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‘HOMO SEXUALIS’
AND
‘THE HOMOSEXUAL HIERARCHY’

- TWO SOCIOLOGICAL ESSAYS ON HUMAN SEXUALITY
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In memoriam
William Simon (1930-2000)
Pioneering American sociologist of sexuality
This working paper or monograph contains two sociologically informed essays. Where the first essay is purely theoretical, the other essay relies more on empirical material. The reason why I have decided to publish these two essays in unison is purely pragmatic as they centre on the same theme, namely sexuality. However, they are indeed different in both form and content.

The first essay sets out as a historical study of some of the most significant conditions for our contemporary sexual practices and understandings. These are located within the realms of social morality and social scientific practise – what later became known as *sexology* or *Sexualwissenschaft*. By creating a science of sexuality, which borrowed insights from many different areas such as medical practise, ecclesiastical doctrines, psychological theories and etiological assumptions, a somewhat homogeneous perspective on ‘normal’ sexuality was created and continually reinforced. A sexual paradigm was constructed in which everything that counted as ‘normal science’ in the Kuhnian sense of the term had to be incorporated in a relatively simple normal-abnormal continuum. Shulamit Ramon noted: “Whether defined or not, normality is used as a base for evaluation of overt human behaviour. Such a definition acts as a class criterion of the normal or non-normal, either exclusively or inclusively” (Ramon 1972:103). As both constructivists and structuralists have striven to indicate for decades, social life evolves around culturally constructed schemes of classification and bipolar categorisations. Sexual life is no exception to this rule and in fact it is almost entirely constituted by it. Gradually, laymen have come to adopt this originally religious as well as scientific way of classifying human beings and their accompanying acts way and extended it into the realm of everyday interaction. The reason behind the existence of this continuum is to be found in the scientific and religious circumscription of sexuality, as this essay first seeks to illustrate.

The second essay is a much shorter and more empirically based piece building on a first hand impression of a small secluded gay community in the fourth biggest city in America. It also deals with the divide ‘normal’ and ‘non-normal’ by looking into the lived life of the latter category through an so-called sporadic sociological investigation of a group of sexual ‘outcasts’. They lived in
an enclave in which they continuously and laboriously had to construct their identities and assert themselves vis-à-vis ‘normal society’ as well as their homosexual brothers in arms. This proved to be a path difficult to tread and resulted in internal fragmentation and the construction of a homosexual hierarchy, as the essay attempts to illustrate.

Together these two essays illustrate some of the ideas I have been able to develop around the theme of human sexuality. More substantial theoretical work as well as empirical evidence will have to be applied if the hypotheses advanced in either essay are to be either falsified or verified. For the time being they merely aspire to the status of proposals or hypotheses.

References
HOMO SEXUALIS
- The Moralisation and Politicisation of Human Sexuality*

Introduction
In a vein similar to that of the very capable analyst of modernity and post-modernity, Frederic Jameson (1991), who utilised Edvard Munch’s famous painting *The Scream* as an artistic expression of the evils of the modern age, I too, also wish to begin this monograph on sexuality with an observation on art as a signifier and symbol of contemporary social and sexual life. On a wall of a seminar room at the Department of Sociology at the University of Copenhagen, a marvellous painting by Poul Jupont is on display. The title of the painting, *Blinded by Hetero*, depicts the rather dramatic situation of a young muscular naked male torso presumably suffocating from the violent facial embrace of two flamboyantly red stiletto clad female legs. Whether from pleasure, protest or pain, the young man seems to gesticulate silently to the sky, as in most paintings, such that the body position could be interpreted in numerous and disparate ways. Here I shall offer merely three possible interpretations, unknowing whether one of them is similar to that intended by the artist himself. The first concerns the cry for help, the demand for a saviour descending from the heavenly above to release the young man from his apparent agony. A second interpretation runs along the same lines, claiming that the man is pointing to the sky as if to signal that the truth or redemption should come from that particular direction, that only the ethereally unknown can provide the answers to human life. The third interpretation is contrary to the previous two in that it proposes that the finger pointing to the sky is not a the physical gesture of a suppressed cry for help nor a demand for guidance, and thus is not made by a person looking for celestial insights or assistance, but rather it is an act of overt defiance, an accusation of the truths and the rules stemming from above.

These interpretations are obviously marked by the fact that they are not the evaluative pronouncements of an art critic or someone claiming to hold either

authoritative or esoteric knowledge of art, but they are instead the simple and trivial interpretations made by a sociologist. However, they can provide guidelines for the understanding of the following essay, which on its focussing on the construction of human sexuality, has a fivefold purpose. First, to investigate the heteronormativity and dominance of the conformist heterosexual ideal in Western society - a heteronormativity whose roots exist prior to the advent of modernity. Such heteronormativity is to certain degrees still prevalent in the West but it is at the same time undergoing a significant transformation at the level of social practice. Second, this essay examines the heteronormative foundation of the social scientific interest in human sexuality, how this biased perspective evolved particularly during the modern epoch and how it has been transformed throughout the last century. Third, the essay paints a picture of our contemporary politics of sexuality as moulded by the sexual prescriptions of more than 100 years of heteronormative social science. Fourth, I will look into the phenomenon expressed by Freud called *the return of the repressed* and relate this to the contemporary sexual atmosphere, which is permeated equally by freedom of choice and fear of new perversions. Finally, the essay proposes a tentative alternative to this heteronormative bias in science as well as in society, in which individual freedom of choice is coupled with obligations and responsibilities, not to morality or social convention, but toward other individuals. We are indeed living in a society as well as practising a social science, whose subject matter is exactly that society, where both are blinded by heteronormativity, as Jupont’s painting suggested. This essay thus seeks to illustrate the historical backdrop for this social and scientific bias and it aspires to point to new horizons in our understanding of human sexuality primarily from a theoretical and conceptual frame of reference.

**Homo Sexualis Meets Homo Sociologicus**

We are all subjected to the laws of nature, the pre-given characteristics governing and constituting our biology and anatomy, our body and hormones, and other physical aspects of our sexuality. These are not matters of individual choice but entirely fortuitous events turning into facts of life. Thus, we do not choose our sexualities – they are given to us and will to a certain extent come to determine the course of our ‘sexual trajectories’ throughout life. Since every
society is founded on the premise of continuous human procreation and sexual activity as one of the most common traits of being human, or a human being, we are therefore all constituted, whether we like it or not, as a *homo sexualis*, as a sexual being in the analytical sense of the term. Simultaneously, we are also to various degrees subjected to the laws of society - the social and cultural logic governing our sociality, our minds, our behaviour and the more social and interactional aspects of our sexuality. Accordingly, since every society is founded upon the premise of human sociality as well as sociability as another fundamental feature of human beings we are all, whether we like it or not, equally constituted as a *homo sociologicus*, as social beings. Ralf Dahrendorf (1968) originally coined this designation of man as a homo sociologicus, although the socialised and indeed over-socialised conception of man is an almost ancient consideration in the social sciences (Wrong 1961). This label intended to denote the non-randomness of human social existence, that being human is to be sited in the intersection of both individual desires and longings as well as collective constraints and expectations. In this way we are from beginning to end social as well as sexual beings - products and bearers at one and the same time of social and sexual norms, roles, ideas, etc.¹ Norbert Elias (1994) termed such beings *hominis aperti* which illuminates the fact that we acquire our identities not as completely self-contained, self-determined and secluded individuals, but through complex social figurations and networks that shape our personhood, identities, embodiments and conceptions of self and others.² The roles, morals, ideals, values and norms that mould us – we are told - are the glue that holds society together, that which prevents it from falling apart and withering away. But where does morality, the very foundation for this sociality, really stem from and what impact does it have on our construction as sexual human beings? How do morality and social norms interfere with our ability to construct a sexual identity from our own wishes and aspirations? Michel Foucault pondered that a history of morality would have to be uncovered to answer such questions and he wrote that

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... a history of ‘moral behaviours’ would study the extent to which actions of certain individuals or groups are consistent with the rules and values that are prescribed for them by various agencies. A history of ‘codes’ would analyze the different
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systems of rules and values that are operative in a given society or group, the mechanisms of constraint that enforce them, the forms they take in their multifariousness, the divergences and their contradictions (Foucault 1985:29).

