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Towards A Critical Bisexual Theology

by

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ABSTRACT

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By Karin Elizabeth Smith

My thesis is an investigation into the phenomenon of bisexuality and the problems, challenges and opportunities it presents towards traditional Christian theology. I examine the deconstructive challenge that bisexuality and queer theory presents to what Althaus-Reid calls 'Totalitarian Theology'. My methodology is literature based, comes from a feminist liberationist perspective and my own personal experiences as a bisexual woman, adopting the analytical tools of philosophy, psychology and sociology. Through the utilization of this method, I hope to give a better understanding of this difficult and complex subject.

During the course of my investigation, I have discovered that much of the research undertaken by theologians so far within the area of human sexuality has largely centred on the phenomenon of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Other than the work of Debra R. Kalodny and Queer Theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, very little has been written about bisexuality. In contrast to their work mine is an autobiographical self - reflective account of the difficulties faced living in a culture based on monogamous heterosexuality.

The points in which Althaus-Reid's work and my own diverge is in both cultural style and context. My bi-interpretation goes beyond hers because I provide a critical analysis of heterosexuality. My work is therefore unique, as I am using bisexual identity in a sustained and self-critical way with a view toward the creation of a 'critical bisexual theology' in my particular culture. When informed by queer theory, this has the potential to highlight the performativity of gender and its underlying instability.

Bisexuality provides a further disruption because it also challenges dualism and it has a disruptive influence on the hierarchical structure, which is inherent within traditional Christian theology. The analytical tools of gender theory, philosophy, psychology and sociology bring to light the implicit dualism of gender construction and the power structures underlying it, enabling me to show how bisexuality has the potential to disrupt binary divisions. My chosen area of investigation also allows me to discuss body politics, sexuality and empowerment for both women and men alike.

I ask if bisexuality is normative and, if so, why has it been repressed by religion and theology? If it is seen as normative, there are implications for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. I examine the implications of bisexuality for normative dominance and submission models of patriarchal sexual constructions, looking at the dangers these models create for women as well as challenging the notions of exclusivity that have been part of the patriarchal sexual package. Given that I am challenging the patriarchal system and the property ethic that underpins it, I wish to ask what level of intimacy is appropriate between consenting adults who are in other relationships? This question arises from the notion that bisexuals may need to express both sides of their sexuality if they are to remain functioning and developing individuals.

Suggesting that people can be liberated into a wider understanding of sexuality, I will evaluate pleasure as a starting point for the creation of theology. Sexual non - conformity and pleasure is vital if, women are to have sexual autonomy it could be argued then that pleasure acts as an ethical guideline. An ethic of pleasure based on a model of partnership advances that sexual relationships based on love, trust and mutual respect rather than rankings of fear and force removes the ethical dilemmas experienced by people like myself who identify as bisexual.

Taking my lead from Althaus-Reid, who is critical of holding onto our images of mono-loving gods and relationships and questioning such images, I ask which bodies can image the divine. We then get a radical incarnational theology because bisexuality is not just a way of thinking but is manifest in body knowing. Utilising her imaging of God in such a way a bi-god explodes the view of God as mono or duo. This image of God/divine can then be found in relationships that empower.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Karin Elizabeth Smith declare that the thesis entitled Towards A Critical Bisexual Theology and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:

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This thesis is dedicated to my Mum and Dad.

Introduction and Method

Being Bisexual is a Head fuck

It came as a surprise to me that through my research, my understandings of the complexity of my identity became apparent. I have had to come to terms both with society's heteropatriarchal restrictions placed upon people like myself, in the shape of external biphobia, and my own internalised biphobia, adding to this the fact that I am a woman, serves to compound the complexities involved even further. Due to the intimate nature of this research and my own lived experience being a source of reflection for my work, it has taken longer to complete than anticipated and has also led to quite considerable changes in my own views regarding the conceptual frameworks of bisexuality. It is this journey that is presented in this thesis.

Being bisexual in a heteropatriarchal society means; we have the inability to choose; bisexuals are perceived as greedy, promiscuous, hedonistic, pathological, sexually and emotionally immature. These negative stereotypes placed upon us, if taken on board, can often lead to feelings of low self-worth. In order to survive, many of us are put in a position whereby deceitfulness and self-deception is the only remedy, we may feel compelled to hide behind convention opting to present ourselves to the world as heterosexual. In my case for example, I chose to marry someone of the opposite sex. By entering into a marriage contract, I naively thought that my problem would then be solved. However, my own particular experience was to show that this is not the case, through the denial of an essential part of myself, I experienced feelings of isolation and through a deep embodied way of knowing my desires shut down altogether. The ethical question; was I being faithful? for me, became a question of gender, it was more than just making the right choices, it involved identity, life in abundance. A bisexual woman, who flouts the conventions of a society that thinks in binary terms which is based on notions of exclusivity, transgresses the gender expectations placed upon her, she also falls short in the eyes of that society as a moral custodian. She has dared to transgress the binary thinking placed upon her by *actively* seeking ways to live her life in abundance.

The bi-phobic stereotypes associated with being bisexual had also led me into questioning whether I was indeed bisexual enough, do I need to have multiple partners? This questioning led to episodes of experimentation on my part. Great psychic harm and injustices are inflicted upon bisexual women like

myself who, through the denial of their embodied flourishing are denied their very existence our reality is entirely excluded.

Bisexual people live within a paradox, we are an absurdity, we are viewed as excessive and become unintelligible within the heteropatriarchal Christian economy because we don't live up to the heteropatriarchal ideal, we are called to restrain our homosexual inclinations and develop a heterosexual orientation. The Church ignores or pathologises bisexuality and is therefore not a place of acceptance of who I am. In my youth its judgements led to feelings of inadequacy. I was made to feel less of a person, unloved and unlovable by a God who would judge me in such a way. I tried to conform but this only led to feelings of confusion because I found that my own desires were in conflict with its teachings. That is, the Church's heteropatriarchal constricted view of sexuality was in conflict with my desires. The God of the Church was not my God because my concept of divine love would not inflict this kind of psychic harm on me. It was not the unconditional love that was in keeping with the teachings of Jesus learnt in my childhood and did not cohere with the paradigm of justice and love that Jesus' message seemed to proclaim. I have therefore from an early age chosen not to become part of that community.

Because bisexual lives seem to be in a constant state of flux symbolising for the Church disorder and chaos, we are seen as a threat and have the propensity to destroy patriarchal sacred power. The very idea of choosing a same sex relationship over and above heterosexual relationships, has proven to be an enormous challenge for both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches and dealing with sexuality that is not addressed to a single partner becomes unthinkable. Bisexuality has been largely unacknowledged or rendered invisible by them because of this. The denial of our very existence is the primary manifestation of biphobia. The Church is sexually immature because it is blinkered and refuses to accept the human sexual condition and its multi-various forms and expressions. Indeed, I too have been sexually immature because the selection of choices laid out for people like myself, have been limited by society and the Church. The Church's bi-phobic attitude has for me created confusion, suppression possibly neurosis and inappropriate expression because I have not been supported. Like the Church, I am also bi-phobic and therefore need to talk about and acknowledge my identity as the Church does before we can move on. There is a desperate shortage of adequate affirming role models with which to identify within theology and therefore we need some kind of theology that promotes life

in abundance for people like myself. How does one negotiate living out a bisexual lifestyle? What model should it take?

The theoretical positions I have chosen to examine, allows me to look at the conceptual framework of bisexuality in a different and more positive way, what has become apparent to me is the internal shift experienced during the course of my research.

A sociological examination of the phenomenon of bisexuality highlights how there is the potential in everyone for an infinite variety of sexual expressions. Through an interrogation of the concept of bisexuality and by looking at where it has come from, the burden of guilt heaped upon us gradually begins to lift and we begin to appreciate the gifts bisexuality has to offer. Feminism argues that women's friendships are vital in the struggle for liberation and monogamy can keep us divided, however, part of the patriarchal sexual package, the notion of exclusivity is challenged by bisexual lifestyles and bisexual ways of thinking.¹ Discussions within the fields of psychology and social theory on the various ways in which bisexuals organise their relationships with others have also concluded that bisexuals are not all the same and gender identity is not generally an indicator of sexual object choice. Some may find it possible to maintain exclusive relationships with others without losing their specific bisexual identity therefore the question of whether bisexuals need to express both sides of their sexuality can be problematic. Indeed it was this negative stereotype which led to my need for experimentation and doubts about whether I was bisexual enough. It is also this view that leads people into labelling bisexuals as emotionally immature, hedonistic promiscuous and immoral. Contrary to this view however, social theory concludes that the cultural model of the monogamous relationship may work for some but others may find that their needs are not being met in a monogamous relationship. Their needs are not necessarily greater, but it may be that they require levels of emotional independence, or they may need diversity in sexual, romantic or emotional input. They may be happier and more secure receiving sexual, emotional, and romantic support from a variety of people instead of only one person, which can be seen as perfectly reasonable.² Compared with dependence on one person for these needs to be met, which may be untenable under certain circumstances, having multiple sustaining relationships can be seen as a sign of maturity and provide stability for some individuals.

¹ Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* {Sheffields: SAP 1998}

In my own experience, I have found the love, support and sexual pleasure provided to me by a woman, someone other than my husband, to be life sustaining and a gift and to discover that I am neither immature or unstable for doing so is enormously reassuring.

The utilisation of the interlocking theoretical perspectives of feminism, post-structuralism, queer theory and politics has allowed me to consider the usefulness and limitations of bisexuality and the insights taken from them has the potential to challenge lesbian ethics and traditional Christian theology.

The work of the French Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray and her radical philosophy of difference allows me to demonstrate and highlight the link I recognise between her formulation of an “excessively morphic feminine”³ and the fluid nature of bisexuality. For her the feminine exists in a position of excess, this fluidity and excessiveness mirrors precisely my own experience of being both a bisexual and a woman. My language is excessive because I think and communicate in a polyamorous way. Her evocation of new and exploratory forms of homosexual and heterosexual intimacy allows me to accept and value what and who I am, I cannot live within the confines of a phallic rationale because I am a woman, I am different from man indeed I am different from other women. My bodily self-knowledge as a bisexual woman is not a misconception. My body does not lie to me. Female bisexuality provides a perfect model, the basis for a very different understanding of female homosexuality that Irigaray is trying to promote. With a notion of a feminine bisexuality we can move beyond the phallus, move away from the {ho{m}osexual} order, the logic of the “ho{m}o” understood as the logic of masculine sameness. Bisexuality holds in place the binary frame of feminine/masculine, therefore inside that framework the feminine *can* and does exist. To question the phallus, to go beyond the phallus, there is the possibility for me to love and appreciate other women as *women*, not as male substitutes. As a Feminist bisexual woman I can be secure in the knowledge that to love another woman is clearly not wrong but a vital source for liberation. Indeed to be sexually non-conformist, I have the gift of being able to disrupt the system of sexual hierarchy imposed upon us by heteropatriarchal rule through my bisexual experience. We have a language of our own that is unintelligible within the phallic economy,

² Beth A. Firestein, {ed} *Bisexuality: The psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* {London, California, New Delhi: Sage, 1996}

³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* {New York: Cornell University Press, 1985}

we have the ability to speak / communicate the language of love through our bodies, it is excessive, fluid and beautiful. She articulates clearly how, by valuing my own and other women's pleasure and morphology, I can be self-determined, my bisexuality is a gift not an aberration. I am a bisexual woman who defies the logical, linear, single identity definitions, thrust upon me by patriarchy.

It is not just from the heterosexual community that we find ourselves under attack. Many lesbian and gay men believe that we have less commitment to the gay community because heterosexual relationships are privileged and many lesbian feminists believe that bisexual women like myself, who cohabit with men, are colluding with patriarchy because we refuse to sever all ties with them. As a bisexual feminist to be judged in this way is deeply wounding, I feel my integrity is being questioned.

Radical lesbian theorists Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger⁴ suggest that feminist theory has had the tendency to assume heterosexuality as an innate 'given' for most women. The highlighting of the many debates between feminists concerning the issues of heterosexuality with its patriarchal underpinnings and their subsequent call for the abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice is examined. The affirmation of lesbianism as a liberating feminist act and their critiquing of liberal humanist theorists - fearing a removal of lesbianism from the political arena through a reduction to private and personal solutions - prompted me to consider how bisexuality would fit in with these ideas. Also the ambivalence by heterosexual feminists towards the heterosexual model based on domination and submission and the subsequent proposals suggested by Katz and Smart that rather than abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice, the meanings of heterosexuality should be subverted⁵ conveys the complexities surrounding heterosexuality. These debates allow me to show the immense diversity of lifestyles and the subsequent challenges presented to rigid identities making room for bisexuality to enter into the arena. Heterosexuality and the desire and practice of it may be complex, but I'm certainly not colluding with the enemy. To the outside world the relationship with my husband can be understood as being based on heterosexual assumptions modelled on domination and submission. However, our relationship is far more complex than that, the boundaries of activity and passivity are continuously being crossed.

⁴ Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, {eds} *Heterosexuality: A Feminist and Psychology Reader* {London: Sage Publications. 1994}

⁵ Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex; The Politics of Pleasure* {London: Virago. 1994}

As a feminist liberation theologian and looking at the complexities surrounding women's sexuality, I have become conscious that being both a woman and a bisexual places me in a double bind.

These debates have led me into considering the notions of abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice. Nancy R Howell ⁶ argues, that utopian visions of male excluding communities capitalise upon the idealisation of female community and the romanticisation of a female essence, which is primarily based on the male/female relationship and is an interpretation based on androcentricity.

Rather than abandonment, she focuses upon the issue of personal integrity and redemption. Through a utilization of the work of theologian Mary Daly it is suggested by Howell that rather than being a question of how women relate to men, women's separatism may be a question of how women intend relate to each other.

A superficial impression of the idea that feminists have overcome the distortions in female relationships by challenging patriarchy through their solidarity is created. Rather than investing our energy through our confrontation with patriarchy, for Daly, separatism is seen as the investment of energy in women's self-hood.

There is a reflection upon constructive modes of female bonding and an illumination of how this, poses a threat to patriarchal strongholds indicated through the social taboo of women touching women. This allows me to say as a bisexual woman, that my sisterhood, female friendship, and female identified erotic love with other women have become part of a female discourse of relationships which do not entail the self-loss of male defined relationships for women. The removal of internal and external barriers to self-hood is emphasised in order that we overcome our estrangement from both other women and ourselves, thus re-discovering oneself.

A greater awareness of the pseudo-reality of heteropatriarchy enables my bisexual discourse to continue its disruptions through a recognition of the gender polarity underpinning patriarchy.

Looking for the realities of male domination and uncovering how women may be socialised into accepting this has been the catalyst towards my own personal goal toward integrity. In referring to Rosemary Radford Reuther's Doctrine of Redemption Nancy R. Howell provides an example of how women can achieve this. The subtle forms of male control I have personally experienced within my relationships had been allowed to continue subliminally because I was unaware of the psychological

aspects of domination and the role gender identity played. I was not consciously aware that through the effects of gender socialisation, I had been in collusion with heteropatriarchal rule. In the development of a false-self through gender socialisation under heteropatriarchy, mutual recognition between myself and others had been hampered. I had been compliant in my own oppression.

The process of seeking out ways to both express and experience sexual pleasure is vital if women are to have sexual autonomy. Carole S. Vance ⁷ suggests that the way forward for women is sexual non-conformity, I believe that this lays the foundations for placing bisexuality central to the debate concerning human sexuality. As a bisexual woman negotiating my own sexuality, I have experienced the ambivalent and contradictory extremes Vance writes about. I have been a victim of sexual restriction, timidity and invisibility, which it is argued is thoroughly damaging. This has been the result of a gender system that places pleasure and safety in opposition for women. Experiencing my own passion as dangerous has been the result of the intra-psychic effects of a gender system which exemplifies female sexual nature as being passive. To abandon notions of sexual liberation or to make my pursuit of heterosexual pleasure incompatible with my happiness is not the way to overcome the continuing victimisation placed upon me. Moving outside the restrictive areas created for women by heteropatriarchy, Vance emphasises that we should be encouraged to explore and experiment. She suggests that acknowledgement of difference should be recognised and a “space” needs to be created. I would suggest that this “space” for transgressing traditional gender roles and the type of experimentation required may take the form of bisexuality. Vance’s work supports my position, whereby female difference should be acknowledged and an ethic of sexual pleasure outside the prescriptive arena of heterosexuality for women should be advanced disrupting the system of sexual hierarchy that has been created.

A geneological investigation carried out by Riane Eisler ⁸ who looks at both sex and the sacred in the larger context of our biological evolution, demystifying much of our sexual history, allays the confusion created. She too is aware of the value of consciousness raising and opening our eyes to the

⁶ Nancy R. Howell, ‘Radical Relatedness and Feminist Separatism’ in David Comstock and Susan E. Henking {ed’s} *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* {New York: Continuum, 1997}

⁷ Carole S. Vance, {ed} *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* {London, New York: Pandora Press, 1992}

⁸ Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and The Politics of the Body – New Paths to Power and Love* {San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996}

psuedo-reality of heteropatriarchy and how violence has been eroticised to the detriment of women through different social forms created to conflate care with pain. Her work is a shift from a dominator model of sexuality, towards a model of partnership between equals with an attempt to exemplify a bonding of the give and take of sexual pleasure and love between men and women. Through her work we are shown how the distortions of dominator societies are set in place in order that relations of domination and submission are maintained, blocking the profound human yearning for connection. Focussing on both immanent and transcendent spirituality, Eisler endeavours to forge a re-connection between sex and spirituality bridging the gap - created through the idealization and sacralization of suffering - by focusing on pleasure and viewing the erotic as empowering and life giving. Looking at evidence produced by the scientific community, Eisler's use of the term "sacred pleasure", which does not view the bodily or carnal as lesser, but rather a sacredness of this world, she highlights how orgasms have been recognised by many as altered states of consciousness. Stemming from the same deeply rooted human need or yearning for connection, sexuality and the emotion of love and the spiritual drive for oneness with the divine are confluent.

Exploring the potential for pleasure and desire based on the principal of the sacred facilitates my endeavour to evaluate the principal of sexual pleasure as a starting point for the creation of an incarnational bisexual theology specifically addressed to women. Her work also allows me to further point out how the duality that undermines the connection of the sacred and the profane is disrupted through bisexual or polyamorous ways of thinking. It is my belief that the boundaries created by binary thinking can be transcended when bisexuality is recognised. Our shared experience and wisdom has the ability to contradict hierarchically dualistic categories.

Expressing the notion that bisexuality has the potential to subvert binary thinking is further helped by a greater understanding of sexuality through the analysis of gender. The deconstruction of gender binarisms and subversion of gendered norms is provided through the transgressive form of sexual politics of queer theory that takes its inspiration from post-modern cultural theory.

Judith Butler's⁹ investigation into the phenomenon of transexualism allows me to highlight how gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way and allays the self-doubt heaped upon

⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* {London: Routledge, 1990-1999}

bisexual people like myself, through the provision of evidence that suggests many transexual people are bisexual.

We are also made aware that the illusion of the reality and stability of normative categories of gender are performances cemented through continuous repetitions in action and discourse. Butler warns against the idealisation of expressions of gender, which has the potential to produce new forms of sexual hierarchy and exclusion. Under the influence of queer theory, the importance for the acquisition of specific gender identities has changed placing more emphasis on the instability and multiple character of them, recognising that identity can be used as a mode of social control. However gaining recognition for one's status as a sexual minority is necessary for survival even though the threat remains that identity becomes an instrument of power. Providing a close analysis of the structures of capitalism and moving away from queer theory's preoccupation with psychoanalysis, language and performance Rosemary Hennessy¹⁰ shows how our sexuality becomes a target for market forces. With the recognition of how advanced capitalist societies have made sex a commodity leading to the closing down of the possibility of sexual diversity her insights shows us how Butler's notion of performativity is not rescuing materialism because her conceptions of it are founded in the sign. Gay visibility in commodity culture is a limited victory. Gays are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but are not recognised as social subjects, by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of performative play or by promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer, we have a production of imaginary gay/queer subjects. The commodified perspectives of middle-class, avante guard gay consumers maintain the invisibility of ordinary bisexuals like myself, as well as lesbians, gays and queers, because the divisions of labour remain unseen. She puts in context the reality of living in the world as a member of sexual minority. Society is still organised in such a way that lesbians, gays, transexuals and bisexuals are seen as either benign or malevolent perversions of a naturalised norm. The disclosure of a persons identity as other than "normative" has definite consequences which can often prove dangerous and even fatal without the social mobility or resources for ordinary people to insulate themselves from heteronormativity's insistence that sex equals gender. My concern here is to

¹⁰ Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. {New York, London: Routledge, 2000}

show how capitalism actually impacts on the daily lives and experiences of bisexuals and others who belong in the realm of sexual minorities. However, although capitalism is exploitative it likes new things to exploit leaving the door open for new sexualities, but are they authentic sexualities? Or are they roles dictated by capitalism? Rather than remain subject to the prescriptive forces of capitalism and taking on the performative roles generated, I suggest it necessary to seek an authentic subjectivity. This may be obtained by identifying with an excessive God pertained to by Marcella Althaus-Reid,¹¹ which is not found in traditional theology. That is, rather than adhering to the stereotypes generated through capitalist ideologies, one might follow the model of a God that is polyamorous and all inclusive, tolerant of difference and diversity. These insights urge me to be more considerate in my endeavour and guides me away from the notion that bisexuality may be seen as normative and also provides an awareness of the struggles endured by people like myself who wish to live an authentic life based on personal integrity.

In rediscovering a deeper understanding of the sacred in relation to feminine sexuality through her formulation of an “excessive God”, Marcella Althaus-Reid renounces the “masquerades” of sexual ideology presented as theology. Her work provides me with a “passport” and therefore an opportunity to continue in my endeavour to create a bisexual theology. My polyamorous thinking is validated through her “indecent” formulations highlighting the importance of producing an epistemological paradigm shift. Adopting this perspective and moving from the predominately macro level that Althaus-Reid provides, which is largely theoretical and therefore does not open up any ethical questions, my personal experience as a bisexual enables me to move towards a more micro investigation into the world of the bisexual subject. Pertaining to her work, along with other marginalised sexual subjects, I have been expelled from “the Eden of loving, godly relationships”¹². I have become an exile in the lands of heterosexuality thus occupying “the primordial and complex space of exclusion in the narratives of Genesis”¹³. The acquisition of the passport alluded by her allows me to say with assurance and pride that I am a theologian in diaspora. I may explore at the crossroads of Christianity, issues of self-identity and the identity of my community, providing “a first

¹¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* {London, New York: Routledge. 2003} see also Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* {London, New York: Routledge. 2000}

¹² Althaus-Reid, 2003. p.8.

¹³ Althaus-Reid, 2003. *op.cit.* p7.

person theology: diasporic, self-disclosing, and autobiographical” taking responsibility for my own words. I have responded to her call to “come out in an almost sacrificial way”¹⁴, producing an unstable theology, denouncing the secretive spaces created by traditional theology that tend to be what Althaus-Reid calls “violent and dyadic”.¹⁵

Because it has a potentially disruptive influence on the dualistic hierarchical structure of traditional Christian theology, my question is: can we have a theology of bisexuality? Lacking specific life affirming role models and being largely unacknowledged or misrepresented by the Church denies bisexual people the opportunity to live their lives in abundance. It is for this reason, I wish to form a bisexual theology. In short, my task is to highlight the epistemological and theological importance of bisexuality toward the creation of theology.

Bisexuality is defined as 1. sexually attracted to both men and women. 2. of both sexes.¹⁶ The dictionary defines bisexuality as an orientation whereby people function sexually with either sex but the issues involved render it far more complicated than that. In section one, I discuss the views of Francis Mark Mondimore who suggests that the difficulty in defining what bisexual means has a tendency to hamper research. Asking whether bisexuality is a ‘discrete category of sexual functioning’ or is perhaps, following the work of Alfred Kinsey, ‘a point on a continuum?’,¹⁷ he believes that Kinsey’s approach of opting for a numerical definition does not capture the wide range of styles and attractions that can be called bisexual. Mondimore suggests that we may need to define what bisexuality means. However, I will be demonstrating how other theorists have suggested that we interrogate the concept of bisexuality, that there should be a critical re-think about where it has come from and how its origins continue to shape it in contemporary debates.¹⁸ Beth A. Firestein writing about the psychology and politics of bisexuality explains how some bisexuals may identify as such or may identify as homosexual, heterosexual, transgendered or transexual or may not choose to label at all. It may be defined, ‘As the capacity, regardless of the sexual identity label one chooses, to love and

¹⁴ Althaus-Reid, 2003. *op.cit.* p.14.

¹⁵ Althaus-Reid, 2003. *ibid.*

¹⁶ *Collins Shorter Dictionary and Thesaurus* { England:HarperCollins Publishers,1995 }.

¹⁷ Francis Mark Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality* { Balitimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996}. p.100.

sexually desire both same –and other-gendered individuals’ ‘Broadly conceived, bisexual means of or pertaining to persons of more than one gender.’¹⁹ While there are some definitions of bisexuality some say it is difficult. Theologian Mary Hunt argues that, ‘There is no common agreement on the various and sundry categories of sex and gender, much less any consensus on what constitutes a bisexual. Even our most basic categories, such as male and female, man and woman, are no longer fixed.’²⁰

My methodology is text based coming from a Feminist Liberationist perspective encompassing both my own experience of living in a heteropatriarchal society as a bisexual woman and highlighting the experience of other women. However, because I am coming from a feminist liberationist perspective and my own experience as a woman, and because of the complex nature of the subject, my task will be confined to female bisexuality. I will not be examining male bisexuality. I should also point out that I have not carried out a standard literature review but critiques of the literature permeate throughout my thesis. However, the work of Debra R. Kolodny and Marcella Althaus-Reid are highlighted here to provide current theological literature pertaining to bisexuality.

Kolodny has produced an anthology devoted specifically to bisexual persons providing a *space* for them to speak for themselves. Recognising how bisexual people can be blessed with the possibility of a love that transcends the social constructed boundary of sex {male/female}, she highlights how bisexual people have the capacity to speak to a number of theological principles as no others can. There is a reflection on a wide spectrum of religious traditions and spiritual paths – including Buddhist, Hindu, Twelve-Step, Pagan, Indigenous, Christian and Jewish – all talk about the intersections of their faith, practice and their sexual orientation. Kalodny *does* provide an opportunity for some bisexuals to write about their struggles in their particular denominations as *out* bisexuals. Mary Hunt makes clear how the experiences of bisexual people have been long overdue, ‘The history of theology is replete with instances of people speaking for others with dreadful consequences.’²¹ However, Kalodny’s work is not specifically personal, neither does she provide a critical analysis using bisexual identity in a sustained “self critical” way with a view toward creating a “critical bisexual theology”. Her work is mainly a reflection of the spectrum of spiritual traditions practised and described by bisexual people.

¹⁸ Merl Storr, {ed} *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*. {London, New York: Routledge, 1999 }.

¹⁹ Beth A. Firestein, {ed} 1996 *Opcit*.XX Introduction.

²⁰ Mary Hunt cited in the foreword of Debra R. Kalodny, {ed} *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith*. {New York, London: Continuum, 2000} xii.

Althaus-Reid's *The Queer God*²² takes a different perspective providing an insight into the disruptive potential bisexual theologians may have regardless of their sexual orientation – that is, those individuals who have the capacity to think in a polyamorous or critically bisexual way. She talks of the queer theologian in diaspora who has many passports. Her focus is on the macro level however, endeavouring to disrupt the political project behind the sexual ideology of Christianity that works against people's lives. For her the bisexual theologian is placed in the unique position of acting and reflecting in a theological praxis based on two basic elements: first the relation to the closet and second, the way of transcendence via the instability of God, sexual identity and humanity. In building upon her ideas I take the opportunity to develop a critical bisexual theology on a micro level. From an autobiographical account, my work endeavours to show the difficulties faced by bisexuals and the often internal as well as external conflicts bisexual people have to endure within a hetero-patriarchal society. Her work enables me to reconsider heterosexuality from a bisexual "out-of-the-closet" theology providing an unstable starting point through an introduction of the female divine bisexual subject who has the potential to disrupt dualism.

Feminist theologians follow the Whiteheadian view of Process Thought, viewing life as part of the cosmic process of evolution which is disclosed in human experience. Process thought espouses the idea that specialisation is a false academic distinction, which is unhelpful in our understanding of life. Feminist theology attempts to 'broaden the horizons of patriarchal theologians to show that knowledge of God can be found in all human existence.'²³ Feminist theology is a discipline which stresses the importance of experience; it argues that truth can only be discovered through the experience of its meaning within the lives of people, rather than through the authoritative pronouncements of officials in power. With these concerns in mind as well as writing from personal experience I will be adopting the analytical tools of philosophy, psychology and sociology, forging links and making comparisons between them.

²¹ Hunt in Kalodny, xiv.

²² Marcella Althaus-Reid, {2003}

²³ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan {eds} {1994}. *opcit.* p.72.

There have been some criticisms aimed at Process thought. It has been criticised 'for bringing in the old absolutes of theism-belief in God with or without a special revelation - under different names and for not relating directly to women.'²⁴ Aware of its limitations feminist theology has, however, much to gain from process thought: the stereotypes of sin placed on women are removed by the notion that the world is in process. If the world was never perfect then a woman, Eve, could not have caused a downfall. God and the world are viewed in mutual relation.

Liberation theology has taken up the notion of love as justice.

In Liberation theology 'love is justice.'²⁵ 'While process thought reintroduced the moving and active God who is relating in love, liberation theology has taken up the notion of love as justice.'²⁶ A "radical" Liberation theology is disruptive of the status-quo which accepts and maintains the heteropatriarchal dualistic view reinforcing gender polarities which in turn takes away the option of choice of expression of a bisexual psycho-sexual subjective knowing. Psychic harm is done {inflicted} which does not adhere with Jesus' call for life in abundance because part of the person is denied. Sexual expression is confined to male/female which limits the freedom of those who do not identify with this limited view and are unable to freely claim and express their discrete sexuality within mainstream Christianity. They are therefore unable to influence theological thinking as expressed in the documents and dogmas of the Church. A "radical" Liberation theology which challenges the validity of the norm on which these assumptions rest, opens up the opportunity for the acceptance of different sexual expressions not acceptable within the present prescriptive ideologies of Roman Catholic and Anglican denominations. It also enlarges the concept of the divine incarnated in the flesh. A radical liberation stand point that questions the assumptions of what constitutes freedom and how this is expressed in praxis and manifest in dogmas, may provide the space for a theology that might be liberating for those who identify as bisexual. This also provides a place of justice and love for those marginalised in the present system.

Liberation theology is an attempt at encountering God in a new way, working to end social divisions and promote a more just and peaceful community. It is a diverse movement within the global Christian community;

²⁴ *op.cit.* p.70.

²⁵ *op.cit.* p. 72.

²⁶ *ibid.*

Its unifying principle is a passionate concern for the poor and oppressed and a commitment to living the gospel in ways that link everyday life with its transcendent foundation – God’s love and concern for all human beings.²⁷

Feminist liberation theologians’ adoption of these methods has not escaped criticism however.

Marcella Althaus-Reid argues that the hermeneutical circle adopted by feminist liberation theologians is limited

because it has proven to be politically materialist and sexually idealist and therefore suggests that the sexual representation of the universe and God should be taken seriously and subjected to theological suspicion. Her argument is ‘The limits of the hermeneutical circle have been fixed by sexual assumptions’,²⁸ and it therefore questions the traditional liberationist context of doing theology.

Conceding that liberation theology contributes towards androcentric dislocation world-wide, liberation theology is not immune to idealism and romantic visions of femininity. Taking her lead from gender theorist Judith Butler she argues that the male/female sexual identity and gender constructions in theology have been taken for granted and asserts that feminist liberation theologians have not recognised gender identities for what they really are, ‘the performative acts of the representation of sexuality.’²⁹ We should therefore strive for sexual disruption and difference rather than complementarity in order to produce an epistemological paradigm shift. I shall provide a more detailed description of her criticisms in section three.

The transgressive form of sexual politics that is known as queer theory is a move towards deconstructing gender binarisms. We will see through looking at the theoretical concept of queer theory and understanding that to call for a “normative” sexuality can be counterproductive in the endeavour to open up choices and sexual freedom for others. This is because care must be taken when calling for specific sexual identities because there may be a danger of producing new forms of sexual hierarchy and exclusion, we must therefore avoid idealizations of expressions of gender.

My work is an attempt to deconstruct heteropatriarchy in order that it be seen as a background myth which might be replaced by a number of other background myths producing different subject positions and social structures. The background myth of bisexuality leads from the narrow way of viewing

²⁷ C. Cadorette, M.Giblin, M.J Legge, {eds} *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*. {New York: Orbis Books, 1992.} introduction.

²⁸ Althaus-Reid in her essay ‘Indecent Exposures: Excessive Sex and the Crisis of Theological Representations’ cited in Lisa Isherwood, {ed}, *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism, Studies in Theology and Sexuality* {Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000 } p.218.

through heteropatriarchy to one based on toleration and acceptance of all forms of difference. However, closer understanding of the complexities of the situation provides me with a problem; to be subversive bisexuality must remain a myth otherwise the way bisexuality is structured, knowledge cannot simply be imposed. Myth must never become the fossilised story. My aim is to open up dialogue but at the same time I do not wish to close it down through the marginalisation of other subjective positions. Therefore I will attempt to ground the status and knowledge derived from these insights in incarnational theology. In *The Good News of the Body*, Isherwood tells us that ‘incarnation demands more engagement.’³⁰ We are reminded that one of the first tasks to be undertaken by feminist theologians, when offering a critique of patriarchal theology, is to reclaim our bodies. By placing the body at the centre of theological reflection Isherwood’s message is that bodies, particularly women’s bodies, should be; ‘the incarnational starting point for liberating/redemptive praxis.’³¹ Carter Heyward reflects on ‘the erotic as our embodied yearning for mutuality.’ She probes ‘the Sacred - exploring divine terrain - through sexual experience.’³² For Heyward lovemaking is a form of justice making; ‘sexuality is a foundation for our authority’. Arguing that ‘our personal relational efforts toward liberation can empower us to resist evil generated by our lack of mutuality, our sin, and can contribute to the cultivation of a sacred realm of right relation that is both here and not here yet’. Explaining how:

this affirmation and lament-the “yet/not yet” of our mutuality – might be read traditionally as a doctrine of “last things” or eschatology. It reflects the moral and temporal ambiguities of our lives, as well as faith in our movement towards what is not yet realized among us.³³

She concedes that the erotic continues to be distorted, wreaking abuse and confusion among us therefore our relational visions must remain unfulfilled. However, we must hold on to the belief of the possibility of living together as friends and lovers:

To live through these dynamics of alienated power toward the realization of our power in right relation is not merely to focus, however, on “last things”. We do not move toward a final, static,

²⁹ Judith Butler, ‘Gender Trouble’ {1990 }p.5 cited in Althaus-Reid, {2000} *op.cit.* p.6.

³⁰ Lisa Isherwood, {2000}*op.cit.* p.32.

³¹ *op.cit.* p.14.

³² Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* {New York: Harper Collins Publishers 1989} p.91.

³³ *ibid.*

resolution of our relational fears and tensions. To the contrary, our power draws us into our beginnings – into the heart of our creation/creativity, into our relatedness.³⁴

Focusing on several issues that arise from my investigation, my concerns will be centred on the invisibility of bisexuality and why it is disregarded by traditional theology. With the adoption of these methods, I will also be examining why women's experience is ignored, looking at their experience of domination within patriarchal society and exploring the eroticization of domination. By examining how women negotiate the heteropatriarchal landscape, I will be provided with the opportunity to show how some heterosexual feminists are ambivalent towards claiming that heterosexual identity. I will demonstrate how, through the legacy of patriarchal dualism, there appears to be a repression of sexual pleasure and a pervasive fear of sex and of strong passion within the Christian tradition. Many feminist scholars argue that it leads to a violent and unhealthy culture, especially dangerous to women that can also be problematic for men.³⁵ It is my contention that bisexuality has the potential to disrupt the binary divisions created by patriarchal society.

I will also highlight the Roman Catholic and Anglican Church's limited understanding of biblical texts and expose the inherent homophobia within its teachings. My work allows me to illustrate how feminist theology and feminist social theorists in the field of sexual ethics have been working to reconstruct the concepts of justice and sexual pleasure, challenging the patriarchal legacy of Christian culture.

There are three parts to my thesis. In section one, I begin by highlighting the problems and challenges homosexuality presents to Christian Theology. Nothing or very little has been said about bisexuality by the Church³⁶ in fact it has been largely ignored or held up as a pathological disorder or an immature category within all the major discussions by the Church. It is important therefore to begin with what they have had to say about homosexuality and human sexuality in general. This provides a background for my work and also allows me to consider whether there are any usable strands I can take from this in

³⁴ *op.cit.* p.92.

³⁵ This issue has been debated by many scholars. For example see the work of Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* { Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1984} Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* { London: SCM Press Ltd. 1996} Susan Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God* { Great Britain: Geoffrey Chapman. 1989} Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* { New York: Crossroad. 1988}

³⁶ The House of Bishops: *Issues in Human Sexuality* {London: Church House Publishing 1991} 5.8 p.42.

order that I might form a bisexual theology. Mary E. Hunt writes; ‘religious insights of bisexual people must be added to the mix of those who seek spiritual and political justice.’ She informs us ‘Theology and spirituality articulated from the perspective of bisexual persons are long overdue. Yet virtually all bi theological reflection to date has been derivative, with “bisexual” a category tacked on reflexively to ‘lesbian/gay.’³⁷ This particular line of investigation uncovers how homosexuality has been viewed in the past by the Roman Catholic Church; as an intrinsic moral evil and how this view has changed. Religious discourse has been replaced by scientific discourse and homosexuality is now viewed as a pathological condition in need of healing; Robert Goss argues, ‘the notion of homosexual orientation as an intrinsic evil or objective disorder becomes comparable to mental illness.’³⁸ With this in mind, my endeavour is to highlight the link between the pathologization of homosexuality and bisexuality evidenced in the Statement by the Anglican House of Bishops *Issues in Human Sexuality* 1991.

Utilising the work of feminist sexual theologians such as Lisa Isherwood, Elizabeth Stuart, and Adrian Thatcher among others, I have discovered how traditional Christian theology has relied heavily on ideas of procreative sex and the theory of gender complementarity resulting in the reinforcement of gender dualism. During the course of my research the inadequacies of biblical interpretation have also been highlighted. I examine bisexuality and highlight how it has been largely ignored within traditional theology. This issue enables me to talk about the often painful and isolated positions bisexuals find themselves in. Homophobic prescriptions by the Church and its refusal to acknowledge bisexuality, prompts me to seek out life-affirming role models with a view towards creating a specific bisexual identity. I also enquire if bisexuality has anything to offer toward theological thought and reflection. Bisexuality is examined and made visible with a view of unmasking its potential for disrupting binary divisions in a heteropatriarchal society. There is also a discussion on how identifying oneself as bisexual {claiming a bisexual identity} can be problematic because, it is argued, by doing so monosexual positions are pathologised; also, by calling for a bisexual identity some argue that it loses its subversive potential. Biphobia and internalised biphobia are also discussed, directing me toward calling for adequate affirming role models with which one can identify.

³⁷ Mary E. Hunt cited in Debra R. Kolodny {ed} {2000} *opcit.* xii.

I will be examining the work of French Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray in section two. Irigaray calls for a philosophy of difference and warns feminists of the political danger of fitting into pre-established masculine canons. For her, in relation to phallogocentric rationality, the feminine exists in a position of excess, the feminine is plural, multiple and resists all assimilation. She uses women's bodily experience as a metaphor for their differential self-knowledge. The process of becoming divine by women is to acquire a new subjectivity in the love of our own sex, we should therefore move toward a tactical homosexuality. Her wish is to evoke new and exploratory forms of homo - and heterosexual intimacy. This view may point a way forward for bisexual women who may have difficulty in feeling a sense of pride in who they are purely because of their sexual orientation. Her work enables me to show how morphology is women's experience: a feminine exists in a position of excess. For a bisexual woman this offers tremendous hope because a link between the excessively morphic feminine and the fluid nature of bisexuality is recognised and highlighted. The insight concerning women's excessiveness is also pertinent when I discuss the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid in section three.

I highlight how Irigaray focuses on valuing women's own pleasure and morphology as a source of protest and self determination which echoes the work of Carol Vance, Lynne Segal and Raine Eisler in part three of this section. All call for sexual non-conformity because this disrupts the system of sexual hierarchy, and this allows me to bring bisexuality into the debate as a form of sexual disruption.

Remaining with this bodily knowledge, utilising the work of Shere Hite, there is a discussion on the female orgasm and the phallogocentric myths surrounding it. Highlighting her argument that orgasms in women are not necessarily produced through penetrative sex affords me the opportunity to show how radical feminists utilise her insights to support their arguments for the abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice. The disruptive potential of the female orgasm also gives me the opportunity, in this section, to discuss pleasure for its own sake as an ethical guide-line. Discussions surrounding the clitoris enable me to highlight the disruptive potential it has on traditional theology.

Women are dealing with a legacy of violence on both the physical level and on the psychic level through gender expectations. Drawing on the work of Freud, psychoanalyst Adam Philips writes:

³⁸ Robert Goss *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* {Sanfrancisco: Harper Collins 1994.} p.15.

Freud glimpses in the *Interpretation of Dreams* the ego's potential for promiscuous mobility; dreams in particular revealed that psychic life was astonishingly mobile and adventurous even if lived life was not, {very few people are actively bisexual yet everyone is psychically bisexual}.³⁹

However, patriarchal society seeks to limit this repertoire and bisexual experience has largely been ignored within traditional Christian theology. Therefore I wish to look at the social construction of women's sexuality and the eroticisation of women's oppression. These particular psychoanalytic issues highlight the divisions created amongst feminists, where some have called for strategies for abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice. This gives me the opportunity to discuss the work of Nancy R. Howell and Mary Daly. Daly, who like many other feminists, is sceptical of resubmitting women into pre-established masculine canons and calls for a radical phallic separatism. Daly argues that we must not allow patriarchy to control the use of gynergy because this negates women's influence in the world. Nancy R. Howell highlights the Whiteheadian feminist perspective describing negative perception in relation to consciousness, in which reality is not hetero-reality and women come to the consciousness of the psuedo-reality of hetero-reality through female friendship.

In this particular section, I also discuss the psychological and theological perspectives of Lallene J. Rector and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Looking at the psychological reflections of Rector, I will demonstrate how women may be socialised into accepting psuedo-reality. It is suggested that feminists should explore the experiences of those who are dominated and their participation in that domination, this to be carried out with an awareness of how gender roles for women and men are socialised in our culture. This consciousness raising leads to personal conversions and an opening up to one another, which Ruether maintains can be a means of redemption whereby, all forms of patriarchy can be overcome.

Continuing with the theme of women's oppression, I evoke the work of Carol Vance and Lynne Segal. Both argue that women's pursuit of sexual pleasure, even though it may at times be dangerous, is also necessary. It is said that women are exposed to more danger of becoming divorced from their own passions⁴⁰ if there is no expansion of opportunities, possibilities and permissions for pleasure. It is also argued that we must endeavour to break the taboo of making speech about sexual pleasure. Again,

³⁹ Adam Philips cited in Judith Butler *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* {California: Stanford University Press 1997}. p.152.

⁴⁰ See Carter Heyward *Touching Our Strength*: {1989}.

recognition of difference amongst women is called for, because it is oppressive and dishonest if feminism calls for uniformity in women's responses. We must also refuse to conform to rigid standards and avoid prescriptivism. It is argued that by making sexual non-conformity visible, we will be able to break down the system of sexual hierarchy. Vance argues that women must also continue to fight for economic emancipation and continue to make demands on the state. There is also the assertion about movement between and across active/passive boundaries.

Remaining with the theme of domination, I discuss the work of Raine Eisler who believes the pain to pleasure shift is an ethical imperative. Her work also attempts to disrupt the dualism between sexuality and spirituality. The body politics presented in her book *Sacred Pleasure* talk about the evolution of pleasure and the chemistry of love. The primacy of the reward of pleasure as an evolutionary movement

from the primacy of pain and punishment has been recognised and highlighted by her. She examines how we are socialised into accepting an authoritarian social system, operating on both emotional and physical levels, and it is in our childhood that this conditioning is most effective and enduring. She presents the argument that children learn from their primary carers the conflation of care with pain, which is the major characteristic of dominator child rearing. She talks of an awakening from the trance-like acceptance of the painful way of structuring human relations whereby we become conscious that there are alternatives to the chronic suffering caused by rankings of domination.

The links between parenting styles and sexual styles is highlighted and we are reminded that sexual style is the adjunct of religious or spiritual style. Along with other feminists she, too, recognises that religious authorities have used sex to maintain rankings of domination. She also uncovers how the Church was obsessive about sex and how it came to eroticize domination and violence. She therefore calls for new myths, which will foster our capacity for pleasure from caring connection. Eisler's work is essential to our self - understanding: being made aware of the history of our socialization into rankings of domination can be the first step to revolutionizing the way we live and love. The work highlighted here will enable me to develop an ethic of pleasure. It is not just the clitoris alone that indicates erotic pleasure as a natural way to experience sex, our brains also respond greatly to pleasurable erotic caring connectedness producing both physiologically and psychologically positive responses.

Under the influence of dualism, sexuality and spirituality have been perceived to be conflicting opposites. However, bisexuality invites us to overcome these boundaries, just as we are called to follow Jesus' example in Galatians 3:28, in the name of God's boundless, all-inclusive love. Jesus understood that the disruption of boundaries was the appropriate human response to right relation with God, others and self. The suppression of our sexual vitality and expression 'does not honour spirit.'⁴¹ The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation teaches us that divine love makes itself known and expresses itself through human bodies, through viewing sexuality as an embodiment of divine love it can no longer be seen as an act of violence, domination or control. This highlights the place of the body in a radical understanding of incarnation. James Nelson for example, suggests that it is important to explore the meanings of incarnation, one primary definition for incarnation is embodiment being made flesh. 'Theologically, it means God's embodiment.'⁴² Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid argue that 'Theology that has incarnation at its heart is queer indeed.'⁴³ This 'fundamentally challenges the nature of human and divine identity.'⁴⁴ Because the divine has immersed itself in flesh and that flesh is now divine, we have 'queer theology at its peak.'⁴⁵ We no longer have a doctrine 'stripped of all humanness' the divine becomes 'earthy, messy and partial.'⁴⁶ Constructed within boundaries bodies have at times been distorted and mutilated, queer theology challenges these boundaries and propels us into a much wider paradise, 'one no longer walled and narrow like that in Genesis.'⁴⁷ Clinging to power the Church hierarchy makes the revolutionary potential of the human/divine nature impotent. All 'our myopic earth-bound ideas are subject to change'⁴⁸ through this dynamic life force of the divine in flesh, 'the energy of it will not be inhabited by laws and statutes.'⁴⁹ Such a view of radical incarnation has implications for my work on bisexuality as it embraces the idea of the concept that bisexuals can embody the divine thus challenging the traditional stance on sexuality in mainstream theological thinking. Bisexuals may then embrace their own incarnations as embodiments of the divine

⁴¹ Kolodny *op.cit.* p.203.

⁴² James Nelson, *Body Theology* {Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992} p.50.

⁴³ Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics* {London, New York: T & T Clark International, 2004} p.7.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

without having to conform to the heterosexual norm but celebrate their own discrete identities and sexuality.

In part four of section two, I discuss the work of gender theorist Judith Butler who engages with the theoretical fields of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and Marxism. Butler exposes simplistic and polarised notions of sexual orientation and argues that any notion of a “normative” sexuality is problematic. The transgressive form of sexual politics, presented by Queer Theory, moves towards deconstructing gender binarisms and subverting gender norms. One of the major insights arriving from such an endeavour is the knowledge that bisexuality has the potential to challenge both lesbian ethics and traditional Christian theology. I will be examining the links between transsexuality, intersexuality and bisexuality, the existence of which has the potential to challenge the traditional beliefs people hold about gender. This examination highlights the implications of bisexuality for normative dominance and submission models of patriarchal sexual construction. The imitative “styles” of butch/fem are also considered; this brings into view the constructed status of the so called “heterosexual original”. In the section concerning the erasure of lesbian and gay identities, Butler argues that it may be crucial to insist on them precisely because they are under threat of obliteration. Reflecting on Freud’s speculations in *Mourning and Melancholia*, the analysis of the melancholic formation of gender is seen by Butler, as ‘the predicament of living within a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachments only with great difficulty’.⁵⁰ She suggests the possibility of an ungrieved loss in drag performance, in which gender itself might be understood in part as the “acting out” of unresolved grief. Finally on the subject of coalitional politics, Butler believes it is necessary for one’s survival that one gains recognition for one’s status as a sexual minority, even if the threat remains that identity may become an instrument of power. She argues that this is no reason not to use or be used by identity.

As I am calling for the visibility of bisexuality, in the second part of this section entitled *The Commodification of Sexuality: A Return to Historical Materialism*, I review the work of historical materialist Rosemary Hennessy who endeavours to understand the relationship between capitalism and

⁵⁰ Judith Butler cited in Sara Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*. {Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing 2004}pp. 245-6.

sexual identity. Her work shows how advanced capitalist societies have made sex a commodity, leading to the closing down of the possibility of sexual diversity and stresses how important it is that visibility is conceptualised. This prompts me into calling for bisexual visibility in a more considered way. Hennessy reorients Queer Theory away from its preoccupation with psychoanalysis, language and performance, instead insisting upon close analysis of the structures of late capitalism, labour and commodification. She believes; as globalization transforms capitalism, it also transforms sexual identity, opening up new forms of commodification and new opportunities for agency. The historicizing Hennessy undertakes in her book *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* engages several politically committed bodies of thought: Marxism, feminism, lesbian and gay studies and Queer Theory.

She comments on the disjuncture; where sexuality is severed from its historical relationship to capitalism and notes how it is a characteristic of the post-modern left. She therefore looks at some of the efforts carried out within the tradition of historical materialism of redressing this situation ‘before turning to the ways of understanding the materiality of sexuality proposed by queer theory.’⁵¹

Hennessy critiques the work of gender theorist Judith Butler who, she argues, fails to address the relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive and skirts over the problem of historical “context”. She believes that Butler limits her conception of the social to the discursive and severs the post-modern subject from the collective historical processes through which identities are produced, resulting in foreclosure of the possibility of marshalling collectivities for social transformation across differences in historical positioning. She informs us that there are still very few extended studies being carried out between sexuality and capitalism. Hennessy extends her analysis of commodification to the U.S. activist group Queer Nation who took commodity culture as its focus. Through a reading of their strategies in relation to the history of the avant-garde, she highlights some of the ideological links that bind the reformulation of sexual identity in the discourses of theory, activism, and consumer culture. Hennessy is concerned with Queer Nation’s anti-assimilationist politics and how it understood and made use of the commodity as part of a campaign for gay visibility.

⁵¹ Rosemary Hennessy, {2000} *opcit.* p.33.

