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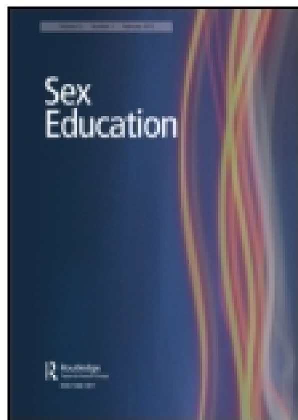

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'Pleasure has no passport': re-visiting the potential of pleasure in sexuality education

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'Pleasure has no passport': re-visiting the potential of pleasure in sexuality education

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The idea that pleasure might form a part of sexuality education is no longer a 'new' idea in the field of sexuality studies. In this paper we examine how originally conceived notions of pleasure have been 'put to work' and theoretically 'taken up' in relation to sexuality and education. It is our contention that because of the nature of discourse and varying cultural and political contexts, pleasure has been operationalised in ways we did not intend or foresee. Throughout this discussion we seek to discern the discursive limits of visions of pleasure to illuminate their normalising potential. Drawing on Foucault's thoughts about pleasure as having 'no passport' and queer theoretical understandings of this concept, we argue for a re-conceptualisation of the potential of pleasure in sexuality education. In particular we identify the need for wedging open spaces for the possibility of ethical pleasures, in forms that are not heteronormatively pre-conceived or mandatory.

Keywords: education; sexuality; pleasure; ethical erotics; Foucault

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The call to pleasure and desire within sexuality education was cemented 23 years ago with the seminal essay by Fine (1988) about the missing discourse of desire in American sex education. Although Jackson (1978) had raised an earlier feminist critique of the 'reproductive' emphasis of sex education, the negation of pleasure and desire did not gain traction until Fine's essay 10 years later. By this time, the effects of the second wave feminist movement had engendered a focus in education on girls, and the pedagogical omissions of their schooling. Within sexuality education, an identified silence was the space and language for girls to explore sexual desire and pleasure (Lenskyj 1990).

The fact that this interest within sexuality programmes has predominately been driven by feminist scholars is a phenomenon signalled by Lamb (2010). She attributes this focus to the potential that feminists saw in pleasure and desire to recoup power for young women lost through their sexual 'objectification', 'abuse and victimization' and 'stereotypes of female passivity' (see Lamb 2010, 294). While 'pleasure' and 'desire' have been taken-up within a broader public health agenda as part of addressing sexual health holistically (Philpott, Knerr, and Boydell 2006), historically within safer sex education programmes for gay men and by some male sexuality researchers (Ingham 2005), within sexuality education these foci remain largely the preserve of feminists (who are female).

Since the call by Fine (1988) for the inclusion of a missing discourse of desire in sex education, there has been a flourish of international research seeking to answer and build

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on her preliminary thoughts. In a now often quoted passage, this work has been premised on the idea that:

> The naming of desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement, particularly for females, barely exists in the formal agenda of public schooling on sexuality. When spoken, it is tagged with reminders of 'consequences' – emotional, physical, moral, reproductive and/or financial (Freudenberg, 1987). A genuine discourse of desire would invite adolescents to explore what feels good and bad, desirable and undesirable, grounded in experiences, needs and limits. Such a discourse would release females from a position of receptivity, enable an analysis of the dialectics of victimization and pleasure, and would pose female adolescents as subjects of sexuality, initiators as well as negotiators. (Fine 1988, 33)

Much of this ensuing research has sought to uncover the absence of this discourse globally in, for example, Ireland (Rolston, Schubotz, and Simpson 2004; Kiely 2005), Canada (Tolman 2002; E. Connell 2005), England (Measor, Tiffin, and Miller 2000; Forrest, Strange, and Oakley 2004; Alldred and David 2007), Australia (Harrison, Hillier, and Walsh 1996; Rasmussen, Rofes, and Talburt 2004; Beasley 2008) and New Zealand (Allen 2001, 2004; Abel and Fitzgerald 2006). Some of these studies have sought to develop Fine's initial vision by delineating the benefits of including a discourse of desire in programmes (Allen 2005; Higgins and Hirsch 2007; Beasley 2008). Others have translated empirical and theoretical insights about pleasure into educational programmes and resources (Philpott, Knerr, and Boydell 2006; Sexual Health and Relationships Education (SHARE) South Australia 2006; The Centre for HIV and Sexual Health 2007; Carmody 2009b).