Thus, a history of morality deals with such objective features. Moreover, he believed that questions relating to subjectivities such as ethical and aesthetic considerations and expressions should be included in such and analysis of morality. In trying to answer the same question about the origin and function of morality, Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman recently published a diminutive but nevertheless rather powerful article titled *What Prospects of Morality in Times of Uncertainty?* In this piece of work Bauman in true genealogical fashion discusses the cultural foundation for morality by looking to the Biblical past, claiming that morality can be based on two different interpretations of the original Biblical sources. The social and moral order of modernity was based on one of these sources, namely a primordial etiological myth, which guide our actions according to specific and almost indispensable principles of right and wrong. According to this so-called etiological myth, “to be moral is to follow strictly the command - to obey unconditionally and never to deviate from the straight path, in deed or in thought” (Bauman 1998a:13). The main source of this *morality of conformity* is, of course, the law-giving act on Mount Sinai and the bestowal of the Ten Commandments. People need to stay on the straight (in the literal sense of the term) and narrow path if they are to be redeemed. This morality of choice is the conglomeration of what Foucault termed respectively ‘ethics-oriented morality’ and ‘code-oriented morality’ (Foucault 1985:29-32). However, there is also another unfulfilled option in the Bible for being moral and a moral being, an option that has not come to dominate the course of morality in Western civilisation. The foundation for this kind of a *morality or drama of choice*, so to speak, was the moral transgression and subsequent expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It “suggests that to be moral is to face a choice between good and evil, and to know that there is such a choice” (Bauman 1998a:13). According to this fundamentally different etiological myth, morality is a matter of personal choice, a choice that will inevitably lead to agony and desperation, since one can never know if one is a moral being or not. Accompanying this agony, however, is also the feeling of
freedom from constraint and oppression; the knowledge that one can choose the road one believe will lead to happiness and personal fulfilment. Where the morality of conformity promises certainty mixed with fear, the morality of choice, on the other hand, promises uncertainty and anxiety mixed with the sensation of freedom.

This is the story, admittedly rather brief, of how the prevalent morality in society came to be the morality of conformity; a morality formation constructed, formulated and perpetrated by the powers that preside, and which was executed so as to make people abide by the letter of the Law and never to deviate from the absolute and universally binding top-down morality. The Ten Commandments are, as we all know, not about multiple choice but about limitations on choosing to do the right thing and incontrovertible rules and regulations of life. Those who dare dissent from the moral prescriptions will indeed be held accountable and be punished, as were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah; the latter-day imprisonment or stigmatisation of sexual deviants is an equally illustrative example. Hence even though “prevailing concepts of sexuality vary according to the time, culture and most prominent moralities” (Gibbs 1994:2), the morality of conformity has nevertheless held a hegemonic position in the discourses and politics surrounding sexuality for millennia, which already Helmut Schelsky (1955) noted in his analysis of sexual life.

So where morality supposedly had a bifurcated origin - understood as either conformity or choice - sexuality, according to the Bible and the subsequent dedicated followers of its orthodoxy, had only a single and unified birth - what shall subsequently be referred to as a mono-genesis. This mono-genesis spells out a sexuality determined by nature and maintained by nurture and socialisation, the biological as well as social demands for endless breeding of the human race. The outcome of the dominance of the morality of conformity has thus been the equal dominance of a certain kind of sexuality, a sexuality tuned, as it were, to the moral as well as practical demands of the traditions of pre-modernity and the institutions of modernity. This historically and institutionally favoured sexuality is of course heterosexuality. Hence, the mono-genesis of a moral sexual identity and activity has since the Biblical prescriptions been supportive of monogamous heterosexual relationships, making heterosexuality a virtually moral imperative, if not compulsory. This is
what we refer to when we talk about *heteronormativity*; that heterosexuality has become the one and only socially sanctioned norm of sexual life. As Jonathan Ned Katz puts it:

> Heterosexuality is old as procreation, ancient as the lust of Eve and Adam. The first lady and gentleman, we assume, perceived themselves, behaved and felt just like today’s heterosexuals. We suppose that heterosexuality is unchanging, universal, essential: ahistorical (Katz 1990:7).^5

Thus, sexual mythology regarded as essential and ahistorical today leads to moral evaluation. In recent decades, however, radical changes have occurred at individual and societal levels, which have challenged the almost God-given and erstwhile predominance of heterosexuality as the only legitimate pathway to social and moral grace. Postmodernisation, globalisation and individualisation combined with an increased sexual awareness, institutional reflexivity and medical advanced have laid the groundwork for these changes.

The morality of conformity works extremely well in times marked by certainty and stability and in periods when society is integrated and cohesive. Times of uncertainty and increasing complexity, however, are marked by the advent of the morality of choice. These are indeed times of uncertainty - uncertainty about identity, sexuality, self, others, love, the environment and so forth (Weeks 1995). These uncertainties relate as much to actions as to definitions of actions, discourses as it were, and these uncertainties have had a prolonged birth full of painful contractions and, as we shall see, were primarily instigated by the collapse of the social engineering of modernity and the resulting disappearance of a core of moral prescriptions, leading to what Bauman (1995) calls *the search for a centre that holds*. This centre is nowhere to be found anymore. Writing on our uncertain postmodern or what I prefer to designate late modern phase, William Simon, the late prominent theorist of contemporary sexuality, recently stated that “*the discourses of sexuality are invariably discourses about something else*” (Simon 1998:2). One is, of course, tempted to ask what that something else is then? In my view, discourses on sexuality centre on morality and social power in defining right and wrong. But whereas the sexual is fundamentally pre-social and primordial - existing in a
natural and uncontaminated form prior to any kind of social arrangement and actually a prerequisite for sociality as such - the moral is necessarily social.

The moral is culturally and historically determined. However, sexuality and morality are inextricably linked to each other on multiple levels, as this essay will seek to illustrate, and the transformation of society also leads to transformations of sexual practices and the moral evaluations of these. Any alteration in sexual practices, therefore, is bound to lead to moral evaluations and sanctions, and any change taking place in morality will in effect affect sexual practices. In this way, sexuality and morality mirror one another, being part and parcel of the very same discourses and lines of thinking. Hence, there exists a dialectical relationship between morality and sexuality and any appropriate and thorough understanding of the phenomenon of sexuality, will necessarily have to be connected and sensitive to the issue of morality. Only in this way can we come to grasp this dialectic historically. In a period marked by a shift from a generally modern to a late modern phase of social development, academic discourses and discussions on issues so central to social life, are important and even indispensable. Although some social scientists claim that “too much of the discussion of sexuality [...] today continues to be merely an adjunct of academics attempting to work through the potential logical implications of modernity” (Rival et al. 1998:315), the sexual must necessarily be analysed in connection with broader social developments.

