and legal definitions as labelling processes which, from a broad historical perspective, had a profound psychological impact. In these terms, the change seems to be comparable to that described by the interactionists' distinction between primary and secondary deviance.

There is no doubt that the new medical and legal definitions of the late nineteenth century had marked psychological consequences for those individuals who even suspected that the definitions might be applicable to themselves. Nor is there any doubt that all of this resulted in a much sharper conception of the homosexual as a specific type of person. But these claims do not replace the need to enquire into the determinant historical conditions under which a homosexual identity is psychologically constructed. Whatever the difficulties in pursuing this question, it remains a valid one and cannot simply be replaced by an account which lacks a psychological dimension, or which obscures it, as happens in the distinction between primary and

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100. Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit., pp. 33-35.



secondary deviance. There is more than a fine line between a psychologically grounded homosexual identity and other forms of homosexual experience. The former has its origins within a particular form of gender relations.

Gender is a recurring and elusive theme in the work of Weeks and Plummer, as it is in the early gay movement's literature. There is a need to achieve a much firmer orientation towards the whole question of gender in pursuing a social theory of homosexuality. This does not in itself provide any solutions to the various questions defined by the sociological and historical work to date; but it is possible to formulate a set of questions around gender relations which provide a sharper focus for this work.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: AN APPROACH TO THE  
SOCIAL THEORY OF MALE HOMOSEXUALITY IN TERMS OF GENDER

Ten years or so after the height of gay liberation fervour, there has been little sustained reflection upon the ideas of the early movement.<sup>1</sup> Among the small amount that has appeared, Watney's recent short piece of vigorous criticism of the ideology of the London GLF is tinged with embarrassment. Its insights are at the expense of a superciliousness which diminishes the significance of the GLF.<sup>2</sup> This kind of approach should be a warning signal to theorists concerned with the social construction of homosexuality. The early gay movement is undoubtedly a landmark in the short history of homosexual activism since the late nineteenth century, and an explanation of the rise of the contemporary movement should inform all theoretical work on the changing social position of homosexual people. A necessary first step towards such an explanation is to take the ideology and practices of the gay liberation fronts seriously.

Questions of gender were prominent in their conception of politics. An early gay liberation poster wittily read:

It's the man in the woman in the man  
in me,  
that loves  
the woman in the man in the woman  
in you,  
Christ - it's getting crowded,  
There's room for you in the Gay Liberation Front. 3

A clever dash past questions of gender - but behind these words, and the confidence with which they were written, lay a mass of theoretical and practical problems for the movement. Gay liberationists have not been very successful in dealing with these problems theoretically. However, especially in the first phase of the movement, they managed to politicise questions of gender in every day life to a significant degree. Watney,

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1. The best, now four years old, are the relevant chapters in Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit.
  2. Watney, op. cit.
  3. Cited by Mike Brake, "I May Be a Queer, But At Least I am a Man: Male hegemony and ascribed versus achieved gender", in Diana Leonard Barker and Sheila Allen (eds.), Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change, London, 1976, p. 193.

despite his impatience with the thinking of the GLF, selected the following incident from a consciousness-raising group as an illustration of the "altogether new and exciting idea of politics" generated by the movement.

Someone had intervened, saying that the group was no more than a 'knitting circle'. At once a keen argument followed. Wasn't this a typical male sexist remark? Didn't the metaphor suggest that women are innately different to men? Didn't it reinforce a stereotype of women? And finally - what was so wrong about being members of a knitting circle, talking quietly while being involved in useful (if unpaid?) work? 4

Why did this kind of argument concern gay men in the first place? Certainly feminism had a major impact: it provided a sharp focus upon sexism and a vocabulary with which to pursue particular issues. But the concern among gay men with sexism, and with questions of gender in a broader sense, was not merely a response to feminism, or to the presence of lesbian feminists within gay liberation groups. They were also responding to tensions within their understanding of themselves as men in a society characterised by pervasive gender distinctions.

Somewhat later, a Gay Left editorial took up the question.

Gay men are socialised from birth as men. The conflicts and guilt in many of our lives stem from the fact that our homo-sexuality is in conflict with our gender assumptions. Our learnt 'maleness' is carried over into our social behaviour with women as well as our sexual with other men. The problems raised by this are whether we maintain the basic characteristics of heterosexual maleness or recognise that the contradictions caused by our sexuality mean that our masculine conditioning is fundamentally questioned and changed. 5

The implication here was that homosexual men experience oppression in terms of a tension between their masculinity and their sexuality. Yet there is a need to understand the relationship between gender and sexual orientation

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4. Watney, op. cit., p. 74.

5. Gay Left Collective, "Love, Sex and Maleness", Gay Left, No. 4 (Summer 1977), p. 4.

more precisely: in what sense is a homosexual man's maleness 'heterosexual'? The editorial implicitly underlined this question because it also maintained that learning to be masculine is linked with the process of sexualisation, the ways in which "an individual comes to learn about sex and sexuality": "But the linkage is not automatic; otherwise there could be no such thing as a homosexual."<sup>6</sup> This argument expressed the same dilemma which ran through earlier attempts to tackle the question: homosexual men were conventionally masculine in some ways, but on another level, since masculinity was tied to heterosexuality, their masculinity was somehow different. The characteristic voluntarism of the early movement, in terms of a conscious rejection of masculine traits, was also present in this discussion.

Two years later, the journal rejected this voluntarism. A statement containing a variety of views from members of the collective concerning their masculine self-images read in part:

The early Gay Movement held that ALL versions and significations of gender are basically oppressive and therefore sexist. Gay people were supposed to somehow neutralize their appearance and de-sex themselves. ...

The felt need in our society for firm gender roles and the clearly defined power relations which they represent confronts us with the major problems of gay identity. For gay men these focus on the relations between our gayness and our masculinity:

"The image I have grown to cultivate is one of an ambiguous masculinity, an almost ironic butchness: Levis, Leather, jacket, boots, all give the appearance of an active masculinity that I don't feel I possess." <sup>7</sup>

Such a solution to the tensions in the masculinity of homosexual men would never have been countenanced in the first phase of the movement. But then, times have changed: the recent, widespread adoption of various masculine images within sections of the subculture is a striking development. The collective defended this development but did not attempt to explain it.

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6. Ibid., p. 2.

7. Gay Left Collective, "Self and Self-Image", Gay Left, No. 9 (1979), p. 4 (the quote is italicised in the original).

Elsewhere, the 'clone' debate has been marked by a high degree of moralism and this is another index of the small amount of theoretical headway which has been made by the movement in constructing a political perspective on gender.<sup>8</sup> Though the debate also suggests that the new masculinity is not a solution for all homosexual men.