These debates follow heated conversations and feminist conferences resulting from the 1982 Barnard Sexuality Conference in the USA. The linking of pleasure and danger sparked significant controversy and resulted in exposing significant ideological chasms between feminists. The 'sex wars', as they were subsequently called, saw some women arguing for a singular focus on eliminating all forms of danger facing women. This included campaigning around pornography and broader issues that were viewed as anti-sex (for example, Dworkin 1979). For others who supported women's sexual freedom, such an exclusive focus and politics was perilous, making women's sexual pleasure invisible (Vance 1992). Other authors such as Grosz (1989) and Waldby (1997) were crucial subsequent contributors in taking sexuality discussions further using post-modern theoretical approaches.

This profusion of research and writing has brought us to the current moment where the suggestion of including pleasure and desire in sexuality education is no longer new. Such proposals are, however, still considered as contentious and vigorously contested in some contexts as they were 23 years ago (see Kiely (2005) for debates in Ireland). What has changed, however, is that previous feminist proponents of pleasure and desire in sexuality education have reached a critical pause. Rather than a moment of inactivity, this pause is about critically reflecting on what has been achieved through the call for inclusion of a missing discourse of desire and pleasure (Fine and McClelland 2006; Lamb 2010; Allen in press; Rasmussen in press). This reflective process began in 2005 when Fine published the article 'Desire: the morning (and 15 years) after' in *Feminism and Psychology*. She wrote of the inextinguishable presence of desire despite the fact that its trajectories, 'have been mediated and colonised by global capital, medicalisation, privatisation and the imperial presence of the state' (Fine 2005, 56). While still hopeful about its possibilities, Fine lamented the way in which calls for desire have been unhooked from their original objectives and expressed disenchantment with the transformative potential of schools to incorporate this discourse productively.

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This paper forms a part of this reflexive pause. As part of a special issue concerned with international perspectives of obstacles to good sex education, we seek to interrogate how the way in which pleasure is theoretically conceived may inhibit its productive inclusion in sexuality classrooms. Our paper is deliberately theoretical to build on a companion piece by the first author which illuminates in a more practical sense the way pleasure has been or is being put to work in classrooms (Allen in press). We write from specific cultural and disciplinary locations as two feminist critical sexuality researchers and educators living in Australasia. As proponents of the potential of pleasure in sexuality programmes we engage with culturally specific pleasure debates resonant of Anglophone and wealthy capitalist countries.

Both authors have advocated for the inclusion of pleasure within educational programmes around sexuality: as part of a perceived need for a discourse of erotics in sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Allen 2001, 2005), and within the field of sexual violence prevention and the sexual ethics work (Carmody 2009a, 2009b) implemented in Australia and New Zealand. How we seek to contribute to this reflexive pause is by interrogating our originally conceived intentions for pleasure in our work together with the conceptualisations of good sexuality education they contain. The reason for undertaking this examination is to clarify pleasure's conceptual basis in our research so that we might see what limitations and possibilities it offers. Our intention is to encourage other reconfigurations of desire and pleasure that attend to the limitations these discourses have been perceived to contain to date. While illuminating the normalising potential of our work we also want to re-think pleasure's potential through Foucault's concept of pleasure as having 'no passport' and queer theoretical work by Jagose (2010) around sexual pleasure and agency. Although we acknowledge the inevitable caveats of pleasure in sexuality education programmes, we argue for the continued importance of wedging open spaces for the possibility of ethical pleasures, in forms that are not pre-conceived, heteronormative or mandatory.

This paper begins with each author reflecting on their original intentions for pleasure within their work and how we sought to take up and contribute to the discourse of desire discussed by Fine (1988). In a bid to reveal some of the constraints to our originally conceived intentions and their normalising effects, we explore the closely related issue of how pleasure has been put to work and interrogated by others. Like Fine (2005), we end with 'a rich sense of theoretical possibility' about pleasure so as to render this pause generative rather than stagnating. In the final section, we seek to conceptually stretch pleasure's possibilities with reference to theoretical tools from Foucault and Jagose.