Regarding Judith Butler's work, Hennessy believes her argument for symbolic openness 'potentially endorses *any* – even exploitative – social relations.'⁵² She advances that it is important how gay visibility is conceptualised if we are to combat the 'heteronormative tyranny of the empirical.' She informs us that gay visibility is aimed most often at producing new and potentially lucrative markets and it is money, not liberation, that is at stake. Therefore visibility is 'fetishized to the extent that it conceals the social relations new urban gay and queer identities depend on.'⁵³ Victory for gays is limited; gays are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects.

Concerning Butlers conceptions of drag as a subversive political practice, Hennessy argues that;

for many lesbians and gays who have not had the social resources or mobility to insulate themselves from heteronormativity's insistence that sex equals gender, drag has been not so much playful subversion as a painful yearning for authenticity, occasionally with brutal results.⁵⁴

She also believes that the concept of class has yet to be really developed for feminist struggles around sexual identity, quoting Charlotte Bunch 1987, 'Idealism can be abandoned at any time, survival cannot'.⁵⁵ Hennessy suggests that we form a collective agency and one particular path toward this goal entails "dissidentification". This is a 'practice of working on existing ways of identifying that we embrace and live by. The "work" is a process of unlearning that opens up the identities we take for granted to the historical conditions that made them possible.'⁵⁶ The narrow "resentment" of identity politics is to be replaced with a more powerful collective opposition of all of capitalism's disenfranchised subjects. Dissidentification 'involves the critical e-labor-ation or working over of normative identities.'⁵⁷ It involves countering dominant knowledge and resists the temptation to claim any single group identity, forming a collectivity 'of those whose surplus human needs, capitalism has outlawed.'⁵⁸ This process does not mean a simple renunciation of identities it involves making visible their historical and material conditions of possibility. The prevailing identities offered us by capitalist culture are not to be replaced but viewed as a starting point for the formation of a more comprehensive,

⁵² *op.cit.* p62.

⁵³ *op.cit.* p 115.

⁵⁴ *op.cit.* p 118.

⁵⁵ Charlotte Bunch was addressing a Social Feminist conference at Antioch College in Ohio, USA. 1975. cited in Hennessy, *op.cit.* p178.

⁵⁶ *op.cit.* p 229.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *op.cit.* p 230.

collective agency. Hennessy's work demonstrates how important visibility is conceptualised, I am therefore aware of how vital it is to keep this in mind when calling for a bisexual identity.

In section three entitled, *Indecent Theology*, I examine the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid. She also presents a materialist understanding of sexuality and states simply 'Theology is a sexual act'.⁵⁹ She recognises a parallel in women and the pattern of God's transcendence and argues that women cannot be represented unless there is an excess in God. Through a renunciation of the masquerades of sexual ideology presented as theology, Althaus-Reid calls for representations of God from excess of orthopraxis. Her endeavour also highlights the limits of the hermeneutical circle adopted by feminist liberation theologians. She takes seriously the sexual representation of the universe including God and subjects both to theological suspicion. In her book *The Queer God* she evokes the work of the French philosopher Georges Bataille and his creation Madam Edwarda, the poor sexually explicit woman God. This enables the suffering body of a woman prostitute to become the space of God, becoming a representation of God from the excess of orthopraxis. Althaus-Reid believes that such a representation has theological promise for we may then have a deeper understanding of the sacred in relation to feminine sexuality.

In the section entitled *Exiled into the Land of Heterosexuality*, Althaus-Reid talks of the passports Indecent Theologians need to acquire, firstly to 'maintain a responsible position in the divine cartography of pleasure and desire'⁶⁰; secondly to occupy the primordial space of exclusion in the narratives of Genesis. She calls for processes of sexual ideological disruption in Christianity that will also disrupt a whole political project, which works against people. She comments on the violent dyadic secretive spaces in which 'Totalitarian Theology' operates and considers the theologian as an "event" as well as enquiring where she is located. In the section entitled *A Critical Bisexual Desire*, the value of bisexuality as an epistemological force is utilized. Althaus-Reid calls Queer Theologians to come out in an almost sacrificial way. Theologians should be committed to perverting Christian Theology by remaining involved in the hard problematising of their role and vocation, arguing that a critical bisexual desire is the purist form of a theologian's desire. Independent of the sexual identity of the

⁵⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid. {2000} *opcit.* p 87.

⁶⁰ Marcella Althaus-Reid. *The Queer God*. {2003} p 7.

theologian as an individual, it is more of an epistemological identity that considers bisexuality in a critical way. The Bisexual Theologian who thinks critically bi - or polyamorously is in a unique position. We are called to think in a triadic way, which will provide a location of non-rigid exchanges amongst peoples, actions and reflections, as a base for theology rooted in more genuine and diverse dialogues. Through her formulation of an excessive and destabilised God, along with Irigaray, she also demonstrates how we can introduce the concept of a divine subject in theology, a woman who wishes to reconsider heterosexuality from a bisexual out-of-the closet theology. For her there is a bi-identity, an either/or also a place to be. Utilizing Althaus-Reid's theoretical model of the bisexual theologian affords me the opportunity to develop an experiential "critical bisexual theology". Informed by Queer Theory, the key feature of a "critical bisexual theology", is to highlight the performativity of gender revealing its underlying instability. This shifting offers an unstable starting point from which to begin. However bisexuality provides a further disruption because it also challenges dualism and as I have said our points of divergence are evident when we see how Althaus-Reid adopts a predominantly theoretical investigation. She doesn't look at the heterosexual aspects concerning bisexuality her work is mainly concerned with the homosexual aspects and therefore there has been no provision for a definitive critique of heterosexuality. As a bisexual woman who is in a primary relationship with a man, my curiosity was aroused and I was prompted to look at the difficulties experienced by me and others in my position looking at the ethical implications of living in a society geared solely towards exclusivity. I have also come to recognise that we are exiled within different cultures whereby her place of exile is in the carnival culture of Latin America, which is steeped in bisexual mythology.⁶¹

In my conclusion I convey how I had initially begun my research with "a straight mind".⁶² Unable to think my way out of fixed identity categories, I wanted order, regulation and harmony and I found it difficult to endure the complexity and chaos that my project entailed. Straight thinking had led me into believing that somehow bisexuality could be viewed as normative and superior, therefore my initial call was for a specific bisexual identity. However, I explain how calling for a specific bisexual identity would be a grave error, for to do so can lead to the pathologisation of monosexualities and bisexuality

⁶¹ See Marcella Althaus-Reid, 2003 "God and sex in the mountains: bi/town theology" and "Bi/Christian festivities" *op.cit.* pp.117-123.

⁶² See Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* {Boston Massachusetts USA: Beacon Press, 1992}

would also lose its subversive potential. I also express how writing my thesis has been a cathartic experience and an extreme learning process. I concede that I probably still think to some degree with a straight mind because I have continued with my project [be it in a more considered way] calling for a 'critically' bi - theology. Perhaps, to be more accurate, because I no longer come from a position of hurt I have a deeper understanding of the complex issues involved. My task has been to highlight the epistemological and theological importance of bisexuality toward the creation of theology; by questioning bisexuality I explain how I have provided myself with a base from which to start. I also propose that the Church, concerning the Queer agenda, still needs to talk identities because it has not yet caught up with feminist theology. Through this process of enquiry I express how I found that I had moved to a broader discourse, formerly my work had been addressing two distinct groups, the Academy and the Church. Is there a place then in theology for bisexuality?

Section One

Bisexuality and Church Silence

Homosexuality: a Challenge for Christian theology: Towards a Creation of a Bisexual Political Identity.

In this section I will be looking at what the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches have to say about homosexuality and human sexuality in general. I will show how the Vatican adopts a pathological model of homosexuality, whereby there is a belief that homosexuals suffer from a condition in need of healing. I will also highlight how the authors of both the Roman Catholic and Anglican documents concerning human sexuality base their arguments on monosexual assumptions about sexual orientation, which assume that people are either heterosexual or homosexual; bisexuals are therefore expected to choose the “healthy” heterosexual path.

In fact, if we look at the Statement produced by the Anglican House of Bishops: *Issues in Human Sexuality*. We see that they go so far as to suggest that bisexuals should seek out counselling: ‘in the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing.’¹ However, this is a recommendation given in the light of their teachings concerning fidelity and exclusiveness within sexual relationships, they have come to this recommendation in light of the fact that they believe all bisexuals need to express both sides of their sexuality based on gender object choice. This also reflects their belief that sexuality can only be expressed within the binary oppositions of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and any other form of sexual expression that does not follow this prescription is viewed as an aberration . I will demonstrate later how their stereotypical view of bisexuality is a manifestation of biphobia. In the Roman Catholic documents, however, bisexuality is ignored. The adoption by both the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches of an essentialist view of sexual orientation allows me to demonstrate how bisexuality becomes the forbidden option or no option at all. I also highlight how conclusions are reached based on inadequate Biblical interpretation.

¹ Statement by The House of Bishops: *Issues in Human Sexuality* {London: Church House Publishing 1991} 5.8 p.42.

Concerning Roman Catholic documents, Mark Jordan {2000} endeavours to identify rhetorical traps in Catholic speaking about homosexuality. He states: ‘we are repeatedly told that homosexual lives are necessarily selfish, solitary, bitter, sterile, hedonistic, and narcissistic. When it comes to homosexual life, such caricatures are dictated not only by strong programs of rhetoric, but by politically motivated institutional hypocrisies.’² He suggests that we look at the rhetoric and not the “content” or “arguments” of the official documents, ‘we should examine how the documents are designed to move readers – to move them to opinion, passion, or action.’³, suggesting that the type of reading recommended resembles the “suspicion” practised by liberation theology.

The Vatican’s initial view on homosexuality was that it is to be seen as an intrinsic moral evil, this is evidenced in the 1986 *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. ‘Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil...’⁴ They have taken much of their argument- that homosexuality is an intrinsic evil- from an intermingling of Natural Law ethics and Biblical ethics.

With regard to Biblical ethics, it is essential that the scriptures are viewed in context. We should ask what the authors are opposing when they oppose homosexuality. What is the model of homosexuality to which biblical authors were opposed? In short we must view the cultural realities of the world of the New Testament. For example, an exploration of the Greco-Roman culture of homosexuality reveals that it was defined by the model of pederasty, the love and use of boys or youths by adult males. By examining Pauline literature and the early Jewish responses to pagan homosexual culture we will have a better understanding of the attitudes of the early Jewish Christians.

Regarding biblical interpretation however, Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart believe that we are ‘at present witnessing the emergence of two divergent paths of theology.’⁵

² Mark Jordan, *Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism: The Silence of Sodom* {Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press. 2000} pp.21-22.

³ *op.cit.* p.22.

⁴ Letter to The Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons. 1986. p.3.

⁵ Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher {eds} *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, {Leominster:Eerdmans and Gracewing, 1998} introduction.

By way of clarification I now present an argument put forward by James Nelson who suggests that the official Churches are attempting to do 'A theology of {or about} sexuality', which he believes has a tendency to argue in a one directional way. Asking what scripture and tradition say about our sexuality and how or what the Church the pope or rabbis say are essential questions. However Nelson states; 'but this is not enough.'⁶ Feminist theologians, gay theologians and others, on the other hand, seek to develop what Nelson calls a "sexual theology", where the movement must be in two directions:

we need to ask also {after the manner of various Liberation theologies}: What does our experience as human sexual beings tell us about how we read the scripture, interpret the tradition, and attempt to live out the meaning of the gospel?... we need to hear the gospel speaking profoundly through gay and lesbian experience' and we need also 'to listen carefully to women's stories.'⁷

Thatcher and Stuart draw our attention towards the thoughts of theologian Stephen C. Barton. He suggests that we should 'take the Bible out of the dock and put the readers into it' further suggesting that we put aside questions like 'is the Bible good news for human sexuality?' He suggests we favour another approach which asks 'what sort of people ought we to be and become, so that we are enabled to read the Bible in ways which are life-giving in the area of gender and sexuality.'⁸ Maintaining that it is easy to;

misinterpret the Bible in the interests of a predetermined, modern agenda... what is needed instead, by way of a corrective, are ways of reading the Bible which are grounded more firmly, both in historically-informed theology and in the worship and discipleship of communities of faith.⁹

He argues: 'the prominence accorded the Bible is related to a number of factors. At a fundamental level, it has to do with the fact that Christianity is what George Lindbeck calls a "textualised religion", where reality has an inscribed, "it is written", quality about it'.¹⁰ On the role of the Bible Barton states;

what the Bible "says" and how the Bible "speaks" are not the same thing... The literal meaning or the meaning of the text is not necessarily the true meaning or the meaning "for us". For the Bible to speak, acts of interpretation and discrimination on the part of the reader in his or her 'reading community', under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are required.¹¹

⁶ James Nelson, *Body Theology* {Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992.} p 21.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Stuart and Thatcher, {1998} *ibid.*

⁹ Stephen C. Barton, {ed} *The Family; In Theological Perspective* {Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996} introduction xvi.

¹⁰ George Lindbeck, 'Barth and Textuality, *Theology Today*' 1986-87, cited in Barton *op.cit.* p.4.

¹¹ Barton, *op.cit.* . p 6.

Referring to an argument put forward by Adrian Thatcher, Barton quotes him as saying that ‘a distinction must be made between a *biblical* sexual theology and a *Christian* sexual theology’.¹²

This means, following Thatcher’s argument further and for the purposes of my work it allows:

A christological principal and a traditional doctrinal framework are advanced as the essential basis for renouncing sub-Christian, literalist readings of the Bible in favour of readings which testify to the revelation of the love of God in Christ: quoting Thatcher ‘Sexual theology is Christian when it derives from a sharing in the vision and experience of God as love, made known in Jesus Christ. The role of the Bible in sexual theology must be that of testifying to that vision and experience.’¹³

Echoing Thatcher, Barton states ‘we have to ask the question, what virtues and skills does a community of readers require in order to read the Bible in ways which are wise and life-giving...’ directing our attention not only at the text but also at those who are doing the reading ... ‘it is also essential to recognise the importance of interpreting the Bible theologically and doxologically’.¹⁴ That is, we should be mindful about how we honour and praise God; in the context of theological reflection on human sexuality, we should read the Bible with a view to discerning more clearly how the Biblical testimony to the love and justice of God is reflected in our sexual relationships.

Theologian Theodore W. Jennings proposes a gay affirmative reading of the Bible, this is because he believes that a defensive strategy of dealing primarily with Biblical passages that are alleged to support homophobia gives far more plausibility than is deserved to traditional readings. He also demonstrates how aspects of the Jesus tradition appear to transcend the boundaries of gender identity. In his book *The Man Jesus Loved*, Jennings takes the position ‘that the homophobic and heterocentric position of the church {and of Western society in general} is a distortion of the Bible.’¹⁵ He argues that greater clarity about the meaning of Biblical texts, and therefore a greater clarity about the meaningfulness of Biblical traditions for contemporary attitudes towards same-sex desire and practice is afforded through a “gay affirmative” or counter homophobic re-reading of the Bible. He recognises that a gay affirmative re-reading of Biblical texts, which presumed there was a basis for cultural and social denigration of people who engage in same-sex gender sexual activity, may no longer be employed because they are a result of mistranslation. It is to behaviour rather than to orientation that any counter homosexual texts can be

¹² Adrian Thatcher, ‘Liberating Sex; A Christian Sexual Theology’ 1993, p.15. cited in Barton *op.cit.* p7.

¹³ Adrian Thatcher, {1993} p28. cited in Barton *ibid.*

¹⁴ Barton, *op.cit.* p.22.

applied, if at all. Jennings work is an attempt to ‘explore texts from the Gospels that suggest something about Jesus’ own erotic attachments and the attitude toward same-sex relationships that may be fairly extrapolated from the traditions about Jesus.’¹⁶ He suggests that what emerges from such an endeavour:

is evidence for the “dangerous memory” of Jesus as the lover of another man and whose attitudes toward such relationships, as well as toward gender and what are today are called “marriage and family values”, are incompatible with modern heterosexism and homophobia.¹⁷

The hermeneutical task he undertakes is ‘an appropriation of the Bible that is not afraid of the body or of the erotic.’¹⁸

The gay affirmative reading of Biblical texts carried out by Jennings raises many points. It has highlighted how the Church appears to deliberately distort both the Bible and the traditions concerning Jesus. It has afforded greater clarity concerning the meaning of Biblical texts which enhances the meaningfulness of the Biblical tradition for contemporary attitudes towards same-sex desire and practice. The contestation of the privileging of heterosexual unions also uncovered by Jennings has provided me with the opportunity to challenge notions of exclusivity, an issue closely linked to the phenomenon of bisexuality. It has also shown how aspects of the Jesus tradition appear to subvert gender categories. His recognition of the probable connection between gender role subversion and the dangerous memory of same-sex eroticism in the Jesus tradition, could perhaps allow us to consider whether Jesus was bisexual. Perhaps because there is an absence in his teaching of any discussion concerning human sexuality, could Jesus perhaps have been the very first “critically bisexual” theologian?

Concerning Natural Law ethics, the Church’s argument that homosexuality is unacceptable relies heavily on the ideas of procreative sex and the theory of complementarity. Complementarity relies on the formulation of binary opposition and this view, highlights just how deeply embedded dualistic thought is within the Church. Also caught up with this particular kind of mind set is the exemplification of the mind over the body, resulting in a general fear of the flesh syndrome.

¹⁵ Theodore W. Jennings. *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* {Cleveland Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2006} p3.

¹⁶ *op.cit.* preface ix.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *op.cit.* p.5.

Complementarity has led to the assumption that the sexes are not whole without one another. It is based partly on the obvious physiological differences between women and men, but mainly on the bible, on traditions of biblical interpretation and on historically based Christian practice...Biblical accounts of male / female complementarity start with the account of creation in Genesis 1.27.¹⁹

Bisexuality challenges such a position because within its practice genders may not be as fixed and binary as complementarity suggests. Bisexuality introduces fluidity and ambiguity that has no place in the complementary world - view. This is problematic for theology that rests so heavily on binary oppositions as the practice of bisexuality by its very nature brings into question this world - view. Both liberation and feminist theologies have highlighted the injustices and exclusions that spring from binary thinking and so a way of life that challenges such thinking is an important contribution as lived experience in the creation of theology.²⁰

Stanley J Grenz writes; 'Sexuality is a dimension of our existence as embodied persons. At its core this embodied existence includes a fundamental incompleteness.'²¹ It is questionable, however, whether Genesis 1.27 can bear such an interpretation as theologians who adhere to the theory of complementarity adopt C G Jung's theory of "archetypes".

Although a person's conscious self is either male or female, their unconscious will carry traces of a "contrasexual" identity. This is adopted to characterise a version of gender complementarity in which each individual can realise and affirm a "shadow" gender archetype and attain wholeness.²²

From a feminist point of view, complementarity actually presents a construction of femininity, which will always leave women socially, politically and theologically subordinate, to men. The theory of complementarity reinforces gender dualism. Elaine Graham argues:

So long as 'femininity' is defined as the polar opposite and negation of dominant and normative 'masculinity', it is still founded on a pattern of gender traits that are fundamentally asymmetrical...The notion of complementarity divides women and men into two ontological species, separate, superficially equal; but like other anthropology's of complementarity, it ignores the objectification of the female within such a symbolic representation.²³

¹⁹ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea Mc Ewan, {eds}. *An A to Z of Feminist Theology* {Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996} p.33

²⁰ See for example, Marcella Althaus-Reid, 2000, 2003. Lisa Isherwood, 2000.

²¹ Stanley Grenz, *Sexual Ethics; An Evangelical Perspective* {Louisville: John Knox Press 1990} p20.

²² Ulanon 1971, cited in Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender Personhood and Theology* {London: Mowbray 1995}p.45.

²³ Graham *op.cit.* p.47.

Rather than from an anthropology of equivalence and mutuality, complementarity of women to men derived originally from the Thomist notion of subordination and inferiority. Graham argues that we are 'still trapped in a bygone era':

Whilst Thomist notions of the essential inferiority of women are no longer explicitly entertained, no alternative theological anthropology is advanced, either to endorse modern thinking on the equality of the sexes, or to identify alternative Christian understandings of human nature. It still wants to draw its anthropology from Natural Law without realising that historically this rested on faulty biology, or that contemporary scholarship on human gender eschews simplistic connections between reproductive difference and social roles.²⁴

However, if we look at a Biblical passage such as Galatians 3.28, we see how it may subvert all notions of complementarity. 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ'. This particular passage in Galatians subverts the notion of binary thinking which is foundational to the idea of complementarity. Also, the theory of complementarity is the foundation upon which the 'falling short' argument is built.²⁵

'Homosexuality belongs to the disorder of creation which follows the fall.'²⁶ Based upon Genesis 1-3 this stance is once again rooted in the theory of complementarity. Mainstream Christian theology maintains that the present world is fallen, it does not measure up to the fullness of the intent of God. Evangelical Stanley Grenz writes: 'when compared to the biblical understanding of the creative intent of God, the homosexual falls short of God's ideal.'²⁷ This argument however, follows a homophobic Biblical creationism: homosexual tendencies are one of the many disorders that have beset fallen humanity.

The Bible opposes homosexuality, but if we look at Leviticus 1.; Corinthians; 1.Timothy, and Romans 1. we shall see it is just one sin among many. It is argued by many that the Bible does not oppose homosexuality per se, because texts do not deal with homosexuality in general. For example, Leviticus. 18: 28 and 20:13 legislates against male homosexuality. However, one possible answer is that the basic objection is to the wasting of male semen. Therefore we must view this particular text within the context of the procreative ethic which it served. To clarify, I shall now therefore turn my attention toward the Church view that sexual relations should ultimately result in procreation.

To traditional theology the possibility of conception symbolises the creation of God. This idea came from Thomas Aquinas' use of Natural Law. Thatcher explains how for Aquinas 'any sexual act at all

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher, *People of Passion* {London: Mowbray 1997}p.187.

²⁶ *op.cit.* p.186.

which does not aim at procreation, he says, is wrong.²⁸ Thatcher also notes that the unexpected delay in the return of Christ led to the belief that sexual activity between persons must have a purpose, an end result. This goal being the procreation of children, Adrian Thatcher informs us that the delay in Christ's return in Pauline times led to the very strict control of our sexual desires. St Paul allowed marriage for sexual expression but advocated a state of singleness as preferable.

As the authority of his letters increased, and awareness of the reasons for his preference diminished, he was assumed to be saying that celibacy is always better than marriage...This 'fatal legacy' was responsible for the higher valuation of celibacy over marriage, the regulation of sexual intercourse within marriage, the relegation of marriage to a defence against desire, and the reputation for marriage that it was for spiritual failures defeated by carnal lusts.²⁹

If we undertake a brief analysis of Paul's references to homo-erotic love in Romans we shall see that Paul is condemning a whole way of life based upon idolatry, in which Godless behaviour is the result. Same-sex behaviour is condemned by Paul on the grounds that it involves the giving up of the natural use of sex organs. In short, 'homosexuality is the by-product of minds turned away and against God.'³⁰ This is the result of his cultural upbringing in which the natural was associated with the hierarchical and sexual acts were supposed to express this natural hierarchy. Bernadette Brooten, a major contributor to an historical understanding of gender and sexuality in late antiquity shows how Paul shared the assumptions about gender held by most non-Christian writers of his time. Brooten classifies Paul's condemnation of sexual relations between women as 'based upon the assumption widely shared within the Roman world calls for men to be super ordinate and active and for women to be subordinate and passive.'³¹

From Perversion to Pathology

I would now like to explore how the homosexual status changed from being viewed as a perversion to being viewed as a pathological illness, in need of healing. As I have said it is my belief that there is a strong link between the pathologization of homosexuality and bisexuality, they are both vilified for their particular sexual practices and expressions with people of the same sex.

Feminist Liberation Theologians tend to view our sexuality as socially constructed. Many take their lead from the French philosopher Michel Foucault, one of the most prominent figures in the analysis of

²⁷ Grenz *op.cit.* p.232.

²⁸ Adrian Thatcher, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* {London: SPCK 1993}p.6.

²⁹ Stuart and Thatcher, {1997} *op.cit.* p.18.

³⁰ Thatcher, in Stuart and Thatcher {1997} *op.cit.* p.171.

³¹ Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women* {Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996} p. 192.

human sexuality. He maintained that sexuality is a created concept that is deployed in the relationship of people in society; it does not exist as an objective entity. He argued that the homosexual as a personality type was invented in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the medical community who were taking over from the Church the role of classifying and controlling society.³² Gay theologian Robert Goss in *Jesus Acted Up* writes; ‘In the 1870s religious discourse about “sin against nature” was replaced by scientific discourse about the unnatural, the abnormal. The perverted was transformed into the pathological.’³³ Goss argues that the official Roman Catholic position opposes all social constructions of human sexuality through the social sciences and maintains Natural Law as the norm of human sexuality. Thus it ‘upholds a patriarchal image of God...this enables the Catholic hierarchy to dismiss all social and cultural constructions of human sexuality as a reduction of the mystery of God.’³⁴

The idea that homosexuality is a pathological state originates from the work of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. His view that sexuality is the central dimension of a person’s character led to the classification of people according to their sexual preferences. Freudian analysis suggests that we are all born with bisexual tendencies and are socialised into “healthy” heterosexuals. He maintained that a settled homosexual condition represented a developmental immaturity. Freud elaborates on this point in Volume V11 of his complete works *Three Essays on Sexuality*.³⁵ We see how his formulations about human sexuality in this chapter, highlights how homosexuality is an ‘inverted’ condition. His discussion concerning ‘The Sexual Aberrations’ shows clearly this point, indeed, his term for bisexual individuals is ‘*amphigenic* inverts’ or ‘*psychosexual hermaphrodites*’.³⁶

Freud acknowledges that we all have bisexual tendencies but then if we look at Judith Butler’s analysis, in section two, we can see that we are expected to repress these primary drives and consign them to a melancholic identification with ones own sex. The analysis provided by Freud ‘inevitably

³² Stuart and Thatcher {1997} *op.cit.* p.169.

³³ Goss, *op.cit.* p.6.

³⁴ Goss *op.cit.* p.13.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, Volume V11 {1901-1905} ‘A Case of Hysteria Three Essays on Sexuality and Other works’. {London, Toronto: The Hogarth Press Ltd, Clark, Irwin and Co. Ltd.} Institute of Psycho-analysis. This edition first published {1953 reprinted 1956, 57,62,64,68}pp.135-37.

³⁶ Freud, *ibid.*

served to provide a new diagnostic tool among those who sought to “cure” homosexuals.³⁷ In the 1986 Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons by Cardinal Ratzinger, Goss argues that he ‘employs the term “homosexual orientation” three times. “Orientation” in the 1986 document is used within a narrow philosophical framework based on natural law.’³⁸ Goss further argues that Christianity legitimises cultural oppression and social violence.

He quotes Mary Hunt’s, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*. 1990:

For churches to baptise and confirm the homophobic insights of society, and indeed for theology to be exposed as the root of many such notions, is the scandal that has driven many people far from the pews. More significantly, to justify the virulent attacks on lesbian/gay people by an appeal to scripture and tradition further undercuts any reason why lesbian/gay people would relate to Christianity as anything but an adversary.³⁹

Goss maintains, however, that ‘Christianity itself is not the enemy. Rather, institutional forms of Christianity continue to oppress gay and lesbian people.’⁴⁰

In light of the medicalised model of homosexuality, traditional Christian theology sees homosexuality as a pathological state, a sickness in need of healing. Referring to the 1992 Vatican document concerning the Catholic Response to Legislate Proposals on the Non Discrimination of Homosexual Persons, Goss argues that, ‘the notion of homosexual orientation as an intrinsic evil or objective disorder becomes comparable to mental illness.’⁴¹ The American Bishops were urged to take a public position of just discrimination against gay men and lesbians. Goss writes; ‘This discrimination {just} is compared to the State’s authority to restrict the exercise of the civil rights of mentally ill persons to protect the common good...gay men and lesbians are dehumanised.’⁴² Also addressing the issue of homosexuality in the context of a theology of male/female complementarity with a reflection to the creation stories, the Protestant theologian Karl Barth adopts a position which, it is said by Stuart and Thatcher, appears more radical in its application than that of the Vatican. Barth’s belief is that the partnership between men and women established at creation permeates all social relationships between them, for him ‘every form of relationship which separates women from men is disobedient to the

³⁷ Vasey, *op.cit.* p.152.

³⁸ Goss, *op.cit.* p.13.

³⁹ Mary Hunt, *A Fierce Tenderness* 1990 p.48. cited in Goss, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Goss., introduction.

⁴¹ *op.cit.* p.15.

divine command – including religious communities and single sex clubs.⁴³ He has taken Paul’s prescription that homosexuality is the by-product of minds turned away from God. However, Thatcher points out that here, too, is also a suggestion that homosexuality can be “healed”, ‘the proper response of the Church is to call people away from the idolatry of which homosexuality is a part, into relationship with the true God who commands that men can only be truly human in relationship with women, and vice versa.’⁴⁴

In light of what has been written so far “heterosexuality” is seen as the healthy norm to which human beings should conform. Michael Vasey asserts that this contrasts with Romans 1:24 which ‘clearly indicates that all human desire is profoundly disordered: “dishonouring of their bodies” refers to activity between men and women.’⁴⁵ He also argues that, ‘The assertion that gay people need healing carries with it strong cultural conditioning.’⁴⁶ The scientific category of the “homosexual” has however, served as an aid to homosexuals forming a “gay identity”. There was a sense that ‘scientific study might offer some respite, and even help, in the face of sustained cultural hostility.’⁴⁷ ‘The identification of a distinct group of people, for whom homosexuality was a given part of their lives, proved an essential part of the campaigns to shift the very heavy burden of social hatred and legal oppression.’⁴⁸ However, ‘the category of the homosexual has also proved profoundly oppressive of gay people...in the popular mind it carries the suggestion of a sort of third sex that it derives from the stigmatisation of homosexual subcultures since 1700.’⁴⁹

The Invisible Sex: Bisexuality and Choice.

When one understands bisexuality as the sum total of all of the implications of loving others at the level of SOUL, and not merely at the level of the physical BODY, one understands that this capacity is indeed our most fortunate destiny, and a state of exquisite grace.⁵⁰

The reader may ask why have I decided to call bisexuality the invisible sex. Indeed, because women are rendered invisible and their experiences are still largely ignored by traditional theology, and if they

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Stuart and Thatcher, {1997} p.171.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Vasey, *op.cit.* p.24.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *op.cit.* p.101.

⁴⁸ *op.cit.* p.103.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

happen to identify as bisexual, and because I am writing from a woman's perspective, bisexuality in this instance is to be viewed as both an invisible sex and sexual orientation. Within all of the major theological discussions concerning human sexuality, bisexuality has been largely ignored. There are many Church statements concerning homosexuality, however, I have found none concerning bisexuality other than the Church pronouncement by the Anglican House of Bishops mentioned earlier. In *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, Francis Mark Mondimore asks: 'is bisexuality a discrete category of sexual functioning? Or is it, rather, as Alfred Kinsey theorised, a point on a continuum?'⁵¹ Sweeping aside categories of sexuality, Kinsey emphasised that all persons had the potential for an infinite variety of sexual expressions and proposed that an individual's "heterosexual potential" and "homosexual potential" were mixed and blended by the individual's upbringing, family dynamics, community and early sexual experiences. Mondimore suggests the difficulty in defining what bisexual means has hampered research. Kinsey's approach of opting for a numerical definition determined by counting the number of sexual contacts with members of either gender does not capture the wide range of styles and attractions that can be called bisexual.

It was Freud who first came up with the idea of the infantile polymorphous position. However, he argued that the polymorphous potential, of which he saw a trace in everyone, was an immature stage in an individual's sexual development. He wrote of the irresistibility of perverse instincts:

The detaching of sexuality from the genitals has the advantage of allowing us to bring the sexual activities of children and perverts into the same scope as those of normal adults...from a psychoanalytic standpoint, even the most eccentric and repellent perversions are explicable as manifestations of component instincts which have freed themselves from the primacy of the genitals and are now in pursuit of pleasure on their own account as they were in the very early days of the libido's development.⁵²

Lynne Segal argues that, 'despite the ubiquity of perverse fantasies and activities at the very core of Freud's writing, which confounds our ideas of what it means to be "masculine" or "feminine", the radical failure of his legacy is that it still, for the most part, simply follows his lead, "takes over" {these} two concepts and makes them the foundation of his work.'⁵³ Concerning the suggestion that Mondimore provides, namely that we may need to define what bisexuality means, it has been

⁵⁰ Kolodney, *op.cit.* p.5.

⁵¹ Francis Mark Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*. {Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1996} *op.cit.* p.100.

⁵² Freud, cited in Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex; The Politics of Pleasure* { London: Virago, 1994 } p.157.

suggested by other theorists that we interrogate the concept of bisexuality, that there should be a critical re-think about where it has come from and how its origins continue to shape it in contemporary debates: 'Bisexuality has the potential for opening up new ways of understanding gender and sexuality but it also has the potential for obscuring or even foreclosing new understandings.'⁵⁴

In general there have been three responses surrounding the question of what bisexuality is. There has been the physiological response, which involves, for example, the work of sexologist Havelock Ellis, whom I shall mention later, and of course the psychological responses from theorists such as Freud. However, their focus has been solely on the male/female dichotomy. The third response concerning bisexuality consists in heterosexuality and homosexuality. Gender theorists argue that the pathologisation of homosexuality has long rested on its characterisation as an inappropriately gendered desire – a “feminine” desire for men in male homosexuals, or a “masculine” desire for women in lesbians. ‘This strict correlation between gender and sexual object choice, such that desire for men is always feminine and desire for women always masculine, was vigorously challenged by the gay liberation movement, as indeed it continues to be today.’⁵⁵

There has been a disassociation of ideas of masculinity and femininity from sexual object choice, so that now an individual's preference for male or female partners - or both - are no longer regarded as a question of masculinity or femininity - or both - but of heterosexuality or homosexuality - or both.⁵⁶

Apart from Theology, it has been found within all of the other major disciplines that the masculine /feminine definition has been steadily superseded by the heterosexual/homosexual definition of bisexuality, although the former continues to haunt the latter.

It is argued ‘bisexuality...is the church’s deepest sexual fear.’⁵⁷ ‘Bisexuals undermine the whole sexual system, the neat classification of people into homosexual and heterosexual, the pathologising of homosexuality as a heterosexual disorder and so on.’⁵⁸ Bisexuality and homosexuality challenges the Roman Catholic Churches teaching on sexuality which is linked to the family and procreation – all

⁵³ Segal, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Merl Storr, {ed} *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* {London, New York: Routledge, 1999} *op.cit.* introduction.

⁵⁵ Butler, 1990, 1993; Weeks. 1997, cited in Storr, *op.cit.* p.4.

⁵⁶ Storr, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Tom Driver, cited in Stuart and Thatcher, {1997} *op.cit.* p.190.

⁵⁸ Stuart and Thatcher, *ibid.*

sexual acts have to be open to new life. The importance of the family and God is based on the prototype of the divine family: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This construct of the divine family mirrors the patriarchal model. Sexuality in the Church is linked with marriage, the Christian idea of God as Father/Son is a familial model and is linked to procreation so any sexual act should only take place in marriage as it mirrors the creativity of the divine. When we talk about bisexuality it challenges this concept of God as Father. Bisexuality also challenges the Roman Catholics stance on complementarity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for example,⁵⁹ expounds that our moral, physical and spiritual difference and complementarity should be oriented towards the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. It is interesting to note however, that these teachings are centred around the issues concerning homosexuality and there is no reference at all in their teachings concerning bisexuality. It is further argued by Stuart and Thatcher that by and large it ‘seems to be a phenomenon more common among women than men and the Church’s inarticulateness about it reflects its usual disregarding of the experiences of lesbians and indeed of women generally.’⁶⁰ Feminist writer Alison Webster writes: ‘The idea of “choosing” a same sex relationship over and above heterosexual relationships is unthinkable to liberal and conservative Christians.’⁶¹ She argues that the Church of England’s pronouncements on bisexuality ‘demonstrate perfectly how such a choice is a refusal to take full moral responsibility and is not seen as a carefully thought out theological perspective.’⁶² :

The Church’s guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile relationships and of satisfactions within them, they should follow the way of holiness in either celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage.... This reinforces an earlier statement issued whereby bisexuals are called to restrain their homosexual inclinations and develop a heterosexual orientation.⁶³

From reading this statement, it is my belief that the Church of England is maintaining that bisexuality is really heterosexuality and people should therefore remain within the hetero-normative role prescribed for all. Webster further explains that an attempt to obliterate the sexual middle ground strengthens the tendency among Christians to polarise “heterosexuals” and “homosexuals” as two

⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* {New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1995} article 6 “The Sixth Commandment” paragraph 2333. See also, Alfonso Card. Lopez Trujillo, President of the The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, Guidelines for Education Within the Family. {Vatican City December 8th 1995 }

⁶⁰ Stuart and Thatcher. *ibid.*

⁶¹ Alison Webster, *Found Wanting* {London: Cassell, 1995} p.27.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Webster produces a statement by the house of bishops, *Issues in Human Sexuality* {London: Church House Publishing 1991} paragraph 5,8, p.42. *ibid.*

completely discrete groups that have nothing to say to one another. The Church of England's view does not take into account the possible quality of such relationships, they assume that heterosexual relationships are better purely because they are heterosexual.

Gay Lifestyle and the Challenges it Presents

Gay lifestyle presents traditional Christian theology with the problem of facing up to its homophobic prescriptions and the injustices these prescriptions incite. Theological reflection upon human sexuality carried out by liberation scholars has uncovered the many contradictions and paradoxes within its doctrines, it highlights how they have come to their conclusions with a total disregard for an adequate historical and contextual Biblical analysis. Much of their argument is based on faulty biology and dualistic thought patterns. As I have already said, the Churches understandings of human nature continues to adhere {although no longer explicitly}, to the legacy of Thomist notions of the essential inferiority of women, which defines "femininity" as the polar opposite and negation of dominant and normative "masculinity". This understanding, creates a pattern of gender traits that are fundamentally asymmetrical, dividing women and men into two ontological species and still wants to draw its anthropology from Natural Law. However, intersexed individuals or hermaphrodites and transgendered people and their experiences have been subject for discussion within anthropological and scientific communities.⁶⁴ Their existence has opened up many debates concerning the confluence of sex and gender, their ambiguous bodily representations exemplifies just how complex it can be for issues surrounding the understanding of human sexual nature.

Another leading authority in the field of sexual ethics, Lisa Isherwood, suggests that the 'churches are still trying to maintain a hierarchy based on "say-so", power-over, and are not trusting the spirit rising from the lives of the people of God and shaping a co-creative future.'⁶⁵ Placing experience at the heart of the creation of theology; 'cuts hierarchy to the quick and demands that individual lives be seen and taken seriously in matters of religion.'⁶⁶ Following Isherwood's lead, this thesis is largely based on my

⁶⁴ See Beth A, Firestein. {ed} *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* {London. California, New Delhi: Sage, 1996} and Vanessa Baird. *The No-Nonsense guide to Sexual Diversity* {Oxford: New International Publications Ltd 2001}

⁶⁵ Isherwood, in Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* {Sheffield: SAP 1998} p.39.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

experience of being both a woman and a bisexual. She believes that the body in its entirety is the site of experience. 'This poses a challenge to theology which has claimed to be based on rationality alone and has functioned in a dualistic way.'⁶⁷

For the traditional Christian who may believe that people do have an essence rooted in the image of God, "coming out" has difficulties... 'gay resistance challenges Christianity on two levels, that of justice and in relation to the "essence" of God in creation.'⁶⁸ Gay lifestyle also challenges Christian ethics:

Foucault talks of "desexualisation" which means taking sexual pleasure away from the normal forms of expression. In this way he claims we liberate our desire and create new pleasures. This is a philosophical activity as it opens new ways of being, by decentering the subject and fragmenting personal identity.⁶⁹

Additionally, bisexuality has been swept under the carpet because its existence undermines the sexual system of classifying people into either heterosexuals or homosexuals, making it problematic to pathologise homosexuality. The experience of bisexual people is not generally acknowledged within society, lesbian and gay people also view bisexuality as a threat. Elizabeth Stuart comments how lesbians and gays have accused bisexuals of:

...wanting to have their cake and eat it', portraying them often as moral cowards who identify with heterosexuals when the going gets rough for the lesbian and gay community. In heteroreality bisexuals, when their existence is acknowledged, are often portrayed at worst as complete degenerates or at best people who are heterosexual really but also have an eccentric habit of being attracted to the same sex.⁷⁰

Finally, bisexual lifestyle also challenges the notion of exclusivity, which has been part of the patriarchal sexual package. This therefore opens up sites of resistance by producing an alternative model. Isherwood suggests that if we look closely towards the origins of monogamous marriage we can see that 'It appears to support the issue of ownership rather than one of romantic love and commitment.'⁷¹ It also 'fits well with complementarity since it brings the two halves of humanity back together in a tightly regulated system.'⁷² She also explains how:

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *op.cit.* p.30.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends: Toward a Lesbian and Gay theology of Relationships* {London: Mowbray 1995} p.179.

⁷¹ Isherwood, in Isherwood and Stuart, {1998} *op.cit.* p.29.

⁷² *ibid.*

The perceived security that women feel in monogamous relationships also tends to make them give priority to that relationship and this does not always act in their interests. Women's friendships are vital in the struggle for liberation but the notion of monogamy keeps women divided.⁷³

Role Models and Negative Stereotypes

Concerning bisexuality, there have sadly been a lack of support and a lack of cultural role models.

Most models are based on negative stereotypes. For example, the question of whether bisexuals need to express both sides of their sexuality can be problematic:

Findings indicate that the stereotype that bisexuals require sexual partners of both sexes is untrue. For some persons who are bisexual, gender is simply not an important determinant of partner choice, whereas others are attracted to gender specific attributes in a potential sexual romantic partner. In the latter case, the gender specific quality of their attractions may lead to a preference for concurrent relationships with partners of each gender. Therefore gender identity in general is not an indicator of sexual object choice.⁷⁴

There have been discussions and studies carried out by academics in the fields of psychology and social theory on the various ways in which bisexuals organise their relationships with others, what they have found is that bisexuals are not all the same and we should allow for the idea that some may find it possible to maintain exclusive relationships with others without losing their specific bisexual identity. The cultural model of the monogamous relationship may work for many who find it possible to have their sexual, romantic, and emotional needs met by a single other person. Others, may find:

...that no one person could meet all their relational needs, not necessarily because they have greater needs than others but because they have needs that cannot be met within a monogamous relationship. For example, some people need or want diversity in sexual, romantic or emotional input. Others need a level of emotional independence that they can't experience in a monogamous relationship.⁷⁵

Cited in *Bisexuality, The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority*; Paula C. Rust writes;

Whatever the reason, some people are happier and more secure receiving sexual, emotional, and romantic support from a variety of people instead of only one person. If we take off our cultural blinders, we can see that this is, in fact, a very reasonable approach to needs fulfilment that provides greater security than monogamy; dependence on one person for all one's needs is a very shaky premise indeed, compared with multiple sustaining relationships that can provide greater support in a wider variety of circumstances. Once this has been recognised, it should be clear that monogamists do not have a monopoly on either maturity or stability.⁷⁶

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Beth A. Firestein, {ed} {1996} *op.cit.* pp. 94-95.

⁷⁵ Paula C. Rust in Firestein, *op.cit.* p.131.

⁷⁶ Rust, *op.cit.* p.132.

She argues that rather than seeing bisexuality strictly as a sexual and behavioural phenomenon, it should be viewed as a social identity. This is because for many, it is difficult to feel an unqualified sense of pride in their bisexuality.

Heterosexuality is viewed as the “healthy” norm to which human beings should conform, and this uncompromising position taken by the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches has a profound effect on gays, lesbians and bisexuals. As evidenced in the field of sociology, rather than being viewed as “unhealthy” or failing to reach a stage of sexual maturity, the bisexual position may be viewed as emotionally and sexually “mature”. I suggest that bisexuality can be a role model of tolerance. This is because in the words of Lynne Segal: ‘Bisexuals are the most likely class of people to understand and easily embrace the concept of gender identity as separate from sexual orientation’.⁷⁷

Utilising the interlocking theoretical perspectives of feminism, poststructuralism and queer theory and politics, the usefulness and limitations of bisexuality will be considered next. I will begin by examining the potential it has for disrupting binary divisions in a heteropatriarchal society and then look at bisexuality as an identity and discuss how identifying one self as a bisexual can be problematic. The insights gleaned from these contemporary perspectives have the potential to challenge lesbian ethics and traditional Christian theology. This endeavour highlights the inadequacies within the Christian Church by showing how it ignores human experience. My research exposes the falsity of simplistic and polarised notions of sexual orientation. This exposure informs us that the sexual identities, to which most of us hope to anchor our complex sexual lives, may not be so simple after all.

Biphobia: Dismantling the Binary Divide with a move toward Affirmative Role Models

Before I proceed with my discussion on bisexuality as an identity, I will briefly explain what biphobia is and how it effects the individuals concerned. This will illustrate why forming such an identity is believed to be so vital for bisexuals, like myself, who feel there is a desperate shortage of adequate affirming role models with which to identify.

⁷⁷ Segal, *op.cit.* p.95.

The denial of the very existence of bisexual people is the primary manifestation of biphobia. Biphobia has been defined as ‘The denigration of bisexuality as a valid life choice.’⁷⁸

I would like to remind the reader that: ‘Bisexuality is the churches deepest sexual fear.’⁷⁹ This is because

bisexual’s very existence undermine the whole sexual system, the neat classification of people into homosexual and heterosexual and this makes the pathologizing of homosexuality problematic. Its existence challenges the hierarchical dualism created by Western binary thinking. Bisexuality undoes hierarchy:

If the hierarchy topples, not only will some members of the “heterosexual” majority have to grapple with the disowned elements of their own sexual and affectional desires, but they also lose the superior status implied by occupying the valued position within the dualistic hierarchy.⁸⁰

I have argued that there are many contradictions and paradoxes within the doctrines of traditional theology. For traditional theology, heterosexuality is seen as the healthy norm to which human beings should conform. Bisexuals are called to restrain their homosexual inclinations and develop a heterosexual orientation. Bisexual lives, it seems, are in a constant state of flux, symbolising disorder and chaos, which is seen as a threat because it has the propensity to destroy patriarchal sacred power. The discomfort heterosexuals feel and the behavioural measures used to protect the security of their position within the existing hierarchy, is biphobic.

Concerning homosexuals bisexuals are problematic because there is a strong need to maintain a clear boundary between “us” and “them”. Many lesbians and gay men believe that ‘bisexuals have less commitment’⁸¹ to the gay community. Heterosexual relationships are privileged. For many lesbian feminists, the lesbian label has come to embody the concept of resistance to patriarchy, and sexism and bisexual women who cohabit with men or who refuse to sever all ties with them are colluding with patriarchy. I will be demonstrating in section two how lesbian feminists have critiqued a liberal humanistic approach which moves towards conceptualisations that represent lesbianism in terms of individual choices of lifestyle or private quests for self-fulfilment and loving interpersonal

⁷⁸ Kathleen Bennet {1992} is quoted by Robyn Ochs ‘Biphobia: It Goes More Than Two Ways’ cited in Firestein *op.cit.*p.224.

⁷⁹ Tom Driver in Batchelor, *Homosexuality and Ethics* {Pilgrim Press , 1980}, cited in Stuart and Thatcher, {1997} *op.cit.* p.190.

⁸⁰ Firestein, *op.cit.* pp.226-227.

⁸¹ Robyn Ochs, in Firestein *op.cit.* p.228.

relationships because they fear assimilation or “liquidation by merger”. The framing of the heterosexuality debate by lesbian feminists has been critiqued because only the pains and problems of heterosexuality could be voiced; however, I will demonstrate how many have argued against the inevitability of eroticised power and abuse. I have suggested that the theorisation of heterosexuality carried out by many lesbian feminists is deterministic, leaving no room for the subject to transcend their situation: ‘The conflating of all heterosexual desire with the destructive mechanisms of heterosexist and heteronormative oppression does nothing to enable people to accept their own sexual diversity.’⁸²

Bisexuality has the potential of dismantling the binary divide between homosexual and heterosexual; the reciprocal nature between both these groups is rendered null and void by the existence of bisexuality. The intensification of gay pride in response to homophobia, and the tightening of the boundaries of the homosexual community that has accompanied it, has therefore led to an increased stigmatisation of bisexuality. One of the products of binary thinking is based on the belief of many that bisexuals need to express both sides of their sexuality. I have illustrated how sociological and psychological findings indicate that the stereotype that bisexuals require partners of both sexes is untrue and biphobia is powerfully evident when gender is seen as a major determinant of partner choice. Differences between men and women are exaggerated in order to preserve a clear distinction between men and women, and those, whose sex or gender is ambiguous, can render others profoundly uncomfortable. ‘The “disorder” resulting from central features of our lives which cannot fit into dichotomies disturbs us deeply.’⁸³ Bisexual lifestyle, if it happens to be non-monogamous, leads to conflict within the wider community as it challenges the notion of exclusivity, which has been part of the patriarchal sexual package. If we look towards the origins of monogamous marriage we can see that it appears to support the issue of ownership rather than love and commitment. It is argued that monogamists do not have the monopoly on either maturity or stability.

⁸² Jo Eadie {1993}, cited in Storr *op.cit.* pp.135-136.

⁸³ L. Orlando {1991} cited in Firestein, *op.cit.* p.224.

I have also demonstrated how bisexuality tends to be invisible except as a point of conflict. In a culture that assumes that we are all either gay or straight, the presumed sexuality of an individual bisexual person is usually determined by the person with whom he / she is, or has been known to be romantically involved. The result of this assumption is:

we usually hear about bisexuality only in the context of complicated, uncomfortable situations...often, when bisexuality is given attention, it is portrayed as a transitional category, an interim stage in an original or subsequent coming-out process, usually from heterosexual to homosexual.⁸⁴

Bisexuality has also been rendered invisible within the field of social scientific research where it has been observed that bisexuality is marginalized by existing sexual epistemologies. Jo Eadie highlights how, within the text *Modern Homosexualities* { Plummer 1992}, an anthology of contemporary lesbian and gay social theory which was described as setting the perimeters of lesbian and gay studies for the 1990s, operates with a structural exclusion of bisexuality, so that its emergence and the questions it raises, cannot be accommodated or theorised by these essays. 'The writers register bisexuality only in their attempts to exclude or rewrite it.'⁸⁵ Research methods used to measure sexuality by mainstream social scientists have been criticised by feminist social scientists:

The research methods generally used by the social sciences have been developed within a larger philosophical perspective that some feminists find problematic, because of its unquestioning valuing of male gender-stereotyped attributes as normative. Claims about scientific objectivity {both the possibility of it and the value of it }, emotional distance from the subject of study, and the 'neutral' character of science are among the many areas of research contested by feminist thinkers.⁸⁶

Internalised Biphobia

It has been noted that many bisexuals often feel that they may not be bisexual enough, which is linked to the belief that gender is a major determinant of partner choice. 'In the absence of a coherent { which would also mean policed} bisexual identity, their expression of bisexuality is wanting. Monogamous people feel they should have more relationships, and people in multiple relationships feel they are perpetuating a stereotype.'⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Firestein, *opcit.* pp.225-226.