It is important to keep in mind various features of the political context which have shaped the gay liberationist critique of gender. In the first phase of the movement, activists could declare: "Every straight man is a target for gay liberation".<sup>9</sup> This seemed obvious in terms of the gay liberationist ideal of the 'de-masculinised' male and in view of the manifest sexism of heterosexual men. In reality, however, few heterosexual men came within the sights of gay liberation. Those who allowed themselves to be a 'target' of anti-sexist politics were overwhelmingly men who were influenced by the feminist movement. And heterosexual men have publicly supported various feminist issues far more readily than they have gay liberationist ones. This is not explained simply by the fact that they were most likely to be affected by their personal relationships with feminists, nor by the relatively greater strength of the feminist over the gay movement. It also reflects something about the connection between male heterosexuality and masculinity.

The distance, then, between gay activists and heterosexual men has contributed to the movement's lack of progress in clarifying questions of gender. And the reverse also seems true. For the same distance is apparent in the small amount of literature produced by those groups of heterosexual men who have

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8. This moralism, in a relatively muted form, colours David Fernbach's remarks in *The Spiral Path, A Gay Contribution to Human Survival*, London, 1981, pp. 101-02. This book did not appear in time to be considered by the present discussion. It is notable for being the most ambitious gay liberationist attempt to employ a theoretical approach to questions of gender. It will be evident, however, that the suggestions made below regarding an approach to gender differ in some important respects.

9. Allen Young, "Out of the Closets, Into the Streets", in Jay and Young, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

tried to construct a political stance in terms of their masculinity. Tolson's The Limits of Masculinity remains the foremost statement from "Men Against Sexism" groups, and it has practically nothing to say about homosexuality. As he merely noted in passing, it was an embarrassment to such groups to be associated with gay liberation.<sup>10</sup>

The barrier between homosexual and heterosexual men reinforced the gay movement's reliance upon feminism for political inspiration. Yet the feminist concern to explore the origins and effects of the oppression of women has not, understandably, directed much attention to the details of men's sexuality, or to exactly how men come to achieve their position of power. Moreover, a range of feminist responses have briefly, but explicitly, denied that the relationship between masculinity and male homosexuality is in any way problematic.<sup>11</sup>

Thus with the decline of the gay movement's initial confidence in bringing about radical social change, there has been little impetus to refine its critique of gender. Activists have reconciled themselves to the fact that the eradication of masculine traits cannot be achieved by an act of will; and some have accepted the new masculine identifications promoted by the subculture as the basis of a greater sexual confidence and openness among homosexual men. But these conclusions are largely based on pragmatism. The reasons for the earlier belief within the movement in the possibility of transcending the gender dichotomy, and the more general question of the position of homosexual men in terms of gender, remain theoretically obscure.

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10. Andrew Tolson, The Limits of Masculinity, London, 1977, p. 143.

11. For example, Phyllis Chesler described male homosexuality as an expression of "misogyny, and the colonization of certain female and/or 'feminine' functions. Male homosexuals, like male heterosexuals (and like heterosexual women), prefer men to women. It is as simple as that" (Women and Madness, New York, 1972, pp. 189-90); Adrienne Rich claimed that the different experiences of lesbians and homosexual men lay in the instance of a lesbian having to pretend "to be not merely heterosexual but a heterosexual woman, in terms of dressing and playing the feminine, deferential role required of 'real' women" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1980), p. 642); and Michèle Barrett

It is important to recognise the fact that the study of masculinity is seriously underdeveloped. Masculinity is, of course, accepted as the norm in a wide range of contexts; but precisely because of this, the assumption that masculinity is a monolithic psychological structure and set of social practices has rarely been seriously questioned. This assumption must be given careful scrutiny if the gay liberationist insight that the oppression of homosexual men is ultimately a product of the subordination of women to men is to be substantiated. It is necessary to replace the monolithic conception of masculinity with one which views it historically, and hence as the variable product of gender relations in a particular social context. In doing this, it should be possible to isolate the contingent elements in the construction of masculinity in the lives of individual men. In what follows, some suggestions will be made about how a social theory of male homosexuality can be developed in these terms.

## (i)

To begin to theorise masculinity, it is essential to make a distinction between its coherent ideological form, what may be termed hegemonic masculinity, and the ways in which this form is lived by men in concrete situations. The central theoretical task is to define the relationship between the two. Here, it is possible only to suggest the dimensions of this task.

The distinction between hegemonic and lived masculinity serves to emphasise two aspects of gender relations. First, the superordinate position in general of men over women, though variously defined at different times and in different societies, is enduring and deeply embedded. At the level of

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argued: "A consideration of homosexuality throws doubt on the notion that sexual behaviour is closely linked to gender identity" (*op. cit.*, p. 64). Her main point referred to the finding of Bell and Weinberg that homosexual couples do not adhere to rigid sex-roles.



'common sense' knowledge of social relations, all individuals have some awareness of the differentiation of power between men and women. However, and this is the second point, this awareness has a variety of meanings in different social contexts. For men do not achieve their position of dominance automatically or easily: masculinity is constructed through a range of experiences and practices from infancy to adulthood, and this process reveals tensions and contradictions.

These tensions and contradictions are inherent in the translation of the hegemonic ideal into its lived forms, and they arise because gender relations do not have an independent social existence. Instead, there is a complex articulation between these relations and other aspects of social life. To note two general instances (to which some further consideration will be given shortly), the experience of 'being' a man, and the obstacles in the way of achieving the hegemonic ideal, are differentiated by age and class. Thus the attainment of masculinity has to be negotiated, and this process frequently provokes resistance. The result is a considerable variety in the distance between the lives of both individuals and specific groups of men and hegemonic masculinity.

The radical feminist claim that all men oppress all women is often either accepted or rejected unproblematically. In fact, it should be understood as a statement about hegemonic gender relations. As such, it is an essential dimension to any theorisation of masculinity, and without it, efforts to conceptualise homosexual men in terms of a masculine gender identity become either abstract or banal. At the same time, on the level of lived gender relations, all men do not oppress all women, and among those who do, they do not do so equally. All men experience their masculinity in relation to a pervasive ideology of masculine dominance, but their ability and willingness to draw upon this ideology is variable.

It is necessary to apply these general remarks to male homosexuality. The first question to consider is the psychodynamic origins of a homosexual

orientation. Freud provides a powerful, though generalised, argument that the gender dichotomy is the axis of the construction of homosexuality. In these terms, both sexual orientations are untidy compromises in the face of the tensions which mark the boy's achievement of an elementary sense of masculinity. The boy's sense of gender is the variable product of the identifications which he makes in the context of pressure to recognise the opposition between the sexes, an opposition which is socially grounded in their anatomical distinction. The tensions in this process reflect the contradictions which characterise the gender dichotomy as it is embodied in the heterosexual family.