A discourse of erotics in sexuality education

Young people's calls for the inclusion of information about pleasure and desire were the motivating force for engagement with these concepts within sexuality education. Louisa Allen first became aware of these persistent and vociferous requests during her doctoral studies in 1997. This involved a project to explore the so-called 'gap' between what young people learn in sexuality education and what they do in practice (Allen 2005). While this research did not intentionally solicit ideas about content young people deemed important in sexuality education, it generated tangentially a large number of impromptu comments about this issue. Students were highly critical of what they saw as the irrelevance of sexuality education to their lives because of its de-eroticised approach that conflicted with their own experiences of relationships and the portrayal of these in the media (i.e. television, film, music, magazines, etc.). In attempting to think through why some young

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people do not always, or ever, operationalise sexuality education's messages, their words pointed to the fact that it did not contain the information they valued and deemed useful. These sentiments were echoed in subsequent research which sought to ask students directly what information was missing from school-based sexuality education and what content they wanted future programmes to contain (Allen 2008). Of the 1180 survey participants in this research, the topic they most wanted to know more about was, 'how to make sexual activity enjoyable for both partners'. Such resounding sentiment made it clear that these young people had a strong investment in pleasure and that they wanted sexuality education to take them, and 'pleasure', seriously.

These findings (Allen 2003, 2005) resonated with Moira Carmody's later work revealing that many young people felt ill-prepared with the knowledge and skills to successfully navigate sexual intimacy (Carmody 2009a). Together, our research has contributed to a growing focus internationally on highlighting a gap between what young people want to know and what is delivered to them via school curricula (DiCenso and Borthwick 2001; Rolston, Schubotz, and Simpson 2004; Abel and Fitzgerald 2006; Hilton 2007; Hillier and Mitchell 2008; Powell 2010). Young people surveyed by researchers from a range of countries are consistently clear about what they want to know, what is over-emphasised in sexuality education and what is omitted. These areas include avoidance of discussion of emotional aspects of sexuality, a focus on reproduction, absence of a discourse of desire and a concentration on the dangers of desire for women – pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted infections. Discussions of sexuality are also criticised for being limited to sexual intercourse and avoiding same sex desire. In addition, students are acutely aware of the awkwardness of some teachers in answering difficult questions.

Findings from Louisa Allen's research on sexuality education within the New Zealand context support Fine's identification of a missing discourse of desire. Applying the work by Fine (1988), she sought to draw on the missing discourse of desire as an explanation for the perceived knowledge–practice 'gap'. In its silence about pleasure, sexuality education failed to capture the attention of young people with important safer sex messages, because they were 'switched off' by existing de-eroticised content. Similarly, this missing discourse constituted young people in ways that were unhelpful to its causes, by denying them as legitimately sexual and in constraining gendered and heteronormative ways (see Allen 2005). Including discussions of pleasure in sexuality education might be one strategy for gaining young people's attention as a first step in closing the perceived knowledge–practice gap. It might also serve as a means of meeting their self-prescribed content needs so that sexuality education better serves these. Depending on its configuration, the inclusion of pleasure might also offer young people a more nuanced and complex understanding of themselves as gendered sexual subjects. For young women, this might mean a previously unacknowledged right to sexual desire and pleasure, and for young men, access to ways of operationalising these concepts beyond notions of the predatory male sexual subject. These hopes were framed by a sex-positive view of young people's sexuality, and a feminist (Tolman 2002) and critical masculinities interest (R.W. Connell 2005) in opening up and disrupting existing gendered sexual norms.

In an attempt to build on Fine's work, it was suggested that sexuality education needed more than the inclusion of a discourse of desire. Instead, we called for the inclusion of a more expansive 'discourse of erotics', of which 'desire' and 'pleasure' both formed a part. Framed by a concern for social/sexual justice (see Allen 2011), this discourse aimed to be inclusive of groups that were not explicitly named in Fine's work, such as gay, lesbian and bisexual students, those who are transgendered and young people with disabilities

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(see Allen 2005, 145–64). I (Louisa Allen) also drew attention to some of its implications for students of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. At the time, I was absorbed with anticipated difficulties of including such a discourse in school sexuality education when classes comprised students whose cultural and religious affiliations might object to it. Rather than being heteronormatively prescriptive, it was hoped that this discourse would hold open the possibility of 'pleasure' as a discussion in sexuality education and site of agentic possibility for young people:

> A discourse of erotics might incorporate an explicit recognition that *all* young people, whatever their gender and sexual identity (i.e. transgender, intersex, female, male, lesbian, same-sex attracted, bisexual, (hetero)sexual or something else) have a right to be positively acknowledged as sexual subjects who may experience sexual desire and pleasure. (Allen 2005, 146; italics in original)

Opening a discursive space in which young people might have a right to pleasure and desire is not the same as insisting that they must seek or experience these things. This was a subtle but important distinction, which sought to preclude a 'pleasure imperative':

> Including a discourse of erotics in sexuality education could also be about creating spaces in which young people's sexual desire and pleasure can be legitimated and positively integrated within official school culture. This does not mean that young people have to, or will necessarily seize upon these spaces, but that they are no longer denied them because they are 'missing' from sexuality education programmes. All discourses have regulatory effects and it is important that a discourse of erotics does not render the experience of desire and pleasure compulsory or constitute those who don't experience these things as somehow lacking. (Allen 2005, 148)

My hopes for pleasure were that these were conceived in their broadest sense to avoid a standardisation of particular practices or regulatory ideas about what 'pleasure is'. For instance, sexual pleasure need not be conflated with bodily sensation, emotional response or cerebral decisions, neither is it necessarily a route to, or evidence of, 'empowerment' or 'sexual health'. While it might be, its relationship to these things is more arbitrary and by no means guaranteed. As Jagose (2010, 531) describes it, pleasure may not necessarily feel good at all. The sense of pleasure I had in mind is more akin to Barthes' (2005) concept of jouissance. Barthes makes a distinction between pleasure as contained within the social/symbolic order, consciously enjoyed and linguistically represented, while *jouissance* pertains to 'pure affect that does not know boundaries and dissolves subjectivity' (Talburt 2009, 91). What pleasure offers, from this perspective, is a site of possibility.

I had also conceptualised a discourse of erotics as containing an explicit affirmation of sexual and gender diversity politics. Talburt (2009) explains that such an intention infers putting pleasure to work in a mode that is counter-productive. The social/sexual justice framing of a discourse of erotics is counter-intuitive to the nature of discourse and its operation. Discourses are not individually authored, mobilised or manipulated. Similarly, pleasure in the mode of *jouissance* is, as Sullivan describes:

> … a pre-discursive, pre-subjective event, an exposure, a becoming-open that is unnameable, this is if you like, queer. Pleasure is a transformative process, not because it is something I can employ to my own ends, but because it inaugurates the very site of (un)becoming. Pleasure exists before the question of its meaning, its use, arises. (1999, 254)

For Talburt (2009, 93), this means political intentions cannot be harnessed to pleasure because doing so undermines its transformative potential as something that 'creates and recreates in ways that cannot be known in advance'. Binding pleasure to political aims such as social/sexual justice saddles it with normalising and regulatory practices.

Paradoxically, the potential for the transformative 'queerness' of pleasure is eradicated at the very moment it is identified with queer politics. In such an instance, it becomes a regulatory practice that establishes identity binarisms of queer/non-queer pleasures and subsequently its affective potential to dissolve subjectivity erodes.

The linking of feminist aspirations of young women's sexual empowerment with pleasure is another example of how a discourse of erotics might be put to work with unanticipated regulatory effects. Tolman (2002) writes of the importance of young women having access to a discourse of desire in sexuality education that enables them to articulate and experience in embodied ways their own desires. It is only when young women know what embodied desire feels like, Tolman (2002) argues, that they can decide whether to engage in a particular sexual practice. This knowledge of pleasure and desire is deemed to have a protective effect against sexual coercion or sexual behaviour that young women do not actively desire.