⁸⁵ Jo Eadie {1993} cited in Storr, *opcit.* p.126

⁸⁶ Amanda Udis-Kessler, *Notes on a Kinsey Scale and other Measures of Sexuality*{1992} cited in Storr *opcit.* pp.53-54.

The lack of role models available to bisexual individuals leads most bisexuals to develop and maintain their bisexual identities in isolation. Internalised Biphobia feeds on itself through negative stereotypes, which in turn lead bisexuals to avoid conflict within the wider community by keeping their identity private. However, I have proposed that bisexuality can be a role model of tolerance. Because it is difficult for many to feel an unqualified sense of pride in their sexuality, it has been suggested that rather than seeing bisexuality strictly as a sexual and behavioural phenomenon, it should be viewed as a social identity. However, formulating a bisexual identity is problematic because doing so places bisexuality at the centre, thus causing other identities to shift to the margins.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Problematizing Bisexuality as an Identity. The Pathologisation of the Mono-sexual Position

It is argued that bisexual identities and politics appear ultimately to be at odds with each other: 'the reification of bisexuality as an identity is incompatible with the allegedly transformative potential of bisexuality as an epistemological force...there is a re-inscription of bisexuality within binary frameworks of gender and sexuality.'⁸⁸ Some theorists have 'admonished bi-activists against solidifying the meaning of "bisexual" if they wish to destabilise the dualistic sex/gender system, bi-women's attempts to achieve recognition and resist negative images risk institutionalising the category along with the sexual binary that produces it.'⁸⁹ Questions, such as does bisexuality deconstruct the boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality, lead to the pathologisation of the mono-sexual position. The essentialisation and universalisation of bisexuality privileges bisexuals against a differently constituted sexual other.

The usefulness and the limitations of bisexual identity are considered by Elizabeth D. Daumer. By viewing bisexuality as an identity as well as an epistemological perspective, Daumer contends that these two instances of bisexuality are extremely different and they may actually be incompatible. She proposes;

...if one wishes to exploit the insights yielded by a bisexual perspective, one should not also attempt to claim it as an identity. Identities must always be, in some sense, fixed and stable, if

⁸⁷ Jo Eadie, cited in Storr *op.cit.* p.123.

⁸⁸ Amber Ault {1996} cited in Storr *op.cit.* pp.172-173

⁸⁹ Amber Ault {1996} cited in Storr *op.cit.* p. 173.

only relatively so; but the radical epistemological potential of bisexuality derives precisely from its ambiguity and self-contradiction.⁹⁰

Efforts to construct a bisexual identity - distinct from heterosexual and homosexual identities while comprising aspects of both - do not always bear out the radical potential of its affirmation. Bisexuality is simplified when it is viewed as integrating heterosexuality and homosexuality or neatly divided between the two. On the one hand, this view of bisexuality retains a notion of sexuality – and sexual identity – based exclusively on the gender of object choice, thus implying that a bisexual woman, for instance, would be heterosexually involved with a man, homosexually involved with a woman.

Daumer argues:

In their tendency to reduce bisexuality to a third sexual orientation {or mixture of orientations}, these tropes of bisexuality simplify its socio-political implications. Bisexuality is not merely a problem of an unrecognised or vilified sexual preference that can be solved, or alleviated, through visibility and legitimisation as a third sexual option.⁹¹

She suggests that the problems of bisexuals are social and political ones, resulting from their ambiguous position ‘between what currently appear as two mutually exclusive cultures, one with the power to exercise violent repression against the other’...

...as long as there are two mutually exclusive sexual cultures, and as long as it is politically essential to maintain oppositional cultures- based on sexuality as much on gender- the effort to disambiguate bisexuality and elevate it into a sign of integration might counteract the subversive potential of bisexuality as a moral and epistemological force, as well as obscure its contribution to current discussions among feminist and lesbian theorists on the limitations of identity politics and the urgent need to respect differences among women.⁹²

Daumer proposes:

...that we assume bisexuality, not as an identity that integrates the heterosexual and homosexual orientations but as an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point from which we can examine and deconstruct the bipolar framework of gender and sexuality in which, as feminists and lesbian feminists, we are still too deeply rooted, both because of and despite our struggle against homophobia and sexism.⁹³

She believes there are advantages of assuming bisexuality as a perspective. Because it occupies an ambiguous position between identities, bisexuality is ‘able to shed light on the gaps and contradictions of all identity, on what we might call the difference within identity’.⁹⁴ Whilst this ambiguous position creates painful contradictions, incoherence and impracticalities in the lives of those who adopt it, it can

⁹⁰ Elizabeth D. Daumer {1992} cited in Storr *op.cit.* p.152.

⁹¹ Daumer in Storr *op.cit.* p.224.

⁹² Daumer in Storr *op.cit.* pp.224-225.

⁹³ Daumer in Storr *op.cit.* p.159.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

also lead to a deep appreciation of the differences among people – whether cultural, sexual or gendered.

Attempts to construct a coherent identity in position to another flounders on the multiplicity of, at times,

conflicting identifications generated by the bisexual point of view.

Bisexuality exposes the distinctive feature of all politicised sexual identities because of its non-identicalness. It exposes the radical discontinuities between an individual's sexual acts and affectional choices, on the one hand, and on her or his affirmed political identity, on the other.

By doing so, bisexuality reactivates the gender and sexuality destabilising moment of all politicised sexual identities, at the same time it can help us view contradiction, not as a personal flaw or a danger to our communities, but as a source of insight and strength, as a basis for more inclusive 'we's' that enable rather than repress the articulation of difference.⁹⁵

It also urges us to problematise heterosexuality in order that we distinguish more clearly between the institution of compulsory heterosexuality and the efforts of individual men and women to resist heterosexualism within and without so-called heterosexual relationships. Her contention is that feminist and lesbian theorists need to inquire more intently into the possibility of anti-heterosexist heterosexual relationships and describe such relationships in ways that neither collapses them univocally with heteropatriarchy or obscures how they are impacted by heterosexuality. Invoking the work of Marilyn Frye, whom Daumer believes, 'took an important step in this direction in a speech delivered at the 1990 National Women's Studies Association conference; she asks: 'Do you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist?' In this speech,... 'Frye firmly asserted that we do not, but that we need to be "virgins" in the radically feminist lesbian sense – i.e., women in creative defiance of patriarchal definitions of the real, the meaningful'.⁹⁶ A series of letters in response to Frye's speech revealed a misreading on the part of the respondents 'many non-lesbian-identified or heterosexual women understood her to affirm the opposite - that you need to be a lesbian to be a feminist'.⁹⁷ This misreading reflects that because lesbian feminists tend to equate the difficulty of being a feminist in relation to a man, the respondents had a sense that lesbian feminists are unable to be curious about or respectful of the anti-patriarchal, anti-heterosexist struggle waged by many non-lesbian-identified women and mothers. Conversely, 'heterosexually identified feminists need, on their part, to embrace

⁹⁵ Daumer *op.cit.* p.160.

⁹⁶ Daumer evokes the work of Marilyn Frye {1990:23}Daumer in Storr *ibid.*.

more emphatically feminism as a sign of sexual ambiguity and refuse to disavow the destabilising “queer” force of feminism, by for instance, publicly dissociating themselves from lesbianism’.⁹⁸

The bisexual perspective because it enacts within itself the battle of contradictory sexual and political identifications; can also serve as a bridge between identifications and communities and therefore strengthen our ability temporarily to “forget” entrenched and seemingly inevitable differences – especially those of race, gender and sexuality – in order to focus on what we might have in common. Rather than broadening the spectrum of available sexual identifications, Daumer argues that the term “bisexuality” holds in place a binary framework of two basic and diametrically opposed sexual orientations. Bisexuality is described by her as ‘a sign of transgression, ambiguity and mutability’ which prises open, ‘radical discontinuities between an individual’s sex acts and affectional choices on the one hand, and on her or his affirmed political identity on the other’.⁹⁹

Summary

I began by examining what the Church had to say about homosexuality and human sexuality in general so that I might provide a background for my work and to consider if there were any usable strands which would enable me to form a bisexual theology. This particular endeavour allowed me to demonstrate how there is a link between the pathologisation of homosexuality and bisexuality. I explained how gay lifestyle presents traditional Christian theology with the problem of facing up to its homophobic and biphobic prescriptions. Many contradictions and paradoxes within its doctrines have been uncovered and I have demonstrated how the Churches have come to their conclusions by basing much of their argument on faulty biology and dualistic thought patterns disregarding historical and contextual Biblical analysis.

Bisexuality was examined and I was able to illustrate how the Church, with its essentialist view of sexual orientation, largely ignores bisexuality or presents it as a pathological disorder. Bisexuals are viewed as sexually immature by failing to reach the stage of sexual maturity required, it is therefore suggested that they are offered counselling in order they might do so. Bisexual existence is denied by

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

the Church because it undermines the sexual system of classifying people into either heterosexual or homosexuals, rendering the pathologisation of homosexuality problematic. The outcome of this is that bisexuality becomes the forbidden option or no option at all. This in turn prompted me to seek out life-affirming role models with which to identify.

I have demonstrated how bisexuality can be viewed as an emotionally and sexually mature position with the potential to disrupt binary divisions and challenge notions of exclusivity. However, I have highlighted how some theorists argue against solidifying the meaning of “bisexual” because it then loses its potential for destabilising the dualistic sex/gender system. It was suggested by Daumer that we should view bisexuality as an epistemological perspective rather than an identity. The ambiguous position of bisexuality leads to the appreciation of the differences among people as well as exposing the discontinuities between an individual’s sexual acts, and their affectional choices. Bisexuality also enables us to resist heterosexualism both within and without so called heterosexual relationships by urging us to problematise heterosexuality.

The following section concerns the work of Luce Irigaray. In contrast to the Church’s view on sexuality and women in particular, she wishes to evoke new and exploratory forms of homo and heterosexual intimacy. Acquiring a new subjectivity in the love of our own sex is defined as a process of ‘becoming divine’.¹⁰⁰ This view may point the way forward for bisexual women who may have difficulty in feeling a sense of pride in who they are purely because of their sexual orientation. Identifying with her morphically, excessive feminine who is self-determined and values her own sex enables me to demonstrate how, as a feminist bisexual subject, my own particular desires are not to be viewed as pathological or immature but rather as an essential prerequisite for a healthy sense of self-worth.

⁹⁹ Daumer {1992: 103} cited in Storr *ibid*.

¹⁰⁰ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* {Polity Press 1991} pp.260-261

Section Two Heteropatriarchy from Queer Theory to Bisexual Theory

Part One

Radical Philosophy of Difference: Luce Irigaray

Luce Irigaray's work provides me with the opportunity to highlight the link between the excessively morphic feminine and the fluid nature of bisexuality. As well as highlighting women's morphology, her work also allows me to demonstrate how patriarchal society and psychoanalytic theory in particular oppresses women and ignores their experience. To further demonstrate how women's experience is ignored I will also present in brief the work of Shere Hite and the myth of the female orgasm.

Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray is concerned with difference: differences between the sexes, differences among women, differences within the single individual woman.

She adopts as her premise that feminine *Jouissance*, that is to say a specific female representation of the unconscious and of desire, is the non-said of all discourse, and develops a fundamental critique of discourse by trying to inscribe sexual difference in it.¹

She reconsiders the question of female sexuality in a variety of contexts that are relevant to current discussion of feminist theory and practice. She examines the implications of the thoughts of Freud and Lacan for understanding womanhood and articulating a feminine discourse; classic views on the significance of the difference between male and female sex organs; and the experience of erotic pleasure in men and women. Irigaray seeks to dispute and displace male-centred structures of language and thought. 'She warns women against the fact that emancipation leads to homologation to masculine modes...The political danger of fitting into pre-established masculine canons is one of Irigaray's firmest points of critique of emancipatory feminism.'² In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray suggests that if we remain within the "empire" of the same, difference cannot escape hierarchy. 'Hierarchy presupposes sameness: difference must be masked by the same, and suppressed by the same. Hierarchy presupposes identity.'³

¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* {Polity Press 1991} p.248.

² *op.cit.* p.250.

Elizabeth Weed views Irigaray's difference as a question of style, which means something quite specific. It is not a style according to the traditional way of looking at things, it is a woman's style, that resists and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea or concept. It is to jam the theoretical machinery. Weed argues, 'To jam the machinery of the onto-theo-logy, this feminine must not renounce its "style."⁴ Irigaray 'points to the explicitly Derridean character of women's style.'⁵ Concerning style, Irigaray and Derrida are similar. However, it is not a similarity concerning their tropes and rhetorical turns, rhythms and syntax. 'Where they come together is on the *question* of style, where style, women's style, is the deconstructive encounter of texts.'⁶ Talking about Irigaray's mimetic style, Weed informs us that: 'Faced with her inevitable implication in the logic she aims to expose, Irigaray takes a homeopathic approach to the problem. If there is no metadiscourse, and if women especially can only repeat, then repetition it will be.'⁷

In her essay *The Hetero and the Homo: The Sexual Ethics of Luce Irigaray*. Elizabeth Grosz writes:

Instead of seeing her work as a confirmation of lesbian and gay sexualities, it is important to see the critical distance she maintains from all existing modes of sexual relation. Irigaray considers female homosexuality to be a form of radical rupture in heterosexism and male domination, and, at the same time, believes that all sexual practices represented in our culture, whether 'deviant' or 'normal', are effects of an underlying phallocentrism that renders women socially and representationally subordinate.⁸

She discusses Irigaray's view of the relations between the "Hetero" and the "Homo" and looks at her earlier works. Irigaray's concern was to create 'modes of representation of women and femininity that resists attempts to define them only in relation to men.'⁹ The texts *An Ethics of Sexual Difference and Divine Women*: 'make explicit Irigaray's aim of analyzing structures of exchange between *sexually different* subjects.'¹⁰

³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* {New York: Cornell University Press 1985} p.141.

⁴ Elizabeth Weed, 'The Question of Style' cited in Caroline Burke, Naomi Schor, Margaret Whitford, {eds} *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* {New York: Columbia University Press 1994} p.82.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Weed, *op.cit.* p.83.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, 'The Hetero and the Homo: The Sexual Ethics of Luce Irigaray'. cited in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, {eds} *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* {London, New York: Routledge, 1995} p. 335.

⁹ Grosz, *op.cit.* p.336.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

Irigaray also suggests that we should make a distinction between female homosexuality and male homosexuality. In order that the phallogocentric myth - that the female homosexual is thought to act as a man in desiring a woman who is equivalent to the phallic mother and/or who has certain attributes that remind her of another man - be destroyed. My own particular experience is relevant here because when I have entered into a relationship with another woman my desire for connection has not been influenced by the stereotypical drive based on gender object choice. That is, I have not looked for gender traits in other women that are typically male.

Irigaray opposes the psychoanalytic theory, which condemns the mother-daughter relationship to failure by reducing it to rivalry, resentment and jealousy. 'By exceeding these divisions which have been historically assigned them women may be able to discover - through a new relation to the mother - new forms of communication with each other.'¹¹ She intervenes into the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan at the level of their core presumptions, which are all related to the centrality of the Oedipus complex. On Freud, Irigaray argues that 'He fails to investigate the historical factors governing the data with which he is dealing.'¹² Further suggesting that by not questioning the relationship of their "pathology" to a certain state of society, of culture, we have the resultant position whereby 'he generally ends up resubmitting women to the dominant discourse of the father, to the law of the father, while silencing their demands.'¹³

The Oedipus complex 'marks the distinction between the sexes, repression, and the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness.'¹⁴

Irigaray 'remains ambivalent about the value of psychoanalysis', however, the problems it raises are recognised by her to be 'symptomatic of a broader social malaise- the insidious, oppressive functioning of patriarchal power.'¹⁵ There is a reluctance to reject Freud's work entirely because to reject his work 'is to reject valuable tools in the analysis of patriarchy that are extremely useful for effectively transforming it.'¹⁶ Therefore Irigaray offers 'a critical reversal' of it.¹⁷ What is important to her is to disrupt 'the staging of representation according to *exclusively* "masculine" parameters, that is,

¹¹ Braidotti, *op.cit.* p.259

¹² Irigaray, { 1985 } *op.cit.* p.70

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Grosz, *op.cit.* p.336.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Grosz, *op.cit.* p.337.

according to a phallogocentric order.’¹⁸ It has nothing to do with toppling that order with a view to replace it ‘but to disrupt and modify it beginning with ‘an “outside” that is exempt, in part, from phallogocentric law.’¹⁹ The unconscious and consciousness are viewed as ‘modes of discourse, textual products’,²⁰ enabling Irigaray to deconstruct Lacan’s intervention into Freudian theory, which raises the questions: ‘if the unconscious is structured like a language, to and for whom does it speak? To and for what sex? How is the position of enunciation sexually coded?’²¹

Rather than anatomical and physiological, women’s castration is sociohistorical and signifying. ‘This sociolinguistic inscription of women’s bodies must be seen as the unspoken condition of the attribution of men’s phallic status: it is only if women’s bodies “lack” that men’s bodies can be seen to “have”’.²²

Freud asserts that the “masculine” is the sexual model that no representation of desire can fail to take it as standard, can fail to submit to it. In so doing, Freud makes manifest the presuppositions of the scene of representation: the sexual indifference that subtends it assures its coherence and its closure.²³

Both sexes are structured by the oedipal model to correspond to the ‘libidinal economy modelled on the law of the same.’²⁴ The law of the same is the law of the phallus ‘the term that renders others capable of comparison and equivalence.’²⁵ In the production of the same the law must ensure that there is a severance of the archaic homosexual bond between mother and daughter, in order to submit the daughter to the phallic rule. Disregarding the Lacanian implication that the phallus is a neutral term or signifier which organises sexual identity, the phallus is seen by Irigaray as being implicated in forms of male domination that have reduced women’s oppression to an invisible and unspoken form. ‘The girl must give up the mother in order to submit herself to the laws of culture and sexual interactions.’²⁶

It would certainly be very interesting to raise the question of the ‘phallus’ and its power in these terms: it would not be the privileged signifier of the penis or even of power and sexual pleasure were it not to be interpreted as *an appropriation of the relation to origin and of the desire for and*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Irigaray, {1985} *op.cit.* p.68.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Grosz, *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ Irigaray, {1985} *op.cit.* p.72.

²⁴ Grosz, *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

as origin. The tropism, as well as the rivalry, is in fact between the man and his mother. And woman is well and truly castrated from the viewpoint of this economy.²⁷

The oppressive logic which imprisons mothers and daughters should be seized and rejected; this implies that the game of mutual blame and resentment, 'regulated by the father / boss's desire to dominate' should end. 'The process of acquiring a new subjectivity in the love of our own sex is also defined as a process of "becoming divine" by women.'²⁸

Grosz writes:

While the mother is the corporeal and psychic source of the child's existence, she remains unacknowledged as such, subsumed under the father's name and law. The mother is designated as the 'phallic mother' in Freud's representation of her pre-oedipal position. After the resolution of the oedipus complex {insofar as is possible}, both sexes regard her as castrated, and, consequently, as inferior to the father.²⁹

The mother 'is defined only by the presence or absence of the male term.'³⁰ She is incomplete, castrated and the daughter is "trapped" in her relation to her, 'yet the mother is the basis of the daughter's subsequent attachments to the father and other men.'³¹ Looking back on my childhood I can see how this psychological implantation of masculine modes have operated. My relationship with my mother was often difficult, contradictory and painful and I would often disregard her subjectivity in favour of my father who would in my eyes be more rational and therefore superior. When she attempted to assert her authority I would see this as confirmation of her irrational nature because she was not conforming to societies expectations of the passive female. Ironically, my resistance at her attempts for self-determination would have a counter effect and I would in turn be admonished by her for my preciousness and transgressing the binary framework set in place by heteropatriarchy. We were locked into a battle set in place whereby women and girls should adhere to the phallic rule of passivity and self-negation. However, at times my mother would struggle with her patriarchal upbringing and would try to offer me an alternative way of viewing things. She would often argue against the oppressive dictates of heteropatriarchal rule because she recognised that it could hinder my sexual development.

²⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*. pp. 33/35-36. Cited in Grosz, *ibid*.

²⁸ Braidotti, *op.cit*.pp.260-261.

²⁹ Grosz, *op.cit*. p.338.

³⁰ *ibid*.

³¹ *ibid*.

A *tactical homosexuality* is advocated by Irigaray which is to be ‘modelled on the corporeal relations of the pre-oedipal daughter to her mother, aimed at exploring, and reclaiming, pleasures, knowledges, bodily contacts that the Oedipus complex and repression attempt to eradicate from her consciousness and memory.’³² Viewed as a relationship between two women, the attachment of mother and daughter provides a homosexuality that is both autoerotic and “other”-directed. For Irigaray, this model of homosexuality is not a *substitute for* heterosexuality, but ‘its disavowed prerequisite.’³³, making explicit ‘the intolerable threat of *women’s desire* within a culture founded on its denial.’³⁴

What we have, then, is an advancement of a concept of femininity, which will represent women in more adequate terms than has been possible within patriarchy. It is a rewriting of their relations, that will affirm a morphology, body, narcissism and desire that is woman’s, an advocacy of pleasure without distinct identity or boundaries, a similarity with and difference from the other. However Irigaray wishes to ‘avoid the dichotomous choices between- heterosexual or lesbian- without taking the noncommittal path of “bisexuality”.’³⁵ She prefers to attempt ‘to undermine the system of binary choices imposed on women by occupying the impossible middle ground between them.’³⁶ Her wish is to evoke new and exploratory forms of homo and heterosexual intimacy. The implication is, ‘at least, the possibility of women loving each other as women, not as male substitutes.’³⁷ In the last analysis, ‘The female’s Oedipus complex is women’s entry into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can “appear” and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men.’³⁸

Grosz informs us of the importance of distinguishing Irigaray’s project of the analysis of sexual difference from the analysis of homosexuality she develops in her writings. She explains to us how Irigaray’s operation of homosexual circuits of amorous exchange *can* be the effect of a profound disavowal of sexual difference, and further explains, how there are certain forms of male homosexuality in which there are high degrees of aggression and contempt toward women, including

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *op.cit.* p. 339.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *op.cit.* p. 340.

the mother. In the Freudian model 'there are two quite distinct paths of development for male homosexuality, both of which are governed by the boy's attempts to resolve the Oedipus complex.'³⁹ The phallus remains central to both and its value is unquestioned, therefore there can be no recognition of sexual difference.

'The male homosexual says and does what remains unspoken, a disavowed condition of social functioning.'⁴⁰ Within our culture, which is homosexual in nature, women are signs, commodities and currency between men. These networks of exchange are 'governed and regulated according to a libidinal economy appropriate only to male sexuality.'⁴¹

As far as Irigaray is concerned, the fundamentally "closeted" dominance of the homosexual within our culture is problematic because 'it accords no position to women as women.'⁴² For Freud and in our culture in general, 'female homosexuality can only be understood on the model, and as an imitation, of the masculine.'⁴³ Therefore, for Irigaray patriarchal societies function in the mode of "semblance". However, my position as a bisexual woman in desiring other women is not based on this particular model, my "performativity" is not congruent with these masculine modes. I am neither particularly masculine nor feminine in my expressions and bodily representations.

Irigaray introduces a new sense or meaning of the word homosexual. In this way she 'distinguishes forms of homosexuality ordered and sanctioned by phallogentrism from other forms it may take "somehow beyond the phallus".'⁴⁴ For Irigaray 'the logic of the "ho{m}o" is the logic of masculine sameness... "{hom{m}osexual" order is the order of the phallic appropriation of sexual norms. "Hom{m}osexual" evokes the male dominance, the *homme* of a hom{m}osexual culture, economy and exchange.'⁴⁵ Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference, moderates her assertion of lesbianism as practice and lifestyle. 'She remains critical of stereotyped forms of lesbianism that appear simply as imitations by women of roles, mannerisms, gestures, movements, etc., either designated as men's, or

³⁸ Irigaray, 1985, *op.cit.* p.134.

³⁹ Grosz, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *op.cit.* p.341.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

designated by men as women's'.⁴⁶ Women who endeavour to create a sexuality that is their own 'may provide the basis for a very different understanding of female homosexuality'⁴⁷ modelled on positive desire and choice for women as women rather than on masculine values.

However, Margaret Whitford 1994⁴⁸ informs us that Irigaray's rejection of a politics based on sexual object/choice in favour of the politics of sexual difference has come under scrutiny. Presenting a criticism advanced by Liana Borgh:

...the theory of sexual difference suffers from the same problem as Adrienne Rich's notion of the lesbian continuum: they are both myths which reflect a dream of imaginary wholeness that glosses over the real differences and divisions between women.⁴⁹

Quoting Borgh; 'The original formulation of the lesbian continuum encompasses all women, not just lesbians. The theory of sexual difference makes no distinction between lesbian and straight, white and black, rich and poor, so as to avoid the pitfall of oppression.'⁵⁰ Whitford tells us that the developments toward a 'woman – centred sociosymbolic practice have not succeeded in breaking free from a fantasy of conflict – free unity and harmony.' However, these reservations:

do not detract from the radicality of the *aim*. The vision of a transformation of imaginary and symbolic to allow for an *other* sex, a different subject, is what gives Irigaray's work utopian and mythical quality but also its reconstructive challenge.⁵¹

Morphology is Women's Bodily Experience.

On Irigaray, Rosi Braidotti writes:

Beneath the veils and masks that our culture attributes to women, a feminine exists, in a position of excess in relation to phallogocratic rationality. In other words, the feminine is plural, multiple, resists all assimilation, as too does feminine "Jouissances."⁵²

Irigaray's belief is that, 'every woman is symbolically multiple, and as such resists unilinear phallic representation.'⁵³ Braidotti writes that Irigaray 'affirms the specificity of women's desire, which she

⁴⁶ *op.cit.* p.342.

⁴⁷ *op.cit.* p.343.

⁴⁸ Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray* {1994} *op.cit.* p.27.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Liana Borgh, 'Between Essence and Presence: Politics, Self, and Symbols in Contemporary Lesbian Poetry', in Dennis Altmann, Carol Vance, Martha Vicinus, and Jeffrey Weeks et al., eds., 'Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?' International Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies {London: GMP Publishers, 1989} p.65. cited in *Engaging with Irigaray*, {1994} *op.cit.* p.27.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Braidotti, *op.cit.* p.258.

⁵³ *ibid.*

claims, resides in the matter of our embodied selves...the morphology which shapes the syntax of our desire.⁵⁴:

She chooses the image of -the half - open sex whose close lips continually kissing each other symbolise the multiple - as - one - for its subversive metaphorical value, which responds to the Lacanian image of the black hole. Her work consists in opening out conditions of possibility for difference to become enacted. In this respect her texts are sites of empowerment of the 'female feminine' whose language is still young.⁵⁵

In *Making the Difference*, Elaine Graham explains how Irigaray:

...uses women's bodily experience as a metaphor for their differential self-knowledge, which serves as the resource for oppositional epistemology. Thus she contrasts the unitary monolithic logocentricism of men with the dual, self-reflexive anatomy of women, using the imagery of water and blood to signify their life-giving properties in opposition to the pathology that is masculinity. Difference becomes more than anatomical: 'the sex which is not one' is thus understood as women who are defined as absence {not a substantive group or sex, but the 'Other'}, which thereby defies the logical, linear, single identity definitions thrust upon them by patriarchy, and of itself offers a self-composed, pluralistic notion of self.⁵⁶

Irigaray's evocation of bodily experience is criticised for collapsing into biological essentialism, however, we should view her work 'as a highly contrived rhetorical strategy.'⁵⁷ She is making 'an ironic comment on the patriarchal characterisation of women as inherently sexual, and using that to articulate an alternative perspective.'⁵⁸ I agree Graham's notion that writing the body is an attempt 'to counter the effects of a "somatophobic" Western philosophy, with its implicit dualism, its notions of a neutral {but covertly male} rational subject.'⁵⁹ Rather than viewing Irigaray's work as a collapse into essentialism it can be seen as countering the lack of a specifically women's meta-narrative. Irigaray is using a mimetic style from a feministic perspective to highlight and deconstruct the masculine meta-narrative and the essentialism of male discourse.

Radical feminism 'argues that bodies are more than mere appendages to "pure reason",'⁶⁰ it seeks strategies which undermines the implicit dualism of liberal theories of selfhood. Irigaray's task is to rescue women's sexuality from the dominant modes of patriarchal culture which objectifies takes over

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender Personhood and Theology* {London:Mowbray, 1995}p.177.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *op.cit.* pp.177-178.

⁵⁹ *op.cit.* p.135.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

and controls women's sexuality. She focuses on 'valuing women's own pleasure and morphology as a source of protest and self determination.'⁶¹

Graham evokes Margaret Whitford's description of Irigaray 'as "a maximalist" of difference; not seeking to minimize sex difference beyond reproduction, as in "liberal" feminism, but asserting it and thereby creating a powerful female symbolic to stand alongside the male.'⁶²

Graham argues however that 'Irigaray risks rendering women's bodies immaterial and rhetorical, rather than empirical and rooted in social relations.'⁶³ Through placing the female body outside patriarchal culture however, 'Irigaray is better understood as a theorist of change who draws upon a metaphorical and philosophical reading of psychoanalytic theory.'⁶⁴ Irigaray moves away from difference in terms of socio-cultural phenomena. Braidotti informs us that Irigaray is very wary of the limitations of a purely sociological approach to the question of the subject. Commenting on sociology Irigaray states that it, 'describes what already exists without inventing a new subjectivity, which I don't believe, can be reduced to a neat social effect.'⁶⁵

Because social and psychoanalytic theory is rooted in phallogentricity I believe Irigaray tries to resist this through her metaphorical readings of them which I endeavour to utilize in my study as this I believe wipes the slate clean enabling a feminine bisexual discourse to flourish. Bisexual women are then given the opportunity to write their own scripts, which is essential for a feminine discourse based on self-determination. Running in tandem with the phallogentric and lifting the female outside of patriarchal culture allows for a gynocentric interpretation of the feminine which is excessive, complex, able to encompass variation, fluidity, growth, movement and change. A template from which, a bisexual discourse can flourish in an unconfined space.

By emphasising the importance of starting from the body, Braidotti assures us that Irigaray is not falling into biological reductivism. 'The "body" in question is clearly not a biological construct, rather a libidinal surface which allows for the construction of subjectivity through the complex interplay of identifications, and consequently language and alterity.'⁶⁶ She also informs us that the central

⁶¹ *op.cit.* p.136.

⁶² Margaret Whitford, {1989}, p.120. cited in Graham, *ibid.*

⁶³ *op.cit.* p.138.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray, {1989}, cited in Braidotti, *op.cit.* p. 258.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

assumption of Irigaray's project is that woman has a sexual morphology, an unconscious and "Jouissance" of her own, distinct from man's. 'To affirm and practice this difference amounts to depriving men of the right to legislate over women, to speak in their name, to define them; which amounts to a right to self-determination.'⁶⁷

By a revaluation of emotional bonds between women, Irigaray has endeavoured to achieve this. The crucial issue for Irigaray is one of morphology: 'The body is the site of the creation of identity, and is therefore very properly the focus of critical discourse.'⁶⁸ The body is no longer passive it holds the potential to "speak" 'and disclose new self – knowledge previously repressed and now stored in the unconscious,'⁶⁹ This formulation may have implications for the repressed bisexual female body, because it has the potential to provide a space and opportunity for us to articulate our own unique experiences.

Genital activity and Penetrative Sex

As mentioned in my introduction, discussion surrounding the clitoris, affords me the opportunity to accentuate the disruptive potential it has on traditional theology. Until relatively recently major Christian understandings of human sexuality, particularly that of women, have been undertaken by men with an overemphasis on genital activity and penetrative sex, in short all major debates have occurred with a total disregard for women's experience.

I shall now, therefore, draw the reader's attention to the fact that, for women, penetrative sex is not a necessity in order that they might achieve orgasm. Shere Hite⁷⁰ for example, on studying female sexuality has found that the majority of women only reach full orgasm through clitoral stimulation during intercourse. The overall consensus of her studies is that most women do not automatically have orgasms from intercourse - in the sense of simple thrusting without additional stimulation. The idea that women need vaginal penetration in order that they may orgasm is a male myth. It is believed that there are three basic reasons why women should orgasm through intercourse. The first is the explanation of

⁶⁷ *op.cit.* p.259.

⁶⁸ Graham, *op.cit.* p.138.

⁶⁹ *op.cit.* p.139.

⁷⁰ See also the document produced by Anna Koedt, *Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* {CWLA Herstory Project, 1970}

sexual pleasure as the means of ensuring production; Hite argues that the evidence to suggest female orgasm ensures reproduction is inconclusive. For example, women can have just as much, if not stronger, arousal and orgasm at times when they are not capable of conception i.e. pregnancy, after menopause, during menstruation, and during childhood. The second basic reason is the crucial role of monogamous intercourse in a patrilineal inheritance.

Concerning such, Hite quotes Nancy Marual, *The Case for Feminist Celibacy* 1971:

In a patriarchal culture like the one we were all brought up in, sexuality is a crucial issue. Beyond all the symbolic aspects of the sexual act {symbolising the male's dominance, manipulation, and control over the female}, it assumes an overwhelming practical importance. This is that men have no direct access to reproduction and the survival of the species. As individuals, their claim to any particular child can never be as clear as that of the mother who demonstrably gave birth to that child. Under normal circumstances it is agreed that a man is needed to provide sperm to the conception of the baby, but it is practically impossible to determine which man. The only way a man can be absolutely sure that he is the one to have contributed that sperm is to control the sexuality of the woman.⁷¹

The third and final basic reason why women have been expected to orgasm during intercourse is the general acceptance of the Freudian model of female sexuality, the model of female psychology based on it, and in general the acceptance of the concept of "mental health". Freud theorised that the clitoral orgasm was adolescent and that, upon puberty, when women began having intercourse with men, women should transfer the centre of orgasm to the vagina. It was assumed that the vagina was able to produce a parallel, but more mature, orgasm than the clitoris. The vaginally produced orgasm would occur when the woman had mastered important major conflicts and achieved a well-integrated feminine identity. 'The woman who could reach orgasm only through clitoral stimulation was said to be "immature" and not to have resolved fundamental "conflicts" about sexual impulses.'⁷²

These theories of Freud's were based on faulty biology. Hite quotes Helen Kaplan in *The New Sex Therapy* in order to explain the anatomical causes of the continuing confusion between clitoral and vaginal orgasm:

...it is now believed by many authorities that all female orgasms are physiologically identical. They are triggered by stimulation of the clitoris and expressed by vaginal contractions. Accordingly, regardless of how friction is applied to the clitoris, i.e. by the tongue, by the woman's finger or her partner's, by a vibrator, or by coitus, female orgasm is probably almost

⁷¹ Nancy Marual, 'The Case for Feminist Celibacy.' 1971. cited in Shere Hite, *The Hite Report* {London: Pandora Press, 1989}p.241.

⁷² Hite, *op.cit.* pp. 244-245.

always evoked by clitoral stimulation. However, it is always expressed by circumvaginal muscle discharge.

Apparently, it is this dichotomy - on the one hand, the location of orgasmic spasms in and around the 'vagina' and concomitant perception of orgasmic sensation in the general vaginal and deep pelvic region; on the other hand, the location of the primary area of stimulation in the 'clitoris' - which has served to perpetuate the myth that the female is capable of two distinct types of orgasms, and has also given rise to the incredibly stupid controversy surrounding female orgasm. The orgasm is, after all, a reflex and as such has a sensory and a motor component. There is little argument over the fact that the motor expression of this reflex is 'vaginal'.⁷³

Hite argues that the reproductive model of sex exploits and oppresses women:

The sequence of 'foreplay', 'penetration', and 'intercourse', followed by male orgasm as the climax and end of the sequence, gives very little chance for female orgasm, it is almost always under the control of the man, frequently teases the woman inhumanely, and in short, has institutionalised out any expression of women's sexual feelings except for those that support male sexual needs.... The reproductive model of sex insures male orgasm by giving it a standardised time and place, during which both people know what to expect and how to make it possible for the man to orgasm. The whole thing is prearranged, pre-agreed but there are not really any patterns or prearranged times and places for a woman to orgasm - unless she can manage to do so during intercourse. So women are put in the position of asking for something 'special', some 'extra' stimulation or they must somehow try to subliminally send messages to a partner who often is not aware that he should be listening.⁷⁴

I shall be discussing later how radical feminists have utilised the ideas presented by Hite, that it is not necessarily penetrative sex which produces orgasms in women to support their arguments for the abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice, creating divisions between lesbian feminists and heterosexual feminists. Radical feminists like Wilkinson and Kitzinger argue that 'to be heterosexual is to be privileged over other forms of sexuality.'⁷⁵ Hite has however been criticised by feminists like Lynne Segal who does not see Hite's perspective as anything new. Segal presents an argument of sexual desire based on pleasure. She argues that Hite's work is a problem because 'it replicates the limitations of prevailing theory.'⁷⁶ reminding us that Hite's main claim is that, 'most women do not orgasm as a result of intercourse'. Her second - antithetical - claim is that we need to redefine sex so that 'it's not specifically just orgasms we are talking about.'⁷⁷ Segal argues that there is 'a bizarre irony in her report on female sexuality "almost all" women say they like penetrative sex, but it is Hite who seems obsessed with orgasms.'⁷⁸ Hite 'shares traditional sexology's penchant for biological

⁷³ Helen Kaplan, *The New Sex Therapy*, cited in Hite, *op.cit.* pp.183-184.

⁷⁴ Hite, *op.cit.* pp. 384-385.

⁷⁵ Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, {eds} *Heterosexuality: A Feminist and Psychology Reader* {London: Sage Publications. 1994.} p.10.

⁷⁶ Segal, *op.cit.* p.106.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

reductionism, and its inability to take seriously either the nature and significance of desire.⁷⁹ I shall endeavour to maintain an awareness of Segal's argument as I continue with my work, particularly the discussions concerned with the eroticisation of violence, and the debates surrounding the issue of women's abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice.

Summary

I have illustrated how for Irigaray women are rendered invisible through their submission to the phallic rule. Emancipation can only be gained at the price of fitting into pre-established masculine canons and the way to overcome this danger is to articulate a feminine discourse, the style of which is to resist and disrupt them. There is a move away from and a resistance to defining women only in relation to men through a consideration of female homosexuality as a form of radical rupture in heterosexism and male domination.

Irigaray's "critical reversal" of Freud's Oedipus complex enable her to recognise that women's "castration", rather than anatomical and physical, is sociohistorical and signficatory. For her the phallus is implicated in forms of male domination that reduces women's oppression to an invisible and unspoken form, whereby the mother/daughter relationship is condemned. This must be rejected and women must enter a process of acquiring a new subjectivity in the love of their own sex, that is, women loving each other as women, not as male substitutes. For her, patriarchal societies function in the mode of "semblance", female homosexuality can only be understood on the model of and as an imitation of, the masculine. She rejects a politics based on sexual object choice and is critical of stereotyped forms of lesbianism that appear as masculine imitations; this has come under scrutiny, however, because the real differences and divisions between women are glossed over. This said, Margaret Whitford suggests that her vision of a transformation of imaginary and symbolic to allow for an *other* sex, a different subject, is what gives her work its reconstructive challenge.

Irigaray also suggests that the feminine exists in a position of excess in relation to phallographic rationality, that is, the feminine is plural, multiple, resists all assimilation. Her task is to rescue

⁷⁹ *op.cit.* p.108.

women's sexuality from the dominant modes of patriarchal culture and focuses on valuing women's own pleasure

and morphology as a source of protest and self determination. Morphology is the crucial issue for Irigaray, the body becomes active with the potential to "speak" and disclose repressed self-knowledge stored in the unconscious. I believe Irigaray's analysis and subsequent suggestions for female bonding points the way forward for feminism, and enables me to forge the link between the excessively morphic feminine and the fluid nature of bisexuality. Following her philosophy, I too, believe the unnatural divisions created between women by the patriarchal system must be destroyed, whilst at the same time acknowledging the differences between us. Irigaray asserts that the multiplicity of theoretical and political positions, which exist within women's movements, is a source of the very wealth of feminist consciousness.

Her work also allows me to address the possibility advanced by Thatcher and Stuart that bisexuality appears to be a predominantly female experience. Reflecting on her articulation of the feminine as sexually morphic, excessive and therefore unintelligible within the phallic economy highlights the similarities recognised through my own experience. My behaviour may be seen as excessive and narcissistic when viewed from a phallogocentric perspective, however, through her disputation and displacement of male-centred structures of language and thought my subjectivity takes on a more nuanced pattern affording me a language free from phallogocentric control and traditional ways of thinking. I am able to experience and accept; a different way of knowing based on a distinctly different feminine model through her deconstruction of the phallogocentric myth that upholds the notion of female emotional sexual bonds based on the dualistic categories of domination/submission.

Destroying the oppressive logic maintained by phallogocentric rule that seeks to divide women and sentences our daughters to that rule opens up the opportunity to view the feminine as a divine subject that is autonomous and self-determined.

Irigaray's work therefore allows me to convey how important it is for women to value their own pleasure and morphology as a source of protest and self-determination. These ideas are echoed in the work of Carol Vance and Lyn Segal in part three of this section. Also, her interpretation of the excessively feminine subject is also emphasised by Althaus-Reid, in section three, who calls for representations of God from excess of orthopraxis, drawing a parallel in women and the pattern of

God's transcendence. All call for sexual non-conformity as a way of disrupting the system of sexual hierarchy this point is particularly significant when forming a bisexual theology because I believe bisexuality with its disruptive influence answers that call. Following Irigaray's analysis, that patriarchal culture objectifies takes over and controls women's sexuality, the beginning of the next section looks at how women's sexuality has been socially constructed to take on a subordinate role within patriarchal society.

Part 2.

Social Construction of Women's Sexuality: Domination and Submission: A Re-modelling of Sexuality and the Eroticisation of Women's Oppression.

As mentioned in my introduction, women are dealing with a legacy of violence, on both the physical level and on the psychic level, through gender expectations and their experience has largely been ignored within traditional theology. Drawing on the work of Freud, psychoanalyst Adam Philips writes;

Freud glimpses in *The Interpretation of Dreams* the ego's potential for promiscuous mobility, dreams in particular revealed that psychic life was astonishingly mobile and adventurous even if lived life was not, {very few people are actively bisexual yet everyone is psychically bisexual}.⁸⁰

However, as I have intimated, patriarchal society seeks to limit this repertoire. My wish therefore is to look at the social construction of women's sexuality and the eroticisation of women's oppression. These particular psychoanalytic issues highlight the divisions created among feminists, causing some to call for strategies for abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice. What follows is the assertion that rather than homosexuality, heterosexuality should be the focus of enquiry, by highlighting its mythical qualities through an examination of heterocentricity we see how women are disempowered under the political institution of heterosexuality. The myth – that heterosexuality is viewed as an innate “given” for most women - perpetuated by feminist scholarly writing and feminist psychology is challenged. This endeavour also allows me to take the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid in section three in a different direction. By forging ahead with her idea of the bisexual theologian and questioning what may be seen as

⁸⁰ Adam Philips cited in Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* {California: Stanford: 1997} *op.cit.* p.152.

the heterosexual aspects of bisexuality and providing an analysis of heterosexuality's compulsory and prescriptive features with a view towards its deconstruction so that it may be seen as a background myth, paints a more nuanced picture of bisexuality. Through an autobiographical account of what it means to be a bisexual woman in a heteropatriarchal world based on notions of exclusivity I look at how one negotiates our relationships with others based on an ethic of mutual care and respect. The idea suggested by Riane Eisler in part three of this section - that we should take the opportunity to forge new myths, allows me to perhaps suggest that the introduction of a bisexual myth – with its capacity to produce the reinvention of our basic values and institutions and it's potential to foster our human capacity for pleasure and caring connections based on tolerance and mutual respect for others and oneself – might come into operation.

As the reader will see in the next section, there have been many debates raging between feminists concerning the issues of heterosexuality and its patriarchal underpinnings. Radical lesbian feminists Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger argue for strategies of abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice. However, strategies for separatism or abandonment presented by these radical feminists can become problematic. To view relations with people of the same sex as somehow superior in terms of mutuality and equality does not take into account the experience of bisexual people like myself, who choose to enter into a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and are fortunate to also find mutuality and equality within them. The following will demonstrate a desire to subvert the meanings of heterosexuality, calling us to challenge the binary divide of heterosexuality and homosexuality. I will later present the work of theologian Mary Daly, who critiques the strategies of abandonment presented by theorists such as these; she has what has been described as a more radical approach toward separatism. Rather than separatism from others, her idea of separatism is a paring away of false selves from the Self. What is pertinent to my task is the recognition that gender polarity underpinning patriarchy is linked to the many common dualism's and this could possibly be disrupted through the acknowledgement of bisexuality.

Feminist's strategies for Abandonment

Feminist psychological theorists Wilkinson and Kitzinger argue that heterosexuality should become the focus of inquiry rather than homosexuality. They call for a deliberate reversal of inquiry so far adopted by psychology concerning lesbianism. Indeed they argue that heterosexuality has been largely un-

theorised within both psychology and feminism. With both these disciplines heterosexuality disappears into the background because in psychology, homosexuality is either seen as an alternative lifestyle at best, or a pathological perversion at worst, it is argued that feminist theory tends to assume heterosexuality as a given. Wilkinson and Kitzinger write: 'It remains true that feminist scholarly writing generally, and feminist psychology in particular, perpetuates the myth of heterosexuality as an innate and unquestioned "given" for most women.'⁸¹ The major concern to Wilkinson and Kitzinger - following in the path of Adrienne Rich - is the desire to challenge the erasure of lesbian existence within feminist literature, which, is felt to be both anti lesbian and anti feminist, whilst leading to a distortion of the experience of heterosexual women also. Rich's aim was not to widen divisions but to encourage heterosexual feminists to critique heterosexuality with a view to changing it. Heterocentricity was to be examined in order to recognise that the political institution of heterosexuality disempowers women.

Liberal Humanism and Choice of Lifestyle

The liberal humanistic approach has been critiqued by Kitzinger and Wilkinson because there is a danger of assimilation or 'Liquidation by merger.'⁸² Liberal humanists move away from pathological models towards conceptualisations that represent lesbianism in terms of individual choices and lifestyles or private quests for self-fulfilment and loving interpersonal relationships. For liberal humanists, lesbians and gays are no longer a species apart but human beings of equal worth and dignity. By rejecting deterministic models of human development, they seek to develop the potential of the "whole" person. However, Wilkinson and Kitzinger state; 'An explanation of lesbianism in terms of personal happiness and self-fulfilment serves to remove lesbianism from the political arena and to reduce it to a private and personal solution.'⁸³ By retaining the privatised concept of lesbianism introduced by the pathologists, liberal humanism replaced 'lesbianism as personal pathology' with 'lesbianism as personal choice of lifestyle' or 'source of sexual/emotionally personal fulfilment', for them it becomes 'a private depoliticised identity'.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Wilkinson and Kitzinger *op.cit.* p.3.

⁸² Berger and Luckman, 1967, cited in Wilkinson and Kitzinger, *op.cit.*, p.46.

⁸³ *op.cit.* p. 102.

⁸⁴ *op.cit.* p.45.

They advance that 'Heterosexual feminists sometimes fail to appreciate the importance of the label "lesbian" to those who claim it.'⁸⁵

In sending out a questionnaire asking 'How does your heterosexuality contribute to your feminist politics and/or your feminist psychology?' Wilkinson and Kitzinger found that heterosexual was not a popular label, indeed many feminists expressed their concern about it. 'Primarily they had thought of themselves as "women" or "feminists"...our invitation positioned them as "heterosexual feminists" - making explicit the silent term, qualifying {as do labels like "white", "western", "able bodied"} the presumed universality of their perspective as generic women.'⁸⁶ They discovered that many felt that the label "heterosexual" limited and constrained them, believing that it was an inaccurate definition of their lifestyles. Quoting Alison Young:

To be invited to write in the name of heterosexuality by another is to experience the force of being positioned as Other. 'In this context, the name 'heterosexual' seems far more permanent and concrete than in my own use of it, now my identity feels out of control.'⁸⁷

Within these protestations made by feminists, Wilkinson and Kitzinger suggest that an important distinction is discovered. The acceptance of the label "lesbian" is for many lesbian feminists, a defiant act of self-naming in which the refusal of the heteropatriarchal order, and commitment to women and lesbians, is asserted. 'It is claiming for ourselves, and as political, the identity they taught us to despise' in the words of Denise Thompson: 'Lesbianism is not only genital sexual desire and/or activity, but also a redefining by women for women.'⁸⁸ Wilkinson and Kitzinger advance that heterosexuality is not a "political" identity for heterosexual feminists in the way that lesbianism is a political identity for lesbian feminists. This is because for heterosexual feminists in a heteropatriarchal world, questions such as "what causes it?" "Can I change?" "How will it affect my children?" never come up.

Conversely, these questions are always in the forefront of the minds of lesbians. Affirming lesbianism is a liberating feminist act; they are making a political statement.

Wilkinson and Kitzinger state that; 'Some feminists suggest that lesbians are also rendered invisible by Adriane Rich's phrase "lesbian continuum".'⁸⁹ They give reference to the work of Tamsin Wilton who

⁸⁵ *op.cit.* p.7.

⁸⁶ *op.cit.* p.6.

⁸⁷ Alison Young, cited in Wilkinson and Kitzinger, *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁸⁸ *op.cit.* p.6.

⁸⁹ *op.cit.* p.9.

suggests that ‘women’s bonding in the face of oppression {part of Adriane Rich’s “lesbian continuum”} in fact plays a key role in supporting and sustaining the power differential between heterosexual women and men.’⁹⁰ Heterosexual women can be highly critical of the treatment they receive from individual men but fail to criticise heterosexuality. Wilton suggests that the oppressed are colluding with the oppressor.

The motivation for heterosexual woman-bonding is analogous to that of a battlefield hospital: to get the casualties fit and well so that they may be sent straight back to fight - not to rescue combatants from the horror of war or to protest at war itself.⁹¹

It is argued ‘To be heterosexual is to be privileged over other forms of sexuality.’⁹² With reference to radical feminists like Wilkinson and Kitzinger feminist materialist Stevi Jackson writes:

These feminists do not allow the conventional ‘moral complexity’ of heterosexuality to go unchallenged and would certainly not place it on the ‘good’ side of any moral or political divide. In the process however, they frequently deny it any complexity at all: it is simply eroticised power.⁹³

Feminist materialism is an alternative to overly deterministic views of the operation of power and those that play down its structural underpinnings and overestimate its stability. Jackson argues that it is essential that we begin with gender, as this is fundamental in the theorisation of sexuality: as desiring subjects we are gendered, as are the objects of our desire.

In theorising sexuality we need a means of understanding how we become gendered and how we become sexual without conflating gender and sexuality, without assuming that particular forms of desire are automatically consequent upon acquiring feminine or masculine gender without reducing the complexity of desire to the gender of its object.⁹⁴

Jackson suggests that we should not over privilege sexuality. There should be a recognition that ‘the “specialness” of sexuality derives not from its intrinsic “nature”, but from the social meanings it has historically acquired.’⁹⁵

To name oneself as heterosexual can be a means of bringing heterosexuality into question, making visible an identity which is generally taken for granted as a normal fact of life by challenging its

⁹⁰ Tamsin Wilton, cited in Wilkinson and Kitzinger, *op.cit.* p.10.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Stevi Jackson, cited in Diane Richardson {ed}, *Theorizing Heterosexuality* {London: Open University Press, 1996.} pp. 29-30.