While the mother-son bond promotes the boy's incipient sense of gender, which accompanies his earliest knowledge that he is different from her, this bond must be broken if he is to consolidate his masculinity via an identification with his father. The boy can only gain a fuller sense of the social significance attached to the fact of his biological sex by downgrading the importance of his mother. This transition is tortuous and it has a variety of possible outcomes.

The original father-son bond is also important in Freud's account, although its full significance remains implicit. This bond is likely to be less intense than the other in a culture where women exclusively care for children, but the father, mother and the boy each have general motives for establishing it. The tensions here are potentially more acute than in the boy's relationship with his mother. For if the boy persists with an erotic attachment to his father after he has recognised the opposition between the sexes, it entails his acceptance that he too is inferior to his father.

Freud presents a complex picture of the oedipal tensions facing the boy. It does not suggest that heterosexual masculinity and homosexual masculinity are simple, predictable outcomes of this conflict: both are compromises,

both have a variety of forms and both typically contain their own instability. The basis of heterosexual masculinity lies in the boy's acknowledgement of his father's castration threat and his acceptance of its reality. He therefore recognises the opposition between the sexes, and this recognition is psychically integrated by his identification with his father. The result is a sense of himself as opposite to his mother, and a continuing (though suspended) sexual connection with her.

Freud's account implies a patriarchal ideal in terms of moderation and balance. The boy should identify with his father, but the latter's castration threat should not be extreme in terms of resentment of the boy's attachment to his mother. The boy should give up his mother, but not downgrade her excessively (which runs the risk of homosexuality). The boy should be confident in his identification and externalise his oedipal aggressiveness, but here again, Freud was critical of the level of aggression which typified the psychic lives of men. With regard to this ideal, he described the erotic-obsessional-narcissistic type, which in fact "would no longer be a type at all: it would be an absolute norm, the ideal harmony".<sup>12</sup> This, however, is a lot to ask, as Freud was well aware.

In reality, there are a variety of basic, psychological tensions in heterosexual masculinity revolving around the ways in which men understand themselves as opposite to women but at the same time wish to make sexual and emotional connection with them. Thus the universal tendency of men to debase their sexual object is an obstacle to the unification of the affectionate and sensual 'currents', and it vitiates their desire to recover the mother-son bond. This desire can take the form of passive attitudes towards women, but their repudiation of femininity emphatically denies the expression of passive attitudes towards other men.

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12. Freud, "Libidinal Types", op. cit., p.219.

In homosexual masculinity, the elements of opposition to and connection with women are not held together. Here, the boy acknowledges the father's castration threat, but he may adopt a contradictory attitude towards its reality, or accept that he himself is castrated, or he may energetically reject the threat so that its reality applies only to women. Freud's account suggests that the ways in which this leads to a recognition of the opposition between the sexes can be either more muted or more exaggerated than in heterosexual masculinity. Thus there may be a connection with the mother in terms of identification so that there is not the sense of opposition which marks heterosexual masculinity. This does not, however, exclude the possible deprecation of women as being castrated in the same way as the boy may resent his own inferiority in relation to the father. Alternatively, if the boy confines the reality of castration to women, this means a basic negation of them as erotic objects, a sense of opposition and no connection in terms of identification.

If the homosexual does not choose a sexual object which he regards as being castrated, this would suggest that there is not the same tendency to debasement as in heterosexual masculinity (though there is clearly room to differentiate sexual objects in terms of being 'masculine' and 'feminine'). There are, however, still motives for the homosexual to resist the expression of passive attitudes towards other men arising from the exaggerated repudiation of femininity which accompanies the 'masculine' oedipal resolution. The additional tensions which mark homosexual masculinity would seem to lie with the father: the oedipal resolutions involved express varying degrees of ambivalence to the castration threat and they point to the father as a continuing figure of fear or resentment.

The schematic character of Freud's account is immediately evident. It clearly needs to be filled out with detailed material from individual analyses. It is also generalised in the sense that it does not make allowance

for the variation in gender relations which characterise families in different social classes. But his account does have some important strengths. Despite his ever present assumptions about 'normal' development, he makes the psychodynamic origins of homosexuality and heterosexuality a relative matter. With certain reformulations, Freud may be read to say that homosexuality and heterosexuality have a common origin in the boy's negotiation of a range of gender issues within the heterosexual family. The boy's orientation towards homosexual or heterosexual masculinity is thus a variable resolution to the tensions within hegemonic gender relations. And since it is evident that these resolutions fall well short of the balanced ideal which Freud posited, it suggests the need for close examination of the continuing negotiation of gender issues in the development of a masculine identity.

This raises the question of the determinacy of the psychoanalytic account of the development of sexual orientation, particularly in view of its traditional heavy emphasis upon the importance of the child's early experiences. Plummer is perfectly correct to argue for a synthesis of the 'orientation' and 'identity construct' models,<sup>13</sup> though this should not, of course, be taken to mean that psychoanalysis explains the construction of a sexual orientation and interactionism then takes over to explain the construction of a sexual identity. The synthesis which is needed should not make a split between the early 'psychological' determinants and later 'social' ones: both sets of determinants are social. And claims regarding the 'final' resolution of psycho-sexual conflicts with the passing of the Oedipus complex should be treated with caution. It may be remembered that for Freud, the Oedipus complex should ideally be 'smashed to pieces', a process which was more than just a repression of the conflict. But his famous dictum that the complex formed the nucleus of the neuroses indicates that, once again, normal psychic development falls well short of this ideal.

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13. Plummer, "Homosexual Categories", op. cit., p. 71.

In this regard, the idea of 'latency' can become a theoretical escape clause: it merely assumes the reasons for a person identifying as homosexual with apparent suddenness or at a relatively late age. Such a person should not be said to have been latently or 'really' homosexual all along. Freud did not use the idea in this way: for him there were psychic conflicts whose appearance and outcome were unpredictable. If there was a resolution, he argued that a particular factor must have been the strongest because it was ultimately able to be determinate. But this was not to say, in retrospect, that that factor embodied the individual's 'real' self: there had been a conflict, and its resolution, even in analysis, was not assured. Freud's insistence upon the impossibility of predicting the outcome of a conflicting set of factors in an individual's psychic life was not an 'excuse' for psychoanalysis. It was an admission of the complexity of psychic life, of the impossibility of ever being able to know all of the relevant details, and it underlay his relative pessimism about the efficacy of analytic practice. Theoretically, he defended his position by the concept of overdetermination.<sup>14</sup>

## (ii)

The resolution of the boy's early psychological conflicts still leaves a considerable amount to be achieved in constructing a masculine identity, and this process continues to be marked by conflict. Freud argued that the boy who identified with his father and gave up his sexual love for his mother was compensated by the knowledge that he would ultimately take his father's place and have a 'mother' of his own. Whatever the precise meaning of this knowledge (for it remains unclear in Freud's account), it is apparent that the boy's claims to adult masculinity are frequently frustrated by his being defined as a child and therefore subject to adult control. The freedom offered by masculine strength and skill is not readily attainable. As

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14. See the discussion by Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, op. cit., pp. 292-93.

