Part 2

THEORETICAL ADVANCES

5

Feminist Discourses and Women's Heterosexual Desire

Wendy Hollway

Would you like to express
your sex without stress?
Would you like to discover
Physical conversations
of a different kind?
(Au Pairs, *Sense and Sensibility*)

There is no emancipatory discourse concerning women's heterosexual desire; that is, there is no currently available way of conceptualizing women's pleasure and sexual desire (active sexual wants) in heterosexual sex which is regarded as consistent with principles of women's liberation. For radical feminism, heterosexual sex is the eroticization of power difference. For psychoanalytic feminism, particularly Lacanian, desire is engendered by difference, and that difference is inaugurated by the phallus, that is, it is patriarchal.

To agree with the introductory statement does not mean, however, that there is no currently available practice of egalitarian and pleasurable heterosex: I do it, for one. What then is the relationship between sexual practice and this discursive state of affairs? Either I am wrong (lying or conning myself); or so-called rare experience need not affect feminist discourses (Thompson, 1994); or these discourses need some development. In both the second and third cases, it is necessary to conceptualize practices which transcend the determination of discourse. I shall argue the third case.

Discourses of unpleasurable heterosex are supported by recent British empirical work which provides a picture of women who are far

from satisfied with their heterosexual relationships, both young women (Holland et al., 1994) and older women in long-term relationships (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993). However, to explore further the limitations of this picture, theoretical work is needed, because what people can report, and how that is made sense of by researchers, is affected by the availability of relevant discourses.[1] Looked at from the perspective that experience is mediated by discourse, the lack of an emancipatory discourse of women's heterosex means that it is very difficult to communicate the experience of pleasurable, egalitarian heterosex, both at the level of simply talking about it, and also at a theoretical level of conceptualizing women's heterosexual desire as consistent with a feminist politics. I shall argue that a feminist discourse on heterosexuality is needed within which the full range of women's experiences can be located; from the experience of disempowerment to the sense of oneself as autonomous sexual agent; from the eroticizing of power difference to the experience of equality and sexual pleasure at the same time.

In summary, the lack of an emancipatory discourse concerning women's heterosexual desire means that there is a serious gap in feminist political discourse: a gap where there could be articulated a possibility of women creating the conditions of sexual pleasure, satisfaction and fulfilment of desire in relationships with other loving and loved adults.

Let me make it clear from the start that the purpose of such a discourse is not to pretend that heterosexual couples can live (and fuck) happily ever after; nor to create an idealized norm against which individual women may fail. It is to de-privatize the actual in some women's lives (how many we cannot know); to articulate the possible, so that women can make better informed choices; and to distinguish the healthy and happy from the oppressive.

There is no emancipatory discourse of women's heterosexual desire

> No questions are being asked in political discourse on sex about hope and sorrow, intimacy and anguish, communion and loss. (Dworkin, 1987: 56)

Since the great feminist debate about women's orgasms in the early seventies (Koedt, 1973), there has been a notable absence of feminist enquiry about 'normal' heterosexual sex, during a time when American and British feminism has concentrated massively on the oppressiveness of male sexuality as manifest in rape, pornography, prostitution and sexual harassment. Male power is understandably

the central conceptual tool of these radical feminist critiques of male heterosexuality which have dominated feminism for the past decade, but there is remarkably little attempt to understand how this is negotiated between men and women in real relations. Now there is a sudden resurgence of feminist discussion about women's heterosexuality.[2] This literature is either based on the argument that there can be no emancipatory heterosexuality for women under the conditions of patriarchy (for example Kitzinger, 1994; Schacht and Achison, 1993), or based on the absence of an emancipatory discourse concerning heterosexuality as a problem for feminism (Hollway, 1993; Jackson, 1995; Smart, 1994; Segal, 1994).

The most obvious recent British example of the resurgent interest is the Special Issue of *Feminism & Psychology* 2(3) (Kitzinger et al., 1992) and subsequent *Reader* (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993) on heterosexuality, whose editorial summarized the contributions as 'one long grey stream of heterosexual misery' (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1993: 12). In a response to the Special Issue I hazarded the opinion that the way that the terms of contribution were set up for heterosexual feminists' personal accounts made it likely, within the recent context of feminist debate on sexuality, that contributors would be hampered by a sense of guilt as well as an absence of discourses which make sense of 'the pleasures, desires and satisfactions in their sexual relationships' as opposed to the 'painful contradictions' (Hollway, 1993: 412). Several of the heterosexual feminist contributors did testify to the difficulty of responding to 'a public challenge to us to account for the ambiguities of our position' (Thomas, 1994: 317), or felt 'rounded up for confessions in a public forum' (Gergen, 1992: 62). One reviewer of the Special Issue simply said: 'No woman, certainly no feminist, would be likely to want to see herself summed up by a term which defines her primarily in relation to men' (Swindells, 1993: 44). Smart (1994) argues that when the earlier second-wave celebration of women's heterosexual practices was rejected within feminism, guilt was put back in a dominant place, especially because accusations of sleeping with the enemy came on top of white, middle-class women's longer-standing sexual guilt, characteristic of the Christian tradition.

The idea that there is something fundamentally inconsistent about the very terms 'feminist' and 'heterosexual' derives from the developments in radical feminist theory in the 1980s which can be encapsulated in the slogan 'sleeping with the enemy'. The fact that the majority of women continued to do just that was accounted for variously in terms of being a powerless victim of heteropatriarchal power (how can women leave if they've got no independent resources?), or, for those of us with independent resources, it

involved false consciousness. The slogan 'any woman can' (be a lesbian) laid down the lesbian feminist gauntlet. However, as Stevi Jackson has recently commented: 'If "any woman can" I, as a financially independent woman surrounded by lesbian friends, ought to have been able to. I could have opted for political correctness via celibacy, but I chose not to' (Jackson, 1994: 14).