⁹⁴ Jackson cited in Richardson, *op.cit.*, p.28.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

privileged status, but for women 'being heterosexual is by no means a situation of unproblematic privilege.'⁹⁶

Wilkinson and Kitzinger argue; 'Recent uses of "diversity" and "difference" often legitimise oppression by obscuring the operation of power.'⁹⁷ They posit that through the philosophy of similarity with usage of continuum, or a philosophy of difference, feminist analysts have reached a stalemate. Concerning both inclusion and exclusion, the same or different, they suggest that both these arguments have been used within the mental health disciplines, and within feminism, to obliterate lesbianism and to reinforce the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. It is only when the institution of compulsory heterosexuality becomes a serious target for analysis and political action that lesbians will become visible within feminism. Commenting on the work presented by Wilkinson and Kitzinger Lynne Segal argues:

Kitzinger and Wilkinson ignore the comments from women, which do not fit the conclusions they are seeking conclusions in line with their lesbian-separatist analysis of heterosexuality as the root of women's oppression, and therefore incompatible with feminist struggle. It is with pleasure, rather than distress, that they inform their readers of the guilt they have managed to elicit as one of the main sentiments from their selected sample of victims when describing their {hetero} sexual fantasies and desires. {As though guilt, shame, and self-doubt were not the most depressingly familiar sentiments women have learned to connect with their sexuality.} Their own condescending and self-righteous reaction to women's sexual doubts and anxieties is to treat them as altogether appropriate: The qualifier "heterosexual" is, at best, an embarrassing adjunct to "feminist" at worst, it seems a contradiction in terms. An irritated heterosexual feminist might conclude that although their book declares its intention of opening up spaces for feminist theorising and exploration of heterosexuality, it is in fact dedicated, one more time, to closing them down.⁹⁸

With Segal, Carol Smart {Smart in Richardson 1996} argues against the inevitability of eroticised power and abuse, maintaining that heterosexuality is always presented as a unitary concept. By drawing our attention to the growing acknowledgement of difference in the writings on lesbian and gay sexualities and identities, she suggests that, 'The recognition of these differences {whether of styles, politics or preference} does not undermine the idea that lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women, are institutionally discriminated against and often personally oppressed and abused by heterosexuals'.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *op.cit.* p.31.

⁹⁷ Wilkinson and Kitzinger, *op.cit.* p.10.

⁹⁸ Segal, {1994}, *op.cit.* pp.215-216.

⁹⁹ Smart cited in Richardson, *op.cit.*p.170.

She has recognised, however, that it casts a doubt on the ‘heterosexist assumption that all lesbians or all gay men are a single type who came to their sexuality identity/preference through a unicausal route {for example Oedipal problems, powerful mothers, weak fathers etc}.’¹⁰⁰ Her main argument is that heterosexuality may be many things even if we need at times to collectivise this diversity, for example when recognising heterosexual privilege and its naturalisation. She argues that the reason why we have avoided thinking in terms of “heterosexualities” is because the pluralisation of heterosexuality gives the appearance of evading accusations of ‘holding’ institutional power.

Critical of feminists who call for strategies of abandonment, Smart views their position as a revival of an old solution which has ‘regenerated an old anger...old divisions have been created.’¹⁰¹ She argues that ‘heterosexual feminists now appear on the defensive; they feel attacked and vulnerable...Wilkinson and Kitzinger have similarly reported that they have been subjected to abuse by heterosexual women.’¹⁰² Both sides feel abused. Western feminism has proven itself deeply divided over the question of straight women. The often-polemical accounts put forward by feminists such as Wilkinson and Kitzinger have put heterosexual feminists on the defensive. How can they come together? Are the divisions going to remain? Lynne Segal asks, ‘Can women express pleasure in sex without increasing men’s power?’¹⁰³ She believes that ‘Rather than abandonment or abolishment all feminists could and strategically should, participate in attempting to subvert the meanings of “heterosexuality”.’¹⁰⁴ Smart refers to the work of Wendy Hollway, who argues for sexual desire based on pleasure, and J. N. Katz, who historicises heterosexuality with an attempt at destabilising it by challenging the binary divide of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Katz {1995} argues that the concept of heterosexuality and the identity of the heterosexual is largely a twentieth century creation. It stemmed from a differing-sex pleasure ethic whereby the reproductive ideal was beginning to be challenged. Therefore if we look back ‘under the old procreative standard,

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *op.cit.* p.169.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Segal, *op.cit.* p.259.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

the new term 'heterosexual' did not at first, always signify the normal and good.'¹⁰⁵ His argument was that

when it was first used by sexologists, the term "heterosexual" referred to a perversion identified as lust for its own sake, rather than sex for procreation. Katz suggests that it is Freud who turned heterosexuality from perversion into what has become taken as normal. Katz critiques lesbian feminist discourse, 'which constitutes heterosexuality as a monolithic and political institution. Their work has tended to depict heterosexuality as timeless and a-historical, and thus far more fixed than it is.'¹⁰⁶

Smart also takes issue with Wilkinson and Kitzinger's position and suggests that they give an inaccurate account of heterosexual feminists' ambivalence towards heterosexuality: 'Cynical responses by Wilkinson and Kitzinger towards heterosexual feminist experiences and their ambivalence towards institutionalised heterosexuality gave the assumption that these heterosexual women were in "denial".'¹⁰⁷

Smart, however, found that these heterosexual feminists were expressing a strong 'ambivalent relationship to institutional or traditional heterosexuality and a fluid identity, which refuses to be trapped by a crudely defined notion of heterosexual identity.'¹⁰⁸ Rather than dismiss them as justifications or excuses it is suggested that we need to build on these insights, 'These women were saying that they had no commitment to orthodox heterosexuality.'¹⁰⁹

Smart recognised Hollway {1993} as one of the heterosexual feminists who tried to take issue with the way the renewed debate seemed to be framed. Hollway argues that the framing of the heterosexuality debate by Wilkinson and Kitzinger meant that only the pains and problems of heterosexuality could be voiced. Her purpose is to provide a theoretical sketch of a female sexual desire, which eludes and resists patriarchal relations. We should follow the development of desire in an individual's history, this is important for the subsequent conditions for its expression in adulthood within sexual relations. She believes 'in the possibility of sexual desire which expresses other dynamics - other than domination

¹⁰⁵ J.N. Katz, 1995, cited in Richardson, *op.cit.* p. 171.

¹⁰⁶ Smart cited in Richardson, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *op.cit.* p.176.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

and submission - dynamics which allow “self and other” to meet as sovereign equals.’¹¹⁰ and suggests that the characteristic of heterosexual desire, the eroticisation of gendered power difference is not inevitable within current social and political conditions as Kitzinger has argued. Hollway critiques the ‘universalist Lacanian assumptions of split subjectivity and the unfulfillability of desire’ suggesting that the ‘basic processes by which subjectivity is achieved are not initially gendered.’¹¹¹ Introducing a Kleinian model of the Oedipus complex ‘does not put sexual difference at the centre of child development as do the Freudian and Lacanian models.’¹¹² Emphasis is on the ‘achievement of recognition, integration and differentiation in early childhood relations and its implications for the preservation of crossgender identifications and therefore recognition of likeness across the sexes.’¹¹³ She tries to theorise ‘a passage through Oedipal dynamics, for girls and boys, where the polarities and prohibitions of gender difference do not inevitably produce defensive heterosexual relationships based on false recognition.’¹¹⁴

Summary

For Wilkinson and Kitzinger heterosexuality should become the focus of enquiry rather than homosexuality. They argue both feminist scholarly writing and feminist psychology perpetuates the myth of heterosexuality as an innate unquestioned “given” for most women. They wish to challenge the erasure of lesbian existence within feminist literature, believing it to be both anti-lesbian and anti-feminist which leads to a distortion of the experience of heterosexual women. Through an examination of heterocentricity, the disempowerment of women under the political institution of heterosexuality was recognised and highlighted by them. They criticise the liberal humanistic approach because there is a danger of assimilation. The removal of lesbianism from the political arena by explaining it in terms of personal happiness and self-fulfilment, they believe, reduces it to a private and personal solution. By retaining the privatised concept of lesbianism it becomes for them “a private depoliticised identity”. They argue the importance of claiming the label “lesbian” has not always been appreciated by heterosexual feminists and these criticisms have in turn placed heterosexual feminists on the defensive. Highlighting the thoughts of Lynne Segal, Western feminism has proven itself deeply divided over the

¹¹⁰ Wendy Hollway, 1993, cited in Richardson, *op.cit.* p.91.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

question of straight women. I would also like to suggest that the experiences of bisexual women who are in relationships with men have been ignored in these debates. Are we required to abandon our relationships with men because heterosexuality has been consigned to this narrow view? What if bisexual women need to express their sexuality on a wider spectrum?

Heterosexuality thus far theorised by lesbian feminists such as Wilkinson and Kitzinger is, I believe, deterministic leaving no room for the subject to transcend their situation. They understand heterosexuality as a unitary concept based on domination and submission and therefore believe it should be abandoned. However, far from it being so simple and unproblematic, it has been suggested that it is more complex than this when given certain treatments by theorists such as Katz and Smart: rather than abandonment feminists should participate in attempting to subvert the meanings of heterosexuality. As we can now understand through Smart's analysis, heterosexual women do see drawbacks in accepting the heterosexual model based on domination and submission by conveying their ambivalence towards it, by displaying a fluidity that echoes Irigaray's analysis of women's sexuality. Smart's ideas have led me to think about my own ambivalent feelings for heterosexual models based on domination and submission. On reflection, I would suggest that my own lived experience shows that there can be an alternative way of negotiating intimate relationships with men that can be based on equality and mutual respect. Furthermore, Katz points to the immense diversity of lifestyles and how rigid identities are being challenged. 'This makes room for bisexual identities to enter central stage in the debate as they are vital to the redefinition of people as merely fitting into two categories of heterosexual and homosexual.'¹¹⁵

At the beginning of this section I stated that I have chosen to be in a relationship with a man, which to all intents and purpose appears to be based on heterosexual assumptions. However, how we negotiate our relationship is more complex than this, the boundaries of activity and passivity are continuously being crossed by the both of us. Segal looks at the elements of pleasure in women's heterosexual desire that have been identified by Naomi Segal:

¹¹⁵ Richardson, *op.cit.* p.172.

Such desire can be characterised by its purposeless playfulness, its recovery of childhood feelings {or whatever consciousness can tolerate of their original polymorphous perversity}, its connection with nurturance, its games with power { especially the pleasure of feeling power over the powerful }, and its narcissistic sense of completion through access to the body of another: 'The man with whom the woman experiences this range of pleasures is for her sexy.' Except for the games with power- 'power' being culturally symbolized as 'phallic' and 'masculine'- there seems little reason to see the pleasures and risks of desire outlined here as either distinctively 'feminine', or 'heterosexual'.¹¹⁶

Finally it is also argued that to be a lesbian requires some measure of self-reflection, or at least self-consciousness; I would like to suggest that this might also be true for bisexuals, at least from my own experience I believe that to be the case. In light of the evidence covered so far, it is my contention bisexuality has much to offer concerning theological thought.

The theologian Mary Daly has a different and what could be argued a more radical approach toward separatism to that of Wilkinson and Kitzinger. Remaining with the theme of women's experience under heteropatriarchy, I would like to present an alternative to their work in the next section. Daly's work allows for a different way of addressing the problems concerning the heterosexual question. For heterosexual and bisexual women abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice may be untenable. However, the subversion of the meanings of heterosexuality and following Daly's notion of abandonment, which involves moving away from androcentric notions of separatism and moving towards the goal of personal integrity of women may be the way forward. A greater awareness of the pseudo-reality of heteropatriarchy highlighted in her work enables my bisexual discourse to continue its disruptions through a recognition of the gender polarity underpinning patriarchy.

Mary Daly and Abandonment

In her paper *Radical relatedness and feminist separatism*, Nancy R Howell asks whether the separatism of radical feminism is as radical as it could be. There are various understandings of separatism that Howell argues, 'Occasionally carries the vagueness of an intuition rather than the precision of a definition.'¹¹⁷ Howell explains how at one level, separatism has been represented by literary utopian visions, bringing to our attention the literary works of Sally Gearhart and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who have created male excluding communities. By criticising patriarchy and

¹¹⁶ Naomi Segal, 1992, cited in Lynne Segal *op.cit.* p.248

¹¹⁷ Nancy R. Howell, 'Radical Relatedness and Feminist Separatism', cited in David Comstock and Susan E. Henking {ed.s} *Que{e}rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* {New York: Continuum, 1997} chapter.12, p. 202.

envisioning alternatives to its misogynist, biocidal hierarchies, 'These novels are, in fact, useful fictions.'¹¹⁸ However, at their extremes, 'utopian alternatives capitalise upon romanticisation of a female essence and idealisation of female community.'¹¹⁹

Women can choose to envision permanently segregated communities that would in turn reflect the hopelessness of the transcendence of patriarchy in society at large, or they could choose provisional separatism by segregating themselves for a time into exclusive women's communities as a means of deprogramming themselves from patriarchy, or women could and do engage in non-segregationist separatism which is limited to selected spheres of their lives. The purpose of this form of separatism is the formation of personal and political identity within a patriarchal society. It is argued that these teleological characterisations make perfect sense; however, there is one serious flaw in the presupposition that leads to such categorisations within feminist separatism. Howell informs us that this sort of categorisation suggests 'That the issue basic to separatism is the female/male relationship' which, 'is an androcentric interpretation of women's separatism.'¹²⁰ Howell presents Mary Daly's understanding of radical feminist separatism because she believes Daly 'perseveres in removing androcentric, patriarchal scales from her own and other women's eyes.'¹²¹ She suggests that 'Perhaps, women's separatism is not a question of how women will relate to men, but of how women intend to relate to each other.'¹²²

Howell refers to Daly's understanding of radical feminist separatism 'as a gynocentric interpretation' of women's separatism. This has been defined by Daly as:

theory and actions of radical feminists who choose separation from the Dissociated State of patriarchy in order to release the flow of elemental energy and Gynophilic communication; radical withdrawal of energy from warring patriarchy and transferral of this energy to women's Selves.¹²³

'Separation is seen as the investment of energy in women's selfhood' not as 'another investment of energy in confrontation with patriarchy.'¹²⁴ It is an 'absence of androcentric focus, a refusal to allow

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *op.cit.* p.203.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ Mary Daly *IW* {1987}, p.96. cited in Howell cited in Comstock and Henking, *op.cit.*, p204.

¹²⁴ Howell, *ibid.*

patriarchy to control the use of gynenergy.’¹²⁵ To ask the question ‘What about men?’ is an irrelevant question, because with Daly’s formulation of separatism there is a complete concentration on a gynocentric agenda. The idea that feminists have already overcome the distortions in female relationships by challenging patriarchy through their solidarity, ‘creates a superficial impression’. There are indications through literature ‘that the issue of female relationships is an unfinished constructive effort which will continue to receive priority.’¹²⁶

Women have been the more relational gender, however, Howell asks ‘why is it necessary for women to reflect upon constructive modes of female relating?’¹²⁷ She suggests ‘The fundamental reason is that the role of women as relational caretakers has been exercised for the nurturing of hetero-relations rather than gynaffectionate relations.’¹²⁸ Being instrumental in the maintenance of patriarchal relationships, which serves to separate women from women, results in women being cast in competitive or estranged relationships with each other. ‘Internalization of the patriarchal agenda leads women to do horizontal violence to each other...mothers act as token torturers of their daughters to serve patriarchal interests.’¹²⁹ Those who have achieved apparent equality have taken upon themselves the priorities of the patriarchs and are therefore seen as merely ‘token women’.¹³⁰ This separation of women from one another enables patriarchy to thrive. The power of female bonding is a threat to patriarchal strongholds, which is clearly indicated through the social taboo against women-touching women. To better understand Daly’s position, women are not only estranged from their sisters but also from themselves.

For Daly, estrangement is the crux of the issue. Daly uses a play upon the etymology of “separate” describing separatism as follows:

When Spinsters speak of separatism, the deep questions that are being asked concern the problem of paring away from the Self all that is alienating and confining. Crone-logically prior to all discussion of political separatism from or within groups is the basic task of paring away the layers of false selves from the Self. In analyzing this basic Gyn/Ecological problem, we should

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

struggle to detect whatever obstacles we can find, both internal and external, to this dis-covering of the Self.¹³¹

There are important features that ought to be highlighted from this description of separatism.

Separation is primarily a concept that has to do with loosening the confinement of women, it has nothing to do with building boundaries that isolate and confine women. Separatism facilitates genuine relationships with oneself and others. Rather than obstructing relationships, separatism paradoxically removes that which is alienating. Rather than separatism from or within groups, separatism is a paring away of false selves from the Self. There is an intention to remove both internal and external barriers to selfhood through Daly's interpretation of separatism. Primarily for all authentic separation the removal of internal obstacles is called for and is seen as normative for personal and political separatism. It is argued that women have already been fragmented, and the course of action which 'counters phallic separatism, separation of women from ourselves and our Selves'¹³² is radical feminist separation of the kind described by Daly. Fragmentation is the interruption of the flow of connection with all be-ing, it is the disconnectedness which flies in the face of interconnectedness. The philosophical and existential presupposition Daly espouses in her book *Pure Lust* is that 'everything that IS is connected with everything else that IS.'¹³³

Howell writes:

Daly suggests that the word 'separatism' functions as a labrys. It has a two edged meaning. 'Separatism' names phallic separatism, the separatism which blocks women's lust for ontological communication. 'Separatism' also names feminist resistance to phallic separatism...Radical feminist separatism is a choice to pare away the false selves layered upon women's selfhood by patriarchy and to undertake telic centering, the purposive focusing which facilitates women's metamorphosis.¹³⁴

There are unique histories and temperaments among women that may come to light during the paring process. 'Such differences mean that women may need separation from other female selves in order to make their unique discoveries.'¹³⁵

As well as pain there is also great potential in these differences and separations:

¹³¹ Daly GE {1978}, p.381. cited in Howell cited in Comstock and Henking, *op.cit.* pp.204 -205.

¹³² Howell, *ibid.*

¹³³ Daly, PL {1984}, p.362. cited in Howell cited in Comstock and Henking, *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Howell, *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *op.cit.* p.206.

Acknowledging the deep differences among friends/sisters is one of the most difficult stages of the Journey and it is essential for those who are Sparking in free and independent friendship rather than merely melting into mass mergers. Recognising the chasms of differences among sister Voyagers is coming to understand the terrifying terrain through which we must travel together and apart. At the same time, the spaces between us are encouraging signs of our immeasurable unique potentialities, which need free room of their own to grow in, to Spark in, to Blaze in. The greatness of our differences signals the immensity/ intensity of the Fire that will flame from our combined creative Fury.¹³⁶

For Daly, Be-Friending is an ontological category that describes the context within which women experience metamorphosis. It is ontological friending, biophilic communication among women, implying the interconnectedness of all be-ing. In comparison with male comradeship, be-friending reveals the uniqueness of female friendship. The survival of comradeship/fraternity is maintained by draining women of their energy, whereas female bonding is energising. Comradeship is threatened by female bonding, because it ignores the “Brotherhood” and exposes its relationships with women as property arrangements. ‘Sisterhood, female friendship, and female-identified erotic love are female discourses of relationship which do not entail the self-loss of male defined relationships for women.’¹³⁷

For Daly, ‘lesbianism is a paradigm...not merely a “special case” of sisterhood or female friendship.’¹³⁸

Owing to their marginal status, lesbian communities are removed from patriarchy and may act as pioneers in the discovering of female friendship; because it is more than physical contact between women, lesbianism is the ultimate threat to patriarchy. To help illuminate the issue, Howell refers to the work put forward by Janice Raymond in *A Passion for Friends*, where Raymond talks of hetero-reality that has been created by the prevailing system of hetero-relations. She uncovers the paradox whereby women are used instrumentally to sustain hetero-relations, when in fact reality is homo-relational. A distinction is made with respect to the word “separatism”, which is a term that is used in a variety of ways among feminist theorists. If separatism is seen to mean sex segregation then she rejects this because it is an option not obtained by women’s choice, but against their will, it is seen as an imposed “ghettoization” of women. Separatism is also to be distinguished from simplistic, escapist, apolitical dissociation from the world. It should not be understood as “escape from”; separatism is a move toward personal integrity, it is, a dissociation from hetero-reality not from the world.

¹³⁶ Daly GE, {1987}, p.382. cited in Howell cited in Comstock and Henking, *ibid.*

¹³⁷ Howell, *op.cit.* p.207

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

Howell believes that Daly's and Raymond's understandings of separatism 'lend themselves to interpretation from a Whiteheadian feminist perspective.'¹³⁹ She believes that 'Whiteheadian philosophy will be enhanced by the incorporation of women's experience {inclusive of feminist philosophy as part of women's experience}' arguing that 'feminist theorists involved in critical and constructive projects ought to become involved in collaborative efforts to express feminist concerns.'¹⁴⁰ Howell maintains that be-friending or gynaffection functions as a standpoint 'from which we may exercise judgement upon hetero-reality.'¹⁴¹ Whitehead highlights the idea that 'the most general case of conscious perception, the most primitive form of judgement, is the negative perception { 'perceiving this stone is not grey' }.'¹⁴²

Howell quotes Whitehead who describes the negative perception in relationship to consciousness:

Consciousness is the feeling of negation: in the perception of 'the stone as grey,' such feeling is in barest germ; in the perception of 'the stone is not grey,' such feeling is in full development. Thus the negative perception is the triumph of consciousness. It finally rises to speak of free imagination, in which the conceptual novelties search throughout a universe in which they are not datively exemplified.¹⁴³

Utilising this insight Howell suggests that 'women have come to consciousness in a most basic way when we become aware of a particular negative perception...namely, reality is not hetero-reality.'¹⁴⁴

Through the context of female friendship, women have a standpoint from which they may make a judgement. By understanding this, hetero-reality is invalidated 'it is not really a fact'. Through female friendships women come to the consciousness of the psuedo-reality of hetero-reality.

'Separatism is women's way of separating themselves from psuedo-reality.'¹⁴⁵

Howell further explains how Whitehead's doctrine of internal relations may enhance an understanding of separatism and be – friending: 'It helps to underscore the ludicrous assumptions of hetero-reality.'¹⁴⁶, these being, 'the assumption that women are not really related to other women, the absence of understanding men in relationship to women, the refusal to acknowledge the homo-relational basis of hetero-reality, the ignorance of connectedness with nature all attest to the relational naivete of hetero-

¹³⁹ *op.cit.* p.210.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Alfred North Whitehead, 'Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology', {1978}, pp.161-245. Cited in Howell cited in Comstock and Henking, *op.cit.* pp.210-211.

¹⁴⁴ Howell, *op.cit.* p.211.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *op.cit.* p.212.

reality.’¹⁴⁷ The doctrine of internal relations may ‘also be used to interpret the significance of female friendship.’¹⁴⁸

It may be helpful in explaining how radical feminist separatism is seen as useful primarily for the purpose of dis-covering woman’s Self and women’s Selves in relationship. ‘According to Whitehead there is a reciprocal relationship between individuality and society. Through our social relationships, we become

individuals as well as contributing to society by our completion as individuals.’¹⁴⁹ Howell explains; ‘In a context of female friendship, women contribute to my search for my Self, just as the emergence of my Self enhances the metamorphic movement of gynaffectionate women.’¹⁵⁰ Through an imposed dissociation from female relationships, the contributions from gynaffectionate women are truncated.

Segregation is a silencing of women by hetero-reality and also eliminates or negates women’s influence in the world. Howell therefore advocates ‘the utter worldliness of feminist dissociation.’¹⁵¹ This is in contrast to a worldless dissociation, which is, in effect, segregation of women. Separatism, as understood by Daly, is women’s way of separating themselves from psuedo-reality. What follows are the psychological reflections of Lallene J. Rector who highlights how women may be socialised into accepting that psuedo-reality and how through Rosemary Radford Ruether’s doctrine of redemption, women can begin the task of overcoming all forms of patriarchy. In my introduction I intimated that in the past I have been instrumental in my own oppression because I had been unaware of the psychological aspects of domination and the role gender identity played in this. The subtle forms of male control experienced by me in my relationships with men had been allowed to continue subliminally because of this. Through the effects of gender socialisation I had been in collusion with heteropatriarchal rule. In the development of a false – self through gender socialisation under heteropatriarchy, mutual recognition between myself and others had been hampered.

Towards Personal Conversions: Seeking for the Realities of Male Domination

In the course of their journey he came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to him

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *op.cit.* p.213.

speaking. Now Martha who was distracted with all the serving said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do all the serving all by my self? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered: 'Martha, Martha', he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her'. {Luke 10:38-42}

In her paper, *Are we making love yet? Theological and Psychological Perspectives on the role of Gender Identity in the Experience of Domination*, Lallene J. Rector argues that while there are more gross and violent kinds of male domination [sexual abuse, domestic violence, rape and so on], the situations frequently reported in the field of psychotherapy by women within intimate heterosexual relationships are usually experienced as very subtle forms of domination. Rector utilises the case study of a middle aged professional woman called Mrs B, who is within a relationship which to all intents and purposes, appears companionable, amiable and based on equality. This case illustrates, how, 'from the woman's perspective, she feels she is submitting or surrendering her own desires and preferences in deference to her male partner.'¹⁵² Domestic life is geared around the husband's. This is carried out without overt or dramatic domination by the husband, neither is it accompanied by explicit demands on his part. It is argued 'women often accommodate male sexual desire and feel dominated by it without much sense that a different choice might be exercised, even though they seem to participate willingly. Or, perhaps they labour under the expectation that self assertion in a different direction would cause unwanted and sometimes anxiety provoking conflict.'¹⁵³

The question asked is 'Why is this? Is it the way gender roles for men and women are socialised in our culture? Or is it the idiosyncratic psychopathology of Ms B. and other women like her? Or, some combination of both?'¹⁵⁴ Rector endeavours to 'offer a critical consideration of the relationship between gender identity and the experience of domination within the larger context of the social justice agenda of feminist scholars, theologians and psychologists.'¹⁵⁵

She maintains:

The considerations of female psychology and feminist psychoanalytic theorizing become relevant specifically in their contribution to the consciousness- raising which must undergird other efforts to challenge and change patriarchal ideology and social structures. It is at this juncture that a

¹⁵² Lallene J. Rector, 'Are we Making Love Yet? Theological and Psychological Perspectives on the Role of Gender Identity in the Experience of Domination', cited in Lisa Isherwood {ed}, *The Good News of the Body*. {Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000} p.74.

¹⁵³ Rector *op.cit.* p.75.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

psychological perspective on domination and the role of gender identity becomes useful to the larger project of feminist theologians.¹⁵⁶

Rector briefly reviews Rosemary Radford Ruether's historical and theological assessment of the major claims of feminist theologies, especially through the doctrine of redemption. Ruether calls for a personal conversion and an opening up to one another as one part of the means of redemption.

'Redemption means overcoming all forms of patriarchy.'¹⁵⁷ Patriarchy is recognised by feminists as 'a multi-layered system of domination, centred in male control of women', which also includes, 'class and race hierarchy, generational hierarchy, clericalism, militarism and the domination of nature'.

Ruether calls for a personal conversion of consciousness that eschews gender hierarchy, which it is argued, is central to the foundation of patriarchal systems.

Her view of sin and conversion differs from the classical view whereby "sin" is seen as a condition of alienation from God, rooted in a primordial "fall" which is biologically inherited and that we can be rescued from this alienation from God through the sacrifice of Christ.

Not accepting the idea of "original sin", Ruether prefers the traditional Jewish concept, whereby humans possess two tendencies, the tendency to good or the tendency to evil, believing that we retain the capacity to choose between them. Ruether believes that we are born into a world which has been deeply distorted on the side of alienation and violence and are socialised from infancy to conform to those systems, believing them to be normal, natural and the will of God. As well as confronting our own sadistic and masochistic tendencies we also have to unmask the claims of the dominant culture that misleads us about the nature of good and evil. I shall continue with the theme of socialised violence in part three when I review the work of Raine Eisler who believes the pain to pleasure shift is an ethical imperative. Regarding "sin", rather than beginning with the concept of alienation from God, Ruether suggests that we need to start with alienation from each other. 'We can then go on to understand how alienation from one another expresses itself in personal relations and social relations of negation of others, as well as self negation, that are sick making and violent.'¹⁵⁸ This first step will enable us to look at the larger systems of social power and culture that re-enforce these patterns.

¹⁵⁶ *op.cit.* p.76.

¹⁵⁷ Rosemary R. Ruether, {1996}, p.274. cited in Rector in Isherwood, {2000} *op.cit.* p.78.

¹⁵⁸ Rosemary R. Ruether, 'Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism' {Sheffield Academic Press, 1998}, cited in Isherwood. {2000} p.70.

Ruether informs us that for far too long Christians have mixed up the concept of sin with problems of finitude and mortality. Natural limitations should not be seen as the result of sin but rather as sources of tragedy. This argument has been developed by Kathleen Sands (*Escape from Paradise :Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* 1994) who proposes that feminist theologians have focused too much on sin or culpable evil and not enough on tragedy. Sin: ‘belongs to that sphere of human freedom where we have the possibility of enhancing life or stifling it. When this freedom is misused, patterns and organisational systems of relationship are generated where competitive hatred builds up.’¹⁵⁹ The egoistic refusal of mutuality and passive acquiescence to victimisation of others or of ourselves sustains this violence. Ruether believes the central issue of sin is ‘The misuse of freedom to exploit humans and other earth creatures and thus to violate the basic relations that sustain life; physically, psychically and spiritually.’¹⁶⁰ Sin is viewed by Ruether as distorted relationship, which has three dimensions: ‘There is a personal-interpersonal dimension, a social-historical dimension and an ideological-cultural dimension.’¹⁶¹

For my purposes here I am focusing on the interpersonal level, where sin, is seen by Ruether as the distortion of relationship, whereby some people absolutize their rights to life and potency at the expense of others with whom they are dependent. She talks of ‘soul-making’, which happens through ‘transformative metanoia’, which is both sudden insight and also slow maturation of a grounded self in relationship or community, able to be both self-affirming and other-affirming in life enhancing mutuality, ‘It is both a gift and a task, grace and work.’¹⁶² ‘For Christian women from conservative traditions one of the most difficult barriers to feminist consciousness is the Christian identification of sin with pride and anger and virtue with humility and self- abnegation.’¹⁶³ Psychological perspectives on domination are necessary for a personal conversion of consciousness, in particular an exploration of the experience of the one who is dominated should also be considered. This includes the ways in which one desires and/or participates in being dominated. It is argued that ‘feminism has too often ignored this aspect of domination as a contributing factor to its preservation.’¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ *op.cit.* p71.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² *op.cit.* p.75.

¹⁶³ *op.cit.* p.76.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

Rector considers the psychological perspectives of Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin.

Rather than focusing on Freud's gender theory and the Oedipal phase, the relational approach of Nancy Chodorow {1978} 'offers a different psychoanalytic perspective on gender acquisition and the characteristics of femininity and masculinity.'¹⁶⁵ Object relations theory focuses on the pre - Oedipal period when attachment to the mother is primary. Human motivation is viewed differently from Freudian perspectives, 'rather than a biological bedrock of sexual and aggressive drives, object relations theory argues that the need for connection with others is the primary driving force of human personality.'¹⁶⁶ It is believed that children already have a sense of being male or female before entering the Oedipal phase.

The different psychoanalytic perspective on gender acquisition offered up by Nancy Chodorow paves the way for the intersubjective approach proposed by Benjamin, who seeks to outline a psychology of domination based upon such a theory. For Benjamin, domination is an extension of the bonds of love not only a matter of aggression or obedience. Rather than focusing primarily on the psychology of the one who exercises power, there is an emphasis on the two-way process of domination and an investigation into the psychology of those who submit to it. Like Irigaray, Benjamin has noted that Freud takes the "masculine" as the standard representation of sexuality, therefore women are fixed into a system of values not their own but male values. She argues that women are therefore relegated to one of three possibilities. 1. as a temptation to regression, 2. as a prize, 3. as a third part of the Oedipal triangle. She notes Simone De Beauvoir's early observations of the opposition of subject and object and women's "otherness" for men. There is a recognition that the gender polarity observed and maintained is linked to the many
common dualisms: master/slave, power/surrender, self/other, independence/dependence and so on. Benjamin argues for a basic tension in the human personality between the need for self-assertion and the need for mutual recognition. Her view of human nature follows the more general view of object relations theorists, whereby human beings are fundamentally relational beings which, it is argued, is 'quite different from Freud's.'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Rector cited in Isherwood, {2000}, p.80.

¹⁶⁶ *op.cit.* p.81.

The assumption Benjamin has put forward after following Stern's {1985} infant observation studies is that babies come into the world with emergent selves ready to engage the other. It is argued, however, that this stands in contrast to Mahler et al's {1975} notion of the self- differentiating out of a merged oneness with the other. Rector suggests with regards to the role of the mother's subjectivity, the mutuality of the need for recognition has not been adequately acknowledged in the theory of development. A paradox is recognised by Rector: 'Though the child desires recognition from the mother, the child must first recognise the other as a separate person.'¹⁶⁸ Without this capacity, which begins in infancy, the argument goes that 'the exchange of recognition is often converted into a dynamic of domination and submission.'¹⁶⁹ The breakdown of the necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals result in relationships based on domination and submission.

'Benjamin argues that the rigidity or permeability of an individual's boundaries are shaped, at least in part, by the nature of the experiences of mutuality.'¹⁷⁰ We are informed, 'the need for self-assertion and mutual recognition may conflict at times.'¹⁷¹ Coined by Benjamin as 'the negative cycle of recognition', this may come about, for example, through the mother pursuing the baby for recognition and the baby needing space and feeling intruded upon. 'In a negative cycle of recognition, a person feels that aloneness is only possible by obliterating the intrusive other, that attunement is only possible by surrendering to the other.'¹⁷² 'The negative cycle of recognition may lead to the development of defensive boundaries in which the other must be kept out, separate and distinct.'¹⁷³

The process of mutual recognition is hampered by what is called the development of a false- self, Winnicott {1960}. This dynamic is characterised by Benjamin as an act of submission. Conflict management between one's own desire, which may differ from the other's, and the desire to remain connected through the experience of harmony leads individuals to respond in an acquiescent way to the

¹⁶⁷ *op.cit.* p.83.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² Jessica Benjamin, 'Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of domination', {1998}. p.28. cited in Rector in Isherwood, {2000} *ibid.*

¹⁷³ Rector *ibid.*

other's wish, or to one's perception of the other's wish. 'Avoiding submission means dealing with the other as an equal. This brings the self face to face with the problem of omnipotence.'¹⁷⁴ With regards to the fate of omnipotent wishes and fantasies, different styles of parenting can lead to two possible developmental extremes: 'One arises from an overly permissive parent, who essentially, is self-denying.'¹⁷⁵ This is when the child has no one and no limit to bump up against, resulting in the child's sense of omnipotence not being challenged and the child not really accomplishing anything in terms of the need of recognition. The outcome is that the child has nothing and feelings of abandonment ensue. Conversely when a parent has little tolerance for the child's attempt to do things independently 'freedom is felt as an impossibility; what is required is compliance.'¹⁷⁶ The result; omnipotence, is attributed to the parent and the child's sense of agency is suppressed. The process of recognition in both of these scenarios cannot begin. Benjamin's inter-subjective theory, 'appeals to a fundamental human motivation to connect with another and to create unities....the fundamental human motivations are the needs for recognition and assertion.'¹⁷⁷

To have an acknowledgement of the difference between self and other, dependence on the other and the recognition of the subjectivity of the self as well as the other, the fulfilment of the needs for recognition is optimal. If the tension between self and other breaks down and relationships are based on complementarity as opposed to one of mutuality, domination results. 'The experience of domination is constituted by the inability of a subject to experience or acknowledge the other's subjectivity.'¹⁷⁸

Hegelian theory of the dynamics between master and slave {1952} is referred to so that Benjamin may 'describe the dynamics of each according to her categories of the basic needs for recognition and assertion, as well as considering the viscidities of omnipotence in both the dominator and the dominated.'¹⁷⁹ The solution to the master's inability to accept dependence on and need of the other, who cannot be controlled, is found in the transformation of need into subjugation of the other, through coercive means obtaining recognition from an unwilling other. There is a refusal to sustain the tension

¹⁷⁴ *op.cit.* p.84.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *op.cit.* p.85.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

between asserting oneself and recognising the other. True independence may only be achieved by maintaining this tension. 'The underlying theme of Sadism is the attempt to break through to the other.'¹⁸⁰ So the violation becomes the extreme form of assertion 'the other is assimilated into the self.'¹⁸¹ There is recognition, 'That even when people do not submit, per se, fantasies of being dominated may play a significant part in their mental lives.'¹⁸² It is suggested by Benjamin that, 'in a paradoxical way, a person may seek freedom in submission to slavery.'¹⁸³ As in the case of Ms B, 'this may be expressed in a subtle form of the experience of psychological domination.'¹⁸⁴ In sadomasochistic sexual enactments, 'physical pain substitutes for the psychological pain caused by lack of recognition. Submission becomes an extreme form of losing self in order to gain recognition.'¹⁸⁵ 'With the loss of the self, one hopes to gain access to a more powerful self perceived in the other.'¹⁸⁶ 'Omnipotence is projected on to the other with whom one then merges.'¹⁸⁷ Rector informs us that the most common form of erotic domination is sadomasochistic fantasy which can be viewed as the clearest application of the master-slave enactment.

In her paper, Rector refers to the continuing debates on whether or not there are essential differences in the characteristics between men and women. For example, she mentions the Freudian description of a dualism in which femininity is linked to passivity, narcissism and masochism, and masculinity is linked with activity, aggression and sadism. She writes:

Though contemporary feminism criticizes this division of characteristics, it has continued to perpetuate these dualisms in claims that women develop a natural capacity for empathy and emotional connectedness{Jordan, et al, 1991}; women have their own ethic of caring{Gilligan, 1982}; and women have their own struggle with sin{Saiving1979}.¹⁸⁸

These characteristics are believed to be socialised, through the vehicle of gender polarisation, by social constructivists. Initially similar to Chodorow's object relations theory, which shifts from traditional Freudian perspectives, 'Benjamin suggests that male children develop masculinity, at least in part, by

¹⁸⁰ Benjamin, {1988}, cited in Rector cited in Isherwood,{2000} *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Rector, *ibid.*

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *op.cit.* pp.85-86.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *op.cit.* p.85.

¹⁸⁸ *op.cit.* p.87.

rejecting an original identification with the mother.’¹⁸⁹ Recognition of mother as a subject is interfered with through this rejection; mother is seen primarily as other.

The male child repudiates his commonality with her, thereby leading to the identification of masochism with the female and sadism with the male. The girl’s lack of having a way to dis-identify with the mother leads her to a less developed sense of independence.¹⁹⁰

‘Identificatory love’ is regarded by Benjamin as the prototype of ideal love, whereby the ideal image of the self is sought in the other. Identification with the pre-oedipal father constitutes the basis for this kind of love. With the desire for recognition, ‘women’s search for identificatory love often leads to submission.’¹⁹¹ The girl begins to express her need for the father as an identification with separation from the mother, and as a representative of the outside world, but the father’s need to assert his difference from the feminine may lead him to relate to his daughter as a ‘sweet adorable thing, a nascent sex object.’¹⁹² Father’s withdrawal leads the daughter to psychologically return to the mother where anger and depression can often ensue. We are informed that identificatory love of the father becomes the basis for later heterosexual love. The little girl ‘attempts to “have” what she cannot “be”’. Thus, many women are left with a life-long admiration for and idealization of men who possess what they cannot have that is, power and desire, those ‘who get away with their sense of omnipotence in tact.’¹⁹³

Like Ms B, the girl projects her own omnipotence onto the other and is therefore socialised to care for others and to fear abandonment should she fail to make these accommodations. Relationships of overt or unconscious submission are often the expressions of this admiration and with its inclination toward submission ‘Ideal love emerges as a substitute for one’s own agency.’¹⁹⁴

‘The resulting male psychology and sense of masculinity regards the female as object and other, lacking her own subjectivity. He privileges assertion {domination} in his own search for recognition and assumes the omnipotence of his desire.’¹⁹⁵ The gender socialisation process and the parent’s role in it are significantly responsible for the problem of domination, but not completely. ‘The images of

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *op.cit.* p.88.

¹⁹² Benjamin, {1988}, cited in Rector in Isherwood, {2000} *ibid.*

¹⁹³ *op.cit.* p.89.

¹⁹⁴ Rector cited in Isherwood, {2000} *ibid.*

femininity and masculinity in culture tend to operate nearly as powerfully as the valuation of images presented to children by their parents.¹⁹⁶ For Benjamin inter-subjectivity is the way forward. She critiques the idea of submitting to an omnipotent father in order to differentiate oneself from the omnipotent mother. 'Omnipotence has to be broken out of altogether.'¹⁹⁷ An alternative position in which a 'sense of self and other evolves through the consciousness that separate minds can share the same feelings and intentions, through mutual recognition,¹⁹⁸ is provided through Benjamin's theory of inter-subjectivity.

Benjamin is also critical of feminists who believe the problem can be rectified by substituting a female organ as a new symbol of desire.

She maintains that it can only reinforce a different gender polarity, which can be problematic in two ways:

First, these symbols derive power from the total gestalt of the parent, so that if the maternal figure is a source of fear, then this supports negative feelings about female organs. Secondly, the symbolic level of the psyche is already occupied by the phallus, so that an active mother is equated to a phallic woman.¹⁹⁹

The inter-subjective perspective advanced by Benjamin, requires 'an individual to live with the tension of the paradoxical needs for recognition and assertion.'²⁰⁰ A psychic space is created where a 'personal conversion' can occur and also 'where the experience of sexual desire is transformed into an engagement of mutual recognition.'²⁰¹

Summary

I have demonstrated how the separatist proposals by Wilkinson and Kitzinger can leave no room for women to transcend their situation and considered the more radical approach toward separatism proposed by Daly. In reference to Daly's ideas Howell highlights how utopian visions in literary works written by lesbian feminists, through their creations of male excluding communities, capitalise upon the romanticisation of a female essence and idealisation of female community. She concedes that these characterisations do make perfect sense but recognises a flaw in their proposals, arguing that theirs is

¹⁹⁵ *op.cit.* p.91.

¹⁹⁶ *op.cit.* p.90.

¹⁹⁷ *op.cit.* p.89.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *op.cit.* pp. 89.90.

²⁰⁰ *op.cit.* p.92.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

an androcentric interpretation of separatism based on the male/female relationship. She accentuates Daly's understandings of radical separatism as a gynocentric endeavour, which is an investment of energy in women's self-hood rather than energy expended in the confrontation of patriarchy.

Separatism as understood by Daly is women's way of separating themselves from psuedo-reality.

Following from these proposals I presented the psychological reflections of Rector who illustrates how women may be

socialised into accepting psuedo-reality, She then considered Reuther's doctrine of redemption as a possible way of beginning the task of overcoming all forms of patriarchy.

Rector has provided a description of what Isherwood has described as the early implantation of the 'patriarchal narrative that cites male authority' and excludes female autonomy.²⁰² Rector demonstrates how for both Chodorow and Benjamin there is an emphasis on the two way process of domination. Rather than just focusing on the psychology of the one who exercises power, we should examine the psychology of those who submit to it. The adoption of this method demonstrates how women become compliant in their own oppression. Through an exploration of the work of Chodorow, Benjamin and others we have a better understanding of how social patterns of child-rearing can lead to male domination. They explain how women have difficulty in experiencing their own subjectivity including sexual subjectivity. As evidenced, the inter-subjective perspective requires an individual to live with the tension of the paradoxical needs for recognition and assertion. Therefore a shift from having sex to making love when getting pleasure in and with the other is predicated on the mutuality of recognition and the assertion of the self. The value of the work carried out by these scholars is the recognition that gender polarity underpinning patriarchy is linked to many common dualism's and I believe the acknowledgement of bisexuality has the potential to disrupt them. As a self-identifying bisexual I do not cohere with the androcentric separatist proposals advanced by Wilkinson and Kitzinger instead I wish to follow what Daly terms a gynocentric interpretation fostering genuine relationships between myself and others, both male and females. To be made aware of the psychological aspects of domination and the role gender identity plays in my relationships with others

highlighting how I may have been instrumental in my own oppression has facilitated an internal shift allowing me an alternative route towards personal integrity and liberation.

A general awareness of the implications involved through Daly's formulations, mutual recognition between myself and others are no longer hampered, I am provided with an alternative view allowing me the opportunity to transcend my particular situation.

Part 3.

Pleasure -0. Danger - 1.

Continuing with the theme of women's oppression, I would now like to discuss the views of the socialist feminist Carole S. Vance from the U S A, who was the co-ordinator of the Barnard conference in 1982 entitled *Towards a Politics of Sexuality*. The aim of the conference was to address women's sexual autonomy, choice, and pleasure, acknowledging that sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger, as well as exploration, pleasure, and agency. Concerned 'that a premature orthodoxy had come to dominate feminist discussion',²⁰³ the organisers asserted that feminists had been focusing on sexual violence but paid relatively little attention to sexuality per se. Conceding they had little knowledge about sexuality, the organisers set up a conference that would critically examine theories of sexuality, both within and outside the women's movement. As well as highlighting the importance of seeking out ways to both express and experience sexual pleasure as a way forward for women's sexual autonomy, Vance advocates sexual non-conformity as a way forward for women. As a bisexual woman, I believe her work is invaluable because of this. I also believe her call for sexual non-conformity assists me in my endeavour of highlighting the importance and value of placing bisexuality central to the debate concerning human sexuality. Vance was highly critical of the anti-pornography movement, which was launched by North American feminists such as Robin Morgan, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. This was because she believed their campaign against pornography was damaging the movement. The anti-porn movement were issuing warnings to

²⁰² Isherwood. {2000} p 10.

²⁰³ Carole S. Vance, {ed} *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* {London, New York: Pandora Press, 1992} p. 451.

women of the ways in which they were complicit in their own degradation and suggesting that their pursuit of sexual pleasure could be dangerous.

Within the texts of *Pleasure and Danger*, Carole S. Vance writes about the ambivalent and contradictory extremes women experience in negotiating sexuality. 'For women to experience autonomous desire and act in ways that give them sexual pleasure in a society that would nurture and protect their delights is our culture's worst nightmare and feminism's best fantasy.'²⁰⁴ However, Vance suggests that this fantasy, although vivid and compelling, remains far from realised. This is made clear through daily events which are 'depressingly filled with violence, punishment, backlash, and male rage that unerringly target women's sexuality.'²⁰⁵ She reminds us that even though it is more imaginable and available for women than at the end of the 19th century, sexual pleasure for women is still complicated and frightening in our society today, which remains deeply hostile to both women and sex. Her work is about the concept of pleasure and danger; she attempts to speak about the complexities surrounding the issues of women's sexuality.

At the individual level, it explains the mix of fear and excitement that women often feel when they approach sexuality. At the group level, it speaks to the differences among women, who depending on personal history and experience, may want to stress safety or adventure at various times in their lives.²⁰⁶

Her concept had the intention of offering a generous framework for understanding difference.

Ambiguity in my own experience is one of the issues I have chosen to explore. I have already intimated how - through the psychological implantation of masculinist modes discussed by Irigaray - my mother and I had been locked into a battle set in place whereby women and girls should adhere to the phallic rule of passivity and self - negation. Pleasure and safety for us has been rendered untenable. The intra-psychic effects of a gender system which exemplifies female sexual nature as being passive led me to see my own passion as being dangerous and I had been stripped of any chance for sexual autonomy. However, a deeper understanding of the imperative, that women should strive for this through expressions of desire and through their experiences of sexual pleasure and sexual non-conformity paves the way for me to attain this opportunity denied through gender socialisation under

²⁰⁴ *op.cit.* introduction.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

heteropatriarchy. My sexual non - conformity as a bisexual woman can be the very source of my liberation.

Concerning the issue of difference, Vance reveals to us that women's relationships to sexuality are diverse not singular and warns, 'that any feminist program that requires uniformity in women's responses will be dishonest and oppressive.'²⁰⁷

Vance argues that to focus exclusively on reducing the danger women face, without expanding the possibilities, opportunities, and permissions for pleasure, will fail as a feminist strategy and will expose women to more danger. Focusing exclusively on danger and overstating it monopolises the entire framework, positioning women solely as victims disempowers the movement, making women's actual experience with pleasure invisible. 'The notion that women cannot explore sexuality until danger is first eliminated is a strategic dead-end.'²⁰⁸ We are reminded of the second wave feminism of the 60s and 70s which did explore women's potential for pleasure embodying 'a feisty mix of the outrageous and the practical.'²⁰⁹ There was demand for better birth control and access to abortion, with an awareness that women were left infantile and desperate through ideological themes of love and romance. Feminism was trying to lay claim to a new language of women's bodily desire through a rejection of the prescriptive orgasm by vaginal penetration only. This progressive movement was halted through a changing climate beginning in the 80s. Feminism's agenda on sexuality had narrowed becoming increasingly more conservative in response to ferocious right-wing attacks. 'Further narrowing came in the form of the anti-pornography movement.'²¹⁰ Its narrative 'erased the diversity of female subjectivity, putting in its place the fiction that women's view of sexual imagery was singular and united.'²¹¹ Vance explains;

Much like the right-to-life slide shows, the anti-porn slide show achieved its considerable emotional impact through visual manipulation and decontextualization, supplemented by highly unrepresentative images and dubious facts. In the overheated atmosphere, sexuality itself became demonized, as almost all representations of sexuality were 'degrading to women'.²¹²

arguing that a climate was created whereby it was increasingly dangerous for feminists to speak about women's desire. 'Female desire, although theoretically acknowledged as possible in a utopian future,

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ *ibid.*

²¹² *ibid.*

remained an ethereal and remote presence, never embarrassing or personally implicating for anti-porn leaders.²¹³ Because their purpose was to condemn, ‘only the anti-pornography movement could publicly revel in the most graphic sexual images and lurid sexual language.’²¹⁴ It was recognised that a climate needed to be re-created and a framework set up, which would ‘alleviate the need for a forced choice

between pleasure and danger, as well as provide an inclusive ground for understanding difference.’²¹⁵ Vance conveys to us that even though we must not ignore or weaken the critique of sexual danger women face within society, we must also not forget the importance of expanding the analysis of pleasure. She argues that feminist theorists should ‘draw on women’s energy to create a movement that speaks as powerfully in favour of sexual pleasure as it does against sexual danger.’²¹⁶ Vance critiques the ideology whereby female desire should be restricted to areas protected and privileged within our culture, for example in traditional marriage and the nuclear family. She also disagrees with the idea that women should be in such relationships in order that they remain safe and become the moral custodians of male behaviour, where they are perceived as the instigators of such morality because it is unjust, illogical and misogynous. ‘If female sexual desire triggers male attack, it cannot be freely or spontaneously shown, either in public or private.’²¹⁷ She writes: ‘Women inherit a substantial task: the management of their own sexual desire and its public expression. Self-control and watchfulness become major and necessary female virtues.’²¹⁸ There is an appreciation of ‘the intra-psychic effects of a gender system that places pleasure and safety in opposition for women’²¹⁹ arguing that sexual restriction, invisibility, timidity, and uncuriosity, rather than being the signs of an intrinsic and specific female sexual nature, ‘are more the signs of a thoroughgoing damage.’²²⁰ I would just like to remind the reader here that having been a victim myself in the past for attempting to exert my own sexual

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ *op.cit.* p.3.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁸ *op.cit.* p.4.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ *ibid.*

autonomy my impulses both externally and internally had been hampered, I had become sexually timid, unable to show spontaneity, until eventually my desires shut down altogether.