Connell has written,

It is no wonder, then, that boys latch on to the social practices that confirm physical masculinity, with considerable fervour; even when, as is particularly true for working-class boys, these attract a good deal of hostile pressure from adults. Teenage peer groups, collectively distancing themselves from the adults who exert these pressures (parents, teachers, police) are in no sense distancing themselves from adulthood (the error in much discussion of 'youth culture'). The points on which the issue of control are fought out - smoking, drinking, driving, fucking, foul language, physical aggression - are an inextricable mixture of claims to adulthood and claims to masculinity. Their barrenness reflects the very limited claims that can be made by people who, because of the age and class structure, have very few resources. 15

This observation suggests the obstacles which stand in the way of the boy's attempts to construct his masculinity in terms of the hegemonic ideal, and the ways in which his efforts to embody that ideal can lead to considerable conflict with those who have power over him.

There is also scope for less dramatic and more covert conflict in a range of masculinising practices. The young boy has to learn how to deal with physical aggression from his peers, he may be involved in youth organisations which explicitly seek to teach masculine skills, and he will certainly need to adopt an attitude towards organised sport. Indeed, the promotion of team sports (and in particular of football) is the most explicit practice whereby one form of masculinity is established as hegemonic within schools. Clearly not all boys accept this definition of masculinity, and among those who do, some achieve their sporting prowess at considerable cost. The boy's ability to adopt an alternative form of masculinity which still affords him some positive recognition (such as academic achievement), is again differentiated by age and class.<sup>16</sup>

Later in life, a man finds his masculinity being confirmed or challenged in his work, in his role as sexual initiator, in marriage and fatherhood, and

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15. R.W. Connell, "Men's Bodies", 1979, p. 9 (unpublished paper).
  16. Sandra Kessler, et. al., "Ockers and Disco-Maniacs", A report on sex, gender and secondary schooling for the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Discussion Paper No. 8, Schools Commission, Canberra, 1981.

sometimes in more specific experiences such as military training and warfare, and in public office. With regard to work, it should be noted that though heavy labour and most trades are seen as distinctively masculine, a large number of men such as office workers receive no immediate confirmation of their masculinity from their work in itself.<sup>17</sup> The movement towards higher levels of automation and computer based industries accentuates this, and also leads to higher levels of unemployment. Thus some men now confront the experience of being unemployed, or having extreme difficulty in getting a promotion or better job, while their wives have entered the workforce; under these circumstances, it would seem that a growing number of working-class men find their traditional position as head of the family being contested by their wives.<sup>18</sup>

These remarks cover a complex range of masculinising practices very briefly. They should be sufficient, however, to question the assumption that the achievement of masculinity is a smooth, straightforward process. Masculinity is not a birthright in the sense of being born into a certain station in life: it has to be constructed. And because hegemonic masculinity sets an impossible standard, the process of construction confronts a variety of obstacles so that resistances arise. The obstacles, and alternative strategies, are differentiated by age and class. At the same time, the rewards of masculinity are obvious enough: a relative freedom based on power over women and younger men. Men do not go through their lives in a state of crisis over their masculinity. They typically achieve a reasonably comfortable compromise with hegemonic masculinity. But there are important moments of crisis, none the less for the fact that they are obscured by the hegemonic ideals of the denial of emotionalism and introspection among men.

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17. Thus, as Connell noted: "It is doubtless no accident ... that the social customs of the male-dominated office heavily stress the femininity of the women workers there (even to the technically farcical inclusion of instruction on grooming, deportment and dress in the training of secretarial workers)" (*op. cit.*, p. 5).

18. Kessler *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 11. This paper notes that before the



There is considerable room to explore the development of a homosexual identity in relation to the standards of hegemonic masculinity. If there is some urgency to the ways in which all men negotiate masculinising practices, it is to be expected that this will be even more acute for homosexual men. It should not, however, be assumed that they adopt a common strategy, or that the evolution of a homosexual identity is essentially feminine.<sup>19</sup> Because the hegemonic ideal is firmly defined as heterosexual, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity are frequently classed as feminine. Thus homosexual men, along with some heterosexual men, do have to negotiate the imputation of femininity; but it should be stressed that this is a matter of negotiation, and not of an imposition of femininity or an expression of an essential femininity.

Some homosexual men have a clear recollection of their 'difference' from a very early age. There is a common pattern of a continuing awareness of the gap between their masculinity and the hegemonic ideal, and a history of resistance to masculinising practices.<sup>20</sup> It is notable that the Bell and Weinberg survey carried out in the San Francisco area in the late sixties and early seventies revealed that a substantial majority of white homosexual men had neither attended a sporting event nor participated in one during the previous year.<sup>21</sup> It also seems very likely that the percentage of homosexual men involved in sporting activities would now be higher,

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second world war in Australia, "only about 5% of married women held jobs; now around 40% do, and the figure is certainly higher where economic need is greatest" (p. 10).

19. Fembach appears to make this assumption (*The Spiral Path*, *op. cit.*).
20. One piece of research revealed that 60% of homosexual men described themselves as "appropriately masculine" in contrast to 97% of heterosexual men. In addition, 30% of homosexual men (this group overlapping to some extent with the first) said that they "avoided competitive situations" in contrast to 6% of heterosexual men. This simple questioning technique is, of course, hardly an adequate way to gauge gender identities, but the differences it reveals are still interesting. See Marcel T. Sagir and Eli Robins, *Male and Female Homosexuality, A Comprehensive Investigation*, Baltimore, 1973, pp. 107, 109-10.
21. Bell and Weinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 410-11. Sixty-nine percent had not attended a sporting event; 62% had not participated in one.

particularly if these activities are defined to include various forms of physical fitness programmes. For the new masculine images adopted by many homosexual men (particularly in cities such as San Francisco) partly express a determined effort to achieve a level of physical competence and skill which in the past have been clearly associated with heterosexual masculinity. In these terms, the 'clone' phenomenon clearly contests the hegemonic definition of male homosexuality as a form of gender inversion. It is an excellent illustration of the general point that masculinity is not a stable, given set of characteristics but is actively constructed in specific contexts of power, and in reference to the hegemonic ideal.<sup>22</sup>

Two further general observations may be made about the heterosexual definition of hegemonic masculinity and its relation to a homosexual identity. Because there is considerable potential for conflict in masculinising practices, and particularly during adolescence when many boys develop a sharp sensitivity to gender issues under the scrutiny of each other and of adults, homosexuality is a possible solution to these conflicts. Presumably for many boys, such a solution has been psychologically excluded in their earlier experiences; but for others, it will not have been. Such a boy, as has been noted, is not usefully seen as 'latently' homosexual; there is no inevitability to his adopting a homosexual identity, nor to even becoming conscious of the possibility. But in the context of resistance to the demands of hegemonic masculinity, there is room for developing a sensitivity to the idea of being homosexual.