Choice is a rare – and brave – term in relation to feminist heterosexuality, particularly in a theoretical climate dominated by social constructionism, in which choice is often regarded as an illusory discursive product of liberal individualism. So Jackson's theoretical position is in this light problematic, but also a fluent expression of the dominant position:

> What is specific to heterosexual desire . . . is that it is premised on gender *difference*, on the sexual 'otherness' of the desired object . . . Since it is gender hierarchy which renders these anatomical differences socially and erotically significant, it is hardly surprising heterosexual sex has been culturally constructed around an eroticization of power. (Jackson, 1994: 3)

While the dominant position derives primarily from radical feminism, Jackson is also echoing the orthodox feminist psychoanalytic account of the construction of desire in gender difference (see Chodorow, 1994 for a clarifying, full account). Adams presents it with a Lacanian accent:

> Both the boy and the girl have to submit to castration to allow the emergence of desire, that investment of the object with erotic value which makes the object relation possible . . . The whole economy of desire is rooted in the phallus *and* this phallus is attributed to the father . . . So if desire is the investing of the object with erotic value, this investment is not made in relation to difference as such, but in relation to a gendered difference . . . Desire is *engendered* by difference. (Adams, 1989: 248)

Lacan took the proposition directly into the realm of heterosexuality, when he made his 'great, scandalous claim that there is no sexual relation', which Gallop interprets as his 'announcement of the impossibility of heterosexuality' (1982: 129). According to Gallop, the arena of gender difference is crucial to feminist transformation: 'any feminist upheaval . . . must undo the vicious circle by which the desire for the father's desire . . . causes her to submit to the father's law' (1982: 71).

The conjunction of radical feminist and psychoanalytic feminist thought in conflating power, difference and desire (albeit from such different epistemological starting points) has made it very difficult to get a theoretical glimpse of any desire, let alone a heterosexual desire, based on equality.[3]

The structural reality of men's privileged access to power and the effects of the dominance of heterosexuality in reproducing women's inequality are amplified in contemporary feminist discourses in which 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980), 'heteropatriarchy' (Jeffreys, 1990) or 'the heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990)[4] have become shorthand for the description of a system in which women are represented as having no choice and no meaningful access to power. The implications for a theory of change, and hence a meaningful feminist politics, are profound. It is this problem which has led to the accusations of 'victim' feminism which have so divided feminists of late, particularly in the USA, with other feminists, who want to stress women's agency and (some) power, being labelled 'power' feminists (for example, Roiphe, 1993 and Paglia, 1992).

In the most dogmatic versions of radical feminist discourse, women are represented as inevitably victims in and of heterosexuality. A paradigmatic example, in my view, is Schacht and Achison's article on heterosexual instrumentalism, in which heterosexuality is defined as 'an eroticized hegemonic ideology of male dominance' (1993: 37). (Schacht and Achison are careful to say that 'some sexual acts between women and men are egalitarian' (1993: 39), but since the claim is inconsistent with every feature of their analysis, the qualification is theoretically meaningless and politically redundant.)

This radical feminist emphasis on male power leads to the position that women who have sexual relations with men are necessarily engaged in relations of dominance and subordination: referred to by Dworkin (1981) as the 'eroticization of inequality' and now labelled as 'the eroticization of power difference' (Jeffreys, 1990; Kitzinger, 1994). For Jeffreys, the possibility that women could have orgasms in heterosexual sex under the conditions of patriarchy is seen as a serious problem (Jeffreys, 1990; see also Kitzinger, 1994). Kitzinger asks (problematizing lesbian sado-masochism as well as heterosexuality): 'how then can we have sex without reenacting power differences?' and answers 'I suspect that we can reshape sexual desire only by reconstructing the social and political conditions within which sexuality is defined' (Kitzinger, 1994: 207). This position seems to me to express the core dilemma of contemporary western feminist theory and politics of sexuality.

The same dilemma poses some questions for discourse theory. Is women's sexuality, and particularly heterosexuality, caught in a matrix of discourses? To what extent have feminist approaches been limited by the historical construction of women's sexuality? Is feminism neglecting an extra-discursive terrain? To what extent do our practices and/or our desires transcend discourses?

Power, discourse and subjectivity

By taking the stance that an emancipatory discourse concerning heterosexuality is politically desirable for contemporary feminism, I am making the assumption that the production of discourses can have political effects. The relation between 'word' and 'world' has, however, proven extremely difficult to theorize. The dominance of discursive approaches in social science has led to a remarkable avoidance of the extra-discursive. A recognition of the fact that all understanding of the world is mediated through language has been falsely reduced to a premise that the world can be understood as discursive. This has left out crucial questions about the relation of discourses to practice and to subjectivity, and therefore to agency and choice.

Foucault (1978) famously argued that, far from sex being repressed in modern cultures, as Freud would have it, sex was being actively produced in discourses ranging from that of the confessional to those of public hygiene. He implicated psychoanalysis in positioning a wide range of people through four key discourses: the masturbating child, the homosexual, the hysterical woman and the reproductive heterosexual couple. Foucault's work contributed to an understanding of how deviancies have been produced in relation to the sexual norm of the reproductive couple, and that regulative discourses and practices concerning sexuality have not focused therefore on adult heterosexuality, which remained a hallowed space, protected from public intervention, in the name of the man's right to rule in his own domain.

The implication in Foucault is that a person's sexuality is forged within these discourses. I believe that is too deterministic. To be sure, the nineteenth century witnessed enormous activity in this area, with significant effects, but Foucault's historical analysis relies on the premise that there were sexual practices going on which had been largely outside the sphere of discourse. This extra-discursive sphere could be seen as doubly private, not just located in the 'private' realm of the family, but not talked about there either.[5] However, when sex is not talked about, this absence is not equivalent to an absence of meaning in sex.