Vance suggests that 'The effects of gender inequality may include not only brute violence'²²¹ The internalised control of women's impulses also poisons their desire with self-doubt and anxiety. She maintains that the critical issue to be explored is 'The subtle connection between how patriarchy interferes with female desire and how women experience their own passion as dangerous.'²²² Apart from the threat of male violence, she argues another source of sexual danger is how 'sexuality activates a host of intra-psychic anxieties.'²²³, these being our fear:

...of merging with another, the blurring of body boundaries and the sense of self that occurs in the tangles of parts and sensations, with attendant fears of dissolution and self-annihilation. In sex, people experience earlier substrates, irrational connections, infantile memories, and a range of rich sensations. We fear dependency and possible loss of control, as well as our own greedy aggression, our wishes to incorporate body parts, even entire persons.²²⁴

The fear of competition with other women is also experienced through our recognition of our own wishes to compete for attention and for loved objects. We are also profoundly uneasy about violating the bounds of traditional femininity through our experience of desire, which will often signal the giving up of vigilance and control:

Transgressing gender raises the spectre of separation from other women - both the mother and literal and metaphorical sisters - leaving one isolated and vulnerable to attack. These subterranean pulls on women are no less powerful by remaining unnamed. Our unspoken fears are added to the sum of sexual terror. Without a better language to excavate and delineate these other sources of danger, everything is attributed to men, thereby inflating male power and impoverishing ourselves. Moreover, we leave the irrationality and volatility of sex open to manipulation by others, easily mobilized in campaigns against sexual deviance, degeneration, and pollution.²²⁵

Female experience 'contains elements of pleasure and oppression, happiness and humiliation.'²²⁶

Vance suggests that we should use this ambiguousness as a source-book to examine how women experience sexual desire, fantasy, and action rather than be confused by it. We need to know our sexual histories in order to identify what is pleasurable and under what conditions, and control experience so that it occurs again. New forms of shaming - which women are vulnerable - have been made possible

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² *ibid.*

²²³ *op.cit.* p.5.

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ *ibid.*

²²⁶ *op.cit.* p.6.

through the anti-pornography ideology. She maintains that making speech about sexual pleasure has become a taboo through the over emphasis on danger: 'hiding pleasure and its sources in feminist discussion does not make the world safe for women, any more than women's acceding to the system of male protection made the world safe for them.'²²⁷

Like many contemporary feminists, Vance considers the possibility that desire is not intrinsic but constituted or constructed and talks of historical contrasts between lived experience and constructed social reality. She reminds us: 'The nineteenth-century feminist discourse about women's sexuality and sexual reform, remain largely heterosexual and marital, despite evidence of women's actual experience with romantic female friendships that offered physical and emotional intensity',²²⁸ and asks 'what other unnamed realms lurk silently in our own discussions.'²²⁹ 'Notions of sexual transformation and change occurring within an individual lifetime is a crucial one.'²³⁰

Thus we are forced to give up the static picture of an unchanging sexual order. We must also strive to understand what women's differing and various sexual representations mean, 'if we want to study sexuality, we need more information about individual responses to symbol and image.'²³¹ We need knowledge about what the viewer may bring with her 'to make an interpretation: a cultural frame, resonances, connections, and personal experience.'²³² Context is also important because viewers read symbols differently. Vance informs us that we must not assume that symbols have a unitary meaning because we will fail to investigate the individual's experience. 'To ignore the potential for variation is to inadvertently place women outside of culture except as passive recipients of official symbol systems.'²³³ We are also reminded that feminist descriptions and analysis in the past have often assumed that women have been white, heterosexual, middle-or upper-class and this insight has made feminist scholars self critical about omissions, gaps, and silences. They are now endeavouring 'to qualify and specify findings, particularly if they apply to particular groups only, and to take more aggressive efforts in researching areas and topics which had been ignored.'²³⁴ Because it is a topic that

²²⁷ *op.cit.* p.7.

²²⁸ *op.cit.* p.14.

²²⁹ *ibid.*

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ *op.cit.*, p.15.

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ *ibid.*

²³⁴ *op.cit.* p.18.

has largely been ignored, I would like to suggest that my ongoing research into bisexuality may be seen as part of this endeavour. Vance emphasises that ‘feminist work on sexuality must confront the dialectic between specificity and generalization, and endure its ongoing tension.’²³⁵

Lynne Segal highlights the struggle in her book *Straight Sex: The politics of pleasure* {1994}. She informs us that the conservative backlash against radical politics enabled pornography to serve as a symbol of women’s defeat. Many feminists became less confidently on the offensive, leaving them less able to celebrate women’s potential and no longer concerned with wider issues of equality, becoming more concerned with a narrower, defensive politics linking sex and violence. ‘Pornography provided its authorisation.’²³⁶ There was a lack of focus on class and race issues. The USA Women Against Pornography movement was formed and led by white middle-class women. She points out a suggestion made by Carla Freccero, ‘It is because white feminists already have most of their basic needs met, that they can afford to highlight their sexual experiences as the most restraining, if not sole, source of women’s oppression.’²³⁷ Feminism has now become aware of the lack of focus on race and class issues, in part four of this section I shall be discussing a return to historical materialism evidenced through the work of Rosemary Hennessy and Marcella Althaus-Reid in section three.

Exploration of Differences

Vance argues that our fear of difference is especially evident around the question of sexual variation and explains how our ability to think about sexual difference is limited ‘by a cultural system that organises sexual difference in a hierarchy in which some acts and partners are privileged and others are punished’²³⁸ noting how ‘the system of sexual hierarchy functions smoothly only if sexual nonconformity is kept invisible.’²³⁹ She believes that within each of us lies a replication of an external system of sexual hierarchy, ‘internalized cultural norms enforce the status quo.’²⁴⁰ According to the rules of sexual hierarchy, stigmatised acts or preferences are devalued

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ Lynne Segal, *op.cit.* p.62.

²³⁷ Carla Freccero, ‘Notes of a Post-Sex Wars Theorizer’ in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller {eds}, *Conflicts and Feminism* {London, Routledge, 1990} p.316. cited in Segal, *op.cit.* pp.62. 63.

²³⁸ Vance, *op.cit.* p.19.

²³⁹ *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *op.cit.* p.20.

yet paradoxically we judge our own behaviour second-rate and unsatisfying, resenting those whose mere existence makes us doubtful and deprived. Thus, the presentation of sexual difference, whether intended or not, is often interpreted as a chauvinistic statement of superiority, if not an exhortation to experiment or an attempt to prescribe a new sexual norm.²⁴¹

Vance comments on “prescriptivism”, a term coined by Alice Echols, which comes about when we seek politically appropriate sexual behaviour, whereby we have a ‘tendency to transform broad, general principals like equality, autonomy, and self-determination into fairly specific and rigid standards to which all feminists are expected to conform.’²⁴² Unfortunately, this leads us to create structures of deadening conformity. Vance argues that feminism, as well as continuing to work for material changes, must be a movement that speaks to sexuality as a site of oppression and not forfeit the field to reactionary groups. Feminism must also understand pleasure as life-affirming and empowering. It must see sexual pleasure as a fundamental right. ‘It is not enough to move women away from danger.’²⁴³

Segal 1994 informs us that Vance’s important message, however, ‘was to little avail’.²⁴⁴ ‘Divisions between North American feminists would only deepen.’²⁴⁵ Lesbian feminist sex radicals persisted with their sponsoring of sexual role playing and the exploration of consensual lesbian sadomasochism, which in turn only served to provoke other feminists, leading them to step up their campaign. Individual fears were directed towards anxiety, guilt, frustration and personal unhappiness, back to what was to be viewed as the main agenda: ‘men’s abuse of power symbolized in pornography.’²⁴⁶

Segal suggests that feminists were:

No longer one step ahead, but simply *out of step* with many women’s dreams and desires, feminists were becoming either more pessimistic or more silent about sexual pleasure - especially if heterosexual - just when the mainstream media and women themselves had adopted their earlier, once confidently radical, enthusiasm for sex.²⁴⁷

She comments on the ‘circle of completion’,²⁴⁸ whereby we have gone from erotomania to erotophobia and maintains, ‘overall, women’s vulnerability today most directly reflects their failure to

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

²⁴² *op.cit.* p.21

²⁴³ *op.cit.* p.24.

²⁴⁴ Segal. *op.cit.* p.65

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *op.cit.* p.66.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *op.cit.* p.69.

achieve economic emancipation {so many still ghettoized into low paid and irregular 'women's work' }.²⁴⁹

Vance argues, 'sex, however we define it, is not and never has been simply a private affair'²⁵⁰, stating;

If we are to assess the prospects for greater sexual agency and fulfilment for heterosexual women, we will need to consider changes in the broader context and forces out of which our gender and sexual identities are made and remade, always precariously, through conflict, envy and struggle.²⁵¹

We should then, look at the wider issues involved and provide a materialist analysis of human sexuality

and also provide the space for the fluidity of sexual expression. If this is possible, men and women have

the opportunity to come together in mutual relation and men may no longer fear for their masculinity, allowing for freedom of movement across and between active/passive binaries.

Segal discusses gender panic in Western men: 'any threat to gender certainties trails in its wake evidence of personal and social panic.'²⁵² Reviewing what some cultural commentators have suggested, she discusses the fortunes of feminism which has proved to be 'one of the most powerful forces reshaping American culture in the 70s and 80s, promising, via its influence on Hollywood, to reshape culture world-wide',²⁵³ reminding us about box office hits in the 80s which had themes of endangered masculinity. Posing the question, 'but what is it...which is inducing such a sense of "crisis" and hysteria in these angry and aggressive men?'²⁵⁴ She reminds us that it is not just something born and bred in the U. S. A. , British men have also found advocates to rail against feminism.

Nevertheless, it is in the U.S.A. that the pattern, causes and outcomes of apparently gender-related troubles and tensions can be seen most clearly. In a media-saturated society with its motor in Washington, a new sex-war agenda has been framed.²⁵⁵

She also reminds us about the far deeper social insecurities of joblessness and personal disintegration caused by economic recession and restructuring. 'Such personal powerlessness clashes violently with prevailing conceptions of the power and prerogatives of manhood. Far more than feminism ever could,

²⁴⁹ *op.cit.* p.68.

²⁵⁰ Vance, *op.cit.* p.267.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*

²⁵² Segal, *op.cit.* p.269.

²⁵³ *op.cit.* p.270.

²⁵⁴ *op.cit.* p.275.

these are the social forces which threaten the conventional attributes of manhood, of the work-oriented, skilled, ambitious husband and father.²⁵⁶

We are informed by Segal that economic crisis has been displaced, re-articulated, and “managed” as gender crisis by propagandists of the right. ‘Men who have fewer resources for constructing any sense of worth may try to assert it through the sexual “conquest” of women, drawing upon conventional definitions of ‘masculinity.’²⁵⁷ The irony is ‘What men want, as often as not, is to be sexually passive. What men do not want, by and large, is for women {and certainly other men} to know this.’²⁵⁸ She explains that there are men who enjoy ‘being the objectified target of women’s or man’s desire, and to move between and across the supposed active/ passive binaries.’²⁵⁹ and talks of a possible binary collapse whereby some men ‘may occupy spaces where mutuality, equality, openness and intimacy between women and men are genuine goals.’²⁶⁰

Contrary to the dominant iconographies of sex, the polarities of gender may falter and blur in actual bodily contact:

In sex , bodies meet; and the epiphany of that meeting, the great threat and joy, is precisely that the dichotomies of activity/passivity, subject/object, heterosexual/homosexual which have up to now sustained the charade of their source in the gender ordering of masculinity/femininity are always in danger of collapsing. They all collapse together. For beneath the veil of the phallus is merely a vulnerable penis, which men may or may not gain pleasure from pushing into others; even as they remain vulnerable to the embraces, enclosures and penetrations of others. In sex, beyond phallogocentric metaphor, one body actively seeks its passive objectification in and through the desire of another. The heterosexual embrace we seek, simply for its own sake, whatever its form, and whatever our sex, can be as ‘queer’, or as threatening to the gender order, as its perverse alternatives.²⁶¹

More women should claim the right to sexual pleasure, because it can provide a strong sense of increased confidence and control over their lives. Segal maintains that it is from this perspective, ‘we need to oppose and subvert all traditional discourses and understandings of bodily pleasure which symbolically position women as necessarily subordinated in and through heterosexual encounters or partnerships - whether coming from traditional sexist rhetoric or dissident radical feminism.’²⁶²

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *op.cit.* p.277.

²⁵⁷ *op.cit.* p.288.

²⁵⁸ *op.cit.* p.290.

²⁵⁹ *op.cit.* p.295.

²⁶⁰ *op.cit.* p.296.

²⁶¹ *ibid.*

²⁶² *op.cit.* p.307.

arguing: 'The way to fight the continuing victimization of women cannot be to abandon notions of sexual liberation, or to make women's pursuit of heterosexual pleasure incompatible with women's happiness.'²⁶³

We are reminded of the conservative forces which have mobilized consistently for battle against abortion, homosexuality, divorce, sex education and pornography, in fact any change that would promote women's or gay men's sexual autonomy by transforming the order of gender, has been particularly active in Britain since the mid 80s:

As feminists, we play into the hands of our enemies if we downplay, rather than seek fully to strengthen, ideas of women's sexual liberation. Nor can we leave the goal of expanding personal liberation to a commodity consumer culture eager to expand its markets, whatever its sometimes 'dissident', playful or progressive moments.²⁶⁴

I will be elaborating on the issue of the commodification of sexuality in part four of this section when I discuss the work of historical materialist Rosemary Hennessy. Through a provision of an analysis of the structures of capitalism she shows how our sexuality becomes a target for market forces. Critiquing gender theorist Judith Butler's notion of performativity Hennessy argues that she leaves the structures of capitalism invisible and fails to recognise the negative consequences of disclosing ones sexuality other than normative particularly for those who do not have the opportunity for social mobility or the resources to insulate themselves from heteronormativity's insistence that sex equals gender.

Segal proposes that there is still a need for a political movement for women with an agenda of its own, women must continue to make demands on the state while providing diverse networks of support and cultural resistance. Contrary to traditionalists' warnings, surveys of sexual behaviour in 1990s Britain concluded that sex had become far safer for women. Feminists today should continue to argue for women's sexual autonomy, fertility rights and the education and resources necessary for each person to encounter care for themselves and for others in ways that enhance the possibilities for pleasure, mutuality, responsibility and comfort, 'sexual pleasure is far too significant in our lives and culture for women not to be seeking to express our agency through it.'²⁶⁵

²⁶³ *op.cit.* pp.309-310.

²⁶⁴ *op.cit.* p.312.

²⁶⁵ *op.cit.* pp.313-314.

Segal suggests the task for feminists is to uncover and change the social forces which ensure that women's sexual agency is suppressed in contexts of significant gender inequalities. Another task feminists face is to 'uncover and challenge the cultural forces which disparage women and gay men through meanings roping gender to sexuality via conceptions of "masculinity" as "activity" and "dominance" coded into heterosexual coitus, however shaky the symbolism at interpersonal levels.'²⁶⁶ There must also be a continuation of the traditional forms of canvassing, lobbying, fighting and arguing for better and more comprehensive welfare provision at state and local levels. We are told by Segal that anti-pornography legislation, while strengthening the agenda of moral conservatives,

does nothing to rid us of the ubiquitous non-sexually explicit gender imagery depicting men as dominant and aggressive, women as subordinate and servicing in cultural representation generally {the feminine/effeminate/homosexual remain subordinate identities, in and out of their clothes}.²⁶⁷

She asserts that in both Britain and the U.S.A. 'safer sex' campaigning material and sex education generally has been 'grotesquely hampered by accusations of pornography. Most significantly, proposing anti-pornography legislation is a cheap diversion from doing anything useful about violence against women.'²⁶⁸

As well as combating homophobia, a solution would be to increase women's financial independence and rather than stigmatising or trying to penalise 'single' mothers who have fled violent partnerships, they should be encouraged to do so. Along with this, the idea of heterosexuality as confirmation of "manhood" must be attacked. Segal maintains that gender hierarchy will only disappear if and when we continue to fashion new concepts and practices of gender based upon the mutual recognition of similarities and differences between men and women, rather than upon notions of their opposition.

Along with Irigaray, both Segal and Vance value the importance of difference; Vance highlights how the anti-pornography movement's narrative led to the erasure of diversity amongst women. She also illustrates how important it is for women to explore their sexuality, warning against an over emphasis on danger as this produces a situation whereby women remain the victims of patriarchal society, rendering sexual pleasure for them an impossible goal. Women are encouraged to explore and

²⁶⁶ *op.cit.* p.314.

²⁶⁷ *op.cit.* p.315.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

experiment, moving outside the restrictive areas created for them, which may be dressed up as protective areas, for example, marriage and nuclear families. A space needs to be created where they might wish to transgress traditional gender roles without the risk of vilification. I would like to advance that perhaps this type of experimentation might take the form of “bisexuality”.

Vance also suggests that “heterosexual” women should be free to explore and talk about the emotional and erotic experiences they might have with other women. Another crucial point to recognise is that within an individual’s lifetime sexual transformation and change might occur, whereby who or what was desirable yesterday or ten years ago, may not be so today. In light of what I have researched so far, I

believe this may be viewed as a common phenomenon, particularly among women. Vance argues that to ignore the potential for variation between women and within an individual woman’s lifetime places women outside of culture, they lose their sexual autonomy and are rendered passive recipients of official symbol systems.

An Ethic of Pleasure

I have suggested that people can be liberated into a wider understanding of sexuality, continuing an evaluation of pleasure as a starting point for the creation of theology. I will now review the work of Riane Eisler, who explores the potential for pleasure and desire, based on the principal of the sacred.

In her book *Sacred Pleasure* 1995 Eisler explores the past, present, and potential future of sex. She looks at both sex and the sacred in the larger context of our cultural and biological evolution, demystifying much in our sexual history that has confused us. Her primary focus is on heterosexual relations and how these affect, and are in turn affected by, different social forms. However, I believe her work has relevance for bisexual relations because at some point in a bisexual’s lifetime an individual may have erotic or sexual experiences with the opposite gender. Her work is a continuation of the theme of eroticized violence and the oppression of women and how women learn the conflation of care with pain. Much of her work has been influenced by the writings and ideas of theologians such as Carol Christ, Mathew Fox, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, and Carter Heyward, which focuses on both immanent and transcendent spirituality. She highlights the reconnection of sex and spirituality or re-

sacralising the erotic and women, viewing the erotic as empowering, life giving and above all pleasurable.

She begins with the knowledge that, 'rather than focusing on pleasure, much of Christian religious imagery focuses on pain and cruelty, idealizing and actually sacralizing suffering.'²⁶⁹

Eisler suggests that there are 'two underlying possibilities for our species'²⁷⁰ which she has called, 'the dominator and partnership models.'²⁷¹ In the dominator model, society relies heavily on pain or the fear of pain to maintain itself. Moreover, the natural bonding of the give and take of sexual pleasure and love between the female and male has to be blocked or distorted in order that relations of domination and submission are maintained. She believes that there are a number of devices that distort and repress sexuality built into the basic social structures of societies based on the dominator model.

For example, in contrast to dominator societies, difference is not automatically equated with inferiority or superiority, with "in-groups" versus "out-groups", with dominating or being dominated in a partnership model of social organisation. Sex can be a form of sacrament in partnership - oriented societies, in which 'the sexual union of two human beings can be a reminder of the oneness of all life, a reaffirmation of the sacred bond between woman and man and between us and all forms of life.'²⁷²

We are reminded that in societies primarily oriented toward partnership, 'there is no structural requirement to implant the kinds of attitudes and behaviours needed to maintain a system based on rankings backed by force and fear of pain.'²⁷³ In a partnership oriented society 'sex can be a means of linking based on the giving and receiving of pleasure and it can also be both spiritual and natural.'²⁷⁴

For bisexuals who find themselves negotiating relationships with more than one person in a society geared solely towards exclusivism, an ethic of pleasure based on the model of partnership may have profound implications. Sexual relationships based on love, trust and mutual respect rather than rankings of fear and force removes the ethical dilemma experienced by individuals such as these.

²⁶⁹ Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and The Politics of the Body-New Paths to Power and Love* {San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996 }, p.377.

²⁷⁰ *op.cit.* p.4.

²⁷¹ *ibid.*

²⁷² *op.cit.* p.7.

²⁷³ *ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*

She examines the modern sexual and spiritual revolutions, which have become part of a larger revolution in consciousness, and have in turn become integral to the modern struggle to create a less painful violent world. The human body, pain, pleasure, power, love and the sacred is examined and she explores ‘the “biology of love” - how a dominator social and sexual organization at every turn distorts and blocks the profound human yearning for connection, for bonds forged through love and trust rather than fear and force.’²⁷⁵ Once we leave behind a fundamentally imbalanced system, Eisler argues that spiritually satisfying relations ‘are possible.’²⁷⁶

Cultural transformation theory is adopted by Eisler, it ‘proposes that, in the language of non-linear dynamics, the dominator and partnership models have for the whole of our cultural evolution been two basic “attractors” for social and ideological organization.’²⁷⁷ However she expands it, by grounding it in the experience and politics of the body. *Cultural transformation theory* shows how the same scientific principals as chaos theory can be applied to social systems. She also examines how dominator systems have idealized the institutionalization of pain, that an effective way of accustoming the body to dominance and submission is through painful authoritarian child rearing practices and much of religious asceticism, which has links with sadomasochism. We are informed that there is an ‘important partnership core’²⁷⁸ underneath the overlay of dominator teaching in Christianity and most other world religions. However, ‘the dominator element in these religions have served, and continue to serve, as powerful means of conditioning women and men, and even sanctify, unjust authority.’²⁷⁹ This has been done ‘in ways that directly impact such basic matters as our bodies, pain and pleasure.’²⁸⁰

However, she is careful to inform us that her use of the term “sacred pleasure”, ‘is by no means the kind of “holy” pleasure Christian women and men were during the Middle Ages encouraged to derive from the self-inflicted tortures and abuses of their bodies.’²⁸¹ Neither is it pleasure derived from humiliating or debasing other human beings, or ‘the kind of “pleasure” we are supposed to derive from

²⁷⁵ *op.cit.* p.10.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *op.cit.* p.11.

²⁷⁸ *op.cit.* pp.166-167.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *op.cit.* p.167.

²⁸¹ *ibid.*

winning wars'²⁸² and it is not the same view of the sacred conveyed by religious representations of cruelty and sacrifice. It is a different kind of sacredness, one, which is appropriate for a partnership view of what is holy:

This is a sacredness that is of this world, rather than some disembodied, otherworldly realm -a sacredness that derives from a reverence for life, not for what comes after death or before birth. It is a sacredness that does not make a sharp divide between us and what we call the divine. Above all, it is a sacredness that does not view the bodily or carnal as lesser, and therefore unimportant, but rather as an essential part of what, in its basic or integral sense, is holy.²⁸³

The belief that sexual sensations are of a “lower order” and higher consciousness is connected with mental rather than physical states is critiqued. Eisler informs us that scientific research indicates ‘that the locus of the sex drive is not in our genitals but in our brains.’²⁸⁴ The emotion of love involves our brains. However, our brains are part of our bodies and it is in our bodies that we physically experience all feelings and sensations, therefore, ‘it is actually what happens in our bodies that bring on spiritual trance-like states.’²⁸⁵ The physical dimension of spiritual states experienced by yoga masters or others who engage in rigorous bodily exercises is documented in a growing scientific literature on what researchers call “altered states of consciousness”. ‘Experiments show that meditative or trance-like states involve measurable changes in the electrical activity of the brain {or brainwaves} as measured by electroencephalographs.’²⁸⁶ The outcomes of these experiments then, provides evidence – grounded in the body – that duality has no place here, humans encompass both spirit and flesh.

Sexual orgasm is also recognised by many as an altered state of consciousness and Eisler suggests that this view may be growing. By first reminding us that there are immense individual differences, Eisler introduces us to the work of Julian Davidson from his book *The Psychobiology of Consciousness* 1980, ‘all orgasms share some of the criteria found in full-blown ASCs.’²⁸⁷ These include changes in ‘the senses of space, time, identity, as well as strong emotions and great changes in motor output’. And as Davidson also notes, ‘orgasms have been used extensively to induce mystical states.’²⁸⁸ Eisler explains that even though we have been taught that human sexuality, the emotion of love and the spiritual striving for union or oneness with the divine are at opposite poles, they actually ‘stem from the same

²⁸² *ibid.*

²⁸³ *op.cit.* pp.168-169.

²⁸⁴ *op.cit.*p.170.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Julian Davidson, ‘The Psychology of Consciousness’ {1980}, pp.292-295. cited in Eisler, *ibid.*

²⁸⁸ Davison {1980} pp.292-295. *in* Eisler, *ibid.*

deeply rooted human need: our powerful human yearning for connection.²⁸⁹ When I experience orgasm with another what is experienced then is a deep spiritual connection with the divine.

The Evolution of Pleasure: The Development of Language and the Biology of Love

Eisler examines our biological responses and our need for physical connections in order that we humans as a species may survive, ‘without love we humans do not survive.’²⁹⁰ Evoking the work of biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, she looks at human evolution and our highly developed potential for conscious and caring connectivity:

The main evolutionary development emphasized in the emergence of our species is the human brain. And it is our brain {combined with our vocal cords} that directly accounts for the fact that ours is the only species that can communicate through complex symbols we call words. But as the biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela note, it is our frontal and non-seasonal human sexuality {combined with the long period of physical dependency of the products of that sexuality} that seems to have provided a major impetus for what they call ‘‘a biology of co-operation and a linguistic co-ordination of action’’.²⁹¹

She goes on to view the ideas of Adrienne Zihlman and Nancy Tanner, who also recognise the link between the human species’ long maturation period and the need for mothers and infants to communicate. However, Eisler informs us that both Maturana and Varela argue ‘that the development of language as a means of communicating in intimate relations was facilitated by human female’s year -
round sexuality. They note that this would have tended to promote more sustained and co-operative contacts between males and females.’²⁹² They therefore, ‘specifically relate the emergence of language as a human tool to facilitate sharing and co-operation to sex.’²⁹³ Evoking an argument presented by Maturana, humans literally ‘‘depend on love and we get sick when it is denied to us at any point in our lives’’.²⁹⁴ This is why Maturana asserts that the biology of love is not only the basis for human society but a ‘dynamic deeply imbedded in the history of evolution.’²⁹⁵ This leads Eisler on to a discussion about the ‘evolution of pleasure’.²⁹⁶ Endorphins are, ‘the chemical rewards that provide our bodies

²⁸⁹ *op.cit.* p.171.

²⁹⁰ *op.cit.* p.174.

²⁹¹ *op.cit.* p.172. Eisler cites Maturana and Varela {1987} p.222.

²⁹² *ibid.*

²⁹³ *ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *op.cit.* p.174. Eisler cites Maturana {1990} p.xv.

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

with enormous pleasure both when we are loved and when we are loving others.²⁹⁷ We are told that instead of just helping an organism deal with pain in fight or flight situations, it has been recognised by scientists that there was a certain point in evolution when these pleasure inducing chemicals also began to serve in the promotion of 'the bonding involved in caretaking - and even beyond this, the caring touch - required for the survival of more complex species.'²⁹⁸ Viewing the work of psychiatrist Micheal Liebowitz from *The Chemistry of Love 1983* Eisler writes:

In *The Chemistry of Love* it is this reward by chemicals that in our species probably explains the euphoria of "falling in love". For this state, as well as the intense pleasures of sexual love, seems to be associated with rising levels of certain chemicals, probably phenylethylamine, an amphetamine-like substance. Such chemical rewards are most probably also a factor in the pleasure mothers, fathers, and other adults {as well as children} can derive from caring for babies and why people in loving relationships speak of a great sense of contentment - in other words pleasure.²⁹⁹

She tells us that even though these studies are relatively new and...

the conclusions are still speculative, they may eventually also help explain the states of euphoric bliss that mystics through the ages have associated with love for the divine. And they may even help us better understand what lies behind the intense pleasure we feel in moments of creation, discovery, aesthetic contemplation, and helpfulness to others.³⁰⁰

She further points out that 'what we are now learning about the evolution of both love and pleasure points to the need for some reevaluations of evolutionary theories.'³⁰¹ Arguing that the evolution of love, like the evolution of sex and consciousness, 'was the major turning point in the movement toward more complex or highly developed life forms on our planet.'³⁰² she suggests that 'when we speak of adaptation we can no longer gloss over our capacity for love.'³⁰³ The development of our capacity for love is the most adaptive development in the evolution of our species, contrary to earlier theories which claim our capacity for great violence and aggression. The human adaptive development for love in the evolution of our species provides us with an opportunity to displace the generally accepted consensus that our capacity for violence and aggression is a natural evolutionary phenomenon. We are therefore given the opportunity to transcend our situation, there is an alternative way of life and an

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *op.cit.* pp.174-175.

³⁰¹ *ibid.*

³⁰² *ibid.*

³⁰³ *ibid.*

opportunity for fundamental changes toward a profound social, personal and cultural transformation.

The evolution of human sexuality and love:

are part of a much larger movement. This is the evolutionary movement from the primacy of the punishment of pain to the primacy of the reward of pleasure - and very specifically, pleasure from love - as a major motivator for adaptive behaviours.³⁰⁴

Although I want to keep my discussion specific toward an ethic of pleasure within intimate sexual relations, both the giving and receiving of pleasure have far reaching consequences, Eisler writes:

If, as appears to be the case, the evolution of human sexuality and our very long period of childhood dependency led to our uniquely powerful human yearning for connection - and with this, to the great pleasure we humans derive from loving and being loved - then a social organization oriented more to partnership than domination is more congruent with our biological evolution. And if, as also appears to be the case, this was the earlier direction of Western cultural evolution - as reflected in a sacred imagery in which the taking of life is virtually absent and the giving and nurturing of life is venerated - then it should be possible for us to meet the great contemporary challenge of fundamental personal, cultural, and social transformation.³⁰⁵

Eisler concedes that we will still have pain even if we succeed in our efforts to leave behind a system that relies so heavily upon it. Eisler reminds us that the experiences of pain and pleasure are part of both life and evolution. Pain is not only very useful as a warning it can also be an avenue to both personal and spiritual growth. 'However, in dominator systems, we cannot even make full use of pain for this purpose, since one of the effects of chronic pain is a blunting of both perception and emotion.'³⁰⁶ We are informed that there was a fundamental restructuring of the family during the prehistoric shift from partnership to dominator society. If there is to be success in reversing that shift, a much clearer understanding of how the social construction of family and other intimate relations is required. She writes, 'how we are taught to view, and act in, our most intimate relations is a major factor in the social construction of all our relations.'³⁰⁷

The Acceptance of Authoritarianism as Natural

Eisler notes:

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *op.cit.* p.177.

³⁰⁶ *op.cit.* p.178.

³⁰⁷ *op.cit.* p.185.

The psychological mechanism of denial - the suppression out of fear into the unconscious of authentic human needs, perceptions, and experiences - which makes possible the acceptance, and even idealization, of abusive and violent relations by both the dominated and the dominators.³⁰⁸

It also 'helps to explain why so many people have unquestioningly followed their "superiors"' orders, no matter how brutal they may be.'³⁰⁹

Turning to the classic work of psychologist Else Frenkel-Brunswick, she explains how authoritarian personalities are socialised to become extremely susceptible as adults to surrendering their wills and minds to authoritarian leaders. This is achieved by being conditioned throughout childhood through brutal abuse, in order that they surrender their will to the requirements of feared authoritarian parents. However, authoritarian families do not spring up in a vacuum. As well as 'the use of violence to impose authority - is a training to prepare people to fit into an authoritarian social system in which, to maintain rankings of domination, abuse and violence are built into the entire social structure.'³¹⁰ What we have is a 'lifelong process of socialization designed to teach us to view dominator "reality"' as inevitable.'³¹¹ Suggesting that:

This socialization operates not only on a mental and emotional level; it operates on a physical level, on the level of the body. In fact, it is on this bodily level that childhood conditioning is most effective and enduring, as it is here that authoritarian control is most traumatically experienced and the psychosomatic patterns required for the maintenance of dominator systems first become entrenched.³¹²

Eisler comments on the 'confluence of caring' and gives an example of this by referring to the analysis, undertaken by C.Fred Blake, of the barbaric practice of binding girls' feet in pre-Revolutionary China. This practice functioned to teach women to accept, 'as the very essence of their sense of self, the most painful bending of not only their minds but their bodies to the will of others.'³¹³

The principal agent in this process, on both the symbolic level of describing what her place in the social system should be and on the physical level of becoming the kind of body the social system demanded, was the girls own mother.³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ *op.cit.* p.186.

³⁰⁹ *op.cit.* p.187.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*

³¹¹ *op.cit.* p.188.

³¹² *ibid.*

³¹³ *ibid.*

³¹⁴ *ibid.*

As well as learning - through this practice - their essence of femininity as conforming to male desires, girls also learned the “conflation of care with pain”, a term coined by Blake. These young girls would learn that they too will one day do the same to their own daughters in the name of love in order that they might find the right husband. ‘It taught them to accept that the same touch they associated with love and pleasure should also be the coercive touch that caused them such excruciating pain.’³¹⁵

Confluence of caring and hurting is a characteristic of dominator child rearing. This is because ‘it is a very effective way of conditioning people to fit into a system of rankings ultimately backed up by the fear of pain.’³¹⁶ In some cases the confluence of caring and hurting is primarily psychological, however:

...because of how our bodies react to psychological abuse in the development of muscular and neural patternings, it is also physical. And it is these same patternings that in dominator societies serve as the basis for a social construction of sexuality that further reinforces the view that human relations are inevitably based on rankings of domination backed up by force or the fear of pain.³¹⁷

Eisler argues that we need to interrupt the replication of these kinds of psychosomatic dynamics if we are to shift to a social organization in which the human need for loving connection is no longer distorted and perverted through its association with coercion and the infliction or acceptance of pain. The false consciousness that makes abuse and violence seem inevitable, and psychological dynamics such as shame and denial through which abuse and violence are rendered invisible, need to be blocked. If we are to understand and successfully change the way we think, feel, and act, we also ‘need to understand painful events in our childhoods, particularly within the psychodynamics of our families’³¹⁸

Eisler concedes that ‘social change involves far more than an awareness of what happens to us as children’, however, the ‘growing awareness of the buried side to childhood has been a very important part of the modern revolution in consciousness.’³¹⁹ And she makes an important point, consciousness that there are alternatives to the chronic suffering caused by rankings of domination has come ‘with this awakening from the trancelike acceptance of a chronically painful way of structuring human relations.’³²⁰ However, Eisler argues:

³¹⁵ *op.cit.* p.189.

³¹⁶ *ibid.*

³¹⁷ *ibid.*

³¹⁸ *op.cit.* p.191.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*

³²⁰ *op.cit.* p.192.

...as the partnership thrust has accelerated, so also has the dominator resistance. And one of the most devastating manifestations of an inherently violent and abusive system seeking to re-impose its hold has been an escalation of extreme violence in intimate relations - as grimly shown by the recent spate of killings by men not only of their wives but also their children and often eventually themselves, when women refuse to any longer stay in abusive relations.³²¹

Conflict, insecurity and stress arise when there is an acceleration of technological, social and economic change, 'dominator elites seek to maintain and even extend their power.'³²² We are incited to deflect anger and fear onto members of traditionally disempowered groups, for example single mothers, the

poor and racial minorities, and I would add lesbians, gays, and bisexuals to this list.

The Dominator Mechanism of Co-option

Eisler argues, "the sexual revolution" is in fact part of the dominator sexual *counter-* revolution.'³²³

She writes:

It is easy under the guise of sexual {or any other} freedom for those who hold power to more effectively dominate those who have been socially disempowered. We see this in nonsexual relations, where all too often "free enterprise" has served as a smokescreen for the domination and exploitation of economically disempowered groups such as minorities and women.³²⁴

What we see is 'the dominator mechanism of co-option - the appropriation and distortion of partnership social trends to maintain or re-impose dominator-dominated relations'.³²⁵ She explains how "sexual freedom" has all too often led to even more exploitive sexual predation, as women are pressured to be sexually available to men simply because they have been taken out to dinner or a show.'³²⁶ ... 'this problem of co-option has been a constant all through the first phase of not only the modern sexual revolution but the modern revolution in consciousness.'³²⁷ For example, 'important modern economic and political theories, such as those of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, were co-opted in

³²¹ *op.cit.*p.193.

³²² *ibid.*

³²³ *op.cit.*p.198.

³²⁴ *ibid.*

³²⁵ *ibid.*

³²⁶ *ibid.*

the service of dominator political and economic regressions.³²⁸ We can see this aggressive pull most visibly from the fundamentalist right:

...often from people who seem to be literally hypnotized by religious leaders who alternately threaten them with the most hideous divine punishments or promise that - in exchange for total obedience - God will choose only them to be saved, while others are destroyed when Armageddon brings on the end of the world.³²⁹

Eisler also talks of 'a re-imposition of strict and "if necessary", violent control over women and women's sexuality, since this control is both a symbol and a linchpin for all other forms of domination and control.'³³⁰ However she maintains that 'while there is a tremendous regressive pull, there is also a very strong and - despite periodic setbacks - cumulatively mounting forward movement.'³³¹ We should reconstruct social reality and she believes:

a decisive factor in whether we move backward or forward will be whether we not only go much deeper in our deconstruction - particularly to the reconstruction of our most foundational beliefs about gender, sex, and our bodies as a central component of what Anthony Giddens has aptly called the democratization of daily life.³³²

If the cultural shift we are striving for is a success, 'we will see a real sexual revolution.'³³³

It will be one which will be associated with:

...the full expression of our powerful human yearning for connection and for erotic pleasure. It will be a sexuality that will make it possible for us to more fully express and experience sexual passion as an altered state of consciousness. It will also bring the recognition that erotic pleasure can be imbued with a spirituality that is both immanent and transcendent. And it will combine greater sexual freedom with greater empathy, respect, responsibility, and caring.³³⁴

Eisler wishes to clarify what she means by greater responsibility and caring. She does not mean inflexible lifelong bonds, 'while it may embody these qualities, sex in lifelong marriages has all too often been marked by lack of respect, empathy, responsibility and caring.'³³⁵ She asserts that a healthy amount of spontaneity and sexual experimentation, 'are not inconsistent with caring, empathic, and

³²⁷ *ibid.*

³²⁸ *ibid.*

³²⁹ *ibid.*

³³⁰ *op.cit.*p.199.

³³¹ *ibid.*

³³² *ibid.*

³³³ *ibid.*

³³⁴ *op.cit.* pp.199-200

³³⁵ *ibid.*

mutually responsible and respectful sexual relations.³³⁶, if we succeed in shifting to a partnership society all sexual relations would have a spiritual dimension

but in a society animated by a partnership rather than a dominator ethos, all sexual relations - from the most playful to the most fiercely passionate - would no longer be associated with impersonal, mechanical, and/or coercive touch. Nor would the human body, be it female or male, in such a society be imaged as merely an instrument for use, much less abuse, by another.³³⁷

Eisler tells us, 'how sexuality is constructed differs greatly in the context of a partnership or dominator society.'³³⁹ and quotes the words of Linda Kerber 'sexual style is the adjunct of political style.'³³⁹

Talking about the double standards for men and women which have been in operation throughout the history of social and political reform, Eisler asserts that double standards for freedom and equality serve to maintain male domination and further maintains that gender double standards have made it difficult to see something else of fundamental importance:

That the eroticization of domination has been a major obstacle in the modern struggle to create a free and equal society. Because contrary to what we have been taught, freedom and equality are not just a matter of political organization, but of the structure of personal and social life as a whole.³⁴⁰

Adding that 'Sexual style is also the adjunct of religious or spiritual style',³⁴¹ she argues that 'this is still another reason the contemporary search for a new politics and a new economics is inextricably related to the contemporary search for both a new sexuality and a new spirituality.'³⁴² She therefore explains that this is why she asserts that 'religious authorities in the name of spirituality, have used sex to maintain rankings of domination.'³⁴³

Eisler reminds us however, that there are many important teachings within our Judeo-Christian heritage and the distortion of human sexuality that we are dealing with, which is a function of our dominator heritage it is not a function of our religious heritage. Nonetheless, 'institutionalized religion - be it pagan, Hebrew, or Christian - has in Western history often helped to maintain hierarchies of domination, while at the same time also helping to alleviate some of the suffering caused by these

³³⁶ *ibid.*

³³⁷ *op.cit.* p.200.

³³⁹ *ibid.*

³³⁹ *op.cit.* p.202.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.*

³⁴¹ *ibid.*

³⁴² *ibid.*

³⁴³ *ibid.*

hierarchies.³⁴⁴ We are also reminded that ‘the medieval Christian church played a major part in actively causing both women and men much sexual guilt, fear, and suffering.’³⁴⁵

It is suggested that we need to more fully understand how and why the medieval Christian Church expended enormous time and energy devising rules and punishments for women’s and men’s sexual behaviours if we are to free ourselves from the bondage of millennia - long traditions of sexual, personal, and political repression. She highlights the argument offered up by the religious historian Uta Ranke-Heinemann, who points out that there is no basis in the claim, according to some Christian authorities such as Siricius {who became Pope in 384}, that the Church’s hostility toward sex - particularly women’s sexuality - simply followed the teachings of Jesus. What Jesus preached against was a society where women were sexually oppressed and ‘not, as the church was to later claim, women’s sexuality, and even sex itself.’³⁴⁶ Christianity did not originally introduce this hostility toward sex per se. ‘Even though we are told that Christians taught pagans sexual asceticism...the church’s negative view of both sex and women was already shared by many pagans.’³⁴⁷

The constant association of sex with punishment and pain by the Church succeeded in alienating men from women with the resulting justification for male dominance. It also ‘served to alienate men from their own bodies, their own emotions, and above all, from their human need for loving human connection’.³⁴⁸ The result was that it served to distort men and women’s sexuality whilst at the same time it ‘conditioned men and women to distort their most basic human need for connection into an acceptance of domination, coercion, and repression’.³⁴⁹ It was for “ones own good” that one should accept all coercive controls by the Church. Eisler also speculates:

If sexual or bodily pleasure was sinful, perhaps it was not so sinful instead to cause others bodily pain, also for their own good {as the church itself did }. And if the conception of life itself was considered sinful by God, it was perhaps also not so sinful to take the life of others in the name of God {as the church also did }.³⁵⁰

Obsessing with Sex

³⁴⁴ *op.cit.* p.203.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *op.cit.* pp.203-204.

³⁴⁸ *op.cit.* p.205.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*

We are informed that there was another way the Church - through its self-appointed role as the controller of sex - served to maintain a hierarchy based on fear and force which was to eroticize domination and violence. We can see a disgust and contempt for sex when we look at its dogma, where sex is strictly for procreation and *not* for pleasure. Eisler suggests however, that 'if we probe deeper, what we see is *not* what one usually expects from contempt and disgust : the avoidance of anything to do with its subject. Quite the contrary.' Eisler explains that there is actually an obsession with sex under the guise of spirituality.³⁵¹ She comments that the inevitable production of sexually repressed and frustrated men through the Church's emphasis on lifelong celibacy and suggests 'that it's the way these men fixated on sex'³⁵² which is the key, 'if we look closely at the endless church pronouncements, edicts, and laws about sex... we will see the pornographic eroticization of domination and violence'.³⁵³ The Church's warnings

were both verbally and pictorially delivered through the most vivid images of bodily torture and excruciating suffering in hell. So even though it was in the name of forbidding sexual pleasure rather than, as in pornography, attaining it, the church too constantly associated sex with violence and domination.³⁵⁴

In section three I will be discussing the work of Marcella Althaus Reid who elaborates on the Church's obsession with sex with her concept of an indecent theology.

All Human Creations can be Re-invented: The new Adams and Eves

Eisler calls for 'new myths which lay the groundwork for social structures that foster - rather than impede - the great capacity for pleasure from caring connections.'³⁵⁵ She asserts that if we are to reinvent our basic values and institutions however, we 'need to reinvent creativity.'³⁵⁶ Eisler argues,

The still-prevailing view of creativity is in itself an outgrowth of a dominator social and ideological organization. ... no distinction is made between inventiveness that expands people's life choices and enhances the quality of our lives, and inventiveness that restrict people's life choices and even more efficiently takes people's lives.³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ *op.cit.* p.206.

³⁵² *ibid.*

³⁵³ *ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵⁵ *op.cit.* p.374.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *op.cit.* pp.374-375.

She suggests however that there are new ways of looking at creativity whereby we recognise ‘that all humans are endowed with the capacity for creativity.’³⁵⁸ Eisler argues that there has been no attention ‘given to the social context of creativity {to what David Loye calls the nurturing ‘feminine’ matrix of creativity in social systems} or to collaborative creativity.’³⁵⁹ and informs us that the idea that all humans are endowed with the capacity for creativity has been recognised and there have been changes in the classification of what is and is not a “creative product”. There is also a recognition, ‘that in fact it is “ordinary” creativity, the creativity we invest in our daily lives.’³⁶⁰ Evoking the writing of Elizabeth Dodson Gray Eisler tells us that ordinary creativity,

can give far more meaning, and even sanctity to our lives. It no longer indiscriminately applies the term *creativity* to all inventiveness, including that designed to better dominate and kill. Rather it reserves the term *creativity* for those uses of inventiveness in line with the creative, rather than destructive, cycles of nature.³⁶¹

Most important, this new view of creativity is focused extensively on the social context of creativity.

Social creativity ‘opens up for both study and action, the fact that from the very beginning of our human adventure here on earth we humans have been co-creators of our social evolution.’³⁶²

Highlighting the work of James Dittes, Eisler explains how both women and men have been crippled by stereotypical gender roles and relations and discusses the construction of a world ‘where both men’s and women’s life scripts contain many different types of behaviours.’³⁶³

Finally, in partnership oriented societies, difference is not automatically equated with inferiority or superiority, “in groups” or “out groups”, what we see here is a disruption of a dualistic world view.

Summary.

Eisler’s work is concerned with forging a more balanced system, and the utilization of bisexuality as an epistemological force lays the foundation for carrying out such a task. This may just pave the way for bisexuality to enter into the equation as a force of potential disruption. Her ideas provides the opportunity to show how the duality that undermines the connection of the sacred and the profane may

³⁵⁸ *op.cit.* p.375.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*

³⁶¹ *ibid.*

³⁶² *ibid.*

³⁶³ *op.cit.* p.263.

be disrupted through bisexual or polyamorous ways of thinking and the ability to focus on both the immanence and transcendence of spirituality is made easier through a bisexual lens. The boundaries created by binary thinking can be transcended when bisexuality is recognised and acknowledged making it possible for the reconnection of sex and spirituality.

For Eisler the transformation toward a partnership society is absolutely crucial for our survival in our nuclear/electronic/biochemical age. What distinguishes the partnership model from androcracy is lack of institutionalization and idealization of violence {the main purpose of which is to maintain rigid rankings of domination} and lack of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

However, while some critics argue that Eisler's work is overly simplistic, its importance is not its theoretical rigorousness but in its ability to re-read history and create the possibility of an alternative future- it gives assets to both women and men. Unlike post-modern writers, Eisler eschews detached irony, focussing instead on recovering an idealized past from a male present and future.³⁶⁴ All the above theorists demonstrate how women live with the legacy of violence and oppression. The continuing theme running throughout their work has been a great concern with the implicit dualism of gender construction.

The following part four, entitled 'Gender analysis and Queer Theory', an investigation into the work of Judith Butler illustrates how Queer Theory becomes an invaluable tool for scholars like myself who wish to disrupt binary divisions. The transgressive form of sexual politics presented by Queer Theory moves toward deconstructing gender binarisms and subverting gender norms.

Part 4.

Gender Analysis and Queer Theory.

What follows will be an examination of the work carried out by gender theorist Judith Butler. Gender analysis is of vital importance if we are to understand the intimacies of human sexuality. Through looking at gender we will also receive a better understanding of bisexuality. In particular, through looking at transexualism, Butler's work demonstrates how gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way and through an adoption of Foucault's genealogical critique, there is a refusal to search

³⁶⁴ See: Kathy Ferguson, *The Man Question* {Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993} and Sohail Inayatullah, *Macro History and Social Transformation Theory: The Contribution of Riane Eisler World Futures* {Forthcoming 1998}

for the origins of gender. Evidence suggesting that many transsexuals are bisexual is provided. She also shows how the sexual style of the “butch” and “fem” bring into relief the constructed status of the heterosexual original. One of the major insights arriving from such an endeavour is the knowledge that bisexuality has the potential to challenge both lesbian ethics and traditional Christian theology.

Lisa Isherwood argues that rather than just playing the game - which has got us nowhere - for women in this day and age ‘transgressive sex’³⁶⁵ is safe sex. To trouble gender is not a new idea and it can be argued that it is a theological imperative, Isherwood draws our attention to women prophets who transgressed the norm through the act of cross-dressing.³⁶⁶ Highlighting the story of Thecla, Prisca and Maximilla, she explains how it may be possible to argue that ‘they understood their male attire as a signal of overcoming the binary opposites of gender that set in place unequal lived reality.’ Pushing gender boundaries ‘in order to create a space in which to flourish.’³⁶⁷ We need to see their stories ‘in a different light than that cast by the Fathers who celebrate the putting aside of female natures in order to become holy men of God.’³⁶⁸ Isherwood believes that they were ‘doing something much more profound: they were challenging the restricting and deadening gender-performances that did not allow for the full flourishing of full humanity.’³⁶⁹

Judith Butler’s book *Gender Trouble* has been cited as one of the founding texts of Queer Theory. She maintains that any notion of a “normative” sexuality is problematic and argues that ‘feminism ought to be careful not to idealise certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion.’³⁷⁰ Queer Theory is a transgressive form of sexual politics, which aims to deconstruct gender binarism and subvert gendered norms of dress and bodily presentation or representation. It takes its inspiration from post-modern cultural theory and is dedicated to undermining the notion that gender and sexual identity are expressions of an internal and “natural” self. The normative categories of gender are not “real” in any essential sense but are rather performances, which, through continual repetition in actions and discourse, create the illusion of reality and stability. The radical lesbians paper

³⁶⁵ See Lisa Isherwood, *The Good News of the Body* {2000}.

³⁶⁶ Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Ried {eds}, *Controversies in Feminist Theology* { London: SCM Press 2007} p.21

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *op.cit.* p.22.

³⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* {London: Routledge, 1990-1999} Preface 1999: viii.