Lamb (2010, 330) argues that these kinds of hopes for pleasure once again burden young women with the responsibility of 'understanding their bodies' and 'managing their orgasms' and may be unrealistic to achieve. She also maintains that: 'the kind of sexual person who feels pleasure, desire, and subjectivity may be ironically similar to the commodified, sexualised, marketed teen girl that is also problematic for feminism' (Lamb 2010, 296; see also, McNair 2002; Levy 2005). Fine (2005, 57) reminds us however that, 'while the commodification of desire has a long history, it should not be confused with an explicit commitment to sexual freedom for women'. Rather than a tool for sexual agency, pleasure as discursively configured here, serves to re-inscribe traditional notions of female sexual responsibility and objectification. The nature of discourse means individuals do not exert control over how it operates in different contents, so it may become untethered from its original intentions around acting as an antidote for female sexual objectification and disempowerment.

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Ethical erotics and preventing sexual violence

Louisa Allen's way into this work was through listening closely to what young people wanted from sexuality education, whereas my (Moira Carmody) research began with adults exploring the ways in which they had learnt to negotiate sexual relationships. In 2005, I published an article in the journal *Sexualities* (Carmody 2005), which presented findings from a small qualitative study. These demonstrated the way in which women and men of diverse sexualities were able to negotiate ethical and non-violent sexual relationships. My argument in this article centred on sexual ethics and its conceptual usefulness to sexuality and violence prevention education. It was from this starting point that I then moved on to work with young people aged 16–25 years of age. My call for an ethical erotics discourse to inform violence prevention programmes came from several concerns. I argued that an artificial separation of sexuality education from violence prevention education was not helpful to young people and was a false separation that primarily reflected different professional backgrounds of researchers and educators. Instead, I argued for a greater integration of all aspects of sexuality including the need to explicitly address within programmes pressured, coerced sex and sexual assault.

The contested nature of sexuality education is well recognised and the field is saturated by a myriad of discourses as Jones (2011a, 2011b) has recently documented. Informed by Foucault's work on ethical sexual subjectivity, I put forward a definition of ethical erotics as involving:

> negotiation in which care of the self is linked to care of the other. For either to be missing or limited tips the balance from mutual pleasure to dangerous sex either physically or emotionally. This then would be unethical and would significantly increase the risk or danger for the individuals concerned. (Carmody 2005, 477)

The linkage between ethical erotics and pleasure therefore created alternative spaces to explore new possibilities of intimate pleasures not constrained by dominant heteronormative discourses. Like Louisa Allen, I was conceptualising this work with a focus on possibilities as opposed to a sexual restraint model often applied to young people. The following discussion will tease this out more fully.

Until very recently, most sexuality education programmes in schools have avoided complex ethical and legal questions such as pressured and coerced sex. As such they have avoided dealing with aspects of unethical sexual subjectivity. Interviews with young people conducted in 2008 in NSW, Australia, found that sexual and other forms of intimate violence were rarely discussed in schools (Carmody 2009a). If they were included, they appeared as part of a larger discourse of sexual risk but were not addressed in any depth. Alternatively, a violence against women service might be invited in to provide a one-off presentation on the law and victim support services. These approaches are severely limiting in terms of equipping young people with the knowledge and skills needed to explore and develop ethical sexual lives. They fail to recognise that sexual encounters can move from pleasurable to dangerous in the space of seconds and this reinforces discourses of sexual violence as happening outside the 'normal' practices of sexual intimacy.

Normalising discourses attempt to suppress, control and police the sexual activity of communities and subgroups within them. Young people are one such group that are a constant focus of moral panic. Their desires, acts and pleasures are held up to scrutiny and control in official discourses but meanwhile they operate in their own worlds with their own rules, methods of regulation and customs. While they cannot stand outside the cultural and historical forces that shape them, some can and do resist dominant societal expectations of how they are expected to behave. One of the difficulties young people face is having access to some navigation tools or maps to guide them through the new world they enter as emerging sexual subjects. Sawicki argues that:

> Foucault attempted to open the epistemological and cultural space for us to invent new truths about ourselves – to subject ourselves to new forms of self understanding. Why? Because he believed the cost associated with continuing to operate within the regime of sexual normalisation was both too high and unnecessarily constraining. (2010, 186)

It is this challenge to sexual normalisation including the normalisation of sexual violence between intimate partners that ethical erotics discourse seeks to address. It aims to do this by placing ethical sexual subjectivity as central to the task of countering the disciplinary system of sexuality. Within this counter discourse lies the possibility, following Foucault, 'of a non-disciplinary eroticism – that of a body in a volatile and diffused state, with its chance encounters and unplanned pleasures' (cited in Jagose 2010, 523).