Alternatively, a boy may construct an exaggeratedly masculine identity in

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22. With regard to the present homosexual contestation of the traditional feminine stereotype, one investigation of 258 college students found that they disliked a specified homosexual man more than a heterosexual man, regardless of whether the latter was perceived to be feminine; and also, that they liked a feminine homosexual man more than a masculine homosexual man. See Michael D. Storms, "Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Femininity in Men", *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring 1978), pp. 257-63.

order to deny the possibility of homosexual interests. This is not, as the adherents of the repression hypothesis have argued, a simple matter of the negation of homosexuality, so that it finds expression in its 'opposite' - aggressive masculinity. The psychological origins of a male homosexual orientation cannot be reduced to a matter of femininity in men, and the possible consequences of an unsuccessfully repressed homosexual attachment are diverse. But in a culture where a constitutive element in the definition of hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual and, conversely, where non-hegemonic forms are readily classed as feminine, the construction of an aggressive masculinity is an obvious strategy by which to deny any suggestion of homosexuality to both the self and others.<sup>23</sup> Sociologists have frequently noted that this strategy is used by men who do engage in homosexual behaviour (such as hustlers) but who define themselves as heterosexual.

It is surprising that this kind of observation regarding the use of 'accounts' which both emphasise masculinity and contain the potential implications of homosexual behaviour, has not been extended. For this is only an exaggerated example of the general difficulties in constructing a homosexual identity. Patrick White, for example, wrote in his recent autobiography:

I can't remember being much worried by evidence of sexual ambivalence. I indulged my sexual inclinations at an early age. What disturbed me was the scorn of other boys, not for my sexuality, which they accepted and in some cases enjoyed, but for a feminine sensibility which they despised because they mistrusted. 24

Indeed, it might be asked whether a homosexual identity is ever constructed

23. This is upheld by one experiment in which a man who was labelled homosexual was immediately perceived by the group to be significantly less masculine than others in the group; and, interestingly, the man responsible for the labelling was perceived to be more masculine than when he was not responsible for it. See Rodney G. Karr, "Homosexual Labeling and the Male Role", Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Summer 1978), pp. 73-83.
24. Patrick White, Flaws in the Glass, A Self-Portrait, London, 1981, p. 34.

without a conflict in terms of the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity; or whether homosexual behaviour ever sensitises an individual to the possibility of being homosexual so long as the behaviour is able to be reconciled with the hegemonic ideal. While most sociologists are now alert to the fact that a homosexual identity is constructed in a social context which is markedly hostile to homosexuality, few seem able to relate this context to the power exercised within gender relations. Their 'social context' therefore remains a distinctly shrunken one.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, as the notion of homosexuality as gender inversion is becoming outmoded, the idea of 'androgyny' is increasingly popular. But only a peculiarly powerless conception of gender relations could allow researchers to add up the number of 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics to be found in homosexual men and then to give them an androgyny score. The variable gender identities of homosexual men need to be understood in the light of their negotiation of masculinising practices, and in relation to hegemonic masculinity. The latter disappears completely with the notion of androgyny.<sup>26</sup>

It may, however, be asked what the conceptual shift represented in the difference between 'inversion' to 'androgyny' says about hegemonic gender relations. The first describes a biological male who is assumed to be

25. See for example, Thomas S. Weinberg, "On 'Doing' and 'Being' Gay: Sexual Behavior and Homosexual Male Self-Identity", Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1978), pp. 143-56; and Vivienne C. Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model", Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring 1979), pp. 219-35.

26. See for example, Larry Craig Bernard and David J. Epstein, "Androgyny Scores of Matched Homosexual and Heterosexual Males", Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1978), pp. 169-78; Robert E. Hooberman, "Psychological Androgyny, Feminine Gender Identity and Self-Esteem in Homosexual and Heterosexual Males", The Journal of Sex Research, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Nov. 1979), pp. 306-15; and Gary J. McDonald and Robert J. Moore, "Sex-Role Self-Concepts of Homosexual Men and Their Attitudes Toward Both Women and Male Homosexuality", Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Fall 1978), pp. 3-14.

essentially feminine, the second a man with a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. Both bear some relation to how homosexual men actually understand themselves and taken together they suggest the way in which their understanding has changed. 'Inversion' expresses a more rigid definition in terms of the gender dichotomy than does 'androgyny'. The significance of this difference needs to be considered in more detail, for it raises the question of the historical dimension of gender relations.

## (iii)

First, a comment on the historical specificity of the psychoanalytic account of the origin of a homosexual orientation. This problem involves a range of issues, such as the widely debated question of the universality of the Oedipus complex, which are beyond the scope of the present discussion. However, there are grounds for making a general assumption. That is, the emotional structuring of children which takes place within families changes over time, and these changes bear on the psychological construction of a homosexual orientation. Since it is clear that gender relations change historically, the ways in which the negotiation of gender issues may establish a homosexual orientation can not remain constant.

One of the most frequently noted, if only broadly understood, changes in gender relations in modern western societies involves the gradual removal of paid labour from the home with the development of industrial capitalism. This development needs to be differentiated in terms of families in particular social classes, but there is every reason to suppose that the sharper definition of the sexual division of labour which it entailed meant some far-reaching changes in gender relations. Again, it is now firmly recognised that the length and status of childhood is a modern construction. This development too must have had consequences for the child's early sexual development, especially in terms of the assumption of its 'innocence'.

Thus Freud's comment on the phenomenon of 'His Majesty the Baby', and its importance in relation to the parents' narcissism, was not a description of a trans-historical fact of family life.

In principle, it should be possible to relate such changes to the conflict over gender issues which establishes the basis of a homosexual orientation. This is not a question of looking for the historical 'origins' of homosexuality in terms of a specified constellation of gender relations. Rather, it is a matter of considering the historical evidence of males with same-sex preferences in relation to the gender relations of a particular historical period. However, there are obvious difficulties in gaining sufficient evidence to establish this relationship. And even if this evidence was available, it would still leave the question of the kind of sexual identity males with same-sex preferences were able to consolidate in a particular social context. But it is possible to make some headway with the latter question. There is room for an historical investigation of the development of a homosexual identity on a level which does not immediately depend upon an adequate historicisation of Freud's account.