'The Woman Identified Woman' [1970] defines heterosexuality and homosexuality as 'inauthentic categories' which would disappear in a society not organised on the basis of sex. Monique Wittig [1981] argues that 'the category "woman" as well as the category "man" are political and economic categories not eternal ones.'³⁷¹

As I have said, gender analysis is of vital importance if we are to understand the intimacies of human sexuality. Butler maintains that any notion of a normative sexuality is problematic: 'normative has at least two meanings' firstly, the term mainly describes the 'mundane violence performed by certain kinds of gender ideal' and secondly it also 'pertains to ethical justification, how it is established, and what concrete consequences proceed therefrom'.³⁷² She argues that 'Feminism ought to be careful not to idealise certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion'.³⁷³ I have said that Butler maintains the normative categories of gender are not "real" in any essential sense but are rather performances. Butler originally took her clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jaques Derrida's reading of Kafka's 'Before The Law'. Gender operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates.

Queer theorists argue that identities are always multiple or at best composites with literally an infinite number of ways in which 'identity-components' {e.g., sexual orientation, race, class, nationality, gender, age, ableness} can intersect or combine. Any specific identity construction, moreover, is arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary. Identity constructions necessarily entail the silencing or exclusion of some experiences or forms of life.³⁷⁴

The question of identity has been and remains at the centre of modern Western homosexual studies and politics. Analysing the historical formation of identities, their social construction or acquisition and processes of coming out is pivotal to the sociology of homosexual desire. However, under the influence of queer theory, recent sociological work has begun to alter its approach to identity. Instead of viewing identity as something an individual learns or accomplishes or fashions as a positive basis for self-evaluation and politics, new sociological queer perspectives emphasise the unstable, multiple character of identities, the performative aspects of identity, and identity as a mode of social control.³⁷⁵

As part of 'a fundamental commitment to extend and expand the category of "the human".' Butler represents 'the rights of sexual minorities inclusive of all kinds of people who for whatever reason are

³⁷¹ Monique Wittig, {1981} cited in Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw {eds}, *Women's Bodies Discipline and Transgression* {London New York: Cassel, 1999} p.198.

³⁷² Butler, {1990- 1999}*op.cit.* preface xx.

³⁷³ *op.cit.* preface viii.

³⁷⁴ Steven Seidman, {ed} *Queer Theory/Sociology* {Massachusetts USA, Oxford England: Blackwell Publishers, 1996} p.11.

not immediately captured or legitimated by the available norms.³⁷⁶ To enable ‘a more capacious understanding of difference, she seeks to suspend the ontological certainties currently pertaining to the category of “the human”’.³⁷⁷

Her work engages with a wide array of thinkers and critical-theoretical fields, these include psychoanalysis, feminism, poststructuralism and Marxism. She also draws from Freud’s schematizations of melancholia and incorporation in *Mourning and Melancholia*, along with his essay *The Ego and the Id*.³⁷⁸ Melancholia has been identified by Butler as a potential site of subversion and agency and her subject is the result of its deeds rather than the initiator of them. Butler is prompted by Friedrich Nietzsche’s insight that ‘There is no “being” behind doing, acting, becoming the “doer” is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything’³⁷⁹ ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’³⁸⁰ Althusserian interpellation, and Austinian performativity together with Nietzsche’s causal reversal, inform Butler’s insight that the subject is ‘retroactively, performatively “hailed” into gender’ ...Althusser’s “Hey, you there!” is substituted by Butler with the statement “It’s a girl”’.³⁸¹

However, Butler does not fully accept Nietzsche’s punitive scene of inauguration of the subject, but she does accept the validity of accounts of homosexuality that do not have repudiation as their basis. Butler also diverges from Althusser’s descriptions of the sovereign interpellator, the obedient interpellatee and the efficacy of the interpellative, and argues that in its pursuit of social recognition and social identity, the subject is engaged in a willing embrace of the law.

Although the failure of interpellation is productive, Butler also recognizes that the subjects’ passionate attachment to the law necessarily limits her/his critique of it. However, like Homi K. Bhabha, she regards melancholia as a means of potential revolt rather than a site of passive self-abnegation: the melancholic acceptance and embracing of one’s own incoherence and alterity

³⁷⁵ *op.cit.* p.19.

³⁷⁶ Sarah Salih, {ed} with Judith Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader*, *op.cit.* introduction p.3.

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Ego and The Id’ and ‘Morning and Meloncholia’ in ‘The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud’, ed & trans, James Strachey, 24 vols. {London: Hogarth, 1953-74} in Salih and Butler.

³⁷⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘On The Genealogy of Morals’, trans. Walter Kaufmann, {New York: Vintage 1969} p.26. cited in Salih and Butler, *op.cit.* p.6.

³⁸⁰ Judith Butler p. 25. Cited in Salih and Butler, *ibid.*

³⁸¹ *op.cit.* p.7.

facilitates an epistemological encounter with the other, while psychic survival involves acknowledging that one's emergence as a subject is inaugurated through loss.³⁸²

Transsexualism and Bisexuality: A Brief Discussion on the Confusion of Sex and Gender and the Role of Anatomy in Determining Sex, Gender and Sexual Orientation

Transsexuals are described by the psychological community as having a long-standing desire to live as the opposite sex of their "normal" genitalia and who wish to have the primary and secondary sex characteristics of the other sex. Transsexuality is seen purely as a reassignment or realignment of an individual's sex to match their psyche. A transsexual woman is a biological male with longstanding desires to live as a woman, conversely, a transsexual man is a biological female with longstanding desire to live as a man. Transsexuals do not always seek medical intervention. Depending on whether or not they have had surgery to modify their genitals, transsexual men and women can be postoperative, preoperative or entirely non-operative.

'The transsexual, the hermaphrodite, and the homosexual have all been very much part of the history of "bisexuality" as it has evolved in scientific and social discourse'.³⁸³ This could be because transsexual people are not necessarily attracted only to those of the same natal sex; evidence suggests that many are bisexual or attracted to members of their own gender.

Like bisexuals, who challenge the norm of mono-sexual orientations, the highly varied transgendered, intersexed, and transsexual people who embody the concepts of fluid, changeable, or contra-physical gender identity also break down a rigid binary system that has been used for centuries to control society.³⁸⁴

Discussions relating to transsexual sexuality can be very instructive about the nature of sexuality in general and especially bisexuality, throwing up questions such as 'Should homosexuality be considered in relation to the individuals natal sex or in relation to their new role?...is a transsexual woman who is still fulfilling the role of husband in a marriage in a lesbian relationship?'.³⁸⁵ An orientation that is viewed as homosexual at one point in a transsexual's life may be seen as heterosexual at another point and vice versa.

³⁸² Salih and Butler, *opcit.* p.245 chapter 9. Introduction to *Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification* {1997}

³⁸³ M.Garber cited in Storr, {ed} *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*. {London, NewYork: Routledge. 1999} .p.142.

³⁸⁴ Dallas Denny and Jamison Green, 'Gender Identity and Bisexuality', cited in Firestein, {ed} *Bisexuality; The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* {London, California, and New Delhi: Sage. 1996} chapter 3, p.95.

Social theory notes that there are a number of beliefs that people traditionally hold about gender and the existence of transsexuals challenges these beliefs. 'Transsexual people defy categorisation into either one of the two gender roles and so cast doubt on the belief that there are only two genders', and by traversing between roles, 'they seriously challenge the view that biology is destiny'.³⁸⁶ Denny and Green explain how a relationship between a biological male and a postoperative transsexual woman would be described by those who subscribe to a traditional belief system as homosexual:

If bisexuality marks the intersection between homosexuality and heterosexuality, then transgender identity can be seen as either the virtual melting pot of biological and social distinctions or as the final arbiter of the intersection between an individual's self-concept and the object of her or his sexual desire.³⁸⁷

Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex.³⁸⁸

Butler informs us that 'gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way, if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes', taken to its logical limit 'The sex gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders'.³⁸⁹ Butler informs us: 'The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it'.³⁹⁰ Queer theory subscribes to a critical genealogy of gender categories.

Being Lesbian is always a kind of Miming

Butler tells us that 'Gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as real.' and asks:

is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatise the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? ... Does being female {or male} constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts., that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?.³⁹¹

It is argued that the sexual style of the "butch" and "fem" cannot be explained as fanciful representations of originally heterosexual identities. These forms of repetition do not necessarily

³⁸⁵ Denny and Green, cited in Firestein, chapter 3, *op.cit.* p.89.

³⁸⁶ Denny and Green, cited in Firestein, chapter 3, *ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Denny and Green, cited in Firestein, *op.cit.* p.84.

³⁸⁸ Butler, {1990-1999}. *op.cit.* p.9-10.

³⁸⁹ *op.cit.* p.10.

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*

constitute a simple imitation, reproduction or consolidation of the law. They may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalisation and mobilisation of gender categories. These replications therefore bring into relief the utterly constructed status of the so called heterosexual original. 'The periodic repetition of "the original"...reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and original' Thus 'gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy'.³⁹² 'Gender is the

repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being'.³⁹³ Authoritative accounts about an irrecoverable past or an original state before the law are strategic tactics which make the constitution of the law appear as a historical inevitability and justification. Butler reworks the notion that lesbianism is an imitation of "original" heterosexuality. By reinscribing lesbian sexuality within a heterosexual matrix she calls into question the heterosexual presumption of priority. Rather than imitate heterosexual identities, lesbian identities panic them by confounding the heterosexual - to-lesbian / origin to copy line of causation 'exposing heterosexual claims to originality as illusory'.³⁹⁴

This is highlighted in the parodic practices such as drag, where we see 'the imitative nature of *all* gender identities which are copies of copies without an original; in particular, they expose the panicked, imitative nature of heterosexuality even as it attempts to set itself up as "natural"'.³⁹⁵

Evoking the work of Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Butler informs us that 'drag is not an imitation of a copy of some prior and true gender, according to Newton, drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which *any* gender is assumed'.³⁹⁶

Newton tells us that the notion that a volitional subject precedes its acts of parodic repetition is rejected by Butler, 'she continues to insist that gender performativity is constitutive of the subject-effect it is said to express'.³⁹⁷ however, 'denying the priority of the subject is not the same as denying the subject itself. ...Butler is careful to distinguish between subject and psyche, asserting that the latter always

³⁹¹ *op.cit.* preface.

³⁹² *op.cit.* p.41.

³⁹³ *op.cit.* pp.43-44.

³⁹⁴ Introduction from Diana Fuss, {ed} *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories*, pp.13-31. {New York:Routledge 1991} reproduced by permission of Routledge, an imprint of Taylor and Frances Books, Inc. Paper entitled *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* {1990} by Judith Butler, cited in Salih and Butler *op.cit.* p.119.

³⁹⁵ *op.cit.* p.120.

³⁹⁶ Butler refers to the work of Esther Newton, 'Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America' {Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972} *op.cit.* p.127.

exceeds the former.³⁹⁸ She draws on Freud in her ‘characterization of gender as a form of psychic mime that is the subject’s melancholic response to the lost indentifications it mimetically incorporates.’³⁹⁹

The Erasure of Lesbian and Gay Identities

Butler writes: ‘The professionalization of gayness requires a certain performance and production of a “self” which is the *constituted effect* of a discourse that nevertheless claims to “represent” that self as a prior truth.’⁴⁰⁰ She suggests that *politically* it could be argued that it may be ‘crucial to insist on lesbian and gay identities precisely because they are being threatened with erasure and obliteration from homophobic quarters.’⁴⁰¹ It is ‘no accident’ that ‘theoretical contestations of identity emerge within a political climate that is performing a set of similar obliterations of homosexual identities through legal and political means.’⁴⁰² The questions she raises in return are these:

Ought such threats of obliteration dictate the terms of the political resistance to them, and if they do, do such homophobic efforts to that extent win the battle from the start? There is no question that gays and lesbians are threatened by the violence of public erasure, but the decision to counter that violence must be careful not to reinstall another in its place. Which version of lesbian or gay ought to be rendered visible, and which internal exclusions will that rendering visible institute? Can the visibility of identity *suffice* as a political strategy, or can it only be the starting point for a strategic intervention which calls for a transformation of policy? Is it not a sign of despair over public politics when identity becomes its own policy, bringing with it those who would ‘police’ it from various sides?⁴⁰³

Butler maintains that ‘this is not a call to return to silence or invisibility, but rather, to make use of a category that can be called into question, made to account for what it excludes.’⁴⁰⁴ She believes that it seems clear that any consolidation of identity requires some set of differentiations and exclusions but enquires which ones should be valorized. Identity signs may have their purposes and they may seem right, but the political uses to which they will be put in the future may not be predictable or

³⁹⁷ *op.cit.* p.120.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *op.cit.* p.124.

⁴⁰¹ *op.cit.* p.125.

⁴⁰² *ibid.*

⁴⁰³ *op.cit.* pp.125-126.

⁴⁰⁴ *op.cit.* p.126.

controllable. She wonders whether perhaps this is a kind of openness, that ought to be safeguarded for political reasons regardless of the risks, and poses the question:

If the rendering visible of lesbian/gay identity now presupposes a set of exclusions, then perhaps part of what is necessarily excluded is *the future uses of the sign...* but how to use it in such a way that its futural significations are not *foreclosed*? How to use the sign and avow its temporal contingency at once? ⁴⁰⁵

She further states that;

...it is important to recognise that oppression works not merely through acts of overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable {un} subjects - *abjects*, we might call them - who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law. Here oppression works through the production of a domain of unthinkability and unnameability. ⁴⁰⁶

It is argued that to be 'prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverses discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition.' ⁴⁰⁷

It is one thing to be erased from discourse, and yet another to be present within discourse as an abiding falsehood. Hence, there is a political imperative to render lesbianism visible, but how is that to be done outside or through existing regulatory regimes? Can exclusion from ontology itself become a rallying point for resistance? ⁴⁰⁸

She argues that it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics, instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequences of a radical critique of the categories of identity.

Melancholia

'Butler argues that the formation of gendered and sexed identities involves the foreclosure and loss of same-sex attachments and the preservation and incorporation of that loss.' ⁴⁰⁹ She links psychoanalysis to gender performativity to melancholia, and these connections lead her to 'formulate performativity as the "acting out" of unresolved grief, whereby performative genders { both straight and gay } allegories of heterosexual / homosexual melancholia.' ⁴¹⁰ Taking her formulation from Freud, Butler argues; 'Melancholy, the unfinished process of grieving, is central to the formation of the identifications that

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *op.cit.* p.127.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Introduction to 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification' {1997}, Salih and Butler, Chapter 9. *op.cit.* p.244. Chapter 9.

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*

form the ego.⁴¹¹ Butler explains the sense in which ‘a melancholic identification is central to the process whereby the ego assumes a gendered character’ and further explores how this ‘analysis of the melancholic formation of gender sheds light on the predicament of living within a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachment only with great difficulty.’⁴¹² Butler reflects on Freud’s speculations in *Mourning and Melancholia*, ‘He had supposed that “an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego - that is, that an object-cathexis had been replaced by an identification”’.⁴¹³ Still quoting Freud, “when it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia.”⁴¹⁴

For Freud ‘the “character of the ego” appears to be the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archaeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief.’⁴¹⁵ Butler informs us how this formulation reversed his original position in *Mourning and Melancholia* on what it means to resolve grief.⁴¹⁶ She tells us that Freud previously assumed that:

grief can be resolved through a decathexis, a breaking of attachment, as well as the subsequent making of new attachments. In *The Ego and the Id*, he makes room for the notion that melancholic identification may be a *prerequisite* for letting the object go.⁴¹⁷

There is a change in what it means ‘to “let the object go”’, for there is no final breaking of attachment. There is, rather, the incorporation of the attachment *as* identification.’⁴¹⁸ Identification becomes a psychic form of preserving the object ‘the lost object continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications’.⁴¹⁹ Melancholic identification provides a way to preserve the object as part of the ego. Full abandonment of the object does not happen, there is a transference of the status of the object from external to internal. Butler poses the question, ‘Is there a way in which gender identification or, rather, the identifications that become central to the formulation of gender, are produced through melancholic identification?’⁴²⁰

⁴¹¹ Butler in Salih and Butler, *op.cit.* p.245.

⁴¹² Butler in Salih and Butler, *op.cit.* pp.245-246.

⁴¹³ Butler cites the work of Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and The Id*. in Salih and Butler, *op.cit.* p.246.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ Butler in Salih and Butler, *ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*

On Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, {1905} she reminds us that the positions of "masculine" and "feminine" are understood by Freud, 'as the effects of laborious and uncertain accomplishment, are established in part through prohibitions which *demand the loss* of certain sexual attachments, and demand as well that those losses *not* be avowed, and *not* be grieved.'⁴²¹

Speculating on Freud's theory Butler writes:

If the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, *preempting* the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss. This heterosexuality is produced not only through implementing the prohibition on incest but, prior to that, by enforcing the prohibition on homosexuality. The oedipal conflict presumes that heterosexual desire has already been *accomplished*, that the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual has been enforced { a distinction which, after all, has no necessity }; in this sense, the prohibition on incest presupposes the prohibition on homosexuality, for it presumes the heterosexualization of desire.⁴²²

Butler argues that Freud is articulating

a cultural logic whereby gender is achieved and stabilized through heterosexual positioning, and where threats to heterosexuality thus become threats to gender itself... To accept this view we must begin by presupposing that masculine and feminine are not dispositions, as Freud sometimes argues, but indeed accomplishments, ones which emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality.⁴²³

Freud's theoretical constructions of gender have been absorbed into cultural life and are 'inhabited by everyday forms of gender anxiety.'⁴²⁴

Butler views the convergences between Freud's thinking on ungrieved and ungrievable loss and the predicament of living in a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachment only with great difficulty as being productive. What she has been offering is 'something like an exegesis of a certain psychoanalytic logic, one that appears in some psychoanalytic texts but which these texts and others also sometimes contest.'⁴²⁵ She examines homosexual love and loss and considers whether it is regarded as 'a "true" love, a "true" loss, a love and loss worthy and capable of being grieved, and thus worthy and capable of being lived?'⁴²⁶ And further considers whether it may be a love and loss 'haunted by the specter of a certain unreality, a certain unthinkability, the double disavowal of the 'I

⁴²⁰ *op.cit.* p.247.

⁴²¹ *op.cit.* p.246.

⁴²² *op.cit.* p.247.

⁴²³ *ibid.*

⁴²⁴ *ibid.*

⁴²⁵ *op.cit.* p.249.

never loved her and I never lost her’ uttered by a woman, the ‘‘I never loved him and never lost him,’’ uttered by a man?’⁴²⁷ She then poses the following questions: ‘is this the “never-never” that supports the naturalized surface of heterosexual life as well as its pervasive melancholia? Is it the disavowal of loss by which sexual formation, including gay sexual formation, proceeds?’⁴²⁸

She formulates that the loss of homosexual objects and aims [not simply this person of the same gender, but *any* person of the same gender] would seem to be foreclosed from the start, if we accept the notion that the prohibition on homosexuality operates throughout a largely heterosexual culture. She writes, ‘When certain kinds of losses are compelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions, we might expect a culturally prevalent form of melancholia, one which signals the internalization of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis.’⁴²⁹ Butler argues that melancholia takes on cultural dimensions of contemporary consequence, where there is no public recognition or discourse through which such a loss might be named and mourned, and she further informs us that the ungrieved homosexual cathexis becomes ‘more fierce’, when masculine identification becomes hyperbolic and defensive. ‘In this sense, we might understand both “masculinity” and “femininity” as formed and consolidated through identifications which are in part composed of disavowed grief.’⁴³⁰

It is suggested that heterosexual identity is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love it disavows, if the notion that heterosexuality naturalizes itself by insisting on the radical otherness of homosexuality is accepted: ‘the man who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he had never loved another man, and hence never lost another man.’⁴³¹ Never having loved and never having lost is the double disavowal this particular attachment becomes subject to. This “never-never”⁴³² is an identity based upon the refusal to grieve thus founds the heterosexual subject.

When the prohibition against homosexuality is culturally pervasive, then the ‘loss’ of homosexual love is precipitated through a prohibition which is repeated and ritualized throughout the culture. What ensues is a culture of gender melancholy in which masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love; indeed, where masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual matrix are strengthened through the repudiations that they perform. In opposition to a conception of sexuality which is said to ‘express’ a gender, gender itself is here understood to be composed of precisely what remains inarticulate in sexuality.

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*

⁴²⁸ *ibid.*

⁴²⁹ *op.cit.* pp.249-250.

⁴³⁰ *op.cit.* p.250.

⁴³¹ *ibid.*

⁴³² *ibid.*

If we understand gender melancholy in this way, then perhaps we can make sense of the peculiar phenomenon whereby homosexual desire becomes a source of guilt.⁴³³

Butler argues that ‘The prohibition on homosexuality pre-empts the process of grief and prompts a melancholic identification which effectively turns homosexual desire back upon itself. This turning back upon itself is precisely the action of self-beratement and guilt.’⁴³⁴ The melancholy described by Butler

which is produced through the compulsory production of heterosexuality, a heterosexual melancholy that Butler describes as one that might read in the workings of gender itself, leads her to suggest that ‘rigid forms of gender and sexual identification, whether homosexual or heterosexual, appear to spawn forms of melancholy.’⁴³⁵

In her essay *Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification*. Butler reconsiders the theory of gender as performative, which was her original elaboration in *Gender Trouble*. Within this formulation she had argued that gender is performative, meaning that ‘no gender is “expressed” by actions gestures, or speech, but that the performance of gender produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core.’⁴³⁶ Her reason for doing so is because the formulation whereby drag imitates the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender itself to be an imitation, ‘didn’t address the question of how certain forms of disavowal and repudiation come to organize the performance of gender.’⁴³⁷ She poses the question:

How is the phenomenon of gender melancholia to be related to the practice of gender performativity? Given the iconographic figure of the melancholic drag queen, one might ask whether there is not a dissatisfied longing in the mimetic incorporation of gender that is drag.⁴³⁸

She suggests that one might also ask:

If there is an ungrieved loss in drag performance, perhaps it is a loss that is refused and incorporated in the performed identification, one which reiterates a gendered idealization and its radical uninhabitability. This is, then, neither a territorialization of the feminine by the masculine nor a sign of the essential plasticity of gender. It suggests that the performance allegorizes a loss it cannot grieve, allegorizes the incorporative fantasy of melancholia whereby an object is

⁴³³ *ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *op.cit.* p.252

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

⁴³⁶ *op.cit.* p.253.

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *ibid.*

phantamatically taken in or on as a way of refusing to let it go. Gender itself might be understood in part as the 'acting out' of unresolved grief.⁴³⁹

Butler concedes her analysis 'is a risky one because it suggests that for a "man" performing femininity, or for a "woman" performing masculinity, there is an attachment to - and a loss and refusal of - the figure of femininity by the man, or the figure of masculinity by the woman.'⁴⁴⁰

Butler takes pains to convey to us however, that, 'although drag is an effort to negotiate cross-gendered identification, cross-gendered identification is not the only paradigm for thinking about homosexuality, merely one among others. Drag allegorizes some set of melancholic incorporative fantasies that stabilize *gender*.'⁴⁴¹ In the sense that drag allegorizes heterosexual melancholy, one by which 'a masculine gender is formed from a refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love'⁴⁴² and vice versa. For women, exclusion preserved through heightened feminine identification is an exclusion never grieved. We are informed that 'the "truest" lesbian melancholic is the strictly straight woman, and the "truest" gay male melancholic is the strictly straight man.'⁴⁴³ ... 'what constitutes the *sexually* unperformable may - but need not - be performed as *gender identification*.'⁴⁴⁴ To the extent, within normative heterosexuality homosexual attachments remain unacknowledged, Butler suggests that these desires are proscribed from the beginning, and that they are not merely constituted as desires which emerge and subsequently become prohibited. Butler argues that the absence of cultural conventions for avowing the loss of homosexual love produces a culture of heterosexual melancholy:

...one which can be read in the hyperbolic identifications by which mundane heterosexual masculinity and femininity confirm themselves. The straight man *becomes* [mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of] the man he 'never' loved and 'never' grieved; the straight woman *becomes* the woman she 'never' loved and 'never' grieved. It is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal.⁴⁴⁵

We are told by her that melancholy can work within homosexuality in specific ways that call for rethinking. There may be an effort to disavow a constitutive relationship to heterosexuality within the formation of gay and lesbian identity. If this disavowal is understood as a political necessity in order to *specify* gay and lesbian identity over and against its apparent opposite, namely heterosexuality, Butler informs us, 'that cultural practice paradoxically culminates in a weakening of the very constituency it

⁴³⁹ *op.cit.* p.253-254

⁴⁴⁰ *op.cit.* p.254.

⁴⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁴² *ibid.*

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*

is meant to unite.⁴⁴⁶ As well as refuting the logic of mutual exclusion by which heterosexism proceeds [causing it to miss the political opportunity to work on the weakness of heterosexual subjectivation] such a strategy assigns 'a false and monolithic status to heterosexuality.'⁴⁴⁷ To sustain the appearance of a gay and lesbian identity as a coherent one, Butler states that 'heterosexuality must remain in that rejected and repudiated place. Paradoxically, its heterosexual *remains* must be *sustained* precisely through insisting on the seamless coherence of a specifically gay identity.'⁴⁴⁸ she maintains that it is clear on some level there is a suggestion that an identification has already taken place through a radical refusal to identify, 'an identification has been made and disavowed, whose symptomatic appearance is the insistence, the over- determination of the identification that is, as it were, worn on the body that shows.'⁴⁴⁹

For Butler:

This raises the political question of the cost of articulating a coherent identity position by producing, excluding, and repudiating a domain of abjected specters that threaten the arbitrarily closed domain of subject positions. Perhaps only by risking the *incoherence* of identity is connection possible, a political point that correlates with Leo Bersani's insight that only the decentered subject is available to desire. What cannot be avowed as a constitutive identification for any given subject position runs the risk not only of becoming externalized in a degraded form, but repeatedly repudiated and subject to a policy of disavowal.⁴⁵⁰

The logic of repudiation formulated by Butler 'is in some ways a hyperbolic theory, a logic in drag, as it were, which overstates the case, but overstates the case for a reason.'⁴⁵¹ Butler argues that:

There is no necessary reason for identification to oppose desire, or for desire to be fuelled by repudiation. This remains true for heterosexuality and homosexuality alike, and for forms of bisexuality that take themselves to be composite forms of each. Indeed, we are made all the more fragile under the pressure of such rules, and all the more mobile when ambivalence and loss are given a dramatic language in which to do their acting out.⁴⁵²

Problematizing the Locality and Meaning of both Subject and Gender

Butler enquires, 'How does language construct the categories of sex?'⁴⁵³ The constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, thus gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one

⁴⁴⁵ *op.cit.* p.255.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *op.cit.* pp. 255-256.

⁴⁴⁹ *op.cit.* p. 256.

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁵² *ibid.*

and vice versa. However, Butler suggests that the radical splitting of the gendered subject leads one to ask 'Can we refer to a "given" sex or a "given" gender without first inquiring into how sex / or gender is given, through what means?'⁴⁵⁴

She suggests that perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender. 'If the immutable character of sex is contested', the consequence would be 'that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all'.⁴⁵⁵ However she argues, by casting the duality of sex in the pre-discursive domain, the internal stability and binary frame for sex is effectively secured. And further states, 'this production of sex as the pre-discursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender'.⁴⁵⁶ In her book *Gender Trouble* Butler asks how can:

we reformulate gender to encompass the power relations that produce the effect of a pre-discursive sex?... If gender is constructed, what is the mechanism of this construction?... Does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism which forecloses the possibility of agency and transformation?...when the relevant 'culture' that 'constructs' gender is understood in terms of a set of laws governing passive recipients.⁴⁵⁷

suggesting, that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the "biology is destiny" formulation. However, Butler refers to Simone De Beauvoir's suggestion that gender is variable and volitional. Butler asks 'can construction be reduced to a form of choice?'⁴⁵⁸ She informs us that for De Beauvoir one 'becomes' a woman under a cultural compulsion to become one, and the compulsion does not come from sex. It is claimed by De Beauvoir that the 'body is a situation'. Butler suggests that if this is so 'there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a pre-discursive anatomical facticity...By definition, sex will be shown to have been gender all along'.⁴⁵⁹

Butler talks of the controversy over the meaning of construction and suggests that it 'founders on the conventional philosophical polarity between free will and determinism'.⁴⁶⁰ Within the terms of the debate concerning free will and determinism she states that "the body" appears as the instrument

⁴⁵³ Butler, {1990-1999}. *op.cit.* p.10.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ *op.cit.*p.11.

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *op.cit.* p.12.

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid.*

through which appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself and also appears as a passive medium on which meanings are inscribed. The body is figured as a medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. She states ‘ “the body” itself is a construction...bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of gender’.⁴⁶¹ Butler asks the question ‘To what extent does the body come into being in and through the mark{s} of gender?’⁴⁶² We are informed:

...some feminist theorists claim that gender is a ‘relation’ or a set of ‘relations’ not an individual attribute. Others following Beauvoir would argue that only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated or combined, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood.⁴⁶³

According to Luce Irigaray however, women constitute a paradox within the discourse of identity itself.

She maintains that women constitute the “unrepresentable” within a language pervasively masculinist or phallogentric. ‘Women are the “sex” which is not “one”’, they represent ‘the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity’.⁴⁶⁴ For Irigaray, phallogentric language rests on univocal signification and the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignatable. Butler informs us that this is in opposition to Beauvoir who designates women as “Other”, negatives of men, the lack against which masculine identity can differentiate itself, both the subject and the other according to Irigaray;

are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogentric signifying economy that achieves its totalising goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether...Thus within the Sartrian frame of signifying-subject and signified other, women are not only represented falsely but the falsity of the signification points out the entire structure of representation as inadequate.⁴⁶⁵

Irigaray’s position ‘provides a point of departure for a criticism of hegemonic Western representation and of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject’.⁴⁶⁶

Asking what are the metaphysics of substance and how do they inform thinking about the categories of sex, Butler argues that, ‘humanist conceptions of the subject tend to assume a substantive person who

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁶² *ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *op.cit.* p.14.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *ibid.*

is the bearer of various essential and non-essential attributes, Gender might be understood as an attribute of a person who is characterised essentially as a pre-gendered substance or “core”⁴⁶⁷. For a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts, the universal conception of the person is displaced. A ‘relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person “is” and indeed what gender “is” is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined’.⁴⁶⁸ Gender, therefore understood as a shifting and contextual phenomenon, does not denote a substantive being, ‘but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific set of relations’.⁴⁶⁹

For Irigaray however, ‘the feminine “sex” is a point of linguistic *absence*, the impossibility of a grammatically denoted substance’... Irigaray’s point of view exposes that substance as ‘an abiding foundational illusion of a masculinist discourse’.⁴⁷⁰ Butler posits, ‘For Irigaray the female sex is not a “lack” or an “other” that immanently and negatively defines the subject in its masculinity. On the contrary, the female sex eludes the very requirements of representation, for she is neither “other” or “lack”.’...’ For Irigaray the feminine could never be the *mark of the subject*.⁴⁷¹

Butler notes that the distinctions between Beauvoir’s and Irigaray’s positions are far from discrete. For Irigaray ‘The relation between masculine and feminine cannot be represented in a signifying economy in which the masculine constitutes the closed circle of signifier and signified’.⁴⁷² Butler suggests that ‘Beauvoir prefigured this impossibility in *The Second Sex* when she argued that men could not settle the question of women because they would then be acting as both judge and party to the case’.⁴⁷³

Both Irigaray and Beauvoir problematise the locality and meaning of both “subject” and “gender” within the context of a socially instituted gender asymmetry. Butler argues that sharp disagreements about the

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *op.cit.* p.15.

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁷² *ibid.*

meaning of gender establish the need for a radical rethinking of the categories of identity within the context of relations of radical gender asymmetry. Even as she proposes a synthesis of those terms, by uncritically reproducing the Cartesian distinction between freedom and body, the theory of embodiment informing Beauvoir's analysis is limited according to Butler, 'Beauvoir maintains the mind/body dualism', the masculine epistemological subject 'becomes abstract to the extent that it disavows its

socially marked embodiment and, further, projects that disavowed disparaged embodiment on the feminine sphere, effectively renaming the body as female... The preservation of that very distinction can be read as symptomatic of the very phallogentrism that Beauvoir underestimates'.⁴⁷⁴

Butler maintains that Beauvoir fails to mark along the axis of gender the very mind/body distinction that is supposed to illuminate the persistence of gender asymmetry through her discursive construction of "the body" and its separation from "freedom".

She informs us that there is a clear difference between Beauvoir and Irigaray over the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is produced; 'Beauvoir turns to the failed reciprocity of an asymmetrical dialect, while Irigaray suggests that the dialect itself is the monologic elaboration of a masculinist signifying economy'.⁴⁷⁵ By exposing the epistemological, ontological and logical structures of a masculinist signifying economy, Butler can see how Irigaray broadens the scope of feminist critique, and argues however, 'The power of her analysis is undercut precisely by its globalising reach'.⁴⁷⁶

Butler suggests that;

Feminist critique ought to explore the totalising claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalising gestures of feminism. The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms... the colonising gesture is not primarily or irreducibly masculinist. It can operate to effect other relations of racial, class, and heterosexist subordination...⁴⁷⁷

Coalitional Politics

Butler talks of the efforts which have been made to formulate coalitional politics, which do not assume in advance what the contents of women will be. We are warned however that 'the coalitional theorist

⁴⁷³ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ *op.cit.* p.16-17.

⁴⁷⁵ *op.cit.* p.18.

⁴⁷⁶ *ibid.*

can inadvertently reinsert herself as sovereign of the process by trying to assert an ideal form for coalitional structures in *advance*, one that will effectively guarantee unity as an outcome.⁴⁷⁸ These related efforts to determine what is and is not the true shape of a dialogue ‘can impede the self-shaping and self-limiting dynamics of coalition’.⁴⁷⁹ Butler suggests, however, an anti-foundationalist approach to coalitional politics because it assumes neither that “identity” is ‘a premise nor that the shape or meaning of a coalitional assemblage can be known prior to its achievement.’⁴⁸⁰ She asserts that an open coalition ‘will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergence’s and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure.’⁴⁸¹

Do “regulatory practices” of gender formation and division constitute the internal coherence of the subject, the self-identical status of the person? Butler enquires, ‘to what extent is “identity” a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity?’⁴⁸²

Butler states:

In other words, the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as ‘identity’ is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.⁴⁸³

and argues that the production of the notion that there might be a ‘truth’ of sex is generated through the matrix of coherent gender norms. Stating:

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’--- that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁷ *op.cit.* pp. 18-19.

⁴⁷⁸ *op.cit.* p.20 .

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ *op.cit.* p.22.

⁴⁸² *op.cit.* p.23.

⁴⁸³ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ *op.cit.* p.23-24.

Gender identities, which fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, appear as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. Butler posits however, that we are provided with ‘critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder’⁴⁸⁵ through their persistence and proliferation.

Butler critiques the theories of materialist feminists such as Monique Wittig who gives ‘an “inverted” reading of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in which he argues for the developmental superiority of genital sexuality over and against the less restricted and more diffuse infantile sexuality.’⁴⁸⁶ For Wittig, ‘Polymorphous perversity, assumed to exist prior to the marking by sex, is valorised as the telos of human sexuality.’⁴⁸⁷

Butler maintains that rather than the notion of a regulatory practice in Foucault or a materialist account of a system of heterosexist oppression in Wittig ‘The status of a primary prohibition in Lacanian theory is less contingent and operates more forcefully.’⁴⁸⁸ and informs us that sexual difference is not a simple binary that retains the metaphysics of substance as its foundation. In Lacan, as in Irigaray’s post-Lacanian reformulation of Freud, ‘the masculine “subject” is a fictive construction produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire.’⁴⁸⁹ ... ‘Both masculine and feminine positions are instituted through prohibitive laws that produce culturally intelligible genders, but only through the production of an unconscious sexuality that re-emerges in the domain of the imaginary.’⁴⁹⁰ This draws our attention to the works of Jacqueline Rose and Jane Gallop who are said to underscore in a different way the constructed status of sexual difference, its inherent instability, and the dual consequentially of a prohibition that at once institutes a sexual identity and provides for the exposure of this constructions tenuous ground. The critical dimension of the unconscious is said to be neglected by materialist feminists such as Monique Wittig who believe that sexual difference is an unthinking replication of a reified set of sexed polarities. The unconscious, as a site of repressed sexuality, re-emerges within the discourse of the subject as the very impossibility of its coherence.

⁴⁸⁵ *op.cit.* p.24.

⁴⁸⁶ *op.cit.* p.36.

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *op.cit.* p.37.

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid.*

As Rose points out very clearly, the construction of a coherent sexual identity along the disjunctive axis of the feminine/masculine is bound to fail; the disruptions of this coherence through the inadvertent re-emergence of the repressed reveal not only that 'identity' is constructed, but the prohibition that constructs 'identity' is inefficacious {the paternal law ought to be understood not as a deterministic divine will, but as a perpetual bumbler, preparing the ground for the insurrections against him}.⁴⁹¹

Is there a retrievable sexuality either before or outside the law? Butler informs us that 'The differences between the materialist and Lacanian positions emerge in a normative quarrel over whether there is a retrievable sexuality either "before" or "outside" the law in the mode of the unconscious or "after" the law as a postgenital sexuality.'⁴⁹² She sees a paradox here, because both of these views of alternative sexuality see polymorphous perversity as normative but there is disagreement on the manner of delimiting that "law" or set of "laws". The quarrel seems also to turn against current ideas, that sexuality flourishes before, after, or during imposition of law to restrict its authority. Butler reminds us that

Foucault refutes the proposition that a subversive or emancipatory sexuality could be free of the law. Foucault claims sexuality and power are coextensive, sexuality is always constructed within the terms of discourse and power. Sexuality that emerges within the matrix of power relations is not a simple replication or copy of the law itself, a uniform repetition of a masculinist economy of identity. 'The productions swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilise possibilities of "subjects" that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible.'⁴⁹³

Concerning Lacan's concept that sexual difference is conceived of as an arbitrary construction built around the phallus, has come under criticism by many feminists because they believe it may be seen as strengthening patriarchal values. Butler for example challenges the Lacanian notion that women are outside language and suggests that woman is in process and therefore not a fully defined other who can be placed outside, woman is a body becoming.⁴⁹⁴ Beverley Clack states; 'In Lacan's universe, women are less subject than men; they are signifiers of *desire* {shades of the old connection made between women and sexuality, perhaps}; they seek the phallus they lack; and so on.'⁴⁹⁵ She further states, 'when Lacan reflects upon woman's experience of *jouissance* {or orgasm} he falls into a binary

⁴⁹¹ *op.cit.* pp.37-38.

⁴⁹² *op.cit.* p.39.

⁴⁹³ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ Judith Butler, {1990} p. 30.

⁴⁹⁵ Beverley Clack, "Human Sexuality and the Concept of God/ess" in Isherwood {2000} p.123.

understanding of sexuality which defines woman's experience as that which is 'not-man's.'⁴⁹⁶

However, some commentators suggest his work is not entirely sexist:

...it is possible to argue that Lacan is not so much concerned with prescribing a model of gender relations as with describing a particular situation: that of a culture which attaches certain meanings to the presence or absence of designated attributes and, relatedly, invests them with distinctive ideological and mythological connotations.⁴⁹⁷

For Butler a belief of a sexuality freed from heterosexual constructs is a utopian notion. Therefore, 'the postulation of a normative sexuality that is "before", "outside", or "beyond" power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself.'⁴⁹⁸, if sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations.

In her essay *Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions*. {1990} Butler writes:

...to hope for a coalition of sexual minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity, that will refuse the erasure of bisexuality, that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms. I would hope that such a coalition would be based on the irreducible complexity of sexuality and that no one will be too quick to reduce power to hierarchy and to refuse its productive political dimensions.⁴⁹⁹

Butler considers it necessary for survival that one gains recognition for one's status as a sexual minority even though it is a difficult task within reigning discourses of politics, law, and language.

Butler writes:

The mobilization of identity categories for the purposes of politicization always remain threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes. That is no reason not to use, and be used, by identity. There is no political position purified of power, and perhaps that impurity is what produces agency as the potential interruption and reversal of regulatory regimes.⁵⁰⁰

We need then to continue to engage with this endeavour but should remain mindful of the possible implications for other groups. In the following I will expand the notion that capitalism has a role in the development of identity and the formulation of desire. What is relevant here is even though capitalism can be exploitative it likes new things to exploit, leaving the door open for new sexualities. My concern here is to show how capitalism actually impacts on the daily lives and experiences of bisexuals and others who belong in the realm of sexual minorities.

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ Dani Cavallero, *French Feminist Theory* {London: Continuum, 2003} p.30.

⁴⁹⁸ Judith Butler. {1990} *op.cit.* p.40.

⁴⁹⁹ Judith Butler, {1990} cited in Salih and Butler, chapter 9. *op.cit.* p.103.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.*

The Commodification of Sexuality: A Return to Historical Materialism

Historical materialist Rosemary Hennessy endeavours to understand the relationship between capitalism and sexual identity. Hennessy reorients Queer Theory away from its preoccupation with psychoanalysis, language and performance, instead insisting upon close analysis of the structures of late capitalism, labour and commodification. She believes as globalization transforms capitalism, it also transforms sexual identity, opening up new forms of commodification and new opportunities for agency. Her work demonstrates how important visibility is conceptualised. Because I am calling for bisexual visibility, I believe her considerations are invaluable to my task and enable me to continue in an informed and considered way. 'To historicize is to make visible the complex mediated relationships between particular or local cultural forms and global capitalism's fundamental class structures of which they are part.'⁵⁰¹

The historicizing Hennessy undertakes in her book *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, engages several politically committed theoretical bodies of knowledge: Marxism, feminism, lesbian and gay studies and Queer Theory.

She talks of the dis-juncture [whereby sexuality is severed from its historical relationship to capitalism], a characteristic of the post-modern left and looks at some of the efforts carried out within the tradition of historical materialism of redressing this situation before 'turning to the ways of understanding the materiality of sexuality proposed by queer theory.'⁵⁰² She examines the drift in cultural studies toward making representation, identities, and the politics of subjectivity its main concerns while leaving the structures of capitalism invisible. In a reversal of this trend, she argues 'that we can usefully develop further the Marxian concept of the commodity.'⁵⁰³

Hennessy offers 'a critical overview of some examples within the Marxist tradition of efforts to put forward a materialist understanding of sexuality or sexual identity.'⁵⁰⁴ One particular scholar she cites

⁵⁰¹ Hennessy, {2000} *op.cit.* p32.

⁵⁰² *op.cit.* p.33.

⁵⁰³ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *op.cit.* p.40.

is Herbert Marcuse⁵⁰⁵ who argues; ‘Advanced capitalist societies have made sex a commodity and that commodified sexuality closes down the diversity of sexual possibilities as well as critical and aesthetic pursuits that would allow a true sexual revolution to flourish.’, informing us that any analysis of sexuality that begins with an emphatically Marxist feminist starting point ‘has to acknowledge the historical situation of Marxism today.’⁵⁰⁶

She informs us how Marxism has become unpopular for culture theorists and the arguments she makes for a return to historical materialism calls into question the ideas they produce. ‘Culture ideology consists of a variety of different practices or ways of making sense {i.e., discourses } that displace, condense, compensate, mask, and contest the basic inequality of capitalism. Sexuality is one of them. So is gender, and so is race.’⁵⁰⁷

Before addressing the ways culture-ideology legitimizes class relations Hennessy provides a brief introduction of the concept of class from neo-Marxian and post-Marxian perspectives. For neo-Marxists ‘class is only one of many factors {along with gender, race, sexuality, nationality, ect. } shaping social life.’ Although they acknowledge the continuing importance of class relations they have:

...stripped class of any fundamental structuring or determining force. Post-marxists have gone even further. They focus on the fact that social life is only knowable through discourse and conclude that the social as such is a discursive effect, an ensemble of practices, always unstable and penetrated by its limits. From their perspective all social antagonisms are fluid and reversible, and power does not function through top-down hierarchies or structures but rather through diffuse forces. Finally, for post-marxists, class and relations of labor have no objective existence outside of the discourses that constitute them.⁵⁰⁸

Her argument for historical materialism as the basis for developing class analysis is to look at the complex ways class relations are cross-cut by gender and race difference. In the historical connections within a culture’s prevailing knowledge certain differences are important because they are pertinent to the struggle for hegemony. Two such ways are gender and race and they are often coincident;

...gender is racialized and race is gendered. What it means to be a woman or a man, how we name male and female - and even the distinction between them - are sites of struggle because these namings can and have been used to justify, legitimate, authorize, and explain away the contradictions on which capitalism’s relations of production rely.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ Herbert Marcus, *Eros and Civilization* {1955} cited in Hennessy *op.cit.*p44.

⁵⁰⁶ Hennessy, *op.cit.* p 28.

⁵⁰⁷ *op.cit.* p.11.

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ *op.cit.* p.20.

Through the organisation of social differences identity is profoundly shaped by ideological ways of knowing. Ideology legitimates human relations of exploitation and domination by naturalising differences [between men and women, straight and gay, blacks and whites, able and disabled, rich and poor etc.]. Hennessy reminds us that sexuality's hegemonic form under capitalism is heterosexuality, and that in advanced capitalist countries patriarchy is characterised by the 'hyperdevelopment of consumption and the joint wage-earner family, the relative transfer of power from husbands to professionals in the welfare state, the rise of single mother-headed and other alternative households, and sexualised consumerism.'⁵¹⁰

Capitalism's Urge for Newness

Hennessy advances that there is a 'positive face of capitalism.'

New knowledges and new forms of identity are provoked by capitalism's progressive impulses. Capitalism is progressive in the sense that it breaks down oppressive and at times brutally constraining traditional social structures and ways of life. In this progressive capacity capitalism's need for raw materials and markets has always enacted a quest for the new through a modernizing impulse that is in many ways quite liberatory.⁵¹¹

Further advancing that capitalism is fundamentally contradictory through its constant urge for newness, she writes:

On the one hand, capitalism has a revolutionary aspect in that it frees up individuals and social relations from fixed, frozen, traditional constraints; on the other hand, the forms this quest for newness takes also close off the emancipatory possibilities of its revolutionary drive.⁵¹²

Presenting the thoughts of Marx and Engels concerning capitalism's drive for innovation, Hennessy states that they both indicate 'capital's drive for innovation is not just played out in the development of new technologies but also in the accompanying development of new social relations. These entail new forms of consciousness and identity, including new forms of family and sexuality.'⁵¹³

Engineered Desires

Hennessy looks at the history of the emergence of the commodification of the human capacity for sensation and affect during the late-nineteenth-century industrialized sectors that took the form of a

⁵¹⁰ *op.cit.* p.23.

⁵¹¹ *op.cit.* p.29.

⁵¹² *op.cit.* pp.29-30.

⁵¹³ *op.cit.* p.30.

heteronormative organization of sexual identity. In light of this history, she examines ‘what it might mean to consider sexual identity from the vantage point of its relation to commodification, including its reconfiguration in various postmodern forms under late capitalism.’⁵¹⁴

Arguing that an important feature of the historical formation of a new desiring subject is the emergence of a heterogendered, heteropolar normative paradigm and of reified identities of hetero - and homosexuality, ‘heterosexuality became a normative identity whose stability was guaranteed through an array of reified perverse {sexual and racial } others but also through a modernized gender hierarchy.’⁵¹⁵

Hennessy notes a gradual shift from gender incoherence to homosexual desire becoming the basis for identity, evidenced in the writing of late-nineteenth-century sexologists who coined the term ‘‘invert’’ to describe a broadly transgendered condition of which same-sex desire was one symptom. However, after 1900 the term ‘‘invert’’ fell out of common use. Based on a desiring subject constructed in terms of aim or object choice a new conception of sexual difference appeared. There was a separation of the human capacity for sensation and effect from the ideology of family need through sexology’s construction of sexuality. It was possible to conceive of all combinations of desiring subject and object through the construction of sexual identity in terms of object and aim, however, the potentially arbitrary boundaries between sexual identity and gender identity would continue to be secured through heterogendered norms because capitalist investment in a heterogendered division of labour persisted, ‘even as those boundaries were contested and unevenly articulated in mainstream counterculture.’⁵¹⁶

The distinction between hetero- and homosexuality controlled the unruly possibility posed by the new desiring subject [ie. the possibility of any number of possible desiring combinations within or between persons], by scripting desire in terms of heterogendered identities that are understood to be opposite sexes.

⁵¹⁴ *op.cit.* p.34.

⁵¹⁵ *op.cit.* p.100.

⁵¹⁶ *op.cit.* p102.

She says that she is not the first to argue that the consolidation of the two distinct social identities hetero- and homosexuality is not simply a discursive event or cultural phenomenon, and presents an argument put forward by John D' Emilio who posits that it was also wage labour and commodity production 'that allowed men and women to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity.'⁵¹⁷ Other scholars [Estelle Freedman, George Chauncy, Jeffrey Weeks] have also suggested 'that commodity consumption was also the key material condition for the emergence of new sexual identities.'⁵¹⁸

Looking at the work of Kevin Floyd, Hennessy says that one historical development which is significant to the history of the subject of desire under capitalism, concerns the period set against the background of the great depression during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the U.S.A , which witnessed the expanding volume of overproduction which in turn fuelled the rise of commodity consumption and a new consumer culture in industrialised nations.

The competitive struggle for control of consumer demand generated the spectacular growth of advertising and innovations in the field of credit designed to increase consumption ' {Birkin: 120 cited p103.} at the same time, the technological developments responsible for overproduction also spurred new forms of rationalized labor that would eventually take the form of Fordism.'⁵¹⁹

Desire took on a certain ideological independence through the process of engineered production and engineered desire inducement along with the construction of men and women as sexual subjects and sexual objects resulting in the 'reification of the erotic, ultimately inseparable from the retrenchment of capitalism'.⁵²⁰ The reification of the erotic could be understood as 'overdetermined by the displacements of new forms of commodity production and consumption, by the transposition of need into desire, and by changes wrought in other cultural-ideological categories.'⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ *op.cit.* p.103.

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁵²⁰ *op.cit.* p.104.

⁵²¹ *ibid.*

Hennessy stresses the point; ‘consolidation of new sexual identities that pursues the logic of commodification limits the development of collective agency.’⁵²² ‘The occlusion of class in theories of sexuality and the disavowal of class struggle or class affinities in sexual liberation movements are part of the legacy of capital’s commodification of consciousness.’⁵²³ She argues that the separation of class and sex analysis results in the reification of eros into heteronormative identity and its homo-alternative.

Underlying this split is the loss of a way of seeing and a form of social organization that recognizes that human needs are collectively produced and that can address the immense human toll taken by the contradictory relationships through which this process is enacted under capitalism.⁵²⁴

She discusses the changes in the relations of production and new commodity forms and asks ‘what are the effects of new commodity forms on ways of knowing and forms of sexual identity and what are they?’

We are told that the structure of the core relationships upon which capitalism relied dramatically altered. There was a physical expansion of capitalism, which started under Fordism and this continued through the creation and extension of markets, including the deeper penetration and commodification of the body and identity, for example, the growth of health, food, fashion, and athletic markets.