Whilst I have been indebted to discourse analytic approaches in my work on sexuality and heterosexuality (Hollway, 1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1989), my central concern has been to theorize the relation between subjectivity, discourse and gendered power relations in a way which does not reduce subjectivity to the sum of positions in discourses, nor women to an object position in power relations with men (and thus to victim status):

> In displacing the individual as a simple agent the post-structuralists achieved a massive and important step. However . . . in this view the subject is composed of, or exists as, a set of multiple and contradictory positionings of subjectivities. But how are such fragments held together? Are we to assume, as some applications of post-structuralism have implied, that the individual subject is simply the sum total of all positions in discourses since birth? If this is the case, what accounts for the continuity of the subject, and the subjective experience of identity? What accounts for the predictability of people's actions, as they repeatedly position themselves within particular discourses? Can people's wishes and desires be encompassed in an account of discursive relations? (Henriques et al., 1984: 204)

My earlier work left me convinced of the importance of theorizing sex as signification, but dissatisfied with available accounts of desire. Putting these two together in my response to the heterosexuality Special Issue, I tried to give a theoretical explanation of some fragments of an account of my own heterosexual desire (Hollway, 1993). Amongst many responses (see *Feminism & Psychology* 4(2), 1994 and 5(1), 1995), I was criticized for analysing these desires as if they were outside an 'ideological location' (Brown, 1994: 322), for my recourse to a notion of individual history (Thompson, 1994: 327) and (by implication) for excluding 'structural features of male dominance' from my account (Ramazanoglu, 1994: 321). In each case, the premise seems to have been that when an account is based on women's desires which do not simply reflect the well-known contours of male dominance through heterosexuality, it contradicts an analysis which recognizes those wider inequalities. This was despite the fact that my analysis was based on problematizing pleasure and desire as signification. Yet paradoxically, there is a tendency to dismiss such desires because they are 'ideologically' constructed in discourse; a tendency demonstrated in Thompson's dismissal of my exploration of the signifier 'strong arms' (Hollway, 1993) as tantamount to a Mills and Boon narrative (Thompson, 1994: 326), in Jackson's dismissal as 'a traditionally feminine emphasis' (Jackson, 1994: 5) and also in Brown's charge that I come 'perilously close' to the pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse, when I talk about the significations of openness and giving in heterosexual penetration (Brown, 1994: 324; see Hollway, 1995 for the reply). The whole point of analysing sex as signification is to locate desire and pleasure within social forces, understood through a non-reductive analysis of language, power relations and individual history. I think the misreadings are triggered by my insistence on the importance of the psyche as something which is not a simple reflection of the social,

because the dualism which is still so influential in social science has meant that there is no available account of the social and the psyche as mutual productions (see Henriques et al., 1984; Hollway, 1989).

In summary, the problem seemed to be that sex is readily seen as social when it signifies dominance and submission, because this is consistent with available theoretical discourse, but when significations reflect successful resistance to patriarchal relations, for example openness, reciprocity and mutual giving, they are dismissed. Dismissals of individual history and the psyche result in a simplification of the question of how determinative are the wider patriarchal inequalities within which my heterosexual practice, like everyone else's, is located. Because this is unfamiliar theoretical terrain, I shall try to summarize my main arguments.

I have used case examples in order to understand the operations of power and desire in heterosexual couple relations. In the kind of discourse analysis which I used to interrogate the transcripts, I found I needed four strands to the analysis: a simple discourse analysis; a psychodynamic account of the reasons for reproducing or modifying the take-up of positions in discourses; an analysis of the part played by individual history, both conscious and unconscious, in adult social relations; and an emphasis in each of the above analyses on intersubjectivity as formative in the ongoing reconstruction of self, in the past and in the present. Without these components, the account of power relations was unsatisfactory.

For the initial discourse analysis, I identified several discourses concerning sexuality ('male sexual drive', 'have/hold' and 'permissive') and distinguished between the different positions available to men and women. For example, I gave a reading of Jim's account of his early attraction to girlfriends in terms of movement in the account among subject and object positions in three discourses, the power these conferred and the contradictions produced (Hollway, 1989: 61–3). I then reanalysed the same account adding a psychodynamic explanation (1989: 63–6), demonstrating that it was necessary to look for a motive to account for someone's emotional investment in specific positions in discourse, in order to understand the reproduction of gender-differentiated discourses. I concluded that 'over and again in my material, I found that the positions that people took up in gender-differentiated discourses made sense in terms of their interest in gaining them enough power in relation to the other to protect their vulnerable selves' (1989: 60). In this way a connection was made between the power asymmetry of gender-differentiated discourses at the social level and the way this power inequality gets reproduced through individuals; individuals who are agents when they engage in social relations, however constrained

their possibilities. Clearly structuralist notions of power are inadequate for the above kind of discourse analysis.

The last two factors, individual history and intersubjectivity, further complicate this picture of the mutual productions of the social (discourse) and the psyche in gendered power relations. I argue that the uniqueness of meaning for each individual is achieved along an axis which registers past events, not cognitively, but in terms of the unconscious. This unconscious registration pervades the meanings involved in the experiencing of later events. I give examples of two women, for both of whom making love without contraception signifies on this axis as securing commitment, because of the implications of having a baby for men addressed by the have/hold discourse. I then situate them differently in relation to individual histories (within discourses) and power relations (Hollway, 1989: Chapter 4). This analysis develops the use of the unconscious in the idea of positions in gender-differentiated discourses being taken up because the power they confer acts as a defence against anxiety. It gives the concept of the unconscious a social basis through theorizing its historical development in relation to meaning and discourse.

Throughout an individual's history, meaning has been achieved, consciously and unconsciously in relation to others. Since infancy, we have used significant others as vehicles for containing some of the ambivalent feelings which it is difficult to acknowledge in ourselves. Defence mechanisms such as projection and introjection operate intersubjectively and continue, more or less unassuaged, throughout life. Much of my discourse analytic work has demonstrated the workings of these unconscious dynamics between women and men where splitting occurs according to normative femininity and masculinity, through gender-differentiated discourses.