Sexual expression is primarily a relational activity and as such raises the question of how we are 'to do' this relationship (however fleeting or lasting) well; if we wish to live an ethical life. The approach I have taken in relation to sexual ethics falls broadly within the tradition of continental philosophy. This is concerned with determining the conditions for ethical exploration for different types of people, rather than establishing the borders of acceptable or unacceptable desires, thoughts and actions. I extend the continental approach to include feminist conceptions of ethics, including a conception of gender that

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acknowledges the possibility of multiple forms of masculinities. My approach to sexual ethics is therefore not about seeking new certainties in the sense of new moral codes. Rather, it is about a transformation of personal existence, paying attention to the cultural, psychological, interpersonal and emotional conditions of personal transformation that make ethical choices possible (Schroeder 2000).

Foucault's ideas of mutuality and the constant state of reflection and renegotiation are crucial to assess and rework where we are in relation to living an ethical life (Rabinow 1997). Rather than assuming a fixed and stable feminine or masculine subject, a process of constantly becoming or performing gender, as Butler (1990) points out, is possible. Each sexual encounter invites the possibility of also reworking desire and pleasure. Therefore the difference is acknowledged and the possibilities to conform to or resist dominant discourses of gender and sexuality are more likely.

Foucault's central argument about ethics involves what he calls *rapport à soi* – the relationship you ought to have with yourself – which determines how an individual is supposed to constitute himself [sic] as a moral subject of his [sic] own actions (Rabinow 1997, 263). Foucault argues therefore that the care of the self is intimately linked with ethics and that ethics is, in a very practical sense, the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection (Rabinow 1997, 284). Care of the self is synonymous with living an ethical life, but it is not the Socratic admonition to 'Know thyself', as if we can discover an essential self. The ethical adventure is not finding or revealing who we *are*, but the work involved when exploring the self in this or that cultural and historical lineage (Flaming 2006, 221). This is not a solo journey, rather, 'The care of the self is ethical in itself: but it implies complex relationships with others insofar as this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others' (Rabinow 1997, 287).

So what does this mean for a conception of ethical erotics? Constructing sexuality education and intimacy on the basis of ethical sexual subjectivity provides a counter discourse to education based on fear and pathology. Caring for the self and considering the impact of your desires and wants on the other require a process of dynamic mutual negotiation and reflection. This has the potential to encourage practices beyond the regulatory and highly gendered system of sexuality which is focused on control and surveillance. Foucault (cited in Davidson 2001, 213) argued that: 'Pleasure is something that passes from one individual to another, it is not a secretion of identity. Pleasure has no passport, no identity card'. This opens up the erotic exchange between partners to move beyond the dominant sexual norms and create possibilities of unplanned pleasures not tied to assumptions about desire (identity) or acts.

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Pleasure as a site of possibilities

Having canvassed our individual approaches to pleasure, we now extend the discussion to broader issues of how to re-signify and re-deploy pleasure in sexuality education through the work of Foucault (original in French cited in Eribon 1994) and queer theorists like Jagose (2010). Our aim is to re-conceptualise pleasure as a site of possibility, shaking it from some of the discursive baggage it has collected so far in its trajectory. This work is necessarily theoretical because to implement pleasure as a site of possibility within sexuality education at school, space must be opened for it to be thought as such.

Foucault argues that desire, acts and pleasure are three key elements to understanding sexual behaviour (Rabinow 1997, 268–9). Pleasure is illusory if desire is heavily policed. For Foucault, the distinction between 'desire' and 'pleasure' was critical to outlining his

preference for the latter. Foucault sought to detach the experience of pleasure from a psychological theory of sexual desire and sexual subjectivity (Davidson 2001). He saw more potential in pleasure, because desire is tied to identity in ways that can be problematic for those who are not deemed 'the norm'. For Foucault, desire is always expressed as *for* someone or some act and as such seen to reveal 'what one really wants, who one really is' (Davidson 2001, 211–2). Advancing this argument, Foucault wrote, 'Tell me what your desire is and I will tell you who you are, if you are normal or not; I will therefore be able to admit or disqualify your desire' (cited in Davidson 2001, 212). Desire therefore, creates a permanence of identity on which psychological assessments and subsequent management of the subject rest.