Hennessy asserts that we do not have an analysis readily available that explains how ways of knowing and living sexually are linked to the changing logic of the commodity as the keystone of capitalist production.

Asking what these links are, she reminds us of the disruption of discrete asymmetrical oppositions between male and female, of more permeable, fluid, ambiguously coded sexual identities, images which are often produced through the media, but stresses the importance of acknowledging ‘that even though hetero-norms are being challenged and recast, capitalist production does continue to rely on compulsory heterosexuality as a way of organizing sex, gender, and desire’ and...’normative sexual identity remains a battlefield on which the lives of lesbian, gay, and queer-identified people are damaged.’⁵²⁵ Hennessy highlights, however, that it also remains a fact ‘that middle-class professional

⁵²² *op.cit.* p.106.

⁵²³ *ibid.*

⁵²⁴ *ibid.*

⁵²⁵ *op.cit.* p.107.

lesbian, gay, and queer identified subjects are being welcomed into the cultural and corporate mainstream' therefore, 'capitalism does not necessarily need heterosexuality.'⁵²⁶, and argues that these new non-normative sexual identities, what she calls 'postmodern sexualities' whilst 'announcing more flexible gendered codes' and disrupting norms and challenging state practices that are indeed oppressive, 'they do not necessarily challenge neoliberalism or disrupt capitalism'.⁵²⁷

Post-Marxist Materialism

Hennessy further develops her inquiry into the relation of changing forms of sexual identity to commodity culture by focusing her attention more specifically to postmodern sexual identities. She offers a critique of postmodern theorists:

whose work on sexuality and identity might be said to contribute to the construction of a neo-liberal public intellectual discourse {Diana Fuss, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler}, and whose formulations of politics and social change either participate in the commodification of identities or intervene in this process only in very local ways.⁵²⁸

She extends her analysis of commodification to the U.S. activist group Queer Nation who took commodity culture as its focus. Through a reading of their strategies in relation to the history of the avant-garde, she highlights some of the ideological links that bind the reformulation of sexual identity in the discourses of theory, activism, and consumer culture. Before I continue with Hennessy's concern with Queer Nation's anti-assimilationist politics and how it understood and made use of the commodity as part of a campaign for gay visibility, I will present her criticisms of cultural theorists, in particular the work of Judith Butler.

Despite signs of interest in the relationship between culture and class, Hennessy argues that there are still very few extended studies being carried out between sexuality and capitalism: 'While this absence is symptomatic of the postmodern left's contradictory relationship to the hegemonic culture, it is also the effect of a much longer history of atomizing sexuality and class.'⁵²⁹ Hennessy posits that for post

⁵²⁶ *ibid.*

⁵²⁷ *op.cit.* p.109.

⁵²⁸ *op.cit.* p.34.

⁵²⁹ *op.cit.* p.33.

Marxist cultural materialists, 'capitalism as a mode of producing the means for survival is tellingly absent' in their analysis, by:

founding their conceptions of materiality only in symbolic processes means that social struggle, or what they call antagonism, is anchored only in the sign - an effect of "difference", a term coined by Jaques Derrida this being,...'the continual subversion of any positive meaning {or identity} by the excessive proliferation of signifiers {sound-images in language} that refuse to be attached to a single signified {referent or concept}.'⁵³⁰

Regarding Judith Butler's argument for symbolic openness Hennessy argues 'that it potentially endorses *any* - even exploitative - social relations.'⁵³¹

Hennessy informs us for a lesbian and gay political project that has had to combat the 'heteronormative tyranny' of the empirical; it is important how visibility is conceptualised. She acknowledges the positive effects of cultural representation of homosexual concerns and the queering of sex-gender identities, because 'cultural visibility can prepare the ground for gay civil rights protection; affirmative images of lesbians and gays in the mainstream media, like the growing legitimization of lesbian and gay studies in the academy, can be empowering for those of us who have lived most of their lives with no validation from the dominant culture'...however, these endeavours... 'also need to be considered critically in relation to capital's insidious and relentless expansion.'⁵³² We are informed that gay visibility is aimed most often at producing new and potentially lucrative markets and it is money not liberation that is at stake. 'Visibility in commodity culture is in this sense a limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects.'⁵³³ Concerning the promotion of more permeable and fluid identities in both Queer Theory and activism Hennessy argues that 'visibility is still fetishized to the extent that it conceals the social relations new urban gay and queer identities depend on.'⁵³⁴

⁵³⁰ *op.cit.* p.61.

⁵³¹ *op.cit.* p.62.

⁵³² *op.cit.* pp.111-112.

⁵³³ Hennessy refers to the work of Danae Clark 1991. "Commodity Lesbianism." *Camera Obscura* p.192. 'In her analysis of the commodification of lesbians, Danae Clark has observed that the intensified marketing of lesbian images is less indicative of a growing acceptance of homosexuality than of capitalism's appropriation of gay 'styles' for mainstream audiences.' *op.cit.* p.112.

⁵³⁴ *op.cit.* p.115.

Hennessy believes Butler's 'reconceptualization of the experiential and embodied self as only a *discursive* construct is a strategy that safeguards some presuppositions of its own.'⁵³⁵ ... 'one of them is her assumption that the social is equivalent to the cultural.'⁵³⁶ She reminds us how Butler's notion of the discursively constructed subject is heavily indebted to Foucault, 'it is his problematic concept of materialism and of discursive practices that troubles Butler's analysis as well.'⁵³⁷ For Hennessy, it is not surprising that Butler understands history in very local limited terms given her reduction of the social to discourses, conveying that this is a feature of her work that is in keeping with its poststructuralist roots. Providing an example Hennessy states:

at one point she admits that gender parody in itself is not subversive, but rather that its meaning depends on "a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered"... 'she quickly passes over the problem of historical "context"'.⁵³⁸

Hennessy believes that context is a crucial issue for queer politics and enquires; 'what exactly is meant by "context" here?' recognising that for Butler 'context would seem to be a crucial feature of the meaning-making process: its contingent foundation serves as a backdrop of sorts linking one discursive practice - drag, for example, - to others; through these links, presumably, meaning is produced.'⁵³⁹

However, historicizing is different from a consideration of historical context, historicizing as a mode of reading takes place at several levels of analysis 'connecting particular conjunctural arrangements in a social formation to more far reaching ones.' The relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive is addressed thus going further than establishing 'connections only in this local scene of reception - between one discursive practice and another.'⁵⁴⁰

To historicize the meaning of drag among the urban middle class in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century would be to link it as a discursive practice to the social relations that make it possible and in so doing situate practices specific to a particular social formation in the United States within the larger frame of late capitalism's geopolitics and multinational economy.⁵⁴¹

Hennessy believes that Butler 'confines history to a very limited frame whose unspoken "context" has a very specific address: the new bourgeois professional class,' because her 'concept of social life

⁵³⁵ *op.cit.* p.116.

⁵³⁶ *op.cit.* p.117.

⁵³⁷ *ibid.*

⁵³⁸ Judith Butler, {1990-1999} *Gender Trouble* p.139. cited *ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *ibid.*

favours an emphasis on the specific and the local...⁵⁴² It is in Butler's earlier conceptions of drag as a subversive political practice where we find this historical address. The critical force of Butler's commentary on drag performance denaturalises reified versions of sexuality,

but does not consider why they are historically secured as they are. Even though she concedes that the subversiveness of gender parody depends on the historical context in which it is received, most of her earlier analysis assumes that *anyone* might participate in exposing the fiction of sexual identity.⁵⁴³

Hennessy argues that not just anyone can do this because 'societies are still organised so that meaning is taken to be anchored in referents or signifieds; "lesbian" and "gay" are often read as referring to authentic identities, either benign or malevolent perversions of a naturalized norm.'⁵⁴⁴ For example "gay-bashings" which can at times prove fatal show that the disclosure of a person's identity as 'homosexual' has definite consequences for people's lives. In her book Hennessy refers to literature and films, which document the ways "gender parody" often blurs into "passing". In Leslie Fienberg's book "Stone Butch Blues" or Jennie Livingstone's film "Paris is Burning", it is possible to recognise the powerful hold on lesbian and gay imagination the notion that sex should align with gender. Without social mobility or the resources to insulate themselves from heteronormativity's insistence that sex equals gender, for many lesbians and gays drag has been a painful yearning for authenticity, rather than playful subversion. Occasionally this has violent, brutal results.

Hennessy informs us that Butler's earlier arguments on performative subversion and the contextual boundaries of drag have been tested and refers to how Butler addresses some of the ways this has happened through her analysis of Livingstone's documentary of the Harlem balls in 'Paris is Burning'. The dramatisation of the limits of gender parody is shown when the character Venus Xtravaganza is murdered; citing Butler Hennessy writes; 'Her death "testifies to a tragic misreading of the social map of power" {1993:131} and suggests that the resignification of the symbolic order along with the phantasmatic idealizations that drag enacts do have their limits, and these limits have their consequences.'⁵⁴⁵ Hennessy believes there are several points about gender and sexuality in Butler's work that are politically important to queer theory and politics. To begin, the fragility of coherent sex-

⁵⁴² *ibid.*

⁵⁴³ *op.cit.* p.118.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*

gender identities secured by heterosexuality can be viewed as the effect of social struggle rather than being seen as the property of some restlessness in language itself, also, ‘the meanings that are taken to be “real” are so because they help secure a certain social order, an order that is naturalized as the way things are or should be and that ‘illegitimate’’ meanings to some degree threaten.’⁵⁴⁶

She asserts that a politic that contests the prevailing constructions of sexual identity ‘will need to address more than discourse.’ Because it is the social order that is at stake, we should also be aware that naturalised versions of sexual identities and the oppositional versions that contest it ‘are conditioned by more than just their local contexts of reception. Any specific situation is made possible and is affected by social relations that exceed it.’⁵⁴⁷ ‘Historicizing is a way of reading that connects the local ‘context’ with these other social relations.’⁵⁴⁸

By limiting her conception of the social to the discursive, Butler unhinges identity from the other material relations that shape it. Her performative identity recasts bourgeois humanist individuality as a more fluid and indeterminate series of subversive bodily acts, but this postmodern subject is severed from the collective historical processes and struggles through which identities are produced and circulate.⁵⁴⁹

Hennessy believes that Butler ‘forecloses the possibility of marshalling collectivities for social transformation across differences in historical positioning’ through a confinement of her analysis of the inflection of sexuality by racial, national, or class difference to specific historical contexts.⁵⁵⁰

Queer Nation

Hennessy is concerned with how Queer Nation’s anti-assimilationist politics understood and made use of the commodity as part of a campaign for gay visibility. She suggests:

that while Queer Nation’s tactics attend to the commodity, the framework in which the commodity is understood is similar to the informing framework of much queer theory. It is, in short, a cultural one in which the commodity is reduced to an ideological icon.⁵⁵¹

Concerning their attempts, she states: ‘Condensed into a cultural signifier, the commodity remains securely fetishized. Infusing consumer space with a gay sensibility may queer-y commodities’,

⁵⁴⁵ Hennessy cites Butler, 1993 *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* p.131. *op.cit.* p.119.

⁵⁴⁶ Hennessy, *op.cit.* p.120.

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid.*

however, she quotes Berlant and Freeman 1993, “Making queer good by making goods queer” is hardly anti-assimilationist politics.⁵⁵²

Through a disclosure of the invisible heterosexual meanings invested in commodities, she suggests;

is a very limited strategy of resistance, one that ultimately nourishes the commodity’s gravitation toward the new, the exotic, the spectacular. As in queer theory, many of the activities of Queer Nation took visibility at face value and in so doing short-circuited the historicity of visibility concealed in the logic of the commodity.⁵⁵³

She tells us how this sort of “oversight” is demonstrated by Marx in *Capital* it becomes very much a part of the commodity’s secret and its magic: “A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”⁵⁵⁴, and argues that because Marx’s

...reading of commodity invites us to begin by seeing consciousness, state, and political economy as interlinked historical and material forces by which social life is made and remade, it is a more politically useful critical framework for understanding and combating the commodification of identities than a political economy of the sign.⁵⁵⁵

Hennessy informs us that gays and lesbians have been increasingly visible within the arts and entertainment industries despite their investment in heteronormativity, and comments on the appropriation of gay cultural codes and how gays have even constituted the vanguard in middle-class society. She argues however, that

...this limited assimilation of gays into mainstream middle-class culture does not disrupt postmodern patriarchy and its intersection with capitalism; indeed, it is in some ways quite integral to it...The gender flexibility of postmodern patriarchy is pernicious because it casts the illusion that patriarchy has disappeared.⁵⁵⁶

All we have then are new markets.

Who profits?

Hennessy argues that ‘to a great extent the construction of a new “homosexual / queer spectacle” perpetuates a class-specific perspective that keeps invisible the capitalist divisions of labour that organize sexuality and in particular lesbian, gay, queer lives. In so doing, queer spectacles often

⁵⁵¹ *Op.cit.* p.128.

⁵⁵² Hennessy refers to the work of Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman. 1993. “Queer Nationality.” *Fear of a Queer Planet.* p.168. cited *ibid*

⁵⁵³ *op.cit.* p.128.

⁵⁵⁴ Hennessy quotes Karl Marx. *Capital.* 1959. p.163. cited *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ Hennessy, *op.cit.* p.129.

⁵⁵⁶ *op.cit.* p.137.

participate in a long history of class regulated visibility' ...we are reminded how 'beginning around the mid-nineteenth century, the bourgeois mediated their experience of the working class through spatial as well as cultural/ideological arrangements.'⁵⁵⁷ The working classes were rendered out of sight therefore out of mind and the bourgeois no longer had to endure the trauma of seeing the labouring classes.

There was a development within the academy of an autonomous aesthetic perception beginning with the work carried out by eighteenth century philosophers such as Kant, Hume, and Shaftesbury whereby perceived objects are abstracted from the social context of their creation.

This mode of perception dominates modern culture and aesthetics and both reinforce and are 'necessary to commodity exchange.'⁵⁵⁸ Our attention is drawn to the United States as an example of how 'The {in}visibility of class divisions continues to be spatially regulated by urban planning, but it is also reinforced by changes in first-world relations of production as industry has been increasingly consigned to sites in "developing countries" outside the United States.'⁵⁵⁹ Displaying the gay-friendly policies of "progressive" U. S. corporations, for example, Levi Strauss during the early nineties 'often deflects attention from the exploitative international division of labor they depend on in the interests of a company's bottom line – profits.'⁵⁶⁰ She argues that redressing gay visibility by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play or by promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer 'helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on. These commodified perspectives blot from view lesbians, gays, and queers who are manual workers, sex workers, unemployed, and imprisoned.'⁵⁶¹

Class Analysis and Sexual Identity

Hennessy believes that the concept "class" has yet to be really developed for feminist struggles around sexual identity. Raising a point put forward by Charlotte Bunch, Hennessy quotes her "Idealism can be

⁵⁵⁷ *op.cit.* p.138.

⁵⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ *op.cit.* p.138-9.

⁵⁶⁰ *op.cit.* p.139.

⁵⁶¹ *op.cit.* p.140-141.

abandoned at any time. Survival cannot.’’⁵⁶² There is an assertion that commitment to class struggle is fundamental to feminist sexual politics. In a discussion about the history of the feminist movement Hennessy reminds us that the late seventies and early eighties were a pivotal time in the U.S.A.

As sexual desire moved further onto centre stage in feminist debates, historical materialism, and with it Marxist feminism, came to be dismissed by many feminists as a narrow and reductive class analysis in which sexuality was at worst irrelevant or at best a textual figure or trope.⁵⁶³

We are presented with arguments whereby heterosexuals, lesbians, gays, and queers appear across all class categories. We are informed that when class was mentioned in relation to sexuality it was more often presented as a set of cultural practices associated with a particular group but with no systematic connection to the formation of sexual identities or desires.

In the ensuing decade, this thematizing approach to class and sexuality was reinforced by an energetic and widespread emphasis on identity as a cultural construction and on identity politics. In the humanities and in social theory this meant a lot of attention was being devoted to analysis of the formation of identity and desire through discourses whose connection to other facets of social life, and the division of labor especially, remained unspeakable.⁵⁶⁴

Because gender, sexuality, and sexual identity are so integrated into the cultural and political and economic dimensions of late capitalism, historical materialism’s class analysis is vital for our time.

We should:

make use of historical materialism as a frame for explaining how capitalism bears down on people’s lives, and to extend that analysis to the ways sexuality and gender, political oppression, citizenship, sensuality, social reproduction in the broadest sense, and everyday experience feature in them.⁵⁶⁵

Hennessy advances that most of the work carried out by postmodern theorists has largely ignored emotion and effect. Hennessy makes use of Brian Massumi and Deleuze’s insights whereby: ‘there is an interface between affect and social elements ’and ‘it is here in this interface that ideology – but also education for movement and class consciousness – can intervene.’⁵⁶⁶

Turning to the topic of ‘outlawed need’, a term coined by Deborah Kelsh, Hennessy enquires whether considering the production of affective needs might also be a fruitful way to recast sexual politics.

⁵⁶² Charlotte Bunch. {1987}. *Passionate Politics*. p.180. cited in Hennessy *opcit*. p.178.

⁵⁶³ *op.cit*. p.178-9.

⁵⁶⁴ *op.cit*. p.179.

⁵⁶⁵ *ibid*

The production of outlawed need is the companion to the production of surplus value. 'In capitalist divisions of labor, the extractions of surplus value requires that workers alienate themselves from their human potentials, including their sex-affective potentials.'⁵⁶⁷

Because bodily senses cannot speak for themselves – they have to be *made* “sensible” – the human capacity for sensation and affect is inevitably organized by the discourses of culture-ideology. Under capitalism, sensation and affect have been produced historically such that some ways of meeting these needs have been consolidated into legitimate “experiences” and social relations while others have been outlawed.⁵⁶⁸

Presenting an argument advanced by Wendy Brown in considering the occlusion of class affected by identity politics, it is argued ‘that politics organized around individuated identities was purchased at the cost of naturalizing capitalism.’ However, through a disguised form of class resentment, one that is displaced onto forms of social injustice other than class, it has also been observed that identity politics is in fact bound to capitalist class relations. Brown utilizes Nietzsche’s concept of *resentment* which is a way of marshalling affect into rage or righteousness around a history of injuries. ‘Resentment takes suffering as the measure of social virtue and points to “privilege” as the self-recriminating luxury of those who have not suffered...identities structured around a history of group suffering can also tend to become invested in their own subjection.’⁵⁶⁹

One of Brown’s most incisive arguments is that an identity politics structured out of resentment retains a real or imagined bond to the reviled subject that constitutes its suppressed object of desire. Politicized identities of race, gender, and sexuality participate in this structure of resentment in the following way: even though they abjure a critique of class power, they require a limited identification *through class* “precisely insofar as these identities are established vis-à-vis a bourgeois norm of class acceptance, legal protection, and relative material comfort.”⁵⁷⁰

Hennessy suggests that we form a collective agency and one particular path toward this goal entails “dissidentification”. Dissidentification is a practice of working on existing ways of identifying that we embrace and live by, it is ‘a process of unlearning that opens up the identities we take for granted to the historical conditions that make them possible.’⁵⁷¹ She informs us that these identities need to be uprooted from a history of suffering and also from ways of thinking that invite us to construe them as natural ‘and resituating how we know them in a different historical frame, a frame that allows us to see

⁵⁶⁶ *op.cit.* p.213.

⁵⁶⁷ *op.cit.* p.217.

⁵⁶⁸ *op.cit.* p.217.

⁵⁶⁹ *op.cit.* p.226.

⁵⁷⁰ Wendy Brown. 1995. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. p.60. cited in Hennessy *op.cit.* p.226-7.

⁵⁷¹ Hennessy *op.cit.* p.229.

how this suffering is the product of a mode of production that outlaws a whole array of human needs.⁵⁷² We should tap into the ways outlawed needs and affective needs are channelled by culture-ideology. The narrow resentment of identity politics is to be replaced with a more powerful collective opposition of all of capitalism's disenfranchised subjects. Dissidentification 'involves the critical e-labor-ation or working over of normative identities.'⁵⁷³ It involves countering dominant bodies of knowledge, and resisting the temptation to claim any single group identity and forming a collectivity 'of those whose surplus human needs capitalism has outlawed.'⁵⁷⁴ The process of dissidentification does not mean a simple renunciation of identities, it involves a critical working on them to make visible their historical and material conditions of possibility. It also entails 'a continual effort to sublimate rather than negate what is into what can be.'⁵⁷⁵

The prevailing identities offered us by capitalist culture are not to be replaced but viewed as a starting point for the formation of a more comprehensive, collective agency. Hennessy suggests that:

One of the ways to make use of existing identity forms is to highlight the gap between identities promoted by the dominant culture and the lived 'experience' of social relations that is not summoned by these terms. This is the 'excess' that is often 'experienced' as an inchoate affect of not belonging, of not fitting in or not feeling at home within the terms that are offered for identity. The process of dissidentification can zero in on the affective component of this misrecognition and invite consideration of the ways it is named and routed into emotions {of shame, denial, resentment, etc.} that can naturalize the existing categories. Dissidentification invites the renarration of this affective excess in relation to capitalism's systematic production of unmet need. At the same time it works on forms of misrecognition, dissidentification also make visible the ways the dominant organizations of sexual desires and identities are real sites of affective investment, and through this critical awareness invites a process of unlearning. Unlearning these investments is always an incomplete, unfinished business, and recognizing this is an important lesson on the limits of one's historical position. But this ongoing lesson in historical limits does not have to be dismissive or belittling; it can also fold the forms of affective identification we historically and critically inhabit into a more ambitious political project that claims the radical outside of unmet human needs as the starting point for a much needed anti-capitalist project.⁵⁷⁶

Considerations

Judith Butler's argument that any notion of a normative sexuality is problematic has led me to reconsider my initial call for bisexuality to be viewed as normative. However, the insights gleaned from Hennessy's work show how Judith Butler's notion of performativity is not rescuing materialism.

Hennessy argues that Butler, along with other post-modern theorists, has contributed to the

⁵⁷² *ibid.*

⁵⁷³ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ *op.cit.* p.230.

⁵⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ *op.cit.* pp.230-231.

construction of a neo-liberal public intellectual discourse. Through their formulations of politics and social change they have either participated in the commodification of identities or have intervened in the process only in very local ways. We are informed that Butler's analysis is confined to specific historical contexts foreclosing the possibility of marshalling collectivities for social transformation across differences in historical positioning.

The commodified perspectives of middle-class, avante guard gay consumers maintain the invisibility of ordinary bisexuals like myself because the divisions of labour remain unseen. Hennessy puts into context the reality of living in the world as a sexual minority.

Because Hennessy's work highlights the dangers of severing sexuality from its historical relationship to capitalism, I am aware of how important it is that visibility is conceptualised and considered critically in relation to capital's expansion. Her use of historical materialism informs us that the fetishization of visibility conceals the social relations that "new" or "queer" identities depend on, Hennessy's work therefore assists me in my quest of calling for a "critically bi" identity. Another point I should like to consider is through capitalism the door is opened for new sexualities, but are they authentic or roles dictated by capitalism? Rather than remain subject to the prescriptive forces of capitalism and taking on the performative roles generated, I suggest it is necessary that we seek an authentic subjectivity. This may be obtained by identifying with an excessive God pertained to by Marcella Althaus-Reid in the following section, rather than adhering to the stereotypes generated through capitalist ideologies, one might follow the model of a God who is polyamorous and all inclusive, tolerant of difference and diversity.

Section three

Indecent Theology Incarnational Theology

Marcella Althaus-Reid, like Rosemary Hennessy also presents a materialist understanding of sexuality. Althaus - Reid states: 'theology is a sexual act.'¹ She advances that every theologian is bisexual irrespective of her chosen sexual identity, arguing that if we remain theologically honest [for me this has meant a critical reflection of bisexuality's relation to other sexualities] then in its purist form the theologian's desire will be a critical bisexual desire. It is for this reason I have chosen to include her work as I believe it to be of great value to me in the task of creating a bisexual theology. However, we must be aware that her suggestion - that every theologian is bisexual - may be misinterpreted. There is a danger that her work may be viewed as limited to thinking in binary opposites because not all individuals wish to identify as such, which is why I emphasise that I provide a critical reflection in relation to other sexualities. As I have said, we are exiled within different cultures, Althaus-Reid's place of exile is rooted in the carnival culture of Latin America, which is steeped in bisexual mythology and therefore not universal. At best I would like to understand her to mean that a theologian should be prepared to think in a polyamorous way.

As well as highlighting the limits of the hermenutical circle adopted by feminist liberation theologians, Althaus- Reid also calls for representations of God from excess of orthopraxis by renouncing the masquerades of sexual ideology presented as theology. She maintains that unless there is excess in God too, we women cannot be represented. She recognises a parallel in women and the pattern of God's transcendence in that God cannot be completely fixed in history, because God Godself is always "more" or excessive.² Her work is intended as a critical continuation of feminist liberation theology using a multi disciplinary approach.

¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. {London, New York: Routledge.2000} *op.cit.* p.87.

² Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*. {London, New York: Routledge. 2003 }

Althaus-Reid looks forward with tremendous hope to a time when the courageous voices of women theologians encourage systematic theological and hierarchical ecclesiastical suicides of hegemonic representations of God in theology. She asks why, as liberation theologians -with the exception of many Latin American women theologians - after we have been working in a hermenutical circle of suspicion for almost thirty years, the sexual representation of the universe, God included, has not been taken seriously and subjected to theological suspicion? She does however realise the tremendous difficulties facing women theologians who choose to cross boundaries. 'The limits of the hermenutical circle have been fixed by sexual assumptions, and any woman theologian who crosses these boundaries is either ignored or her challenges simply fail to become crucial for every liberationists orthopraxis.'³ Her purpose is not to demolish liberation theology in a European academic fashion, 'but to explore the contextual hermenutical circle of suspicion in depth by questioning the traditional liberationist context of doing theology. In this way the project of Indecent Theology represents both a continuation of liberation theology and a disruption of it.'⁴

Althaus-Reid argues that we need to understand liberation theology 'as a continuing process of recontextualisation, a permanent exercise of serious doubting in theology.'⁵ She asserts, 'as liberation theologians we are not immune to idealism and romantic visions of femininity' although she concedes that liberation theology 'has made a very important contribution towards androcentric dislocations world-wide'.⁶ Taking her lead from gender theorist Judith Butler she argues: 'feminist liberation theologies have taken for granted the male/female sexual identity and gender constructions in theology,'⁷ they have been striving for complementarity rather than sexual disruption and difference in order to produce an epistemological paradigm shift. They have not recognised gender identities for what they really are 'the performative acts of the representation of sexuality'.⁸ Althaus-Reid tells us that analysis of sexual constructions has the effect of destabilising the sexual foundations of economic and political theories, and also unveils the sexual ideology of systematic theology, the true nature of

³ Althaus-Reid in her essay 'Indecent Exposures: Excessive Sex and the Crisis of Theological Representations', cited in Lisa Isherwood, {ed}, *The Good News of the Body* {2000} *op.cit* p.218.

⁴ Althaus-Reid, {2000} *op.cit.* introduction p.5.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *op.cit.* introduction p.6.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, {1990 p.5.} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

theology is then seen as being a sexual project from its epistemological foundation based on a sexed understanding of dualistic relationships and its legitimacy role.

The marginalisation of sexuality from issue based theologies from poverty in Althaus-Reid's continent 'shows how far we are still from renouncing the masquerade of sexual ideology presented as theology.'⁹

There needs to be a challenge that goes beyond the comfortable frontiers provided by centuries of representation of God in an androcentric universe. The French philosopher Georges Bataille's {1981} woman God, the poor and sexually explicit 'Madam Edwarda' becomes a metaphor of God incarnated in a context of poverty, violence and sexuality. This poor woman prostitute is represented as God not from the excess of Orthodoxy but from an excess of Orthopraxis. We are told:

a prostitute is the perfect symbol of faith where economic and sexual oppression are the boundaries of the incarnation while the prostitutes suffering and struggle may direct us toward the revelation of divine justice at odds with patriarchal justice.... The suffering body of a woman then becomes the space of God, and her sex, the privileged site of a transcendental meaning which does not include hyperinflation and under-employment, but relates to them.¹⁰

Althaus-Reid argues:

Systematic theologians have not yet become completely aware of the importance of a reflection based on the dialectic of the *lips of God*; the lips that Madam Edwarda shows to the divine seeker as a testimony of her divinity, while asking him to look at and kiss her as in a parallel episode with a "doubting Thomas."¹¹

A metaphor of an excessive God represented in the excess of poverty and women's sexuality is problematic to systematic theology because it appears to be theologically threatening and deeply destabilising, this 'makes us dismiss that sheer materiality of the representation of God as Madam Edwarda almost instinctively.'¹² However that representation has theological promise. It promises to rediscover for us a deeper understanding of the sacred in relation to feminine sexuality, it also confronts us with the fact that the crisis of theological representations of God, poverty and women are linked to each other by close ties and it makes obvious that our problem is not only that as women we do not have a theological language, but we may have too much of it. She argues:

⁹ Althaus-Reid cited in Isherwood, {2000}, *op.cit.* p.206.

¹⁰ *op.cit.* p.208.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

We are not doing theology from an empty space of systematic systems but on the contrary, our work is deeply attached to a theological method of discernment and representation embodied in the ideals of Androcentric Systematic Theology with an inner logic which obeys androcentric forms of economic and sexual production which are basically obsessively sexual.¹³

‘We need to renounce and become strangers to faith and theology as metaphorical texts, in order to recover the context of our discourses.’¹⁴ Our challenge is ‘one of sexual concreteness in theological reflection, and in a quest for a no-transcendental feminist theology...Androcentric Theology has never been a transcendental theology.’ Its orthodoxy ‘come from ideological {and sexually ideological} understandings of reality that have been systematically projected towards a construction of the sacred.’ This is why ‘theology falls easy prey to masquerades, or carnival representations of reality which have been reified by sexual ideologies from the past.’¹⁵

As well as adjudicating bodies’ false identities, androcentric theologies also cover, reorganise and disorganise them, and also create a static God.

God is also a case of false identity entrapped in the claim of transcendence, while in reality, one can hardly speak of transience if the concept of God cannot cross the pavement between a heterosexual and a lesbian; or between a prostitute and an Almighty Father.¹⁶

She tells us, ‘Madam Edwarda as a scandalous God, provides us with an exercise of representing God from below in a methodology of indecent exposure at the confluence of women, poverty and sexuality.’¹⁷

She argues that it is unfortunate for us ‘a radical theology such as Liberation Theology considers that sex and poverty do not mix well. It may be the same in the case of God: God is visible, almost corporeal in God’s presence, in the concreteness of history but rendered invisible by theology.’¹⁸

Why should we not ask why God cannot be represented as a prostitute? Suspicion in theological systems of representation arises when we posit the ‘Madam Edwarda’ question. ‘The feminisation of the sacred is not accepted because it threatens to destabilise the centrality of God, which depends basically on male-centric systems of meaning.’¹⁹ However, I have found this use of the prostitute as a

¹³ *op.cit.* pp. 208-209.

¹⁴ *op.cit.* p.209.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *op.cit.* pp.216-217.

representation of God is not new. Examples can be found in the Bible and we can see the idea of the prostitute being interpreted in different ways, for example Yvonne Sherwood shows how the story of Hosea with its modelling of Israel as prostitute has been interpreted throughout the centuries. In *The Prostitute and the Prophet* she provides a semiotic analysis of Hosea and highlights points of dissonance between text and reader looking at apologies and interpretations stating; 'Every commentator looks at the text from a certain angle and corners it in a certain way.'²⁰ Through her analysis she suggests that some commentators have attempted to reinstate 'platonic standards'...there is an emphasis to ensure 'that the only relationship between a man of God and such a woman is a platonic {asexual} one.' asserting 'critics, have insisted on logical and sexual propriety.'²¹ Althaus-Reid argues that for women, 'the crisis of representations of God is linked to the limitations of epistemological, meaningful fixation of borders of sexual and gender constructions.'²²

Madam Edwarda need not be our exclusive model of representation of God, but we need to learn to recognise an image of God nearer to our collectively scandalous, indecent lives trying to survive patriarchal society and religion, while finding God in the 'betweenness' of our lives and in our own margins which are sexual and economic margins of contradiction, and love and some hope. What is required is an Indecent Exposure of God, which may help us to overcome the internalised oppression of Androcentric Theology while encouraging us to develop solidarity at the margins of the margins of constructed sexuality, theology and economy.²³

Althaus-Reid maintains that one of the steps we can take as indecent theologians is to introduce an indecent production of God and Jesus. Jesus may be seen as someone with whom out-of-the-closet lesbians, gays, bisexuals and heterosexuals can identify. However:

Indecent Theology must go further in its disrespect for the interpellative, normative forces of patriarchal theology. It must have the right to say not only that a lesbian can identify herself with a liberator Christ but that it must sexually deconstruct Christ too. Then indecent theologians may say: 'God, the Faggot; God, the Drag Queen; God, the Lesbian; God, the heterosexual woman who does not accept the constructions of ideal heterosexuality; God, the ambivalent, not easily classified sexuality.'²⁴

Identifying with such an outrageous God and to say "God the Faggot" or even "God the Bi" we can lay claim to a different epistemology that may also challenge and positively appropriate words used to humiliate and denigrate.

Exiled into the Land of Heterosexuality

²⁰ Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and The Prophet: Reading Hosea in the Late Twentieth Century* {London, New York: T&T Clark. 2004} p.23.

²¹ *op.cit.* p.81.

²² Althaus-Reid in Isherwood, {2000} *op.cit.* p.217.

²³ *op.cit.* pp.221-222.

In her book *The Queer God*, Althaus-Reid states:

A queer theologian has many passports because she is a theologian in diaspora, that is, a theologian who explores at the crossroads of Christianity issues of self identity and the identity of her community, which are related to sexuality, race, culture, and poverty.²⁵

She maintains, ‘as indecent theologians we do not need to accept a claim to neutrality but maintain a responsible position in the divine cartography of pleasure and desire.’²⁶ I hope that I qualify on the terms written above as well as occupying ‘the primordial and complex space of exclusion in the narratives of Genesis.’²⁷ As Althaus-Reid explains, ‘it is the first and most important of the passports’²⁸ an indecent theologian needs to acquire.

To clarify what she means by exile, she talks about the utopian beginning of the “Queer diaspora” which will start with ‘Other sexualities expelled from the Eden of loving, godly relationships and exiled in lands of heterosexuality.’²⁹ She begins by reminding us that Genesis has been viewed as the text which has carried heavy responsibilities for the subjugation of women and also of nature. ‘The traditional reading of Genesis has made of mastery and domination over women and nature a theological virtue.’³⁰ However, following Patton and S’anchez-Eppler {2000}, she tells us that:

a deeper sexual reading of Genesis may show us that beyond issues of heterosexual control over women, there is a more profound dynamics, a divine dynamics which creates mechanisms of sexual exclusion, one in which homosexuality {represented in this reading by Adam and God’s particular loving friendship} is in reality what ends in the exclusion from Eden.³¹

Coming from ‘the displaced love between a man and a God-man’, viewed by Althaus-Reid as a ‘primordial sexual diaspora, ...may be the reason why Queer theologies are usually biographical theologies.’³² They are also theologies of tactics, Althaus-Reid quotes Patton and S’anchez-Eppler ‘using tactical queerness to cruise places occupied by normative straightness.’³³

Queer theologies go into diasporas by using tactics of temporary occupation; disruptive practices which are not necessarily to be repeated, and reflections which aim to be disconcerting. At the

²⁴ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, {2003} *op.cit.* p.95.

²⁵ Althaus-Reid, *op.cit.* p.7.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *op.cit.* p.8.

³⁰ *op.cit.* p.7.

³¹ *op.cit.* p.8.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Patton and S’anchez-Eppler {2000 p.14} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

bottom line of Queer theologies, there are biographies of sexual migrants, testimonies of real lives in rebellions made of love, pleasure and suffering.³⁴

She paraphrases Kosofsky Sedgwick when she suggests that ‘Queer Theologies are those characterised by an ‘I’ because the Queer discourse only becomes such when done in the first person.’³⁵ She states that Queer Theology is ‘a first person theology: diasporic, self-disclosing, autobiographical and responsible for its own words.’³⁶ As I have highlighted, it is vital that we are allowed the opportunity to speak for ourselves, indeed, until relatively recently before the advent of Feminist Liberation Theologies whereby we women began to name our own questions and offer our own answers, it had been men who have spoken for women often with dreadful consequences. Moreover, it would be an injustice to restrict bisexual people like myself, full expression, even if what we have to say calls into question and/or contradicts lesbian/gay and heterosexual experiences. ‘Theology is not a game to win but a process in which to participate faithfully.’³⁷

Althaus-Reid suggests that we therefore need to begin a reflection intimately linked to God-talk on loving and pleasurable relationships, in order to reflect on issues of the theologian’s identity and ways of doing a Queer Theology. She talks about the important challenges queer theology brings to theology in the twenty first century by un-shaping, what she calls, ‘Totalitarian Theology {T-Theology}’, this will be brought about through the experiences of sexuality and loving relationships which will in turn re-shape the theologians. She writes:

The point is that in the process of queering theology, this intricate relationship between theology and the theologians cannot be pulled apart without losing something in the process. What queering theologies may lose in the process gives space for new, even if sometimes contingent, formations. For instance, Queer theologies do not disregard church traditions. However, the process of queering may turn them upside down, or submit them to collage-style processes by adding and highlighting from them precisely those elements which did not fit well in the construction of the church tradition and thus were excluded or ignored.³⁸

To produce an autobiographical theology is difficult because on what/who’s authority do we base it on? Do we base it on capitalist dictates with its inherent heteropatriarchal underpinnings? What past

³⁴ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Debora Kalodny, {ed} *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith* {New York, London: Cotinum, 2000} xiv.

role models of ethical behaviours do we have and how should we conduct our lives and enact our beliefs? How do we live in relation to self and others and remain true to our integrity in light of a divine human relationship that is not universally accepted in a patriarchal world view? It is my suggestion that if we have a God who is contingent it is possible that we can form our relationships with others based on such contingency through a continuing process of negotiation, re-negotiation, adaptation to changes in each individuals lifetime, it then becomes a process of becoming.

Althaus-Reid argues that ‘disruption is our diaspora.’³⁹ Processes of sexual ideological disruption in Christianity are called for. Rather than struggling for its continuity ‘by disrupting the sexual ideology of Christianity, a whole political project which works against peoples lives is also disrupted.’⁴⁰

Althaus-Reid tells us that this is what the original nations in Latin America understood when they were under sufferance to the conquistadors. She explains how Christianity came to her continent ‘as a sexual project concerned with the praxis of specific heterosexual understandings elevated to a sacred level’⁴¹ rather than to explain Christian theology. We are reminded how some Jesuit missions during the sixteenth century held civil and criminal courts, where sexual disobedience to the Christian European norms was punishable and how the elders called people to rebel against the conquistador’s oppression. Recorded documents were uncovered:

which testify that the religious and political leaders of the *Nahua* nations questioned the sexual understanding of Christian marriage and that in 1680, the revolt of the Pueblo Indians started a call to bigamy and concubinage as a way to return to their own traditions and understanding of sex and society.⁴²

She believes that it was the result of political and economic oppression that the call to fidelity, to God and bigamy began in Latin America and this is an important part of the theological tradition of sexual disruption.

To call for Other sexual praxis ‘represents a biographical tradition of sexual disruption in the church, because it concerns people’s lives, love stories and the suffering of the imposed Christian marriage by the state and the church of the time.’⁴³ Althaus-Reid talks of ‘rescued memories which become new

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *op.cit.* p.9.

⁴⁰ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Wiesner-Hanks, {2000:158} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁴³ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

sources of church traditions from which we would like to reflect in theology' these, 'may encourage us also to share our own stories of sexual disruption.'⁴⁴

Her own story as an eight year old about to take her first communion, which she endeavours to queer, is related to the Church tradition of kneeling, 'specifically to kneeling in front of a priest's penis.'⁴⁵ She tells us how for ritualistic purposes, boys were expected to kneel in front of the priest and girls were to kneel at the right side of the priest. She however, knelt in front of the priest by mistake and through her refusal to move from her position was forced to confess, 'without knowing it, I somehow became by default a confessor in myself.'⁴⁶ What she had done was to disregard her sexual position in the Church's structure. She writes: 'in retrospect, one could see the liturgical symbolic geography relating to gender and sexual positions in the church's structures starting to be organised, precociously, amongst that group of eight year old children.'⁴⁷ Suggesting that:

The ritual of kneeling has several elements for us to consider. First, the dialectics present at the liturgy of the confessor/confessant or the 'who is who' of the church order; second, the sexual geography of the ritual, which may be considered at the base of heterosexual relationships and marriage.⁴⁸

She asserts that:

Kneeling is troublesome and it has a theological referent in the church's also troubled waters of sexuality and power. A whole symbolic sexual order is obviously manifested in kneelings as positions of subordination and sites of possible homo- and hetero- seductions, because these are theologically distributed around the axis of the priesthood's male genitalia. The priest's penis carries the sacred connotations of the phallus as a transcendental signifier of the theological discourses to everyday Christianity, and kneeling is a liturgical positing designed to centralise and highlight this.⁴⁹

Althaus-Reid informs us that we are confronted with a geography in which we need to make the distinction between the events and the ordering of knowledge by doing a theological reflection that takes as a point of departure the genital axis of T-Theology. Following Elspeth Probyn in her distinction

between 'locale and location', Althaus-Reid maintains that:

⁴⁴ *op.cit.* p.10.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *op.cit.* p.11.

⁴⁷ *op.cit.* p.10.

⁴⁸ *op.cit.* p.11.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

we may distinguish here between the local as a place {for instance the marital home or the theologically adjudicated places of women in liturgical acts} and the location {the ordering of knowledge; its logical sequence from, for instance, Western heterosexuality}.⁵⁰

We are confronted with both elements and their complex set of relationships through a process of Queer localising of our reflections.

The locale is the event of kneeling and the special configuration of it; it is also the affectivity model {or lack of it} presented in the church. The location is theology as a type of knowledge which orders these spaces of determination for the theologian and for her love life.⁵¹

The sensual actions Althaus-Reid has referred to thus far are ‘sexual and political ones’, she tells us that ‘they imply sensuous, material positions around hierarchical church models constructed from the axis of priests’ penises. They are economic and political and organisational models which organise love, finances, God and theology based on their historical positional understandings.’⁵²

She argues that ‘The materiality of this reflection extends beyond the flow of desire analysed in Feminist Theology, which does not consider pleasure as the site of theological reflection.’⁵³ She suggests that if we intend to take a position in the ‘small circuit of dualistic, hierarchical understandings of the behaviour of sacramental bodies and souls’,⁵⁴ we should start by asking how we can consider the theologian as an event, independently of her doing theology and how she should be located or positioned.

She informs us that theology works quite naturally in secretive spaces that tend to be violent and dyadic because it has been developed as a closeted heterosexual art. To explain she writes:

the kneelings occur in the liturgical sites of the dyads of God and humanity; Father God and Son God; Creator and created. Even the Trinity has become a dyad, independently of mathematics, in this short -circuiting of amorous relational patterns of heterosexual ideologies in theology. In that short circuit, violence occurs by death, by abortions. Life is prevented and excluded.⁵⁵

By considering a theologian as an event, Althaus-Reid means that they are representative of a certain kind of relationship in respect of her particular position in relation to the church and Christianity. ‘The

⁵⁰ Elspeth Probyn, {1990:178.} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁵¹ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁵² *op.cit.* p.12.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

event is a coming out of a significant anarchism against dyads.⁵⁶ She maintains that theological reflections have a kind of secretiveness much like the heterosexual ideological 'secretiveness between two's; this is the logic of husband and mistress; or husband and boyfriend; or wife and her beloved: their secret cannot be shared with the spouse.'⁵⁷ She argues that when theology functions as a sexual ideology based on dyads, that quality of secretiveness is passed to theological reflections.

She enquires whether the theologian, as a confessor/confessant, might have the ability to disturb this type of theological reflection and concludes that she may have if confession is considered positively, as a

Queer thing. 'Both in the sense of, following Kosofsky Sedgwick, being a transitive experience or a *troublant* declaration cutting across communication with elements of sexual difference and restless positions.'⁵⁸ Althaus-Reid poses the questions:

Is the Queer theologian amongst the absolvers or the absolved of the sins of ideology? Is she sitting inside the confessional or does she prefer to kneel down on the cold church tiles? Opposite to what? Arguing with the phallus, or glancing at it from a safe distance?⁵⁹

She maintains that the theologian is a confessor of the past, who does so,

...by discerning the transmission of beliefs while expecting two things to happen. The first is that a continuation of the re-representation of a theological praxis will happen again. This is a belief in resurrections, and needs to be understood in the sense that every theological community deals with and elaborates on the memory of significant events which provide encouragement for new Christian action and reflection, and also forgiveness for the oppressive theological past. Second, and in relation to this last point, is that the theologian expects this encounter of communities from past and present to create a new understanding by the act of resignifying the past in a sharing of memories of belief in itself. However, those memories may need to be resignified to be forgiven in the act of confession, as the sharing of memories in the confessional is a forceful act, not anymore spontaneous but responsive, in the sense of responding according to a provided theological expectation.⁶⁰

In order to show us how 'disabling memories can be for a person whose identity is in struggle with a past and whose whole process of identity formation is made of disruptions and not continuations',⁶¹

⁵⁶ *op.cit.* p.13.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* {1994: xii} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *op.cit.* pp.13-14.

⁶¹ *op.cit.* p.14.

Althaus-Reid evokes the analytical work of Elspeth Probyn {1996},⁶² who reviewed Jeanette Winterson's novel *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* {1990}.⁶³ 'The past may just be saying what we are not, while having a role in disauthorising the process that we have become.'⁶⁴ Althaus-Reid informs us that the role of the theologian is constituted in the confessional link between communities of Christian praxis. The confession act is rooted in the dynamics of "retroaction" in which, Althaus-Reid tells us, Levinus saw the role of forgiveness. 'Obviously there is a sexual genealogy and epistemic construction of the Christian ethics of confession.'⁶⁵ She informs us how Foucault's hermeneutics of desire has uncovered 'issues related to the sexual ethical embodiment of confession in relation to docility and other mechanisms of oppression internalised by the act of representing the story and the identity of the Other in historical Christian confession.'⁶⁶ She tells us that a crucial point has been unveiled 'related to what Butler calls the localisation of the heterosexual matrix, localised in our understanding of confession and the role of the theologian as confessor.'⁶⁷ Althaus-Reid believes that this is important 'because Christian ethics is a discourse concerned with the body of the sacred itself.'⁶⁸

The acknowledgement of the heterosexual matrix is important because how we treat each other not just on a personal level but, in a larger social context, is intimately concerned with the ethics or beliefs relating to which bodies reflect or embody the divine.

A Critical Bisexual Desire

Althaus-Reid argues that Queer theologians should be suspicious of a theological dyad represented in the confessor/confessant dynamic. She also calls us to 'come out in an almost sacrificial way', because 'theological confessions are costly and demanding, and cannot be taken lightly.'⁶⁹ The reason is:

even if we understood the role of the theologian as a complimentary mixture of confessor and confessant we still struggle for limited choices. This happens because we declare the past for forgiveness but also absolve it because theologians belong to the same community of Christians which re-represents the theological discourse.⁷⁰

⁶² Althaus-Reid cites Elspeth Probyn 'Travels in the Postmodern : Making Sense of the Local' in L. Nicholson {ed} *Feminism/Postmodernism* {London Routledge 1996}

⁶³ Althaus-Reid refers to the work of Jeanette Winterson *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* {London: Vintage 1990}

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Althaus-Reid refers to the work of Judith Butler *Gender Trouble* {1990-1999:12} *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *op.cit.* pp.14-15.

Althaus-Reid suggests that theologians have so far been reluctant in producing an unstable theology. However, she believes the way forward, lies in the theologians commitment to pervert Christian theology by remaining involved in the hard problematising of her role and vocation, and to also disrobe herself of what underwear is left in her standing as a theologian. She suggests that it is, at times, the way of “electrocutions” which become part of life. She maintains that even though Churches and theology have to their peril been ignoring it, the theologian’s flow of desire, in its purest form, is a critical bisexual desire and the evocation of this way of theologising is one way to electrocution.

She is clear in explaining however, that this is:

not a question of an individual sexual identity, but of an epistemological identity which considers bisexuality critically, that is, not assuming that bisexuality *per se* is a liberative force unless there is a critical reflection of its relation to other sexualities.⁷¹

Althaus-Reid maintains that theology is the art of a critical bisexual action and reflection on God and humanity, which is independent of the sexual identity of the theologian as an individual. She informs us that ‘the bisexual theologian’ is not viewed as a new and interesting perspective to add to what is already done, and it is for this reason that a bisexual critical epistemology could be considered one of the main challenges for any theologian, more importantly, ‘it is only bisexuality which displaces and causes tension to the established heterosexual dyad implicit in the theologian’s identity and task.’⁷² As an example Althaus-Reid states; ‘in theology the dyad of the heterosexual family is not so different from the one of confessor and confessant before subversion.’⁷³ She maintains that this should not be surprising:

...because the theologian as a heterosexual species is in itself a reminder of the provisional status of any confession of faith, or declaration of fidelity to sexual positions in Christianity. The bisexual theologian {or the theologian who thinks critically bi- or polyamorously} is in the unique position of acting and reflecting in a theological praxis based on two basic elements: first, the relation to the closet, and second, the way of transcendence via the instability of God, sexual identity and humanity.⁷⁴

Reiterating what has been said so far Althaus-Reid states: ‘irrespective of her chosen sexual identity, in the act of doing theology the theologian’s vocation is towards what we have called a critical

⁷⁰ *op.cit.* pp.15.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

bisexuality.⁷⁵ Theologians are made bisexual practitioners through the liturgical location of confession, to elaborate Althaus-Reid reminds us that ‘theologians are only able to confess their faith {or discernments of belief} in their communities by publicly declaring their faith in certain relationships: for instance, a belief in certain patterns of relationships, such as the case of the Trinity.’⁷⁶ She argues that if we believe in the Trinity we accept theology as an art which follows a path of reflections marked by ‘disruptions of dyads or scandals’, we do not see it as ‘a dyadic, one-to-one relationship with issues of dogma and tradition.’⁷⁷ Rather than God is one, manifested in a father-son relationship, ‘God is a relationship of three.’⁷⁸

Using a biblical metaphor, Althaus-Reid informs us ‘this is a disruption of *scandalons* or little stones on the pavements of theology which are an important part of the presence of the “third” in theology as a process.’⁷⁹ She argues that ‘Queer relationships provide the encounter of the third type in theology *par excellence*’.⁸⁰ She explains this by stating ‘the confessional scene is made by an encounter of the third, or the encounter with the Queer, because the dyad is disrupted by someone else who confesses a difference, or non-alignment with herself.’⁸¹

Evoking the words of Lacan, ‘There is no Other of the Other’,⁸² Althaus-Reid tells us that Lacan is referring to the symbolic Father:

but if we use this concept for God, we could say that Queer Theology has restored the Other in the Other; that is, it has proved that God has a back. It is God who confesses God’s primordial non-alignment with Godself, that is, God’s back is made of difference.⁸³

Thinking in a triadic way, which Althaus-Reid says is “permutative” rather than complimentary, we are provided with a location of non-rigid exchanges amongst people’s actions and reflections, as a base for theology rooted in more genuine and diverse dialogues. Althaus-Reid argues that ‘theology as a critical bisexual art can still be thematic and particular.’⁸⁴ This is because ‘bisexual desires do not relate

⁷⁵ *op.cit.* p.16.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² M. Marini, *Jaques Lacan: The French Context*, {1992:178} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁸³ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

indiscriminately to any form of sexual identities, but only to some form of sexual identities which heterosexuality cannot necessarily grasp.’⁸⁵ Althaus-Reid writes:

Perhaps the point in Bisexual Theology is that the instability of the sexual construction of Christian ethics, the reading of the Scriptures and systematic theology becomes more obvious in their contextual and transitive processes of desire. That is the nature of the subversiveness in theology which lies at the core of a critical bisexual praxis.⁸⁶

The theological process differs precisely because bisexual desires cannot be pinned down in a stable or fixed way. She states that ‘to think three is to think an exchange system, not a role model system {as happens for instance in the heterosexual understanding of the Trinity}.’⁸⁷

She evokes Josiah Royce’s idea of the “social infinite” to explain how ‘in a triadic heterosexual relationship the three terms in relation are not meant to be interchangeable but specific to certain tasks.’⁸⁸ And it is ‘in this sense, the understanding which may go beyond the family model of two does not necessarily obliterate traces of discrepancy.’⁸⁹ She does argue however, that ‘critical bisexual thinking may be closer to a way of thinking which could leave behind the complicity {and we will add, secretiveness} of rigid dyads.’⁹⁰ The point she is endeavouring to make is that theology involves more than a domestic contractual act of two people and is not simply a private matter. Therefore, ‘a triadic Bisexual Theology has a third, undisclosed sexual component in the confessor/confessant model.’⁹¹

Viewed as a process, Althaus-Reid suggests that;

...this may almost be represented as a body of knowledge, the body of the Queer Other in transits from closets while relating with other bodies in their own transits. Triads are more than three only if this flux exists. Using a Trinitarian example we can say that every Trinitarian divine person is related to other bodies who share their own particular closets while interchanging affections and economies with any other bodies of the Trinity, and in a location made up of different circumstantial contexts.⁹²

She suggests that ‘understanding this fluidity of thinking and by permanently introducing “unsuitable” new partners in theology’, the Queer theologian will develop a Bisexual Theology. She states that ‘this is precisely what allows changes of position and numbers in her confessor/confessant vocation.’⁹³ She

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ R. Gibbs, *Why Ethics? Signs of Responsibilities*. {2000:250} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Althaus-Reid, *op.cit.* pp.16-17.