**Sexualised Civilisation and Civilised Sexuality**

In the social sciences, our history has often been described as a long and winded process leading toward higher and more sophisticated forms of civilisation (Elias 1994) and as a process involved in the rationalisation of every single aspect of social life as Max Weber wrote. Together, these two features of historical development - civilisation and rationalisation - could rather simplistically and under one heading be termed *modernisation*. What have been the impact and the repercussions of this assumed modernisation of our society, of our actions, beliefs, mores and our lives on human sexuality? The conventional wisdom - though hardly ever spelled out in such rationalist terminology - is that we have moved from what might be termed *animalistic* or *primitive* to more *civilised* and *domesticated sexual practices* and that the
primary reason for this is due to a successful subjugation of human instincts and a gradual sublimation of sexual desire and eroticism. Although representing a prevailing opinion amongst social scientists, this view is contested by the historian Theodore Zeldin (1994:86) who so wittingly noted, “there has been more progress in cooking than in sex”. Modernisation, thus, does not necessarily have anything whatsoever to do with progress. While there may be a grain of truth in Zeldin’s remark - that the way we perform sex has not been altered radically throughout history – sexuality, at least within the discursive representations of sex and our self-understanding of tolerance toward it, has been depicted so as we can present ourselves in an apparently more advanced, more civilised position compared to pre-modern civilisations and cultures. The idea is propounded that throughout modernity and in an entirely unprecedented fashion, we have successfully sought to control sexuality: “For earlier societies it may not have been a need to constrain severely the powerful sexual impulse in order to maintain social stability or limit inherently antisocial force” (Gagnon & Simon 1973:17). It was only with the construction of social order, which happened particularly throughout the early stages of modernity, that sexuality and sexual variety became a pertinent problem. Just as our history of morality is coloured by etiological myths, or mythologies, so is the history of sexuality. The road to our present day late modern sexuality is indeed long and convoluted, full of change and paved with obstacles, recurrences and setbacks. Thus, it would be inappropriate to speak of a unilinear development or progress towards civilisation in connection with sexuality or our understanding of it.

Every human civilisation is fundamentally and biologically based on, even determined by, its members’ continuous sexual activities; in other words, without sex, no civilisation. Sex is thus the prerequisite for establishing, maintaining and producing culture. At the same time, every kind of social organisation, any society and any state, has its own notion of sexual correctness, what is considered right and wrong in sexual relationships, preferences and activities but, as suggested above, it is particularly the morality of conformity that has been in a historical vantage point in commenting on sexuality and erotic activity. Therefore, a certain view on sexuality has been predominant in our Western Hemisphere that has limited the scope of sex or at least sought to delimit the possible variations. As noted recently by two prominent analysts of
sexuality: “Sexuality is more than a domain in which history is enacted. It is constitutive of history itself. Society does not simply construct sexuality, society is constructed sexually” (Connell & Dowsett 1999:190). This sounds as an echo of Jeffrey Weeks’ almost classical statement that “sexuality is not a realm to be discovered in ever more luxuriant detail; it is a historical edifice that has been constructed, and can be changed” (Weeks 1982:294). Thus, sex and society can be regarded as two sides of the same coin of social constructivism, as we saw above in connection to homo sociologicus and homo sexualis. The natural is social and the social is natural, so to speak, and it is through the transformation of the natural into the social that we will eventually be able to control and constrain it: “Sexuality’s biological base is always experienced culturally [...] The bare biological facts do not speak for themselves; they must be expressed socially” (Ross & Rapp 1983:51). As we shall see below, sexuality is positioned in the interplay of nature and culture and is really only revealed in the social being, what Boje Katzenelson (1994) termed homo socius as a contemporary counterpart to Ralf Dahrendorf’s aforementioned notion of homo sociologicus. Katzenelson (1994:332) writes that the natural origin of humans does not present itself in a pure form, so to speak, but only in the form of ‘homo socius’. Reality is not constructed in a way that we on the one hand have the natural human being, on the one hand, and, the cultural human being, on the other hand. These two beings exist only as a single being; they are given in and by each other, and in a dialectical fashion they are conditional on each other [my translation].

Sexuality, then, is neither only a natural fact and perpetual facet of life nor is it merely an ethereal notion; it is the synergical effect of the combination of both society and nature. Somewhere betwixt and between these two poles of action and thought lies sexuality - but this location is never a totally stable and solid foundation. It is always rocked by action and reaction, short intervals of status quo erupted by evolutions and revolutions in ideas as well as practices. Nobody expressed this ambivalence in sexuality better than Michel Foucault (1978:152): “Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of ‘natural given’ which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge gradually tries to
uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct”. Thus, sexuality is – hardly surprising to scholars these days - a historical and social construction and representation; and it is always a representation from a particular moral standpoint, from a position of power and social interest. In this way, history is also the battleground of sexual struggles. Sex is therefore also a social dynamic, a force which has the capacity to change things, to make a difference. But difference is exactly what cannot be accepted by a morality building on the aforementioned mono-genesis. The morality of conformity - what Freud (1974) termed civilised sexual morality – is, as the term suggests, constructed by and founded upon incontrovertible norms, and its ambition is the elimination of the doubting, misunderstanding and questioning of morality, a desire for human uniformity and accommodation within the pre-constructed categories of good and evil, righteous and sinful, right and wrong. Sexuality is a constant thorn in the side of this kind of moral authority.

Sexuality has both its repressive as well as its revolutionary potentials, but since sexuality has historically been subjugated to a civilised sexual morality, the latency of the subversive potentials of sexuality has always been present and has in recent years become more and more salient. The history of modernity - the period that most markedly relied on the morality of conformity (Bauman 1991) to eliminate ambivalence and anxiety - is thus replete with attempts to repress and subjugate sexuality. Modernity was a project aimed at domination and control, categorisation and arrangement, regimentation and social engineering, and in the sexual sphere these instruments were deployed with a never-ending and tireless pertinacity. This is why modernity, which according to Anthony Giddens (1990:1) “refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards”, is, not remarkably, that period on which most sociologists interested in the issue of sexuality have focused, since, it was the period throughout which the moral regulation and control of sexuality presumably reached its apex, although individual attention was not only paid to the sexual aspects of social life - what Max Weber (1948) termed the erotic sphere and Jeffrey Weeks (1991) denoted the intimate sphere. This regulatory preoccupation was particularly evident in the Victorian era marked by “that damned morality” (Weeks 1989:19), a morality aimed at a domestication and subjugation of sexuality.
The Victorian era was marked by the attempt to make the otherwise natural act of sexual activity unnatural, even perverted. Modernity, with its institutions of confession and interrogation, saw an unprecedented political regimentation and religious inculcation, which more often than not converged to construct a powerful image of sexual dissidence and deviance. Where sex was initially regulated exclusively through the ecclesiastical doctrines of the Bible (Hawkes 1996), as modernity progressed, and perhaps as a harbinger of the process of secularisation, there occurred a shift toward an almost purely scientific and medical regulation of sex but the consequences and repercussions of these two otherwise disparate regimes of power were rather similar: a reliance on a mono-genetic view of sexuality, a social creation and construction of perversion and perversity, the emergence of a surveillance system of and a moral iron grip on people’s sexual activities in private as well as in public, and if not a religious damnation of certain sexual orientations then a social labelling and stigmatisation based on scientific discoveries.