In contrast, pleasure is only related to itself, it does not represent anything and therefore cannot be counterfeit. Pleasure is free of use, almost devoid of meaning:

> There is no 'pathology' of pleasure, no 'abnormal' pleasure. It is an event 'outside the subject', or at the limit of the subject, in that something which is neither of the body nor of the soul, which is neither inside nor outside, in short, a notion not assigned and not assignable. (Foucault, cited in Davidson 2001, 212)

This capacity means that pleasure can function as a point of resistance to the apparatus of sexuality. Talk of pleasure in sexuality education might offer one way of unhooking young people from confining identities which deem that they *should* have a particular sexual response or expression based on gendered and sexual identity. This does not mean sexuality education should negate desire, but that all engagements with it should be critical.

It is through the process of examining how desire is conceptualised and allowed to be spoken about that a regulating knowledge/power nexus is revealed. One of the difficulties facing young people exposed to sexuality programmes in schools is a lack of language to express their desires, to name them, to move beyond Fine's missing discourse of desire and claim a space for this. Whether the official discourses of sexuality education are conservative, liberal, critical or post-modern (Jones 2011a) will determine the shape, the texture, the gaps and the ethical underpinnings of the sexuality education knowledge presented. The presence of these discourses may result in desires remaining invisible or actively condemned. In the case of same sex desire, it can be simultaneously invisible and actively denounced, with all the negative ramifications this may have on schoolyard relations (O'Higgins-Norman 2009). This power/knowledge relationship reveals the way in which desire is over-invested with social and cultural norms and imbued with psychological theories of the self and forms of sexual orientation and identity.

Pleasure on the other hand has the potential for quite different purposes. Some conceptualise it primarily as a bodily event. For example, Lamb (2010, 294) argues that: 'pleasure is often used synonymously with desire, but generally indicates that girls, like boys can feel and want pleasure in sex'. While this is one interpretation of the bodily focus of pleasure, it elides wider socio-cultural mechanisms of this concept that some writers call on in their work with young people (Carmody 2003; Allen 2005; McClelland and Fine 2008; Rasmussen in press). To confine pleasure to primarily or exclusively a corporeal event misses its potential for diverse and 'new' configurations.

Foucault argues that 'no-one knows what pleasure is' (Rabinow 1997, 268–9). This quality is perceived as one of its advantages in terms of creating spaces for new configurations of pleasure that are not bound by heteronormative imaginings. Teasing out this potential, Jagose argues that:

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> For Foucault, intense sexual pleasure, particularly that which reorganises the body's erogeneity, is productively impersonal in so far as it has the capacity to reorder momentarily the subject's sense of self, to detach the individual from the stable, coherent identity through which modern sexuality is administered and regulated. (2010, 523)

In this sense, pleasure has the capacity to detach itself from identity, it is an experience that can be divorced from the subject with the potential to reconfigure it. In a similar vein, Davidson (2001, 213) articulates that the difference between desire and pleasure is the possibilities that pleasure opens up: 'desire holds a grip on the subject which is central to the constitution of a science of sexuality, while pleasure escapes the discourse of pathology and abnormality … it disturbs, disrupts the primacy of the subject'. In these conceptualisations of pleasure, 'who' (i.e. the identity of the subject) is displaced by pleasure's potential as possibility.

Drawing on these insights enables a queering of pleasure that attempts to release sexuality education from *teaching for pleasure*. The insertion of pleasure in sexuality education as something which young people should strive for in relationships, or learn skills for how to successfully achieve, we argue, undermines its transformative potential. What we attempt to draw attention to is that, 'pleasure is a very difficult behaviour. It is not as simple as to enjoy one's self' (Foucault, cited in Jagose 2010, 53). But in difficulty lies pleasure's possibilities. The fact that we cannot know what a discourse of pleasure might do in advance opens it as a site of perpetual creation and recreation and therefore (sexual) possibility. As long as this discourse has a presence in sexuality education, the potential for young people to mobilise and negotiate it in ways that make sense for them remains. As a presence, it might also create spaces for ethical sexual negotiation and refashioning gender expectations of individuals, bodies and acts. This possibility exists for those whatever their gendered, cultural, or religious positionings are because it is the 'presence' of this site of possibility rather than its up-take or denial which is transformatively important. Of course, recognising this capacity means relinquishing a sense of false control over how pleasure is remade and recreated. However, our research has taught us that young people have significantly more capacity for transformative sexual possibilities than they are usually given credit for.