⁹⁰ *op.cit.* p.17.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

talks about a disciplined Christian body and the Foucaultian theory of the effects of dominant moral codes that go far beyond the effects of docility amongst bodies.

Dominant moral codes are far more subtle and dangerous because they constitute the embodied ethos {and ethics} of the people who follow them. This is an ethics that is a hermeneutics, because its goal and objectives move around the re-interpretation of bodies.⁹⁴

She talks about it performing:

a kind of cosmetic surgery to dissimilate bodies, in order to train and push them through selective performative praxis towards a confessed agreement. Such agreement has been based on the sexual action and reflections of a disciplined Christian body.⁹⁵

She informs us that according to Foucault, the hermeneutics which are responsible for the self - induced formation of the body come from a dialectics of punishment and confession. Following Paulo Freire, she talks about his concept of prescriptive behaviour, 'punishment is hell by indocility, or by an option when opting is not accepted, but confession is, following Paulo Freire, the art of internalised oppression not only by rejecting actions but also disavowing the attitude of opting.'⁹⁶

She maintains that:

This is Foucault's ethical hermeneutics in a nutshell: by confessing, the subject allows itself to be re-represented and interpreted by an Other who has followed a similar pattern before. Confession is, therefore, the closest image we may have of hell.⁹⁷

Althaus-Reid enquires whether the theologian is 'supposed to confess her desire for hell as an alternative and a right against a Sexual Theology behaving as an authoritarian ideology? Or an escape from prescriptive hetero-hells of love?'⁹⁸ By becoming suspicious and unfaithful, Althaus-Reid tells us that the theologian can become a Queer confessant, 'in that case, the Queer confessor starts doing theology by acknowledging her first longing, that is, the exile of her body.'⁹⁹ She argues that 'critical Bisexual theologians produce a shift in the disciplinary systematisation of theological labour and domesticity by simply replacing what we call the politics of mono-loving'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ *op.cit.* p.18.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Althaus-Reid follows Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, {1979:37} and his concept of prescriptive behaviour. *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *op.cit.* pp.18-19.

⁹⁸ *op.cit.* p.19.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

Theologian of Exiles and Bisexual ways of Thinking

Althaus-Reid informs us that we may need to look no further than Latin America, if we wish to reflect on the theologian as a confessor/confessant. She writes: ‘these theological bisexual sources need to be found not only in bisexual stories, but in ways of thinking.’¹⁰¹ Good examples are provided in popular songs and she talks about the lesbian Mexican singer Chavela Vargas who she describes as a critical bi/thinker who ‘destabilises what she stabilises by claiming her lesbian identity’.¹⁰² Althaus-Reid informs us:

By assuming the purity of her lesbian life, she destabilises the purity of the moral assumptions of heterosexuality, by displacing the category of contamination and moral illness associated in Latin America with homosexuality by so-called straight people. Meanwhile, she stabilises this displacement by finding a divine origin to her lesbianism, what she calls the ‘gift of her gods’.¹⁰³

Althaus-Reid utilises the metaphor of the tango to convey the full flavour of what a bisexual theology in exile is. She talks about tangos and Mexican songs where we see the displacement of desire {unrequited love or forbidden love} and displacement of social locations. She tell us that ‘tangos are songs about different forms of being “exiled” and, as such, represent the experience of exile abroad or in a more general term, in the “internal exile experience” of one’s own country.’¹⁰⁴ We are informed that ‘This is the reason why tangos are Queer, because they represent a longing, a melancholia of displacements.’¹⁰⁵

The bisexual theologian for Althaus-Reid is understood as a theologian in/of exiles, a nomadic subject.

She is the theologian who confesses to being away from home not even knowing where home is, while refusing to allow representations of herself or her own representation of others, if these deny the reality of exile not as a category lacking { settlement, or a going back home, for instance} but as a place to be in itself. A theologian who can only participate in contingent processes of representation of people in transit, nomadic subjects who follow their longing for different forms of purity and holiness and especially find their grace in the lands of the sexually exiled.¹⁰⁶

She informs us that the bisexual theologian positions herself in relation to sexuality and in relation to others outside the established territory of a dis-embodied Christian ethics. Confession is an ‘intimate

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *op.cit.* p.20.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ M. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, {1995:xiv} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *op.cit.* p.21.

act amongst the exiled.¹⁰⁷ We are reminded that ‘ethical thinking is related to a “dwelling” or a practice of dwelling as configured in the bodily acts of Christian people.’¹⁰⁸ To relate in a non-exclusive or a non-mono loving way what ethical questions are raised if our current ethics are based on a model of heterosexuality? Althaus-Reid argues that there is a need for Christian ethics ‘to represent other bodies and their desires according to a particular constitution of the habitat and the habitual.’ She highlights R Diprose’s critique of a universalist contractarian ethics, which, it is stated, ‘cannot deal with sexual differences, as they construct categories of the habitat and the habitual in uniform ways, basically the ways of the {heterosexualised} idealised white middle class man.’¹⁰⁹

Following Foucault, Althaus-Reid reminds us that ethics is understood as a hermeneutics of self-formation, however, she also argues that ‘the dilemmas of the Queer theologian are also related to disrupted processes of self-formation.’¹¹⁰ Being at the core of the confessant theologies, self-representation processes ‘can allow themselves to be subsumed at the end, whatever queerness appears.’¹¹¹ Referring first to the work of A. Jagose Althaus-Reid argues:

the art of the confessional is an art of listening without consolidating , or to follow an argument from Butler, the Queer theologian may confess and receive confessions on the intentions and effects of the theo/political discourse, its resistance points and its attempts to recover the Queer subject by the existing network of power. This may be an act of ‘tangoing’ in itself.¹¹²

Tangoing ‘may disclose the fundamental differences between the critical Bisexual theologian and the mono-loving one.’¹¹³ This is because the call is to disrupt certainty.

Considerations

Althaus-Reid’s work has a great deal of significance for me in my endeavour because it is rooted in experiential Christology and her theoretical model of the bisexual theologian enables me to develop an experiential critical bisexual theology. Her work demonstrates the importance of remaining ever

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ R. Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference*, {1994:19} cited in Althaus-Reid, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Althaus-Reid refers to the work of Diprose {1994:20} *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² Althaus-Reid refers to the work of A. Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction* {1996:131} and Judith Butler {1990-1999:32} *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

critical of our sexual positions in relation to others, that is, before we can view bisexuality as a liberative force,

there must be a critical reflection of its relation to other sexualities. She also highlights how there is a lack of creativity if we hold on to our images of mono-loving gods and relationships. I understand when we question such images of God and also ask which bodies can image the divine we get to a radical incarnational theology because bisexuality is not just a way of thinking but is manifest in body knowing. Bisexual people offer a further perspective in the idea of the divine to that of women, black, lesbian and gay theologies because a bisexual God explodes the view of God as mono or duo. If God is polyamorous we can use the language of God with all its inherent understanding as this implies a discrete being rather than a God who is disclosed between people in relationship, God then becomes unpredictable. This image of God or the divine can then be found in relationships that empower.

Through her formulation of an excessive and destabilised God, Althaus-Reid demonstrates how we can introduce the concept of a divine subject in theology, that subject is a woman who wishes to reconsider heterosexuality from a bisexual out-of-the closet theology. For her there is a bi-identity, an either or, also a place to be. However, as I have suggested my bi-interpretation goes beyond hers because I have provided a critical analysis of heterosexuality. I have also highlighted how we are exiled within different cultures whereby her place of exile is in the carnival culture of Latin America which is steeped in bisexual mythology and therefore not universal. How then would a bisexual theology liberate women in other parts of the world where there are no such myths? We have no bisexual theology because in our culture we have an androcentric religion based on monogamous heterosexuality we therefore need to create new myths with a constant need to review them in light of the differences between the lived lives of women, there must be no unilateral feminist stance. Indeed we need to review the myth of queer theory in light of the acknowledgement of many sexualities, bisexuality makes possible the acceptance of all sexualities because it is inclusive of difference.

Summary and Conclusion.

In section one I began by highlighting the problems and challenges homosexuality presented toward Christian theology. This was so that I might provide a background for my work and to also consider whether there were any usable strands I could take from it in order that I might possibly form a bisexual theology. I presented the Vatican's view on homosexuality, whereby it was originally seen as an intrinsic moral evil, and demonstrated how that view had changed from seeing it as a perversion, to viewing it as a pathology or sickness in need of healing. I also uncovered how much of their argument was taken from an intermingling of Natural Law ethics and Biblical ethics. I also highlighted how the Church has been criticised for attempting to do a theology of, or about sexuality and has a tendency to argue in a one directional way, neglecting to ask what scripture and tradition say and how it should be expressed. Adding to this their failure to enquire - what does our experience as human sexual beings tell us about how we read the scriptures?

I have stated that women's experience too has been neglected. Concerning women's experience Althaus-Reid argues 'more than the bible, it is the eyes of the reader that are responsible for the construction of the imagined Christian woman's body.'¹ I have shown responses and suggestions by scholars; for example Stephen C. Barton highlights how essential it is to recognise the importance of interpreting the Bible theologically and doxologically. That is, that the scriptures, should be read by the community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church has also been shown to rely heavily on the ideas of procreative sex and complementarity and therefore deems homosexuality unacceptable according to these Natural Law ethics. I have shown how their arguments follow a homophobic Biblical creationism and the scholarly responses to their position whereby Biblical scholars have examined the texts and found that the Church does not deal with homosexuality in general. I have discovered that so far, the Church when it has mentioned bisexuality; has dismissed it as an immature stage in an individual's sexual development toward a "healthy" heterosexual position. Bisexuals are misrepresented by the Church; it sees them as sexually indiscriminate and promiscuous. When discussing the invisibility of bisexuality I developed an enquiry into the nature of bisexuality

¹ Marcella Althaus-Ried, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* {London: S.C.M. Press, 2004} p 99.

presenting various suggestions put forward by theorists, for example Kinsey and Mondimore, who endeavour to define what bisexuality means or interrogating the concept of bisexuality.

An enquiry into what bisexuality is has also provided me the opportunity to highlight the dissociation of masculinity and femininity from sexual object choice. I also bring into view the fact that the existence of bisexuality undermines the sexual system of classifying people as heterosexual or homosexual and therefore problematizes the pathologization of homosexuality.

I initially suggested that bisexuality could be a positive role model of tolerance. However, I am now aware that to talk of role models is problematic because it buys back into the patriarchal system. A discussion on the challenges that bisexual lifestyle brings enabled me to examine the notion of exclusivity in a relationship and also the notion that bisexuals may require sexual partners of both sexes. The sociological evidence suggests that this is not necessarily the case but if so, the need for multiple partners can be viewed as a perfectly reasonable way of fulfilling ones needs; also to label bisexuals as intrinsically promiscuous is one of the many negative stereotypes created. Much of the negativity associated with bisexuality can, for many, be internalised leading to feelings of isolation and low self image, it was this fact initially which led me to call for a specific bisexual identity. I provided an explanation of what biphobia is and how this effects the individuals concerned, and presented a discussion on bisexuality as an identity - this was to paint a picture as to why forming such an identity is vital for bisexuals like myself. Initially this was because I felt there was a shortage of life affirming role models.

It was stated that the denial of the existence of bisexual people is the primary manifestation of biphobia. It has been defined by Kathleen Bennet; as the denigration of bisexuality as a valid life choice.

Bi-activist Robyn Ochs argues that the existence of bisexuality challenges the hierarchical dualism created by Western binary thinking, it undoes hierarchy. The heterosexual majority will lose the superior status implied by occupying the valued position within the dualistic hierarchy. I explained how bisexuals are problematic for homosexuals because there is a strong need to maintain a clear

boundary between “us” and “them”² and many homosexuals have felt that bisexuals have less commitment to the lesbian community. Bisexual women are seen to be colluding with patriarchy by many lesbian feminists if they refuse to sever all ties with men. Stigmatisation of bisexuality had increased through the intensification of gay pride and the tightening of boundaries in the homosexual community in response to homophobia.

The issue concerning the stereotypical notion that bisexuals require partners of both sexes was addressed, and I found that biphobia is in evidence when gender is seen as a major determinant of partner choice. Concerning bisexual lifestyle, if it happens to be non-monogamous it leads to conflict with the wider community because it challenges the notion of exclusivity, which has been part of the patriarchal sexual package.³ It is argued that bisexuality tends to be invisible except as a point of conflict because we usually hear about it in the context of complicated, uncomfortable situations, or it is portrayed as a transitional category, a process of “coming-out”.⁴ Sociological evidence concerning internalised biphobia reveals that there are links in the belief that gender is a major determinant of partner choice when a person feels they are not bisexual enough. For example, if they are monogamous they may feel they should have more partners, and people in multiple relationships feel they are “perpetuating a stereotype.”⁵ Internalised biphobia feeds on itself through negative stereotypes. The mono-sexual position is pathologised when we ask questions such as, does bisexuality deconstruct the boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality? It is argued that bisexuals are privileged against a differently constituted sexual other when bisexuality is essentialised and universalised.⁶

I explained how social theorists have considered the usefulness and limitations of bisexuality. The contention is that to view bisexuality as an identity as well as an epistemological perspective is problematic because these two instances of bisexuality are extremely different and may actually be incompatible.⁷ Rather than an identity that integrates the heterosexual and homosexual orientations, we

² Robyn Ochs in Firestein {ed} *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* {London, California, New Delhi: Sage.1996} p. 228.

³ Isherwood and Stuart *Introducing Body Theology* {Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1998} p.29.

⁴ L. Orlando {1991} in Firestein {1996} *op.cit.* pp. 225-226.

⁵ Jo Eadie in Merl Storr {ed} *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* {London, New York: Routledge.1999} p.123.

⁶ Amber Ault in Storr. {1996}

⁷ Ault in Storr. {1996} pp. 172-73

should assume bisexuality as an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point from which we can examine and deconstruct the bipolar framework of gender and sexuality. Bisexuality exposes the radical discontinuities between an individual's sexual acts and affectional choices, on the one hand, and on her or his affirmed political identity on the other.⁸ The advantages of assuming bisexuality as a perspective and because it occupies an ambiguous position between identities, 'it is able to shed light on the gaps and contradictions of all identity, on what we might call the difference within identity', it therefore leads 'to a deep appreciation of the differences among people'. Bisexuality 'can help us view contradiction, not as a personal flaw or a danger to our communities, but as a source of insight and strength, as a basis for more inclusive 'we's' that enable rather than repress the articulation of difference.'⁹

Turning to the work of Luce Irigaray and her philosophy of difference in section two, her work allowed me to demonstrate how patriarchal society, and psychoanalytic theory in particular oppresses women and ignores their experience. Her argument is that if we remain within the "empire" of the same, difference cannot escape hierarchy.¹⁰ Considering the implications of the thoughts of Freud and Lacan for understanding womanhood and articulating a feminine discourse, Irigaray seeks to dispute and displace male-centered structures of language and thought, warning women against the fact that emancipation leads to homologation to masculine modes. For Irigaray that the feminine exists in a position of excess, is plural, multiple and resists all assimilation, and as a metaphor for their differential self-knowledge, she uses women's bodily experience. She calls for a distinction between female homosexuality and male sexuality so that we can destroy the phallogocentric myth that the female homosexual is thought to act as a man in desiring other women. She also critiques the theory which condemns the mother / daughter relationship to rivalry and resentment calling, for new forms of communication between them. The process of 'becoming divine'¹¹ by women is to acquire a new subjectivity in the love of our own sex, we should therefore move toward a 'tactical homosexuality'¹², Irigaray's wish is to evoke new and exploratory forms of homo- heterosexual intimacy.

⁸ Daumar {1992} in Storr.

⁹ *op.cit.* pp.159-160.

¹⁰ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* {New York: Cornell University Press.1985} p.141.

¹¹ Braidotti {1991} p.260-261.

¹² Elizabeth Grosz {ed} *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* {London, New York: Routledge.1995}

An evaluation of her work has enabled me to show how morphology is women's experience; a feminine exists in a position of excess, and highlights the link between the excessively morphic feminine and the fluid nature of bisexuality. The insight whereby a feminine exists in a position of excess became pertinent when I reviewed the work of Althaus-Reid in section three. I suggested that Irigaray's work might point the way forward for bisexual women who may have difficulty in feeling a sense of pride in who they are purely because of their sexual orientation. Irigaray's focus on valuing women's own pleasure and morphology as a source of protest and self determination echoed the work of Carol Vance, Lyn Segal and Raine Eisler in the third part of this section. In the second part of this section I reviewed the work of Shere Hite exposing the phallogocentric myth surrounding the female orgasm, which in turn enabled me to discuss the disruptive potential of the female orgasm where sexual activity need not necessarily result in procreation. This provided me with the opportunity to discuss how radical feminists had utilised the idea, that it is not necessarily penetrative sex which provides orgasms in women, to support their arguments for the abandonment of heterosexual desire and practice. Discussions surrounding the clitoris enabled me to emphasise the disruptive potential it has on traditional theology. This particular line of enquiry also enabled me to examine arguments put forward by Lynne Segal and Carol Vance who call for sexual desire based on pleasure.

I considered the fact that women are dealing with a legacy of violence on both the physical level and the psychic level and their experience has largely been ignored within traditional Christian theology. This prompted me to provide a brief examination of the psychological issues surrounding the social construction of women's sexuality and the eroticisation of women's oppression, which in turn enabled me to highlight the divisions created amongst feminists, some of whom were calling for strategies of abandonment. In the second part of this section, I have examined the debates surrounding the issues of abandonment between radical feminists, which have revealed how their strategies could become problematic. Arguing that heterosexuality should become the focus of enquiry, rather than homosexuality, radical feminists Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger believe that heterosexuality has been largely un-theorised within both feminism and psychology. They have also argued that the myth that heterosexuality as an unquestioned 'given'¹³ for most women was perpetuated through feminist

¹³ Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger {eds} *Heterosexuality: A Feminist Psychology Reader* {London: Sage Publications 1994} p.3.

psychology and scholarly writing in general. Their wish was to challenge the erasure of lesbian existence within feminist literature believing it to be both anti-feminist and anti-lesbian. Following the path of Adrienne Rich, heterosexual feminists were encouraged to critique heterosexuality so that it could be changed. In order to recognise how the political institution of heterosexuality disempowers women, heterocentricity was examined. I highlighted how Wilkinson and Kitzinger were critical of the liberal humanistic approach, believing such an approach would result in assimilation. Rejecting deterministic models of human development, humanists seek to develop the potential of the “whole” person, viewing lesbians and gays as human beings of equal worth and dignity. However, such a view for Wilkinson and Kitzinger had been problematic because for them it served to remove lesbianism from the political arena, reducing it to a private and personal solution. It was their belief that there was a failure on the part of heterosexual feminists to appreciate the importance of the label “lesbian” to those who claim it.

I noted the responses to their criticisms by drawing attention to the work of liberal materialist Stevie Jackson who argues that they were denying the complexity of heterosexuality. Positing that as desiring subjects we are gendered, she therefore suggests it is essential that we begin with gender. She maintains that sexuality derives from the social meanings it has historically acquired not from its intrinsic “nature”, and therefore we should not over privilege sexuality. To make visible an identity, to name oneself heterosexual can be a means of bringing heterosexuality into question, Jackson argues that being heterosexual for women is by no means a situation of unproblematic privilege. Lynn Segal was also critical of these views, she says that they were seeking conclusions in line with their lesbian-separatist analysis of heterosexuality as the root of women’s oppression; rather than opening up spaces for feminist theorising and exploration of heterosexuality, their work had been dedicated to closing them down.¹⁴

According to theorist Carol Smart heterosexuality is always presented as a unitary concept. Critical of strategies of abandonment presented by feminists, she saw their position as a revival of an old solution maintaining that old divisions had been created by them.¹⁵ Rather than abandonment or abolishment,

¹⁴ Lynne Segal, *The Politics of Pleasure* {London: Virago.1994} pp.215-216.

¹⁵ Smart in Richardson {ed} *Theorising Heterosexuality* {London: Open University Press.1996} p.169.

subversion of the meanings of heterosexuality should be attempted, and Smart believes that Wilkinson and Kitzinger gave an inaccurate account of heterosexual feminists ambivalence toward heterosexuality. She believes heterosexual feminists were expressing an ambivalent relationship to institutional heterosexuality, a fluidity that refuses to be trapped by a crudely defined notion of heterosexuality, they were refusing to commit to orthodox heterosexuality. Understanding heterosexuality as a unitary concept based on domination and submission was shown to be problematic because it is deterministic, leaving no room for the subject to transcend their situation. I was able to show how rigid identities were beginning to be challenged, opening up new possibilities and spaces for bisexuality to enter centre stage in the debate.

The work of Nancy R. Howell¹⁶ was examined and she asked whether the separatism of radical feminism was radical enough. Presenting various understandings of separatism, I was afforded the opportunity to show how some feminists understood it to mean male excluding communities. Howell argued that utopian alternatives had been created in which they capitalise upon romanticisation of a female essence and idealisation of female community. It is her belief that permanently segregated communities envisioned by women reflect the hopelessness of the transcendence of patriarchy. To teleologically categorise different forms of separatism is critiqued by her because it is an andocentric interpretation of women's separatism, being mainly concerned with the male/female relationship. She suggests that rather than viewing women's separatism as a question of how women relate to men, we should look at how women tend to relate to each other.¹⁷ Presenting insights produced by Mary Daly, Howell suggests that we understand radical feminist separatism 'as a gynocentric interpretation'¹⁸ of women's separatism. Rather than investing our energy in confronting patriarchy we should invest our energy in women's selfhood and refuse to allow patriarchy to control the use of gynergy.

¹⁶ Howell in Comstock and Henking {eds} *Queering Religion: A Critical Anthology* {New York: Continuum. 1997}

¹⁷ Howell in Comstock and Henking *op.cit.* p. 203.

¹⁸ Mary Daly {1987} in Comstock and Henking *op.cit.* p.204.

I explain how in Mary Daly's understanding of separatism, separation is primarily a concept that has to do with loosening the confinement of women which has nothing to do with building boundaries that isolate and confine women, it facilitates genuine relationships with oneself and others. Through Daly's interpretation of separatism, there is an intention to remove internal and external barriers to selfhood. During the paring process we should also acknowledge the differences among us as there is great potential in this. She also draws comparisons between male comradeship/fraternity and female befriending, the survival of comradeship is maintained by draining women of their energy, whereas female bonding is energising. Sex segregation is seen as an imposed ghettoization of women. The separatism proposed by Daly is to be distinguished from simplistic, escapist, apolitical dissociation from the world, it is a move toward personal integrity. Highlighting the Whitheadian feminist perspective, Howell describes negative perception in relation to consciousness. Reality is not hetero-reality, women come to the consciousness of the psuedo-reality of hetero-reality through female friendship.

By looking at the psychological reflections of Lallene J. Rector¹⁹ I was able to demonstrate how women may be socialised into accepting psuedo-reality and how through Rosemary Radford Ruether's doctrine of redemption, women can begin the task of overcoming all forms of patriarchy. Lallene J. Rector examines how important it is for feminists to explore the experiences of those who are dominated and their participation in that domination, with an awareness of how gender roles for women and men are socialised in our culture. She considers the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether and her reformulation of the doctrine of redemption. Differing from the classical view of sin and conversion, Ruether does not accept the idea of "original sin" preferring the traditional Jewish concept, whereby humans possess the tendency to good or evil, believing that we have the capacity to choose between them. It is suggested that we need to start with alienation from each other rather than beginning with the concept of alienation from God with regards to 'sin'. The psychological perspectives of Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin were also considered. Different psychoanalytic perspectives on gender acquisition presented through the relational approach of Chodorow were examined this paved the way for the intersubjective approach by Benjamin. Both view human

¹⁹ Rector in Isherwood {ed} *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism, Studies in Theology and Sexuality* {Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 2000}

motivation differently from Freudian perspectives, which take the “masculine” as the standard representation of sexuality, fixing women into a system of male values.²⁰ For both Chodorow and Benjamin there is an emphasis on the two-way process of domination and an investigation into the psychology of those who submit to it rather than just focusing on the psychology of the one who exercises power. As evidenced, the intersubjective perspective requires an individual to live with the tension of the paradoxical needs for recognition and assertion. This consciousness raising leads to personal conversions and an opening up to one another, which Reuther maintains can be a means of redemption whereby all forms of patriarchy can be overcome.

The work of Carol Vance, Lyn Segal and Raine Eisler in the third part of section two provided me with the opportunity to develop a sexual ethic based on pleasure. Vance’s work is concerned with the complexities surrounding the issues of women’s sexuality. In her book *Pleasure and Danger*, Vance writes about the ambivalent and contradictory extremes women experience in negotiating sexuality. She argues that feminism’s fantasy for women to experience autonomous desire is far from realised and is culture’s worst nightmare, and that this can be seen clearly through daily events of violence against women, backlash and male rage that target women’s sexuality. This reminds us that sexual pleasure for women remains complicated and frightening for women in our society today. Both Carol Vance and Lynne Segal argue that women’s pursuit of sexual pleasure, even though it may at times be dangerous, is also necessary, as women are exposed to more danger of becoming divorced from their passions if there is no expansion of opportunities, possibilities and permissions for pleasure. It is also argued that we must endeavour to break the taboo of talking about sexual pleasure.

Again, recognition of difference amongst women was called for, because it is oppressive and dishonest if feminism calls for uniformity in women’s responses. We are reminded by Vance how women’s potential for pleasure was beginning to be explored in the 60s and 70s, and how this progressive movement was halted through a changing climate beginning in the 80s, whereby the feminist agenda on sexuality had narrowed becoming increasingly more conservative in response to ferocious right-wing attacks. The anti-pornography movement’s narrative began to erase the diversity of female

²⁰ Rector in Isherwood {2000}

subjectivity. Alleviation of the need for a forced choice between pleasure and danger provided an inclusive ground for understanding difference.

Conceding that we must not ignore or weaken the critique of sexual danger women face within society, Vance argues that we must not forget the importance of expanding the analysis of pleasure. She has also argued that female desire should not be restricted to areas protected and privileged within our culture disagreeing with the idea that women should be in relationships, such as traditional marriage and the nuclear family, in order to remain safe and become the moral custodians of male behaviour, where they are perceived as the instigators of such morality. Vance asserts that the effects of gender inequality may include both violence and the internalised control of women's impulses, leading to a poisoning of desire through self-doubt and anxiety. The connection between how patriarchy interferes with female desire and how women experience their own passion as dangerous is a critical issue that should be explored. Another source of sexual danger apart from the threat of male violence is how sexuality activates a host of intra-psychic anxieties. The fear of competition with other women through our recognition of our own wishes to compete for attention, for loved objects, and the fear of separation from other women is also felt when we violate the bounds of traditional femininity. Because female experience contains elements of pleasure and oppression, happiness and humiliation, Vance suggests that rather than be confused by it we should use this ambiguousness as a source book to examine how women experience sexual desire, fantasy, and action.

The possibility that desire may be constructed, was considered by Vance, she spoke of the historical contrasts between lived experience and constructed social reality. We are reminded how the nineteenth-century feminist discourse about women's sexuality and sexual reform, despite evidence of women's actual experience with romantic female friendships, remained largely heterosexual and marital. It is crucial that we recognise notions of sexual transformation and change that can occur within an individual's lifetime and because of this we are forced to give up the static picture of an unchanging sexual order.

If we want to study sexuality, Vance suggests that we must also strive to understand what, women's differing and various sexual representations mean. We need more information about individual

responses to symbol and image and we also need knowledge about what the viewer may bring with her in the form of personal experience, cultural frame, resonances and connections to make interpretations. Vance asserts that we will fail to investigate the individual's experience if we assume that symbols have a unitary meaning. Other than as passive recipients of official symbol systems, women are inadvertently placed outside of culture, if we ignore the potential for variation. We are reminded that past assumptions made by feminist scholars have been that women are white middle – class heterosexuals and this insight has made them self critical about omissions, gaps and silences, and they are now endeavouring to take more aggressive efforts in researching areas and topics which have been ignored. Vance argues that we must continue to endure the ongoing tension and confront the dialectic between specificity and generalisation. I explained how Lynne Segal highlights the struggle in her book *Straight Sex and the Politics of Pleasure*, arguing that there was a lack of focus on class and race issues.

Vance's work enabled me to present a discussion about the cultural system of sexual hierarchy in which some acts and partners are privileged and others are punished, diminishing our ability to think about sexual difference. Stigmatised acts or preferences are devalued according to the rules of sexual hierarchy, however, Vance highlights how paradoxically we judge our own behaviour second-rate and unsatisfying, resenting those whose mere existence makes us doubtful and deprived. Thus, the presentation of sexual difference is often interpreted as a chauvinistic statement of superiority, if not exhortation to experiment, or an attempt to prescribe a new sexual norm. It is interesting to note that all of the above has applied to my position, whereby I was calling for bisexuality to be seen as normative, the role model of tolerance, and often in the past seeking a way of living an "authentic" bisexual life through experimentation. It is also argued that structures of deadening conformity are created when we seek to prescribe. Vance advocates sexual non-conformity as a way forward for women, this recommendation is extremely important to me in my current endeavour.

I then presented the work of Lynne Segal who suggested that feminists were 'out of step'²¹ with many women's dreams and desires, becoming pessimistic and silent about sexual pleasure. Maintaining that women's vulnerability reflects their failure to achieve economic emancipation. Segal also wrote about

the political backlash against women and how this produced personal and social panic in men, producing a new sex-war agenda, and reminded us about the economic recession and restructuring in the 70s and 80s which caused social insecurities of joblessness and personal disintegration. She discusses how propagandists of the right had displaced, re-articulated, and managed this economic crisis into a gender crisis and we are reminded about the conservative forces that have been active in Britain since the mid 80s, which have mobilized consistently for battle against any change that would promote women's or gay men's autonomy through a transformation of the order of gender. Segal suggests that feminists should endeavour to uncover and change the social forces which ensure that women's sexual agency is suppressed in contexts of significant gender inequalities. This is similar to Irigaray, who argues that we destroy the phallogocentric myth, in which the female homosexual is thought to act as a man in desiring other women. The cultural forces, which disparage women and gay men through meanings attaching gender to sexuality via conceptions of masculinity as activity and dominance coded into heterosexual coitus, should be uncovered and challenged. Segal maintains that there is still a need for a political movement for women and an agenda of their own. Women must continue to make demands on the state while providing diverse networks of support and cultural resistance, and continue to struggle for better and more comprehensive welfare provision at state and local levels. I explained how for Segal, gender hierarchy will disappear only when we continue to fashion new concepts and practices of gender based upon the mutual recognition of similarities and differences between men and women, rather than upon notions of their opposition.

Continuing with the theme of eroticised violence and oppression of women, another focus of my inquiry was the work of Riane Eisler²², who explores the potential for pleasure and desire based on the principle of the sacred. Hers is an attempt to disrupt the dualism between sexuality and spirituality. Exploring the past, present and potential future of sex she comments that the primacy of the reward of pleasure may be viewed as an evolutionary movement; from the primacy of pain and punishment, this allows me to further develop an ethic of pleasure. Greatly influenced by the thoughts and writings of theologians who focus on an immanent and transcendent spirituality, Eisler calls for the reconnection of sex and spirituality or resacralizing of the erotic and women, viewing the erotic as empowering, life

²¹ Segal {1994} *op.cit.* p.66.

giving, and pleasurable. We are called to reinvent our basic values and institutions through a reinvention of our creativity, from being an outgrowth of a dominator social and ideological organisation to an ordinary creativity we invest in our daily lives.²³

In the fourth part of section two I reviewed the work of gender theorist Judith Butler. Her argument that any notion of a 'normative' ²⁴ sexuality is problematic has led me to reconsider my initial call for bisexuality to be viewed as normative. However, I have suggested that one of the major insights to come from her work is the knowledge that bisexuality has the potential to challenge both lesbian and traditional Christian theology.

Her book *Gender Trouble* has been cited as one of the founding texts of Queer Theory.

Butler draws from Freud's schematisations of melancholia, identifies it as a potential site of subversion and agency and her subject, following Nietzsche, is the result of its deeds rather than the initiator of them. I explained how her insight, that the subject is retroactively, performatively 'hailed' into gender, was informed by Nietzsche's causal reversal, Althusserian interpellation, and Austinian performativity. Rather than a site of passive self-abnegation, Butler regards melancholia as a means of potential revolt. In this section there was a brief discussion concerning the links between transexuality and bisexuality, highlighting the role of anatomy in determining sex, gender, and sexual orientation. I advanced that discussions relating to transsexual sexuality can be very instructive about the nature of sexuality in general and bisexuality in particular. It has been noted by social theorists that the existence of transsexuals seriously challenge beliefs traditionally held by people concerning gender. Defying categorisation into either one of the two gender roles {casting doubt on the belief that there are only two genders}, transsexual people seriously challenge the view that biology is destiny. Following this insight Butler has argued that 'gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way.'²⁵

Adopting Foucault's genealogical critique, there is a refusal to search for the origins of gender.

Foucaultian analysis exposes the foundational categories of sex, gender and desire as effects of a

²² Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex Myth, and the Politics of the Body – New Paths of Power and Love* {San Francisco: Harper Collins. 1996}

²³ Eisler, *op.cit.*

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* {London: Routledge.1990-1999} preface xx.

²⁵ Butler, *op.cit.* p.10.

specific formation of power; Butler, however, sees power as being more of an exchange between subject and other, power operating in the production of the binary frame for thinking about gender. Concerning the sexual style of the “butch” and “fem” Butler argues that these cannot be explained as fanciful representations of originally heterosexual identities. Rather than a simple imitation, they may be the site of the denaturalisation and mobilisation of gender categories, these replications bring into relief the utterly constructed status of the so called heterosexual original. They expose the ‘panicked, imitative nature of heterosexuality.’²⁶ Drawing on Freud, her characterisation of gender is a form of psychic mime that is the subject’s melancholic response to the lost identifications it mimetically incorporates. Butler formulates ‘performativity’ as the ‘acting out’ of unresolved grief, whereby performative genders {both straight and gay} allegorize heterosexual/homosexual melancholia.²⁷ Melancholic identification provides a way to preserve the object as part of the ego. She also suggests that if we accept the notion that heterosexuality naturalises itself by insisting on the radical otherness of homosexuality, heterosexual identity is therefore purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love it disavows and this particular attachment becomes subject to a ‘double disavowal’.²⁸ The heterosexual identity is based upon the refusal to avow an attachment and, hence, the refusal to grieve.

She reconsidered the theory of gender as performative, asking whether there may be a dissatisfied longing in the mimetic incorporation of gender that is drag, arguing that gender itself might be understood in part as the ‘acting out’ of unresolved grief. The coherence and continuity of the person are socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility, they are not logical or analytic features of personhood. With the emergence of ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility, the very notion of ‘the person’²⁹ is called into question. Butler argues that a belief of, a sexuality freed from heterosexual constructs is a utopian notion. She suggests an ‘anti-foundationalist approach to coalitional politics’³⁰ as a way forward, a

²⁶ *op.cit.* p.120.

²⁷ Butler in Sara Salih {ed} and Butler *The Judith Butler Reader* {Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004} p244.

²⁸ *op.cit.* p.249.

²⁹ *op.cit.* p.256.

³⁰ Butler {1999} *op.cit.* p.21.

coalition of sexual minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity, based on the irreducible complexity of sexuality. We are always faced with the threat of identity becoming an instrument of the power we oppose. However, she reminds us that ‘there is no political position purified of power, and perhaps that impurity is what produces agency, therefore there is no reason not to use, and be used by identity.’³¹

Historical materialist Rosemary Hennessy analyses the relationship between capitalism and sexual identity, her work shows how advanced capitalist societies have made sex a commodity leading to a closing down of the possibility of sexual diversity. A review of her work enabled me to highlight how she critiques the advanced discourse of the elite reorienting Queer Theory away from its preoccupation with psychoanalysis, language, and performance, instead insisting upon close analysis of the structures of late capitalism, labour, and commodification. The insights gleaned from Hennessy’s work shows how Judith Butler’s notion of performativity is not rescuing materialism, her argument being that Butler,

along with other postmodern theorists, have contributed to the construction of a neo-liberal public intellectual discourse, and their formulations of politics and social change have either participated in the commodification of identities, or have intervened in the process only ‘in very local ways.’³² She highlights how their conceptions of materiality are only founded in symbolic processes, hence social struggle for them is anchored only in the sign, and argues that Judith Butler’s call for symbolic openness has the potential to endorse ‘any’, or even ‘exploitative, social relations.’³³ Limiting her conception of the social to the discursive, because of this, she unhinges identity from the other material relations that shape it, and her postmodern subject is severed from the collective historical processes and struggles through which identities are produced and circulate. Hennessy informs us that Butler’s analysis is confined to specific historical contexts, which foreclose the possibility of marshalling collectivities for social transformation across differences in historical positioning. She maintains that even though cultural visibility can be empowering and can prepare the way for gay and civil rights protection, we should consider these endeavours critically in relation to capital’s expansion. Rather

³¹ Butler {1990} in Salih and Butler. *op.cit.* p.103.

³² Rosemary Hennessy *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* {New York, London: Routledge. 2000} p.34.

³³ *op.cit.* p.62.

than liberation, gay visibility is aimed at producing lucrative markets thus visibility in commodity culture is a limited victory

for gays. We should therefore be careful how we conceptualize gay visibility.

Hennessy informs us how gays have constituted the vanguard in middle-class society. This is in some ways integral to capitalism, therefore the assimilation of gays into mainstream middle-class culture is limited and does not disrupt postmodern patriarchy. The promotion of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer produces imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep 'invisible the divisions of wealth and labour that these images and knowledges depend on.'³⁴ Lesbians, gays, and queers who are manual workers, sex workers, unemployed, and imprisoned are rendered invisible through these commodified perspectives. In order to explain how capitalism bears down on people's lives we should make use of historical materialism. Hennessy advances that we replace the narrow resentment of identity politics with

a more powerful collective opposition of all of capitalism's disenfranchised subjects. Not calling for a renunciation of identities, she suggests that through a process of 'dissidentification'³⁵, we should critically work on identities and make their historical and material conditions of possibility visible. Identities offered us by capitalism should be viewed as a starting point for the formation of a more comprehensive, collective agency. For me her work is very encouraging and assists me in my quest of calling for a 'critically' bi - identity.

Returning to the subject of theology, the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid was reviewed in section three. Along with Hennessy, Marxist historical materialism was adopted as a theoretical tool. Althaus-Reid's work is a critical continuation of feminist liberation theology using a multi disciplinary approach. I explained how through a renunciation of the masquerades of sexual ideology presented as theology, Althaus-Reid calls for representations of God from excess of orthopraxis. She recognises a parallel in women and the pattern of God's transcendence, and highlights the limits of the hermeneutical circle adopted by feminist liberation theologians arguing how it has proved to be politically materialist and sexually idealist. We are also reminded that apologetics still exist in liberation theology.

³⁴ *op.cit.* pp.140-141.

³⁵ *op.cit.* p.229.

Introducing an indecent production of God and Jesus, Althaus-Reid evokes the work of Georges Bataille and his creation Madam Edwarda, the poor sexually explicit woman God. This enables the suffering body of a woman, a prostitute, to become the space of God, a representation of God from the excess of orthopraxis. Her belief is that such a representation has theological promise for we may then have a deeper understanding of the sacred in relation to feminine sexuality. She suggests we go further than seeing Jesus as someone with whom out-of-the-closet lesbians, gays, bisexuals and heterosexuals can identify. Indecent Theology should have the right to say not only that a lesbian can identify with a liberator Christ but it must sexually deconstruct Christ as well.

Althaus-Reid talks of the passports Indecent Theologians need to acquire. Indecent theologians need to 'maintain a responsible position in the divine cartography of pleasure and desire'³⁶ and occupy the primordial space of exclusion in the narratives of Genesis. Utilising the value of bisexuality as an epistemological force, she calls for Queer Theologians to come out in an almost sacrificial way, committed to perverting Christian Theology by remaining involved in the hard problematising of our role and vocation. We are also told about the violent dyadic secretive spaces in which 'Totalitarian Theology'³⁷ operates and consider the theologian as an event as well as enquiring where she is located, her dyad to the bi confuses both theological and ethical categories. Through her formulation of an excessive and destabilised god, she demonstrates how we can introduce the concept of a divine subject in theology, a woman who wishes to reconsider heterosexuality from a bisexual out-of-the-closet theology. For her there is a bi-identity, an either/or also, a place to be. Profound theological insights

come with Althaus-Reid's work, they have a great deal of significance because her work is rooted in experiential Christology and her theoretical model of the bisexual theologian has afforded me the opportunity to develop an experiential critical bisexual theology.

I began my thesis questioning why traditional theology has rendered bisexuality invisible? Can bisexuality offer anything to theological debate? My research has led me into many different fields of academic work and although it has been extremely informative and exciting it has often been difficult and has challenged me both emotionally and intellectually. In fact what I have learned could be

³⁶ Althaus-Reid, *op.cit.* p.7.

³⁷ *op.cit.* p.8.

described as a complete “head fuck”, strong language I hear you say. However, toward the end of my research, I came to the realization that I had begun my questioning with a “straight mind”; I could not think my way out of a fixed identity, neat categories etc., like the Church I was unable endure the chaos, the messiness

of it all. The outcome of straight thinking led me to internalize my bi-phobia and subsequently, after self-acceptance, it was my straight thinking that led me to the idea that maybe bisexuality could be viewed as normative, that bisexuality was superior in some way. I adopt the idea of the straight mind from French writer and lesbian theorist Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*, 1992. ‘Sexes {gender}, differences between the sexes, man, woman, race, black, white, nature are at the core of {the straight mind’s} set of parameters’³⁸ She underlines the oppressive character of the straight mind’s tendency toward universality and the consequences of this being, ‘the straight mind cannot conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness, as well.’³⁹ Asserting that even if we do not consent to the heterosexual contract ‘we cannot think outside of the mental categories of heterosexuality.’⁴⁰

How very straight my thinking was, and probably still is, because even though I now know to view my position as in some way superior or normative and that it can therefore be problematic if not wrong and damaging toward others, the bisexual position is the one I have adopted. However I position myself in a “critical” way, and through questioning bisexuality I have afforded myself a base from which to start. As far as the Church is concerned I want to claim this space for myself. I do not want bisexuality to be dismissed, this is because concerning the Queer agenda, I believe the Church has not caught up with feminist theology, and still has not addressed the bisexual issue and therefore we need names to shock us into reflection. Within the Church nothing speaks to my experience and it is not a place of acceptance of who I am. This needs to be challenged. I disagree with the Church saying that we must live by heteropatriarchal rules. Bisexuality may be viewed as a discrete identity that deserves honouring.

³⁸ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and other Essays*. {Boston, Massachusetts U.S.A.: Beacon Press 1992} forward xii.

³⁹ *op.cit.* p.28

⁴⁰ *op.cit.* p.43.

Through looking at the psychological data I had entered into a process of self-reflection and have become aware that I had been in collusion with patriarchy in a subliminal way.

This thesis has been an examination, of the deconstructive challenge that bisexuality and / or queer theology presents to traditional theology. After many informative discussions with Lisa Isherwood my supervisor, about how to correlate the information I had gathered. It suddenly became clear that having started with a discourse about my own unique position, whereby I was arguing for a bisexual identity, I had found that I had moved to a broader discourse: the information gathered dictates that I call for a 'critically Queer identity'. As well as thinking straight, my work is addressing two distinct groups - the Academy and the Church. On the one hand, as evidenced through looking at the sociology of bisexuality, calling for a distinct bisexual identity is problematic, however, theologically speaking concerning the Church, we still need to talk identity before we can move on.

I have had to grasp many different disciplines in order that I might present for the reader a panoramic view of the nature of being both a woman and a bisexual person in light of the Church and society as a whole. I say this because the theological content may be viewed as minimal, the reader will note that my work has taken on an almost circulatory route, beginning with theology and touching on all the other major disciplines along the way, arriving back again to theology. It could therefore be said that my task has been what Althaus-Reid would call a promiscuous endeavour. Lisa Isherwood states:

Until recently theologians have always believed that our discipline can act as though it is free of the necessity to consult other ideologies; it has made its own rules and not surprisingly come up with its own conclusions, However, modesty and common sense now tell us that matters we deal with do not simply exist in a theological bubble but are part of a greater whole.⁴¹

My work has in part been a critique of both the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions concerning human sexual ethics, specifically what they have to say [or what they omit to say] about both being a woman and a bisexual. It is my belief that the Church has failed to deal with both sufficiently. Bisexual people, like myself, engender great fear and dread because we have a disruptive influence on the Church's hierarchical structure, we must therefore be rendered invisible or must be contained at all

⁴¹ Lisa Isherwood, *The Power of Erotic Celibacy: Queering Heteropatriarchy* {London, New York: T&T Clark 2006} p.16.

costs, sadly; life in abundance is denied us. It is my contention that the Church has been guilty of ignoring the gospel teaching that all God's subjects are called to live life in abundance.

Echoing the thoughts of Lisa Isherwood, the hierarchical Church is still wielding its elitist power manufactured through a dualistic world view. Althaus-Reid argues that Christian theology thinks pornographically, defining the pornographic image as offensive due to its quality of being static and detached. She states that, 'such fixity is almost of exegetical quality; it is the body interpreted because reification is an interpretation in itself.' Reflecting on pornography as a heterosexual art, Althaus-Reid argues:

that what is offensive is the re-petitive mimicry presented of one stereotypical desire. Unfortunately, the same can be said of Christian theology, which mimics the prevalent heterosexual ideology while excluding any epistemological attempt which challenges its dualism, hierarchies and institutionalized gods.⁴²

I have endeavoured to provide the tools that may be used to create a bisexual theology and with a great deal of self-reflection, I have presented an autobiographical account of the effects heteropatriarchy has had and continues to have on me as a bisexual woman. As evidenced, this task has already been carried out but in a different way by Althaus-Reid. Her work has provided me with a "passport" and therefore an opportunity to continue with my endeavour towards the creation of a bisexual theology. My polyamorous thinking is validated through her "indecent" formulations highlighting the importance of producing an epistemological paradigm shift. However, there are three points where we diverge. I have adopted her perspective but move from the predominantly macro level she provides, which is largely theoretical and therefore does not open up any ethical questions, whereas my personal experience as a bisexual, enables me to move toward a more micro investigation into the world of the bisexual subject. My work has highlighted the difficulties faced by bisexuals and the often internal as well as external conflicts bisexual people have to endure within a heteropatriarchal society. Also, by providing a critical evaluation of the conceptual framework of heterosexuality I have been afforded the opportunity to then interrogate the conceptual framework of bisexuality, enquiring where it has come from allowing me to examine it from an alternative perspective. Understanding the importance of focusing my enquiry into the conceptual framework of heterosexuality and highlighting its mythical qualities we see how women are disempowered under the political institution of heterosexuality. This endeavour

⁴² Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* {London SCM Press 2004} pp.95-96.

has allowed me to take Althaus - Reid's work in a different direction. By forging ahead with her idea of the bisexual theologian and providing an analysis of heterosexuality's compulsory and prescriptive features with a view towards its deconstruction so that it can be seen as a background myth, paints a more nuanced picture of bisexuality. I have provided an autobiographical account of what it means to be a bisexual woman in a heteropatriarchal world based on notions of exclusivity and look at how we negotiate our relationships with others based on an ethic of mutual care and respect. Added to this, I have explained how Althaus-Reid and myself are exiled from two radically different cultures. Hers being a carnival culture already steeped in bisexual mythology and therefore not universal. I have intimated how difficult this task may be for me someone who has no such platform from which to reflect because in our culture we have an androcentric religion based on monogamous heterosexuality. However, I wish to point out even though the background myth of bisexuality fostered here leads from the narrow way of viewing through heteropatriarchy to one based on toleration and acceptance of all forms of difference I am aware of the difficulties that arise from this. Myth must never become a fossilised story. I wish to remind the reader that my aim has been to open up dialogue but at the same time I do not wish to close it down through the marginalisation of other subjective positions. I have therefore grounded the status and knowledge derived from these insights in incarnational theology.

Adopting Althaus - Reid's work and building upon it I have attempted to leave behind the images of mono-loving gods and relationships, colonising with an attempt at making universal her bisexual mythology. Bisexuality *can* be seen as a product of the straight mind, it is in the heterosexual framework, but if we queer it, bisexuality becomes a hermeneutical tool for the creation of theology. The image of an unpredictable, polyamorous God that can be found in relationships that empower and allows for a divine bisexual subject in theology.

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