So, to take an example from my case material, Will could consciously believe that he did not mind whether Beverley decided for or against an abortion, until, contrary to both their expectations, she decided for an abortion. At that point, Will experienced his own strong wish for Beverley to have their baby, a wish that had been projected by him, because to contain it made him feel vulnerable and out of control, and introjected by Beverley, where it corresponded to standard feminine positioning in discourse (for a detailed analysis see Hollway, 1989: Chapter 5).

Erotic domination

> Who can love someone who is less than human unless love itself is domination per se? (Dworkin, 1987: 168)

There is no currently available substitute for psychoanalysis, or, more broadly, psychodynamic accounts of child and adult identity, once it is acknowledged that individual history plays an important part in the reproduction of, or change in, sexual relations (see Hollway, 1996). One of the transformative strengths of recent psychoanalytic feminism is its emphasis on intersubjectivity and the earliest relations with others in the formation of the gendered self (Chodorow, 1978, 1994; Dinnerstein, 1978; Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1982; Benjamin, 1984, 1990, 1995; Ernst and Maguire, 1987). This counteracts the determinist tendencies of a Lacanian analysis noted above. Surprisingly, the contributions of feminist psychoanalysts have not been incorporated into dominant feminist discourses concerning sexuality, even in those areas where transgressive sexual desires appear to be central, for example in sado-masochism, where there is overwhelming evidence of the importance of individual history (see Kaplan, 1993; Welldon, 1988). Many feminists dismiss psychoanalysis wholesale because its practice has been oppressive to women and in particular to lesbians (for example Kitzinger, 1987; Jeffreys, 1990; Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993).

In my view, a feminist theory of sexuality which does not engage with the unconscious effects on adult sexual practices of the formative relations of childhood is going to provide an inadequate base for a feminist politics which, by any definition of politics, needs to understand how people can change:

> No political movement can give expression to our real hopes and longing if it condemns without understanding the alienated forms in which these longings have appeared. (Benjamin, 1984: 308)

In her work, Jessica Benjamin has explored directly the question of erotic domination, both in its gendered aspects and in its relation to 'the earliest issues of intimacy and separation in infancy' (1984: 292). She asserts the importance to all human infants of the 'vital connection to another being' (1984: 293) and the process of acquiring a self through differentiation from others, in particular the other who is the primary carer, usually the mother. A common consequence is a 'conflict of differentiation':

> that between the need to establish autonomous identity and the need to be recognized by the other. The child's independent acts require a recognizing audience and so reaffirm its dependency on others. (Benjamin, 1984: 293)

While adults may have achieved some stability in relation to these issues of dependency and separation, it is in the sexual relationship

that they resurface because of its exclusive status in the contemporary West as the location of intimacy.

The denial of dependency, which is characteristic of the way boys are required to give up the mother in order to establish masculinity, produces the problem of domination. However, the conflict of differentiation is not peculiar to boys and neither are we talking about dynamics that are determinative for all boys or all girls. For both sexes, the need for recognition is in conflict with the struggle for autonomy and can produce an artificial resolution by imagining that one can be independent without recognizing the other person as an equally autonomous agent. The current structuring of motherhood exacerbates this tendency in children, and boys already have an extra investment in differentiation because of their exceptionally testing Oedipal drama, which is therefore more likely to culminate in false differentiation. The artificiality of this solution resides in the fact that if we deny the other's agency, 'if we overpower her, there is no one to recognize us' (Benjamin, 1984: 295). Benjamin illustrates the dialectic of control thus:

> If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist. True differentiation means maintaining the essential tension of the contradictory impulses to assert the self and respect the other. (Benjamin, 1984: 295)[6]

Erotic domination is a way of 'repudiating dependency while attempting to avoid the consequent feeling of aloneness' (Benjamin, 1984: 296). In voluntary sado-masochism, partners rely on each other, with one maintaining boundaries while the other allows the boundary to be broken. Each relies on the other for the repudiated part. Autonomy and the need for recognition are split, in contrast to true differentiation. The desire for erotic domination

> is an attempt to relive an original effort at differentiation that failed . . . Behind this failure is a replay of the original thwarted impulse to discover the other person as an intact being who could respond and set limits at the same time. (Benjamin, 1984: 303–4)

Contained in this account is the suggestion of 'true differentiation' as the basis for a sexuality which differs from the scenario of erotic domination. The capacity for true differentiation starts when the relations between infant and mother (or other primary carer) contain 'the germ of mutual recognition' (Benjamin, 1984: 305). Whereas Lacanian theory claims that any such possibility does not survive the Oedipal phase (see Adams, 1989), object relations approaches are based on the premise that human beings are basically object- (or person-) seeking. Depending on the quality of early object relations,

people can achieve relations in adulthood in which the need for recognition and the wish for autonomy can coexist, albeit in tension (see also Klein, 1963; Person, 1988; Gaylin and Person, 1988). Supposing this capacity can exist in relations between women (which few would want to challenge), the question becomes whether it can be accomplished across gender difference as currently structured, given that the capacity for real recognition and differentiation is undermined by gender difference.[7]

In summary, I am arguing that the meanings of sex, notwithstanding their location within patriarchy, can reflect the themes which result from two adults who have achieved a reasonably successful differentiation, which minimizes the psychic investment in establishing control – engaging in domination – and whose desire can therefore be structured around the pleasures of being recognized and loved as an autonomous being. To maintain that this is possible within the wider institutionalization of compulsory heterosexuality is not to place such people outside social forces, nor is it to deny the empowerment necessary to achieve such a position (Ramazanoglu, 1994: 321). In my view, this possibility is the absence at the heart of feminist discourses of sexual desire and the reason why the 'eroticization of power difference' has come to define the practice of heterosexual sex within feminist discourse.