If one believes in mono-genesis, as did people in modernity and particularly as did the Victorians, deviance will be regarded as sinful and as a human defect; in other words, as a perversion. But what if one believes in a poly-genesis of humans, the view that we are not and ought not all to be the one and the same creation with the same desires and longings? Will there then be room for tolerance of deviance and human variability? Is this where we are heading in this historical and moral interlude between modernity and post-modernity? Although it is certainly advisable to look to the past to understand the contemporary, “many of the uses of gender and sexuality, observable within the context of the rapidly changing present, may in fact be different than any that humanity has previously known” (Simon 1996:3). This brings to the fore the problem of the persistence of pre-existing sexual ontologies as well as pre-given sexual adherences, many of which have been upheld in the name of morality by either religion or science, and many of which have subsequently been uncritically internalised by ordinary people in the sphere of everyday life.

In late modernity, contrary to the early modernity of the Victorian Age, we apparently experience a loosening of the social control of sex and a democratisation of desire (Kaplan 1997; Weeks 1998). We are lulled and in sophisticated fashion deceived into believing that we suddenly experience a
feeling of being free to choose the object of our innermost desires and passions, that we can pursue exactly the sexual orientation we want. I suggest that we ought to be wary and critical of this delusion. What has happened in recent decades is not, however, necessarily a lowering of what Norbert Elias (1994) called the *threshold of repugnance* with respect to sexual activity but, on the contrary, a blurring of this point of moral fixity through the creation of many grey zones and morally uncharted waters - waters containing both uncertainty and anxiety. As I will argue below, we have actually become more prudish and morally judgmental in many respects, primarily in terms of our attitudes toward the actions of others. In the meantime, our own sexual life has remained as sacred as it is sacrilegious. The utilisation and deployment of double moral standards, as Freud noted, is perhaps the flamboyant sign of the times with regard not only to sexuality but also to morality, and the sciences, the media and politics are instrumental in promoting the kind of morality which rests on shifting sands.

**The Emergence of a New Scientia Sexualis**

In Umberto Eco’s *In the Name of the Rose*, one of the medieval monks exclaimed that there was no progress and no upheavals in the science of knowledge, that a cumulative progress in human insights was utterly impossible. When it comes to the science of sexuality, this statement is particularly pertinent because many of the ambitions and intentions of the practitioners of sexology were exactly to create a cumulative science. Since the publication of Foucault’s (1978, 1985, 1986) monumental trilogy on the history of sexuality, however, sociologists and historians have become increasingly interested in issues relating to love, sex and eroticism in a manner that defies claims to universal laws and innate nature. In recent years, a veritable torrent of literature on these subjects has swept across the field of sociological theory and fertilised an otherwise barren soil. Nowadays, almost every sociologist with respect for himself and his discipline has contributed to the discussions surrounding sexuality and eroticism in contemporary society and has in this way contributed to the construction, maintenance and development of a body of knowledge on sex and a contemporary social science of sexuality. Yet, it would be inaccurate to speak of the occurrence of an entirely new phenomenon, since a
scientific interest in issues relating to human sexuality can be traced back at least to the Enlightenment. It would also be utterly wrong to speak of the science of sex as a unified body of knowledge, since the content of sexological discourses has changed radically throughout the years. Thus, there appears to be some kind of progressive development after all.

The science of sex, like any scientific enterprise, has, throughout its relatively short life span, sought to demystify its object, sexuality - to subject it to the often rather rigid logic of scientific enquiry. One of the consequences of this effort may, in the long run, well be a disenchantment of sexual activity, as we shall discuss below. Two overall traditions can be said to exist within sexual science, or sexology, which are distinctive ways of interrogating into the nature of human sexuality. The one is a ‘global’ approach, which has stressed that sexology is an almost insular and separate field of inquiry handled by generalists within that specific field. The other approach instead stresses that specialists operating within different and distinct disciplines study sexuality most adequately (Reiss 1983:177-178). These two approaches have from time to time dominated the study of sexuality and there is still no consensus on which of these ought to predominate. Historically, however, it is possible primarily to distinguish three, somewhat overlapping, phases in the development of these demystification attempts in the science of sex. In the first phase, scientists with an interest in social conditions, such as population control and hygiene, began to theorise about sex, and in this fashion became the pioneers of sexology. This period lasted from the mid-19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, particularly in England and Continental Europe. The second phase, from the early 20th century to the 1970’s, saw the interest in sex as an object of scientific scrutiny becoming increasingly dispersed across continents and throughout different disciplines despite the founder of the discipline of sexology, Iwan Bloch, saw it as the mission of Sexualwissenschaft to remain a unified endeavour:

The double nature of the sex drive, its biological and cultural aspect, lets us understand the whole difficulty of scientific sex research and makes it incomprehensible that, on the one hand, medical and natural scientists, and on the other hand theologians, philosophers, lawyers, and cultural scientists believe they
should solve the ‘sexual question’ from their respective narrow points of view. This fact alone proves that it is necessary to found sexology as a science in its own right (Bloch in Haeberle 1983:145).

During this period, particularly cultural and psychological theories of sex flourished, naturally instigated by the research conducted by Sigmund Freud. However, this phase was also marred by the Nazi regime, which set itself the goal of destroying sexology entirely and it almost reached its objective was it not for the fact that sexology had already gained a strong and solid foothold in the U.S.A. from which it spread in the years following the Second World-War.

In the third and current phase, that of the late modern era, we have become almost over-exposed to sex in the social sciences as well as in our everyday lives. Sex has become a topic for everyone to comment on, a commodity to be bought and sold, when tons of self-help books on sex are published faster than they can be read by the public, when sex and the erotic have become popularised in an unprecedented fashion, and when sociology has jumped on the bandwagon of this sexual and erotic carnival. Below I will spell out in more detail some of the scientific content of these three schematised phases since - as Giddens (1976, 1990) has illustrated - science tends to mirror society and vice versa through the working of a double hermeneutic; the continuous exchange between the language of laymen and scientific concepts, the fact that science, fortunately, is not secluded from social activity in general but reorganises and reinterprets an already organised and interpreted world. Changes in scientific enterprise, we thus assume, can tell us about social and political developments; where we come from, where we are going, and particularly important, why we are taking a particular route.⁷

Like society, the science of sex has apparently undergone radical changes in the last centuries, and we shall now contrast some of the early, and some would say antediluvian, assumptions and routines of classical modern sexologists with more recent attempts to acquire knowledge about human sexuality. These initial studies, which formed part of a significant expansion in the writings on sex from the mid-19th century, were erected on a medical platform and were carried out primarily by people schooled in the medical sciences and not, as in the preceding centuries, in religious dogmatics. The
transition from a religious to a scientific approach to human sexuality, however, did not immediately, as one would have expected, contain liberating and emancipating consequences. Rather “the result was not only a negative construction on sexuality, with an emphasis on the dangers rather than the pleasures, but also an emphasis on the deadly results of sexual over-indulgence and sensual voluptuousness” (Hawkes 1996:53). 8 Apart from this, sexuality gradually lost its rooting in mental, and sinful, desire and pleasure and was eventually demystified and stripped of its carnal mystery only to be wrapped in a natural scientific discourse. As Robinson (1976) pointed out, sexuality throughout its modernisation and medicalisation in the latter part of the 19th century - was thought of in purely anatomical and physiological terms and not in values, sentiments and emotions that people hold for and about one another. Therefore, an inherent objective nativism (Connell & Dowssett 1999:179) and essentialism dominated on behalf of subjective experiences. 9 Sexuality was regarded as something innate to human nature, and the explanations offered by sexologists tended to be biologically reductionist. This was also observed by Erwin Haeberle, who pointed out that this tendency has been prevalent until recently:

Today, the medical study of sex often remains scientifically naive and is still moving in ‘aprioristic constructions’ […] Terms like sexual ‘perversion’, ‘aberration’, ‘deviance’, and indeed ‘paraphilia’ demonstrate that medicine and psychiatry are still haunted by the pre-scientific chimera of a single, naturally given correct sexual behavior from which people stray at their peril. This idea is a relic of earlier religious doctrines, as we can learn from sexology as a cultural science (Haeberle 1983:157).