In pre-modern societies, and still in non-western ones, sexual relationships between males seem to be firmly defined by the gender dichotomy. As Weeks has argued, McIntosh's application of the 'homosexual role' to the American Indian institution of the berdache implies "that transvestism is a role which a homosexual man can fall into as if there is a pre-existing homosexual man that can fall into a transvestite role". He suggested that instead, such a male "was actually a woman in terms of that culture. There's no need for a notion of the homosexual; the transvestite was actually the gender he or she was adopting, a cross-dressed gender".<sup>27</sup>

The male berdache, if not actually a woman since his biological sex was

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27. Jeffrey Weeks and Kenneth Plummer interview Mary McIntosh, "Postscript: 'The homosexual role' revisited", in Plummer (ed.), op. cit., p. 47.

still relevant to his status, came very close to it so that, for example, he went through the rituals of giving birth. Thus the hegemonic gender relations among the Mojave Indians seem to have allowed an individual of one sex to adopt the gender of the other with relative ease, but there was no conception of a sexual relationship between individuals of the same gender.

An apparently different arrangement of male sexual relationships is common in New Guinea. Male infants, having spent their foetal life in a woman, are thought to be de-masculinised; this is only rectified when they later have a relationship with an elder kinsman and recover their masculinity through his semen. Here, the point of the relationship is to establish the younger male's heterosexual masculinity and hence to 'reproduce' the gender dichotomy.<sup>28</sup> Again, a more familiar example of the way in which male sexual relationships are defined by gender is found in modern Greece and other Middle Eastern countries. The relationship is understood to be one between an active heterosexual and a passive homosexual.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the very different meanings between these three patterns of sexual relationships in their cultural contexts, each involves a relationship between males where one individual is defined as feminine and the other as masculine. The extremely rigid gender dichotomy of these societies has the effect of constructing inter-gender relationships, regardless of the sex of the individuals, and of proscribing intra-gender relationships. As Rubin remarked of such instances, and they could readily be extended, "the rules of gender division and obligatory heterosexuality are present even in their transformation".<sup>30</sup> The variable forms of what Rubin termed

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28. Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

29. Gay Left Collective, "Spotlight on Greece - An Interview with a member of the Greek Gay Movement AKOE", *Gay Left*, No. 7 (Winter 1978/79), p. 10.

30. Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

the 'sex/gender system' need to be studied, not to search for 'homosexuals' or for a 'homosexual role' with a different content from that of modern western societies, but to examine the ways in which sexual relationships between males are constructed. An important question, then, is how their present construction in the west stands in relation to the rules of gender division and obligatory heterosexuality.

As Marshall has argued, these rules were duplicated in the nineteenth century medical conception of males with same-sex preferences as either gender inverts or perverts. His point was that this dual conception precluded the idea of a homosexual man, for the sexual behaviour of the males in both categories was interpreted as 'heterosexual'. Thus the invert, having 'a feminine soul encased in a male body', sought a masculine object; while the pervert was conventionally masculine except that he chose a youth as a substitute for a woman. Marshall argued that only when the gender identity of being a 'man' was no longer rigidly defined as heterosexual was it possible for a male with same-sex preferences to define himself as a homosexual man. He maintained that this did not occur on a significant scale in Britain until after the second world war when a partial relaxation of gender roles allowed a clear distinction to be made between gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>31</sup>

Marshall's argument usefully directs attention to the importance of changes in gender categorisations in explaining the emergence of the modern homosexual identity. However, the empirical evidence for the qualitatively different homosexual identity after the second world war needs to be much stronger. Whether or not Marshall is correct, his greatest difficulty is in explaining this change. His model of gender is abstract in that it takes no account of the relationship between hegemonic and lived gender

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31. John Marshall, "Pansies, perverts and macho men: changing conceptions of male homosexuality", in Plummer (ed.), op. cit., pp. 133-54.



relations, and in applying it he seems to be forced to exaggerate the recent relaxation in traditional masculinity. Such a modification is evident only in very small social groups (and mainly among the professional intelligentsia over the past decade). Indeed, there would seem to be much stronger evidence of a reinforcement of traditional sexual and familial values immediately after the second world war.<sup>32</sup>

Gender and sexual orientation are not autonomous entities: their relationship changes but there is necessarily a connection between them. While it is essential to trace the emergence of the modern homosexual identity in terms of the changing way in which sexual orientation is defined by hegemonic gender relations, the question of identity cannot be defined discretely. For that identity is the product of oppression, as the gay movement has forcefully argued; and as Plummer, using the interactionist perspective, has demonstrated more systematically. And if issues of gender are central to an understanding of the dynamics of oppression, they are no less so to an understanding of the psychological origins of a homosexual orientation. These two questions must be kept in mind when making any claims about the changing gender identities of homosexual men. If the distinction between gender and sexual orientation was as clear as Marshall believed, it would mean a radical transformation of hegemonic masculinity, and of the social position of homosexual men.

What then is the significance of self-identified homosexual men? On the most general level, it points to a change in hegemonic gender relations. The new identity allows a relationship between two males who understand themselves to be the same gender, and this is precisely what was excluded in the three examples just noted where the rules of gender division and obligatory heterosexuality were unambiguously reproduced. These rules also

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32. See for example, Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, "The Making of the Australian Family", Intervention, No. 12 (April 1979), pp. 63-83.

define the invert/pervert formulation, though less strictly. The 'heterosexual' character of such a relationship is somewhat blurred since the 'feminine' partner is not as institutionalised as in the other examples. And as a scientific notion, the invert/pervert distinction was vulnerable to the criticism made by Freud and others.

No doubt the distinction bore some relation to the way in which men with same-sex preferences in the nineteenth century actually understood themselves. But the exact nature of their understanding is obviously a question for empirical investigation. The idea of inversion was certainly contested. The clearest example of this was in Germany, where there was a sharp split in the homosexual emancipation movement between those who supported Hirschfeld's 'third sex' theory and others such as Brand, Jansen and Friedlander whose 'Community of the Special' exalted the ideals of masculine bisexuality and erotic, rather than sexual, male comradeship. Thus the character of this contestation also reveals the rigidity of gender definitions, and the opposition to homosexuality as gender inversion ultimately had a strong affinity with the sexual politics of the Nazis.<sup>33</sup>

The 'Community of the Special' was attempting to reconcile male homosexuality with the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity. The enormous strains inherent in this attempt lay in the need to exaggerate the gender dichotomy so that men, being completely separate from women, could be united by an erotic bond. Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee, on the other hand, accepted the gap between 'inversion' and hegemonic masculinity. Yet both responses reflected the very strong tension between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity so that the two conceptions of a homosexual identity were firmly subordinated to the hegemonic ideal.

With the emergence of self-identified homosexual men, male homosexuality is

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33. See the discussion by Steakley, op. cit., passim.

no longer so rigidly defined as feminine, and this points to a lesser tension between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity. The new identity reflects a contestation of the gender division. If the division is no longer absolute, sexual relations between males can at least begin to be understood as same-gender relations. It becomes possible to move further away from hegemonic masculinity without accepting a feminine identity. Thus it is not a clear distinction between gender and sexual orientation, but a relatively less clear distinction between 'men' and 'women' which underlies the emergence of self-identified homosexual men.