Heterosexual love

> . . . the secret of love is to be known as oneself. (Benjamin, 1984: 301)

Empirical work on women in heterosexual relations continually stresses the connections for women between sex and love, intimacy or emotions. Two examples: 'many wives reported that to enjoy sex they needed to be talked to in a loving and gentle way' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993: 224); and Stevi Jackson's conclusion from reading the empirical literature on young girls is that their 'capacity for sexual arousal may be bound up with understanding this sensation as love' (Stevi Jackson, 1993: 209). (See also Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Holland et al., 1994; Lees, 1986; Thomson and Scott, 1991; Hite, 1974.) While feminists and others routinely emphasize the social construction of emotions and of pleasure (Jackson, 1994, 1995; Brown, 1994), I would argue that in the theorization of this area, just as of desire, the relation between the historical construction of subjectivity and the contemporary world in which these women are attempting to negotiate satisfying relationships and enjoyable sex needs to be kept in view. To theorize the desire for intimacy in terms of the need for recognition is clearly relevant here.

Generally, in feminist discourse, love is seen as captured by the discourse of romance. The propensity to be sceptical of claims to successful love (including, I suspect, of my own account of heterosex) is reinforced by the daily experience of women who claim love when all one can see from the outside is domination and objectification, as in 'women who love too much' (Norwood, 1985).

The distinction between 'love', as people aspire to it, and this debased version could perhaps be clarified by introducing a parallel distinction to Benjamin's between true and false differentiation. The parallel is between true and false recognition. I would suggest that women (and occasionally men) striving for recognition can feel recognized by finding themselves viewed as sexually desirable (in men's case maybe as financially desirable, though the parallel is not close). This is evidenced in the widespread phenomenon of women who are trapped in their desire to be the objects of men's sexual desire. For an understanding of this phenomenon, the Lacanian account does appear useful. However, the distinction between true and false recognition could rescue it from universalism.

The artificiality of the solution of false recognition lies, I would suggest, in the fact that vulnerable aspects of the self, aspects that contradict the idealized image of sexual perfection, have to remain hidden, thus contradicting the reasons for the search for recognition. Like false differentiation, this is an intersubjective affair, since the capacity of the other to accept what is hidden requires that the woman can acknowledge it and accept it herself and vice versa. This depends not only on her present partner, but on the history of true or false recognition that she has experienced. I echo this idea in my commentary on sexual pleasure: 'It is surprisingly hard to accept someone's love, no holds barred . . .' (Hollway, 1993: 414).

When the interconnection between power and desire is overemphasized, we are left with a psychic determinism which is no more useful for theorizing change than the social determinism inherent in radical feminism.[8] For such reasons, I have preferred to look at the connections between power and anxiety. The resultant insights, like those of Benjamin above, derive from object relations or Kleinian psychoanalysis, which is based on an understanding of pre-Oedipal relations. It points to a time before power relations are gendered, when power is articulated in adult–child relations, giving rise to anxiety and defences against it, so that the basis for future power dynamics in intimate relations are laid here, before Oedipal dynamics come into operation.

The connections between power and anxiety make sense of the uses of control to protect one's vulnerability in love relationships. So, for example, Martin, one of my research participants, says

> . . . in a love relationship you make the most fundamental admission about yourself – that you want somebody else. It seems to me that that is the greatest need, and the need which, in relationship to its power, is most strongly hidden and repressed. Once you've shown the other person that you need them, then you've made yourself incredibly vulnerable.

In consequence, his partner, Martha, cannot find true recognition:

> I want to be treated as a complete person, someone who has feelings and ideas and intuitions that are actually worth taking notice of. No room is allowed for me to be myself, fully, because it might be too powerful an intrusion on his actions. (Hollway, 1984a: 246–7)

True recognition is the other face of true differentiation because recognition of the other does not then have to compromise one's autonomy, which is what Martin feared. The power to deny someone's needs, a power which, when put into practice, Martha experienced as so undermining, can be transformed into the power to meet someone's needs for recognition and autonomy and their power to meet yours. This for Benjamin is 'the secret of love' (1984: 301). The tension which Benjamin believes is a part of the resolution persists precisely because one is always dependent upon the other not to betray that trust; that is their power. In terms of sex, each has the power to satisfy or to frustrate the other's pleasure, a giving or withholding which signifies something more fundamental, namely recognition.

This version of power is gendered and asymmetrical just as long as differentiation and recognition are split between heterosexual partners (typically between men and women, but not always). If both have developed a capacity to hold both within themselves – that is a capacity for true recognition and true differentiation – then this power is symmetrical; there is equality in this arena, which, though limited, is primary when it comes to egalitarian significations of sex. Equality here does not mean no power and no difference. It means no power difference resulting from the needs for recognition and differentiation.

The tension of autonomy and dependency, Benjamin's 'conflict of differentiation', means that issues of power and trust are still played out in sex, but not necessarily in erotic domination. Being the active or passive one can mean giving rather than receiving sexual pleasure, looking after rather than being looked after. Controlling someone else's experience of pleasure is a far cry from controlling their pain. Issues of trust and power are rehearsed, but with a benign outcome. Giving up control when you trust someone to look after you as well as you could yourself feels better than looking after your needs yourself, or catering for your own pleasure.

It is significant for a discussion of egalitarian sex whether these alternative positions can be swapped over. When you know how both emotional positions feel, then you can experience each in the act of doing either: activity/passivity, control/abandon, pleasuring/being pleasured, cradling/being cradled, fucking/being fucked. This analysis assumes the permeability of individual boundaries, at least at the unconscious level, and the possibility of identification across difference: being the instrument of your pleasure turns me on; your abandon makes me come. In these circumstances, who is fucking whom is an irrelevance, one exchangeable signifier among many.