As we are constantly taught, science and morals are often in conflict with each other. However, the early science of sex - what could be termed the biological phase of sexology - was, as Foucault (1978) also illustrated, heavily infused with moral prescriptions and normative biases. An illustrious example of the moral foundation of early sexology can be seen in the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who in his notorious more than famous but nevertheless pioneering Psychopathia Sexualis overtly combined his medical views with
political ones: “The material and moral ruin of the community is steadily brought about by debauchery, adultery and luxury” (Krafft-Ebing 1876:6). This is merely one out of an emporium of equally normative statements on behalf of early sexologists who also saw themselves as educators. There was little doubt among these pioneering scientists of sex that sexual behaviour had destructive consequences for society. Sex had to be regulated and monitored. Therefore, their work often harmonised with the repressive efforts of the power elites and an almost spectacular suppression of sexuality followed. Among other contributors to the fin de siècle sexology, Havelock Ellis, also believed that the sexuality of the modern individual had been distorted and perverted by culture from its original and natural healthy constitution (Weeks 1989:148). Like Krafft-Ebing, Ellis was interested in discovering the universal and natural laws governing human sexuality and his assumption was that this was to be achieved through in-depth investigations of human physiology. Thus, the hallmark of early European sexology, what Béjin (1985a) has termed the long period ranging from the ‘first birth’ of sexology around 1844 to the ‘second birth’ of sexology ending in 1948, was the attempt to decipher a naturally rooted sexual code in humans in order to discover natural laws and uncover variations in sexual manifestations. As a result, the 19th century witnessed a transformation from religious dogmas and speculations about the sinfulness of sex to the scientisation of sex in which

sexual behaviour was subjected to secular scientific scrutiny [...] The science of sex was [...] essentially a post-Enlightenment project. The centrality of nature in its discourse; the faith in human reason to tame the ‘beast within’; the commitment to observe, classify and record, rather than judge and punish; and the search to establish universal fixed paradigms of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are all features evident in this endeavour (Hawkes 1998:103).

Early sexology, like sociology itself a child of the Golden Age of modernity, simply had to rid itself of any associations with mystical and speculative notions about both divine as well as diabolical sexual orientations and try, albeit unsuccessfully, to restrain excessively obvious moral stances. The main concern
of this kind of sexology, however, was to distinguish the moral from the amoral with respect to sexual orientation. Hence,

words which designated sexual traits, such as nymphomania, narcissism, autoeroticism, kleptomania, urolagnia, and many others, began to seep into scientific discourse, by the end of the [nineteenth] century and the beginning of the twentieth century, indicating a new concern with detailing sexual variations, and with using sex as a distinguishing mark between individuals (Weeks 1989:21).

In this way, the early sexology was marked, as well as marred, by attempts to segregate the socially and morally acceptable and prescribed from the unacceptable and perverse. Scientists of sex – either knowingly or unwittingly - became moral mouthpieces, so to speak, for the ideology of the modern state apparatus and its dominant morality of conformity. The vision that came to characterise sexology was that moral conformity and human uniformity were much coveted ideals for humans and societies alike. This was clearly not the intention of the early sexologists who “have always insisted on the scientific objectivity of their work and sought to present themselves as disinterested seekers after the truth” although it gradually has become evident that “sex research is no more neutral than any other body of knowledge” (Jackson 1984:43-44). However, it started out as an attempt to present ‘clinical’ knowledge but often ended up representing sexually biased and sometimes even scientifically downright unsubstantiated perspectives on human sexuality.

The breakthrough from the early, somewhat obscure, science of sex to a more nuanced and complex understanding is, of course, instigated by the authorship and psychoanalytical practice of Sigmund Freud during the first decades of the 20th century. I will not focus too extensively on this period, as it is one of the most commonly described and analysed in the literature on the history of sexology. I will simply make some rather general comments on the dominant figures and their views during this second major phase in the development of the science of sex.11 Freud’s main mission in focusing on sexuality was, on the overall, to seek to map the unconscious. For Freud, sex thus became something of an epiphenomenon in the explanation of human
mental disorders such as neurosis and hysteria. Sexuality was as a consequence looked upon through optics of deviation, disorder and disease. Freud also sought to try and understand - what Juliet Mitchell termed – the tortuous development of sexuality through the repression of human drives by society as well as the individual itself, a process beginning already in the years of early childhood. The single most important contribution of Freud to the science of sex was, although many may disagree on this postulate, his break with a rigid biologism and his introduction of a more psychological as well as historical perspective on human sexuality. Other prominent scholars of this second phase were William Masters and Virginia Johnson and, of course, Alfred Kinsey, whose well-known theories I will, however, not dwell on in this paper. Suffice it to say that this second period was marked by a heterogeneous understanding of human sexuality - both in the theories and methods aimed at mapping it. There was probably more dispute than consensus among sexologists than previously. All of them, however, sought to besiege sexuality theoretically since “the expert-ridden world of the mid-twentieth century could not leave sex to take care of itself” (Hawkes 1996:67).

The ambition of Freud and of those who blindly followed in his footsteps in this second, psychological phase of sexology, which extends roughly from the early 20th century and until the early 1970’s, was to decipher a psychologically - and in the final instance also culturally - rooted code in human sexuality; though some still adhered to a biological reductionism. Like his predecessors in the first phase of sexology, however, Freud was also caught up in a moral evaluation, and eventually moral judgement, of people’s sexual practices and desires. This is particularly evident in the dualism between the pathological versus the healthy and normal. In order to construct what is normal, according to this approach, we must construct and map the abnormal, pathological and perverse. This binary distinction is a relic from a structuralist or functionalist perspective on sex that never really left sociological theorising on sexuality and which psychoanalysis never successfully eroded. With the rise of symbolic interactionism in the sociology of the 1960’s, this rather narrow and sometimes biological reductionist model of human sexuality was discarded, at least temporarily, and attempts at model-building based on the importance of socio-cultural moulding came to prominence (Stein 1989). This was most
exquisitely expressed in the groundbreaking work of John Gagnon and William Simon (1973), who even before the fascinating work of Foucault appeared proposed a model which saw perversion not as a manifestation of distorted individual psychology stemming from within but as something created from without, so to speak, by society. This approach marked the transition from a modern science of sex to a more late modern style of sexology. However, this type of sexology still has its faults and traps - especially regarding sexual minorities such as the gay and lesbian movement or was somewhat biased toward a phallocentric perspective on sexuality. The morality of conformity, therefore, did not stop its inquisitive fervour regarding any phenomena related to sexuality but continued to circumscribe every single aspect of sexuality from choice of partner, time, place and frequency of sex and every single sexual utterance was dissected and analysed thoroughly. Although it has been humorously noted, that the 1960’s and 1970’s was certainly the period when “the clitoris had been let out of the closet and would not be returned” (Hawkes 1996:108), both sexology and public and popular discourse have, for example, reflected a tendency to focus on male stimulus in heterosexual intercourse. Hence, Woody Allen remarked that the idea and delusion of simultaneous orgasm, and thus a male-dominated perspective on sex most feminists would agree, was the most tangible expression of sexual success and satisfaction in contemporary American society. In recent years, however, there has been a recognition - which the early sexologists neglected to emphasise in their work - that sexual theorising is inherently morally biased and a product of the time and place in which it is constructed and produced. The second, psychological phase also marks the end of a long period of sex research, what Parker and Gagnon (1995) recently termed the sexological period, ranging from approximately 1890-1980, in which sex was scrutinised from a clinical and decisively ‘objective’ approach and began to focus on feelings and emotions etc. This marked the end of a period in which sexuality was subjected to a rigid scientific scrutiny and social and moral control. By the beginning of the 1980’s, the perspective has changed radically, as we shall now see.