The new homosexual identity forms a distinct contrast with the invert/pervert distinction, which was, in effect, a duplication of the basic contradiction within hegemonic masculinity in terms of opposition to but connection with women. The 'masculine' pervert was conceived to be opposite to women in the conventional sense and to make a connection via his choice of a 'feminine' youth as a substitute for a woman. By the same logic, the invert was equivalent to a woman and his sexual connection was with his 'opposite', the masculine pervert.

This perspective suggests the need to relate the development of the modern homosexual identity to the changes which have taken place in gender relations. A number of historians have claimed that there was a massive reinforcement of sexual stereotyping in Britain during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: women were perceived to be profoundly different from men.<sup>34</sup> If this claim is borne out by more detailed research, it may be possible to relate this change to the character of the homosexual subculture. Its

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34. For example, Gordon, *op. cit.*, ch. 1; and Margaret George, "From 'Goodwife' to 'Mistress': The Transformation of the Female in Bourgeois Culture", *Science and Society*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 (Summer 1973), pp. 152-77. Both authors cite as a major source, Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the 17th Century*, London, 1919. The same point is made by Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 945. Eli Zaretsky concentrates upon the nineteenth century in Britain as a period of sharpening social differentiation between men and women; see his *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, London, 1976. These arguments are advanced in very broad terms, but there is no doubt that the periods they discuss did see significant changes in gender relations in particular social classes.

high degree of effeminacy was arguably a response to the more rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, not only its style and customs but the very existence of the subculture may have expressed the need of an increasing number of men to form an incipient homosexual identity on the basis of their proscribed sexual interests and in the context of sharper gender expectations.

What is much more certain is that the following century saw significant resistance by large numbers of women to hegemonic gender relations. The feminist movements in Britain, Germany and the United States were the clearest expressions of the shifting relationship between men and women. These were obviously not discrete expressions of a minority interest but instead reflected, and in turn effected, wider changes in the social construction of the gender division. And since it is commonplace to view the contemporary feminist and gay movements as expressing, on a general level, a common resistance to oppression within a patriarchal society, it may be asked how the two were linked in the first wave of sexual liberation.

The nineteenth century femininists contested the hegemonic conception of 'woman'. Their attack upon the double standard of sexual morality and their interest in controlling their own fertility added up to a demand for a revolutionary change to this conception, to the effect that a woman's sexuality was no more part of nature than a man's. In the same period, and especially in Germany, homosexual emancipationists were similarly concerned with the basic question of their gender identity. The hypothesis of a 'third sex', though a natural and not a social conception, was an attempt to bring biological sex and gender identity into a non-oppressive alignment. This argument did not contest the hegemonic conception of 'man', but it still sought to define a social space for non-hegemonic masculinity. It may be asked whether this would have been possible outside of the more general questioning and politicisation of gender relations which was taking place.

If the modern construction of homosexuality is ultimately tied to redefinitions of gender relations, the relationship between the two processes - and between the strategies of the homosexual men and women involved - will reflect the fundamental asymmetry in the hegemonic conception of men and women. The reactionary sexual politics of the 'Community of the Special' in Germany is an obvious instance. On the other hand, as Weeks pointed out, the social purity crusaders and early feminists in Britain viewed homosexuality as an undifferentiated expression of male lust. More might be made of the fact that when feminists attacked male sexual privilege on a number of fronts, the terms of this debate were sharply antithetical to male homosexuality. The feminist effort to bring gender expectations into closer alignment was, of necessity, expressed in an anti-libertarian framework. Only the most advanced feminist opinion before the first world war either questioned motherhood as the supreme destiny of women or gave qualified support to lesbianism or male homosexuality.<sup>35</sup> With a significant amount of attention focussed upon the dangers of male sexual excess, it may be asked to what extent male homosexuality appeared to exemplify that very problem.

The question of the differential development of male homosexual and lesbian identities also needs to be approached in view of the asymmetry of the gender division. On a general level, it would appear that the necessary first task for feminists was to contest the hegemonic conception of the 'natural' woman; and while this led to a redefinition of motherhood in social terms, it rarely led to a questioning of motherhood as such. The redefinition of 'woman' therefore remained a heterosexual conception. The constraints upon the development of the identity of being a homosexual man were different. While the invert/pervert distinction was firmly shaped by

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35. See Weeks, Coming Out, op. cit., ch. 8; and Steakly, op. cit., ch. 2.

hegemonic masculinity and could be understood as 'heterosexual', the distinction was not buttressed by the ideology of the family and marriage (as was the conception of 'woman'), but by a medical ideology of pathology. This at least allowed a social space, however impoverished, in which males with same-sex preferences could begin to understand, and to contest, the meaning of their 'difference'.

Historical work on the construction of the modern homosexual identity needs to have a firm grasp of the changing character of the gender division. A general hypothesis for this work may be that a contestation of gender categorisations has reduced the tension between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity, and that this change underlies the emergence of self-identified homosexual men. This is not a mechanistic development: changes in gender relations do not have an automatic or predictable effect upon the position of male homosexuals. Such changes redefine the constraints upon the negotiation of gender identities; they open up the possibility for new strategies by which to contest the oppression inherent in hegemonic gender relations.

(iv)

It is now more comprehensible that the gay movement's promotion of the positive identity of 'gay' should have entailed an attack upon both the conventional understanding of gender and the characteristic organisation of heterosexual relationships. In adamantly rejecting the medical model of homosexuality which typically defined it as some kind of gender anomaly, gay liberationist politics appropriated the 'space' between homosexual masculinity and the hegemonic ideal far more decisively than had earlier forms of homosexual activism. It may be said that the movement has exploited a situation of reduced tension between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity in order to affirm a homosexual identity which was not to be constituted in terms of masculine expectations, and which was not to employ heterosexual assumptions as the basis for inter-

preting relationships. This aim has achieved considerable success, and it has reached well beyond the boundaries of the movement.

The result has not, of course, fulfilled the early gay liberationist goal of the de-masculinised male. The ideal of transcending gender categorisations had its logic in a belief in the imminence of revolutionary change; it appeared to be realisable in the context of an attack, as Altman put it, on the cultural assumptions regarding 'men' and 'women', 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals'. The extreme difficulty in establishing a general political stance for homosexual men\*in these terms reflects the power of hegemonic gender relations. Some homosexual men have successfully reversed the implications of their effeminacy; but the majority would appear to experience the inferiority attached to homosexuality as so bound up with the imputation of femininity that they have adopted different strategies in affirming their identities.