This kind of heterosex resists fixed gender difference, and I suggest that this resistance is achieved through identification of similarities, as opposed to being caught in the discourses and fantasies of gender difference.[9] All characteristics are potentially gendered, but they are not always forever gendered, since gender difference is never a total success; it is beset by contradictions, particularly in the contemporary world where women's positions have changed so dramatically. Material conditions, institutions, discourses and the human capacities of relating provide spaces for similarities to transcend differences. These can be expressed in heterosexual sex and contribute to true recognition.

Discourse and the extra-discursive

Social constructionism has emphasized, often using discourse theory, how people's social positions construct who they are, and has been criticized for being too deterministic and having no theory of agency or change (Giddens, 1991). This debate is crucial for my theoretical position here, namely that emancipatory heterosexual practice is possible, even though an emancipatory discourse of heterosexual sex does not exist. How is the practice conceivable, if not through discourse? I have discussed three ways of conceptualizing this question, in each being careful to locate the analysis within the social. First, and most simply, there is practice as a product of the possibilities provided because of the contradictions produced between discourses. Second, we can see practice as informed by individual histories, which are themselves located within discourse and power relations, but with meanings achieving unique significance through the workings of the unconscious. Third, I have raised the possibility of an 'extra-discursive' space concerning heterosexual sex, provided by the doubly private realm within which so-called normal sex has been practised. This space is social in that it is constituted through practice (and through fantasy as well as fact), rather than through discourse as talk. It therefore creates spaces for variety

which is reproduced through what sex signifies in families, passed on between generations more through what is not said than what is said; through the reading of parental sexual practice within the wider context of the parental relationship. These three approaches are not mutually exclusive and together they provide ways of understanding the complexity, variability, contradiction and uniqueness through which practices of heterosex can escape the oppressiveness of dominant forms of heterosexual relating.

And in future?

In this chapter, I have suggested some ways of theorizing the possibility of egalitarian heterosex. In the absence of any such public accounts, I have started from my own experience. For discourse analysis, *any* individual's experience is valid and requires understanding theoretically. This contrasts with typical radical feminist formulations, such as Thompson's: discussing my own case, she asserts 'the fact that there are exceptions to the general rule of female subordination within heterosexual relations does not negate the general rule' (Thompson, 1994: 326–7). What theoretical and political status should experiences like mine have, when oppressive heterosexuality is so widespread? Thompson claims that it is an exception and that until exceptions constitute a majority, radical feminism should ignore them (Thompson, 1994: 328). But a theoretical recourse to 'exceptions' leaves any theory dogmatic and resistant to change.

My contention is that a position such as Thompson's discounts the necessity for heterosexual relations to be a site of political changes, along with many other sites, and therefore undermines the possibility of change in this arena. The effects that we may already be seeing include the distancing of many heterosexual women from feminism, and the colonization of issues concerning heterosexuality by the right wing without much of a struggle, because the feminist agenda has recently been unable to incorporate any positive emancipatory discourses about heterosexual relating.

The production of a discourse which resonates with more women's experiences nonetheless requires more empirical work, informed, I hope, by some of these ideas, preliminary though they are. I would like to suggest that heterosexual feminists interested in this research area, and who themselves relate to what I'm talking about (plenty have told me so informally), generate some empirical material in this area. I am not calling for work which suppresses aspects of heterosex which contradict equality; rather for discourse analytic work which

has access to theoretical tools which can do justice to the full range of experience.

Notes

1 For example, on the basis of interviews with heterosexual couples, Gilfoyle et al. (1992) identified a 'reciprocal gift discourse', but modified it, prior to publication, to 'pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse', following criticism that the label 'connoted too much equality and mutuality' (happily, they document this in a footnote: 217). In the absence of a feminist discourse which recognizes the possibility of equality and mutuality, the interviewees' accounts were basically marked up as ideological, informed by a discourse unable to theorize the possibility of equality or mutuality.

2 Kitzinger et al., 1992; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993; Smart, 1994; Margaret Jackson, 1993; Hollway, 1993, 1995; Segal, 1994; Holland et al., 1994; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Stevi Jackson, 1994, 1995. The fact that the British Sociological Association annual conference 1994 took the theme 'Sexualities in social context' accounted for some of this recent production. A further factor is recent funding for research related to HIV transmission.

3 But see Ethel Person and other psychoanalysts such as Kernberg, summarized in Chodorow, 1994.

4 However, in a recent interview, Butler explains that she ceased to use the concept of 'the heterosexual matrix' because it 'became a kind of totalizing symbolic, and that's why I changed the term in *Bodies that Matter* to heterosexual hegemony' (Butler, 1994).

5 Lesley Hall's (1991) analysis of early twentieth-century male sexuality suggests that not only were many men unable to position themselves successfully as men in heterosexual practices, but that some men and women just did not know what to do, because nobody had ever talked about sex.

6 For me this casts light on the dilemma of the so-called 'willing wimp', which seems to be a product of the limitations of current feminist discourse on heterosexuality (see, for example, Ramazanoglu, 1994; Jackson, 1994, 1995). The 'willing wimp' conjures up for me the idea of a man acquiescing in being controlled by his female partner, possibly in the name of feminism. This could not be based on true differentiation, and it does not surprise me that most women do not desire such partners, be they men or women. Men who are not trapped in erotic domination cannot find fulfilment in such partnerships either.

7 'To Freud the difference between the sexes precedes the appearance of the sexes and . . . the integrity of such separated sexes depends upon the power of just this original difference to connect them, with its distance, to each other' (Fineman, 1979: 118).

8 Lacan has been criticized for the determinism of his version of the Oedipal entry into culture and gender (Henriques et al., 1984: 216). Orthodox psychoanalytic theory has been criticized for assuming an inevitable link between the achievement of gendered identity on the one hand and sexual object choice on the other. In their critique of the relation of psychoanalysis to lesbian sexuality, O'Connor and Ryan (1994) have undertaken a detailed deconstruction of this assumption, demonstrating it to be an important task for feminist theory to uncouple the relationship between identity and object choice. Certainly, the case within psychoanalytic feminism for the eroticization of power difference would be undermined by such work.