In the third, sociological phase of sexology sexuality has moved from the margins to the centre of attention, especially for sociologists. Instigated by Foucault’s analyses some 25 years ago, prominent scholars in the social
sciences have in recent years been lured to the field of sexuality as a fertile ground for theorising (cf. Bauman, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Douglas & Attwell, 1988; Giddens, 1992; Luhmann, 1982; Seidman, 1991; Weeks, 1989, 1995 etc.). Sexuality has turned from an embarrassing and obscure interest to a career-promoting, mainstream occupation within sociology and sexology has turned into an emporium for original as well as trivial ideas. There is therefore an acknowledgement that an understanding of sexuality and sexual practices will also inform us about general aspects of society and social practices. What characterises late modern sexology compared to the modern attempts to create a science of sex is the focus on diffusion, and indeed confusion, instead of standardised and stereotypical images of man and his desires. An acceptance of diversity has replaced a preoccupation with perversion, an ambition to create a non-normative although still subjective approach has replaced a judgmental gospel, and a sexuality of blurred genres has replaced a sexual straitjacket. Moreover, the proliferation of perspectives and differentiation of disciplines have resulted in a cascade of discourses on sexuality in which sociology has been one of the more productive, utilised and consulted disciplines within the social sciences.

We have therefore seen a cognitive contraction, as it were, of sexuality, by which sociology has been able to attract many interesting bids from prominent sociologists. The mark of distinction of a late modern concern with sexuality, as opposed to the earlier paradigms within sexology, is therefore to decipher a socially and culturally rooted code in human sexuality, and thus examine the interplay of individual choice and social regulation, freedom and repression.

The contemporary sensitivity in studies of sexuality towards a social and cultural perspective has placed sociology in a particularly favourable position as the scientific interpreter *par excellence* of how we construct and maintain sexuality, how we negatively sanction certain sexual orientations while lending affirmation toward others, how relatively stable sexualities are at all possible in a world marked by rapid change and dissolution of ‘all that is solid’, where all the fixed reference points are disappearing, and how sexual theory is itself an ideological *expert system*, to use Giddens’ notion (1990), which means that sexology is itself often nothing but another ideological instrument and political representation from a particular vantage point, and thus not a value-neutral
enterprise with no consequences for social structure and the everyday lives of individuals. This does not mean, however, that sociology has totally colonised the field of sexuality, that it is superior in comparison to the previous stages or any better equipped to function as an authority on sexual issues than other disciplines. Rather, it means that the discipline, due to its more general and broader perspective, is better capable of negotiating between perspectives and angles than earlier severely specialised, restricted and segmented attempts to theorise sexuality. Above, I have presented the science of sex almost solely as a restricting, authoritarian and powerful instrument for the use of control and repression of peoples’ sexual desires. However, as Véronique Mottier (1998:114) has remarked, “sexological discourse is not exclusively constraining; it can also be a reflexive resource for the active shaping of the sexual self”. Sexology is not merely, as Foucault seemed to claim, a source of top-down power but can thus also be regarded as an empowering sphere for a quotidian bottom-up discourse on sexuality and sexual relations, facilitating the expression of the desires of ordinary people practising sex and reflecting upon it. The described development of the science of sex through the three stages has illustrated this.

**The Politics of Sexuality**

The construction of sexuality is, and always has been, a dialectical process between individual passions and desires on the one hand, and societal expectations and demands on the other. In other words, the construction of sexual identity and a sense of sexual belonging take place in a Heraclitean universe where there is a constant push and pull between often polarised values. This means, of course, that the individual and society are interrelated and mutually constitutive; the one cannot be analysed or thought of without the presence of the other. However, it also follows that conflict is frequently at the centre of attention if it is not successfully suppressed.

Basically, we can speak of two moral levels of sexuality in the social sphere, both of which in practice serve to reinforce each other. The first operates at the abstract level and can be termed the *moralisation of sexuality*, which works through abstract ways of dealing with issues such as deviation, difference and inequality in the sexual sphere. The second, which we shall
return to below, may be called the *politicisation of sexuality* (Weeks 1982) and operates at the much more concrete level in the form of legislation and actual decision-making. Since we have touched upon how sexuality is morally circumscribed and subject to moral constraints on behaviour and thoughts, this will merely be a further elaboration of those ideas. One of the keys to understanding the moralisation of sex lies in the so-called social *sublimation of desire*, i.e., that human sexual passion has to be directed and guided toward certain objects whilst being kept at bay of others, that some actions and the objects of those actions are regarded, to utilise Mary Douglas’ apt terms, as symbols of sexual *purity* while others are imbued with sexual *danger*. Historically, this has meant that heterosexual, marital and coital intercourse performed for the sake of the production of progeny is regarded as the ideal against which to measure all other types of sexual activity. From this ideal construction of sex was derived a relegation of, for example, the sex performed by homosexuals, non-marital sex, adultery, non-coital sex, and sex-for-the-sake-of-carnal-and-mental-stimulation-and-satisfaction such as masturbation, sadomasochism, necrophilia, paedophilia and nymphomania to the sphere of the perverse and obscene. The moralisation of sex usually has meant a stigmatisation of sexual ‘offenders’ and an ostracism of those performing a sex life different from that prescribed either by religious dogmas or secular legislation. Moralisation entails categorisation between normal and perverse, healthy and pathological, proper and unacceptable. Perversity is thus not surprisingly defined by one of the capacities in the field: “*We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it*” (Freud 1974:258). More recently it was expressed by Robert Stoller, the vanguard of an overtly liberal sexual perspective within psychology, stated that the term “*perversion is so pejorative. It reeks of sin, accusation, vindictiveness, and righteousness [...] There is little to the word but insult: hostility that aims to humiliate and subjugate others. As a label, it has been a power tool used by society to transform those who are different into those who are bad*” (Stoller 1985:4).

As we saw previously, sexology has been instrumental in a scientisation of this basically moral valorisation and juxtaposition of sexual practices and
attitudes for the purpose of judging, condemning or punishing. As a result, sexology has also been instrumental in moralising the otherwise purely scientific by lending support to often rather dubious ideas about human physiology and the psyche. Throughout its history the science of sex has created many myths about human sexuality, e.g. the myth of innate female frigidity and the asexual woman (Hawkes 1998:103). Amazingly we never hear of frigid males! Simultaneously, sexology has undermined many of the myths that were constructive for a relaxed and normal sex life. The example given illustrated how especially early sexology clearly was plagued by misogyny and it often regarded the female as nothing more than a simple instrument for the stimulation of male fantasies and as objects of male suppression - what C. Wright Mills’ captured with the satiric phrase ‘women, the darling little slaves’.