Though the force of the early gay liberationist attack on the hegemonic sexual categorisations has diminished, it has left a strong legacy in the assertion of a homosexual identity. This assertion necessarily continues to confront gender issues, as the masculine images promoted by the sub-culture illustrates very clearly. The adoption of these masculine styles is a method of negotiating oppression. The novelty in the strategy is the dual assertion of a gay identity and a form of masculinity. If the first is subordinated to the second in an attempt to obscure the differences between homosexual and heterosexual men, the homosexual would seem to be heavily implicated in the hegemonic prescription of defining himself in opposition to women. But the reverse appears to be more typically the case. This form of masculinity operates as such a clear code of sexual identity (and is frequently so theatrical), that it hardly seems to express a primary interest in imitating heterosexual masculinity. Its significance is that the successful assertion of the identity of a homosexual man is a less rigid resolution to the conflicting demands of the hegemonic ideal

than is heterosexual masculinity. Without the same contradictory stance towards women in terms of opposition and connection, there is less at stake in homosexual masculinity.<sup>36</sup> This is what sociologists describe by the notion of 'androgyny'; and it is here that the progressive potential in homosexual masculinity lies for future political practices organised around gender.

As for future theoretical work, if the sociological and historical study of homosexuality is focussed upon the gender division, it should be sensitive to two sets of related problems. One concerns the theorisation of masculinity and patriarchy. The other is the enormously important task of theorising class and gender relations as a joint structure. The necessary starting point for this work is to understand masculinity, not as a patriarchal gift to men by virtue of their sex, but as a variable character structure and set of practices; the power afforded by masculinity has to be achieved, typically in the way of obstacles and conflicts. The most important result of breaking with the monolithic conception of masculinity is that it opens the way to view gender relations historically. At present, the historical character of gender relations is much clearer in relation to women than to men. It is perfectly apparent that women have not merely endured oppression but have actively contested it. And the fact that their oppression continues should not lead to the conclusion that changes in the social position of women are a 'ruse' on the part of patriarchal power. These changes are evidence of the dynamic character of gender relations. And as the social position of women is not static, neither is that of men.

McIntosh has recently emphasised the need "to question what are men and

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36. Thus heterosexual men appear to be far more readily insulted by the imputation of femininity than do homosexual men. The contrast is illustrated by the fact that it is precisely a form of playing with gender meanings which forms a staple of male homosexual humour. Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* (London, 1969) is an excellent example of such humour.



women, and not treat that as unproblematical".<sup>37</sup> To put this another way, a non-essentialist view is necessary not only for the history of homosexuality, but also for the history of masculinity. Indeed, the first implies the second. For a central reason why there is no question of 'homosexuality' having an independent social existence, or having its own history, is that changing conceptions of same-sex relationships are related to changes in gender relations, that is, to changes in the social construction of 'men' and 'women'. From a broad historical perspective, gender relations have variously excluded any conception of 'homosexuals', they have rigidly defined homosexuality in terms of the gender division, and they have allowed males with same-sex preferences to adopt the identity of homosexual men, and to begin to understand their relationships as same-gender relationships. It should be possible to understand the movement involved in this broad change in more detail, and also to differentiate it in terms of class.

The details of this change ought to throw valuable light on the changing social position of men in relation to women, and thus should help to conceptualise masculinity as an historical product. In fact, a more detailed understanding of the construction of the modern homosexual identity may make an important contribution to the as yet unsolved problem of periodising the history of patriarchy. It may be asked whether the changing tension between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity indicates points of transition in the history of patriarchal societies.

The second set of problems to which work on the social theory of male homosexuality should be sensitive concerns the way in which gender relations interact with class relations. This is clearly an enormous task, for it needs to begin with the assumption that Marxism does not have a logical

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37. Weeks and Plummer interview Mary McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

theoretical primacy. Connell has sketched the kind of perspective required:

There is a patriarchal structuring of production, a class structuring of culture; the two are co-ordinate, not complementary. But they are also interwoven. Their dynamics interact, they help stabilize and destabilize each other; and their effects, in any real person's life, are condensed. For instance, there is no 'class situation' that is simply shared by working-class boys and girls: even the capital/labour-power exchange is sexually structured, for girls and boys enter a segregated labour market, and they know it. And that segregation is in part created by the capitalists' knowledge of their employees' practices of marriage and child rearing, the economic dependence of women, the sense of masculinity, and so on. And the sense and practice of masculinity is simultaneously dependent on the existence of an economy that valorizes male labour, in conjunction with a family that valorizes male children, and a sexual culture that valorizes male genitalia, and devalues women while insisting on heterosexual object-choice ... And so on.

The condensations of patriarchy and capitalism in individual lives need not be, often will not be, functional ... At crucial moments they may be destabilizing, if we are to believe the arguments of socialist feminism and the gay left. The essential point is that as a matter of fact the joint structure is the effective context of the formation of the person. 38

Historical work on homosexuality needs to pay close attention to attempts to theorise the joint determination of gender and class relations; and it is a project which has a clear value for those who wish to develop a 'gay Marxism'. One particular question which would be illuminated by work in this area, and about which extraordinarily little seems to be known at present, is how homosexual experiences are differentiated by class. It is to be expected that the limited resources in general available to working-class males would impose specific constraints upon the construction of a homosexual identity.<sup>39</sup>

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38. R.W. Connell, "On the Wings of History", Arena, No. 55 (1980), p. 52. This article is concerned with the concepts of 'social reproduction' and the 'reproduction of the relations of production', particularly in the work of Althusser, Lefebvre and Bourdieu.

39. A number of studies suggest a marked 'upward mobility' among homosexual men, partly as a result of the conflict which they experience with the masculine norms of working-class occupations. See Reimut Reiche and Martin Dannecker, "Male Homosexuality in West Germany - A Sociological Investigation", The Journal of Sex Research, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Feb. 1977), pp. 35-53; Farrell, op. cit., pp. 75-6; and Harry and

The gender division is the axis of both the construction of male homosexuality and of the oppression of homosexual men. The broadest significance of this perspective is that it opens the way for work on the social theory of male homosexuality to become an essential dimension to the theorisation of patriarchy. The perspective also gives a sharper focus to a range of questions concerning the construction of particular sexual identities and the changing social categorisations of different sexual modes. And it affords the psychological, sociological and historical dimensions which are necessary for further elaboration of the gay liberation movement's assertion of the political character of homosexuality. The most important theoretical work to date has an enormous debt to the movement and it should not forget its 'origins'. While gay liberationists have not developed a coherent argument about homosexuality in terms of gender, it has still been a centrally important theme in their thinking. Their concern with questions of gender is a legacy to theoretical work on male homosexuality which should now be developed.

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De Vall, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-59. These brief statements do not deal with working-class males with homosexual interests for whom 'upward mobility' is not a possibility.

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- (b) Feminism
- (c) Freud and other psychological works
- (d) Sociology
- (e) History
- (f) Fiction and autobiography

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Categories (a), (c), (d) and (e) correspond to the relevant chapters, and works cited in these chapters are listed accordingly except where they would be clearly anomalous.

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