In our re-signification of this concept we also signal that there is a need within sexuality education to recognise that pleasure is not necessarily transformative. Foucault refused to specify any particular set of sexual practices as inherently empowering or resistant. What makes them resistant depends on their particular configuration at any moment, in a specific context and temporality. Foucault writes that: 'I do not think that there is anything that is functionally – by its very nature – absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice' (Foucault, cited in Jagose 2010, 524). The same logic might be applied to pleasure. As a sexual practice, pleasure is not inherently transformative. While it can have these effects, it is not always possible to predict the outcomes or for the individuals involved to stand outside the discourses that shape them.

Somewhat disappointingly for many feminists, the experience of sexual pleasure for young women does not necessarily lead to empowerment, nor is it necessarily a positive indicator of sexual health. However, there is room for some optimism here based on the empirical research with 200 young women and men of diverse sexualities who participated in the Sex + Ethics Program Australia and New Zealand (Carmody 2009b). Follow-up studies with participants 4–6 months after the 6-week education groups finished found that 85–95% are still using ideas and skills learnt in the programme about ethical sexual negotiation. In particular, young women report consistently increased self-care and finding their voice to speak their desires and negotiating to realise them. This suggests that

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developing ideas and practices on the basis of ethical erotics or giving space in curricula for discourses of erotics creates the very possibilities that Foucault suggested around the predictive nature of pleasure that has remained missing in action from sexuality education since it was first identified by Fine in 1988. This also speaks to Fine's original call in 1988 for ways in which young women could become both 'initiators' and 'negotiators'.

Conclusion

Obstacles to good sexuality education are often perceived as occurring at policy, managerial and community levels of schooling. What is often forgotten in the struggles around competing discourses of education is to listen to the voices, the desires and the pleasures that young people want to explore. We find this grounding crucial in our work with young people. What is defined as good sexuality education is most often designed and implemented from an educator's perspective. There is no doubt that as educators we often have to balance competing moral and ethical perspectives coming from multiple sources such as schools, education departments, parents, the wider community and the media. However, we consider it crucial that education is underpinned by clearly articulated and diverse theoretical underpinnings. For this reason, our discussion above is aimed at contributing to what constitutes good sexuality education by concentrating on one aspect of theory that we feel is being constrained by specific and narrow interpretations.

We have deliberately concentrated on the theoretical because we see current conceptualisations of pleasure and their relationship to sexuality education as the first obstacle to 'good' sexuality education. Before good sexuality education (however that might be conceived) can be realised, it has to be conceptualised. Our aim has been to stretch pleasure's theoretical possibilities beyond our original hopes for it and the ways in which these have been mobilised in other work in the field. Opening up theoretical understandings of pleasure to possibilities beyond corporeal sensations, heteronormative configurations and bodily acts not only highlights current conceptual constraints within sexuality education, but also ways of moving beyond these. To understand 'pleasure as having no passport' creates potential for pleasures unhinged from identity and differently configured. Creating spaces for consideration of pleasure in sexuality education cannot be separated from theoretical discussion about what pleasure means and how practically this might be achieved.

To argue such a position may be seen by some as unworkable in the context of young people's lives when operating within the confines of the schoolyard. Put another way; the queer notion of pleasure as a site of possibility is not easily reconciled with the regulatory practices of schooling (Pinar 1998). However, despite attempts to constrain expressions of young people's sexuality, they often actively refuse to comply with these limits. Some are smart travellers and find embodied pleasures for themselves and their partners and also pleasure in pushing against the borders of the dominant culture. The challenge for us as educators is, then, to understand the roles we play consciously or, unconsciously as 'border protection officers'. We consider that it is indeed possible, and crucial that we resist attempts to reduce discourses of erotics into 'a pleasure imperative' where students learn the recipe for how to gain it, and maybe, even, how to give it. This would see pleasure co-opted as part of the regime of sexual normalisation and rob it of its transformative potential for women, men and those who identify their gender outside of this binary.

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