Homosexuals, another popular category among late-19th century sexologists, were at best viewed disdainfully and at worst as carriers and transmitters of sinful diseases; women with an overt appetite for carnal pleasure were regarded either as prostitutes or nymphomaniacs; onanism and auto-eroticism were seen as threatening to your mental and physical health; and people with passions that did not fit the mainstreamed ideal were thought of as threats to social cohesion and menaces to moral sanity. Thus, Robert MacDonald (1967) noted on the status of on masturbation and auto-eroticism in a moralistic discourse: “Many sexual activities in the Christian world have been deemed sins, and have been forbidden at some point by State, Church or custom, yet only masturbation has been named as a chief cause of disease” (MacDonald 1967:423). Generally speaking, sexology as well as society in general, was suspicious of what Foucault (1978) termed peripheral sexualities, sexual orientations other than the dominant heterosexual married couple. These fringe sexualities, so to speak, were thought of as vermin nibbling at the fabric of society and undermining the moral order. Today we find equally energetic attempts to separate the sexual minorities from the normal population, whoever they are, as the following will illustrate.

The obsession of especially medical sexology to categorise and segregate, analytically as well as physically, was evident in the works of Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, Kinsey and Masters and Johnson. As Michel Foucault has noted, this endeavour to classify and categorise was a distinguishing feature of the
mentality of the modern age and Zygmunt Bauman stated that this was done in order to avoid ‘ambivalence’. That this conglomeration of morality and science could also extend itself to our contemporary late modern era is, however, rather surprising. This has to do with the fact that morality, science and politics have experienced ‘a second coming’, a new unexpected curtain call in regard to sexual matters due to the emergence of ever new uncertainties, and although the moralisation of sex was supposedly played down during the 1960’s and 1970’s it was revived with full strength during the 1980’s and the decade known as the reign of the New Right. We are often led to believe that in the chaos of the 1960’s sexual revolution people were liberated and emancipated in an unprecedented fashion. Paul Robinson (1976:xii) termed the 1960’s and 1970’s as the period ‘before the lights went out’, a period marked by a frivolous attitude toward sexual expressionism, erotic hedonism and a general moral turpitude. Following this, as a reactionary reaction, as it were, a new dogmatic regime emerged, which subdued our idea of sexual liberation. As the following decades and tragedies revealed, our emancipation and tolerance had hardly grown at all. Instead of a vigorous and powerful emancipation of sexuality, there occurred only an impaired and fragile sexual liberation. The concerns of sexual morality have changed radically since Ronald Atkinson (1965) catalogued the areas covered by ‘sexual morality’ and the liberation thesis, as the repressive thesis of Foucault (1978) demonstrated, is always to be understood in relative terms. It can be understood and accentuated only by asking critical questions such as, ‘liberated from what into what?’, ‘liberated by purpose or by accident?’, ‘liberation for whom and with what consequences for others?’, etc. The main factor behind the lack of complete sexual liberation, if this is indeed obtainable, and the continuing strict social regulation of sexual behaviour - as optimistically envisaged by writers such as Marcuse and Reich - fundamentally boils down to the emergence of the powerful discourse of the New Right, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, a discourse adopted in more diluted forms in Continental Europe as well as in the Scandinavian countries.

Social transformations are characterised by pushes and pulls, and are therefore often accompanied by retrograde political allegiances that try to counter transformation by pulling development backwards. With the gradual
transformation of the moral order into a more right-wing position, there occurred an accompanying transformation of one of the most conspicuous features of human nature and of our social organisation: a transformation of how we conceive of our sexuality. Simultaneously, uncertainties lurked below the surface, which meant that the dominant morality had to be re-attuned to contemporary conditions. This subsequently meant that the erstwhile old-fashioned moralisation was not applicable to the continuous control of new nuances of human instinct. More subtle, and at the same time more radical, measures had to be applied. The politicisation of sexuality, which is the willing henchman and inevitable outcome of the moralisation of sex, deals with how sex has to be practised, that is, legally, regulated, which sexual orientations to sanction positively and negatively, who to promote as role models and who to imprison. It is a well known case, what Steven Seidman has eloquently noted, that every society sets out rules regulating sexual expression. These rules tell us when to have sex, where, with whom, and how frequently. They regulate sexual representations as well as private behavior. These sexual rules presuppose basic ontologies of sex, i.e., definitions of sex that relate it to gender, self-identity and public life. These sexual concepts and rules are embodied in law, public representations, medical and scientific institutions as well as popular culture, everyday maxims and custom; they amount to a sexual regime. This sexual regime inevitably privileges particular desires and acts while disapproving and penalizing others. Individuals whose chief practices are transgressive will suffer while conformity will confer legitimacy (Seidman 1992:205).

That sexuality is subjected to social control and regulation is probably one of the most commonly known truths in the history of sexology, and much has been written on the subject (cf. DeLamater 1981). Foucault was one of the first to point to the intimate connection between sexuality and power, power and knowledge, knowledge and sex, the private and the public realm, and he used the term bio-politics (Foucault 1978) to denote the regimentation and regulation of the singular human body as well as entire populations, designating the connection between sexuality and social power. Instruments of bio-politics, or
what Weeks (1991:26) denoted body McCarthyism, included the Panoptikon, with its emphasis on constant surveillance and subsequent infliction of an equally constant fear of being observed, as well as more inquisitive measures. What has happened today is that protagonists of the New Right regimes have been successful in monopolising vital parts of the discourse on sexuality and successfully re-accentuated the idea of bio-politics, of the necessity of a short leash on sexuality by the authorities, and a revitalisation of the morality of conformity. Political opposition to this monopolisation has been launched too half-heartedly resulting in a victory to the faction of the hawks in what Hunter (1991) termed the moral civil war.

What we quite often encounter in sociological theories about sexuality and politics is a rather limited view of the prevalent opinions in society about sexual practices and desires, an often artificially polarised conception of people’s attitudes toward sex and about the performance of different kinds of sexual activity; in short, we encounter a rather conflict-ridden conception of the politics of sex. In our society, however, we are not merely faced with either romanticists or libertarians weighing down the poles of the sexual continuum, as Steven Seidman (1992:187-209) seems to be suggesting, and which I read as an opposition between two different emotional rather than political positions. Although Seidman is quite aware that a third option is viable, namely his own more pragmatic sexual ethic, his focus on romanticists versus libertarians is an excessively polarised picture of reality and the pragmatic ethic is unfortunately reserved only for the enlightened avant-garde of academia. I therefore suggest another, less emotional and more political, typology of the prevalent ideologies of sexuality in contemporary Western society. On the one hand we have the reactionary conservatives, who, rather like Seidman’s romanticists, are quite hostile to sexual expressionism and politically active in promoting the true and pristine virtues. With a strange mixture of the darker sides of the New Right, such as an orthodox reliance on State, Family and Church, this group is saturated with judgmental views and prejudices about sexuality that does not perform its reproductive role in the maintenance of society and culture. These people have common ground in those views Eskapa (1995) labelled as sexual Fascism - a notion tightly connected to that of moral fundamentalism. This group, at least in the Scandinavian countries, otherwise the avant-garde when it
comes to sexual politics, is presently a minority but their ideas are gradually and ceaselessly spilling over into larger segments of society. The other end of the continuum is occupied by the emancipated expressionists who, like Seidman’s libertarians, are an equally strange mixture of the brighter sides of the New Right, exclaiming the right to individual choice, as well as leftist radicals with a flavour of the Reichian sexual philosophy. This group, however, is also quite easy to overlook, and their actions can more often than not have led to further restrictions instead of freedoms on sexuality as one of the proponents of radical sexual politics explained: “Radical sexual politics may have created new spaces, but it has also opened new fissures, and generated new hostilities” (Weeks 1991:24).