9 Elsewhere I argue that similarities between women and men have been left under-theorized; that identification is a useful theoretical tool in this regard, and that 'it will be necessary to understand the ways in which identification works across the major social divisions of difference' (Hollway, 1994: 544; see also Hollway, 1996).

References

Adams, Parveen (1989) Of female bondage. In T. Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

Benjamin, Jessica (1984) Master and slave: the fantasy of erotic domination. In Ann Snitow, Christine Standell and Sharon Thompson (eds), *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. London: Virago.

Benjamin, Jessica (1990) *The Bonds of Love*. London: Virago.

Benjamin, Jessica (1995) Sameness and difference: toward an 'over-inclusive' theory of gender development. In A. Elliott and S. Frosh (eds), *Psychoanalysis in Contexts: Paths between Theory and Modern Culture*. London: Routledge.

Brown (1994) Pleasures untold: heterosexuality, power and radicalism. *Feminism & Psychology* 4(2), 322–5.

Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith (1994) Gender as performance: an interview with Judith Butler. Interviewed by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal. *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer), 32–9.

Chodorow, Nancy (1978) *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chodorow, Nancy (1989) *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. London: Yale University Press.

Chodorow, Nancy (1994) *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond*. London: Free Association Books.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy (1978) *The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World*. London: Souvenir Press.

Duncombe, Jean and Marsden, Dennis (1993) Love and intimacy: the gender division of emotion and 'emotion work'. *Sociology* 27(2), 221–41.

Dworkin, Andrea (1981) *Pornography*. London: Women's Press.

Dworkin, Andrea (1987) *Intercourse*. London: Arrow Books.

Eichenbaum, Luise and Orbach, Susie (1982) *Outside In . . . Inside Out*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Ernst, Sheila and Maguire, Marie (eds) (1987) *Living with the Sphinx: Papers from the Women's Therapy Centre*. London: Women's Press.

Fineman, Joel (1979) Psychoanalysis, bisexuality and the difference before the sexes. In M. Nelson and J. Ikenberry (eds), *Psychosexual Imperatives: Their Role in Identity Formation*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Foucault, Michel (1978) *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gallop, Jane (1982) *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*. London: Macmillan.

Gaylin, William and Person, Ethel S. (eds) (1988) *Passionate Attachments: Thinking about Love*. New York: Free Press.

Gergen, Mary (1992) Unbundling our binaries: genders, sexualities and desires. *Feminism & Psychology* 2(3), 447–9.
Giddens, Anthony (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity.
Gilfoyle, Jackie, Wilson, Jonathan and Brown (1992) Sex, organs and audiotape. *Feminism & Psychology* 2(2), 209–30.
Hall, Lesley (1991) *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality 1900–1950*. Cambridge: Polity.
Henriques, Julian, Hollway, Wendy, Urwin, Cathy, Venn, Couze and Walkerdine, Valerie (1984) *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*. London: Methuen.
Hite, Shere (1974) *The Hite Report*. London: Wildwood House.
Holland, Janet, Ramazanoglu, Caroline, Sharpe, Sue and Thomson, Rachel (1994) Power and desire: the embodiment of female sexuality. *Feminist Review* 46, 21–38.
Hollway, Wendy (1983) Heterosexual sex, power and desire for the other. In S. Cartledge and J. Ryan (eds), *Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions*. London: Women's Press.
Hollway, Wendy (1984a) Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In Henriques et al. (1984).
Hollway, Wendy (1984b) Women's power in heterosexual sex. *Women's Studies International Forum* 7(1), 63–8.
Hollway, Wendy (1989) *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology: Gender, Meaning and Science*. London: Sage.
Hollway, Wendy (1993) Theorizing heterosexuality: a response. *Feminism & Psychology* 3(3), 412–17.
Hollway, Wendy (1994) Beyond sex differences: a project for feminist psychology. *Feminism & Psychology* 4(4), 538–46.
Hollway, Wendy (1995) A second bite at the heterosexual cherry. *Feminism & Psychology* 5(1), 126–30.
Hollway, W. (1996) In D. Richardson (ed.), *Theorizing Heterosexuality: Telling It Straight*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
Jackson, Margaret (1993) *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality c. 1850–1940*. London: Taylor and Francis.
Jackson, Stevi (1993) Even sociologists fall in love: an exploration in the sociology of emotions. *Sociology* 27(2), 201–20.
Jackson, Stevi (1994) Heterosexuality as a problem for feminist theory. Unpublished paper presented at the British Sociological Association Conference.
Jackson, Stevi (1995) Heterosexuality, power and pleasure. *Feminism & Psychology* 5(1), 131–5.
Jeffreys, Sheila (1990) *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution*. London: Women's Press.
Kaplan, Louise (1993) *Female Perversions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Kitzinger, Celia (1987) *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*. London: Sage.
Kitzinger, Celia (1994) Problematizing pleasure. In L. Radtke and H. Stam (eds) *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. London: Sage. pp. 194–209.
Kitzinger, Celia and Perkins, Rachel (1993) *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press/New York: New York University Press.
Kitzinger, Celia and Wilkinson, Sue (1993) Theorizing heterosexuality. In S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds), *Heterosexuality: A 'Feminism & Psychology' Reader*. London: Sage.
Kitzinger, Celia, Wilkinson, Sue and Perkins, Rachel (eds) (1992) *Heterosexuality*. Special Issue of *Feminism & Psychology*, 2(3).

Klein, Melanie (1963) *Our Adult World and its Roots in Infancy*. London: Heinemann.
Koedt, Anne (1973) The myth of the vaginal orgasm. In *Radical Feminism*. New York: New York Times Books.
Lees, Sue (1986) *Losing Out*. London: Hutchinson.
Norwood, R. (1985) *Women Who Love Too Much*. London: Arrow Books.
O'Connor, Maureen and Ryan, Jo (1994) *Wild Desires and Mistaken Identities: Lesbianism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Virago.
Paglia, Camille (1992) *Sex, Art and American Culture*. New York: Vintage.
Person, Ethel S. (1988) *Dreams of Love and Fateful Encounters: The Power of Romantic Passion*. New York: Norton.
Ramazanoglu, Caroline (1994) Theorizing heterosexuality: a response to Wendy Hollway. *Feminism & Psychology* 4(2), 320–1.
Rich, Adrienne (1980) Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs* 5(4), 631–57.
Roiphe, Katie (1993) *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus*. New York: Little, Brown.
Schacht, S.P. and Achison, Patricia (1993) Heterosexual instrumentalism: past and future directions. *Feminism & Psychology* 3(1), 37–54.
Segal, Lynne (1994) *Straight Sex: Rethinking Heterosexuality and the Politics of Pleasure*. London: Virago.
Smart, Carol (1994) Desperately seeking the post-heterosexual woman. Unpublished paper presented at the British Sociological Association Conference, University of Central Lancashire, April.
Swindells, Julia (1993) A straight outing. *Trouble and Strife* 26 (Summer), 40–4.
Thomas, Alison (1994) Heterosexual feminist identities: some reflections. *Feminism & Psychology* 4(2), 317–19.
Thompson, Denise (1994) Retaining the radical challenge: a reply to Wendy Hollway. *Feminism & Psychology* 4(2), 326–9.
Thomson, Rachel and Scott, Sue (1991) *Learning about Sex: Young Women and the Social Construction of Sexual Identity*.London: Tufnell Press.
Welldon, E. (1988) *Mother, Madonna, Whore*. London: Free Association Books.
Wilkinson, Sue and Kitzinger, Celia (eds) (1993) *Heterosexuality: A 'Feminism & Psychology' Reader*. London: Sage.

GENDER AND PSYCHOLOGY Series Editor: Sue Wilkinson

Discourse analysis has become an increasingly popular approach to research across the social sciences, and a particularly important tool for feminist psychologists. *Feminism and Discourse* provides a showcase for a wide range of discourse analytical work in psychology from a feminist perspective. It constitutes a thorough critical evaluation of this approach for the feminist project of intellectual, social and political change.

Original contributions by leading researchers explore the benefits and contradictions of discourse analysis and consider its value for feminist psychology. The first part of the book illustrates the application of discourse analysis to four key topics of feminist concern: adolescent knowledge about menstruation, sexual harassment, gendered representations of childhood, and anorexia nervosa. The second part contains five assessments of the usefulness of discourse analysis – both as theory and as method – for feminists.

This book will be of great interest to critical theorists and discourse analysts across the social sciences, as well as to students and lecturers in social psychology, the psychology of women, psychology and language, women's studies, linguistics, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.

Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger are active members of the Loughborough Discourse and Rhetoric Group (DARG) and teach courses on Feminism and Psychology in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University.

Cover design by Malcolm Harvey Young

SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

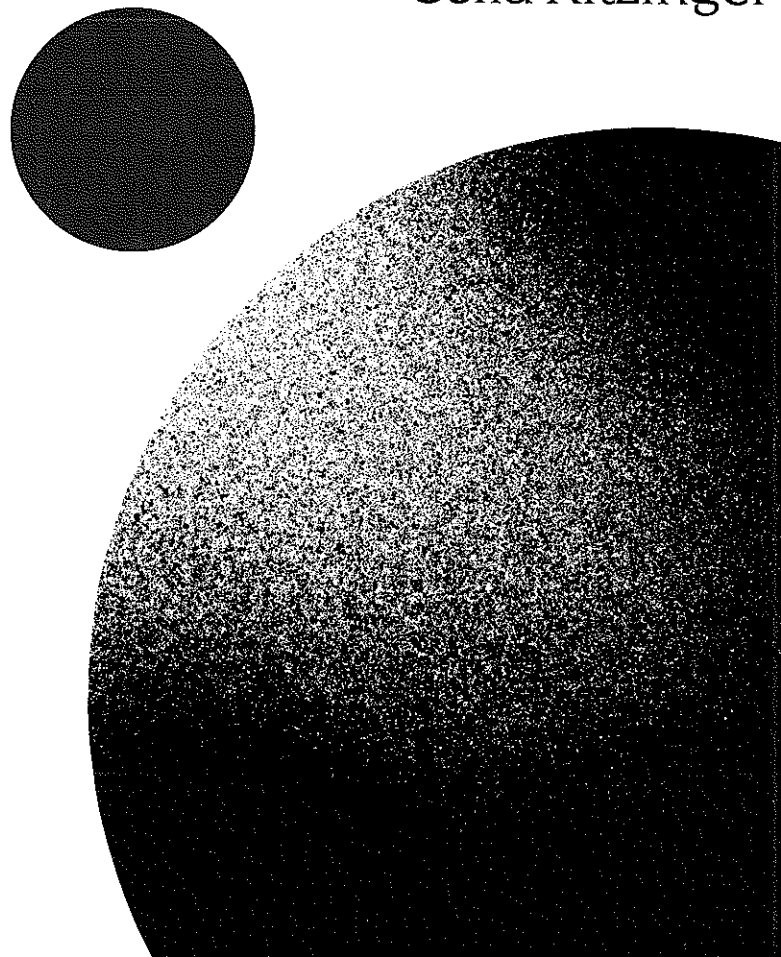
ISBN 0-8039-7802-2
9 780803 978027

Feminism and Discourse Wilkinson • Kitzinger Series Editor: Sue Wilkinson

Feminism and Discourse

Psychological Perspectives

edited by
Sue Wilkinson and
Celia Kitzinger



First published 1995

SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash – I
New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0–8039–7801–4
ISBN 0–8039–7802–2 (pbk)

Library of Congress catalog card number 95–074610

Typeset by Type Study, Scarborough
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, Guildford

Contents