Instead of Seidman’s aforementioned polarised perspective, one could propose a more nuanced understanding of public opinions on sexuality which, however, is not based on empirical observations but embedded in a desire to construct a viable analytical option. Such an option takes into account the fact that most people do not hold extreme opinions – not even in sexual matters. The vast majority of people, I will argue, therefore appear to be so-called fair-weather liberals who hold the key to changes in sexual attitudes, mores and beliefs. It is the beliefs and conceptions of this group that determine the course of the politics of sex. As the label indicates, these people are burdened with ambiguity and tergiversation. Like moral weathercocks, they constantly shift their allegiance. The fair-weather liberals are people who often have a predilection for freedom of choice and claim to be (oh, so) liberated from moral traditionalism and convention. However, their tolerance reaches only as far as their very own doorstep, their own desires and their own preferences. They see a threat to public health and moral sanity in every sexual difference and deviation. These are indeed the incarnations of the subservient little men in Reich’s (1974) caricature, the sanctimonious philistines of the late modern age. The fair-weather liberals disguise their intolerance as tolerance, and their celebration of sexual freedom often ends in an iron cage of right and wrong. On the surface, they are the ordinary citizens, the average people, the normal population, but in fact they are wolves in sheep’s clothing, reactionary conservatives disguised as emancipated expressionists.
How did this group come to occupy such an important position in the discourse - morally as well as politically - on sexuality? What have been the consequences? Who have been the victims and who are the beneficiaries? Where do we draw the line and how bizarre does a sexual orientation have to be in order to be morally condemned and juridically criminalised? These are the unanswered, indeed unanswerable, questions arising in this late modern era, questions that sociologists, politicians and ordinary people are struggling to come to grips with.

As mentioned above, those who pose the greatest threat to sexual liberation are not groupings like the Salisbury Review in Britain or the Moral Majority in the United States. These variants of reactionary New Right ideology will probably never be powerful enough to set the sexual agenda at least in the Scandinavian countries. The danger lies in the possibility of their ideas being adopted by more moderate segments of the political spectrum. Having this in mind, those of us who in the face of the fair-weather liberals try to uphold a more genuinely nuanced and liberal sexual position - find it immensely satisfying when the moral hypocrites are caught with their pants down in the literal sense of the word. Some see the delicate disclosures in the mass media of the Monica Lewinskis and the Jessica Hahns as signs of the sexual hypocrisy and moral cancer festering at the heart of American society in particular and as a symbol of the tainted morality of Western capitalist societies in general.

I would rather regard the sexual disclosures of the powerful as a natural outcome of a moral hypnosis of the media as well as the public in general, a society mesmerised by the spectacle of the private sexuality of other people, particularly those who claim to be immune to sexual seduction and stand as defenders of true family and puritan values. More than forty years ago, the media wallowing in sex and eroticism caught the concern of a far-sighted C. Wright Mills who wrote: “All this public eroticism which floods the mass media in America is at once a reflection and a contributing cause of drastic changes in private morality” (Mills 1972:326). Putting the private sexuality of moral hawks in the public limelight has always been a favourite pastime and sure-fire source of success for the media. Knowledge that scandalous disclosures are destined to be found among this decadent group of people led Andrew Belsey to comment: “The only three women in the life of the True Conservative are his
Queen, his mother and his mistress, while his fantasy life is fully occupied by a vision of a ‘willing’ or even ‘importunate’ schoolgirl” (Belsey 1981:5). In countries like Britain and the U.S. cases of sexual and moral infidelity of public persona have highlighted the fact that even the most vigorous protagonists of a return to the most traditional conservative values of sexuality - politicians, philosophers or tele-evangelists - cannot be trusted and that especially those people who have a vested interest in limiting the sexual freedom of others must have something to hide themselves. In his book Sperm Wars Robin Baker (1996) critically as well as humorously advances it that “the most successful exponents [of sexual hypocrisy] are those who try, through force or criticism, to prevent other people from behaving in precisely that way themselves […] Rule-makers and enforcers are in fact the people who most indulge in behavior they seek to prevent in others”. Whether this can be empirically substantiated or not, the position is interesting. This also highlights that moralism, which is the evil stepmother and extreme and pathological variant of morality, ends up devouring even the most moral of otherwise immoral people, to paraphrase an old revolutionary saying.

Since politicians in liberal democratic societies are elected to office, their views and actions - admittedly only in the ideal case scenario - will mirror those of their electorate, and thus reflect the opinions of the majority of the people. Denmark is generally regarded as a haven for sexual dissidents and as spearheading an emancipated perspective on sexuality. However, as noted by Erik Albæk (1999:24), even in our liberal democratic paradise, limits necessarily have to be set and boundaries drawn:

Liberal tolerance for others’ right to live their lives according to cultural norms and values that deviate from one’s own is great in Denmark, but is not boundless. A minority in the Danish population and in Folketinget [the parliament] draw the line at homosexuality. A majority of the MPs, and probably a majority in the population, draw the line at sexual relations with children.

Recent debates in the Danish media have highlighted the discussions about incest and paedophilia, illustrating the claim that tolerance is limited and that morality, in some form or other, still prevails. As Albæk further illustrates, there
is a constant push and pull and give and take between liberal and communitarian - or what some denote meliorist - positions regarding tolerance in sexual matters. One of the victories, for example, has been the legalisation and general toleration of registered same-sex partnerships (Albæk 1999). How amazing it is to recall that we do not have to go more than 40 years back in Danish history to discover that homosexuals were still prosecuted for violating the law on so-called speculation in sensuality stemming as far back as from the 1880’s. This liberalisation of amongst others the homosexuals, however, has been at the cost of other groups having been turned into sexual martyrs; other sexual minorities still, rightly or wrongly, remain in the closet. This is the result when the obscene and perverse is decided either by strict moral authorities or by submissive fair-weather liberals and not subjected to sound common sense and substantiated judgements. The personal consequences, and options, for people living in fringe sexual relationships as well as the established heterosexual couples may well be severe. But this is the topic for another essay. Suffice it to say that for the moment, the politics of sex have not been morally slackened, if we ever believed so, but have instead been transformed and subjected to even further restrictive measures although these operate in mysterious ways. This was affirmed by Connell and Dowsett (1992:123) who remarked:

While such new ways of speaking of sexual politics in the past are beginning, the old ways still continue strongly into the present moment [...] What was then called wowserism and is now called moralism, whether expressed by doctors, clerics, politicians, feminists, or the populist right; what was then and is still called libertarianism, whether expressed by sexual radicals, pornographers, feminists, or the populist left: these discourses have survived at least a century and a half [...] That discourse is incapable of anything but condemnation of sexual behaviour that cannot be recuperated for worthy social ends, whether they be heterosexual reproduction or ideologically sound liberation politics [...] Such an official, public discourse is itself a sexual politics, one which denies other understandings of sexuality.

All talk about the continued existence of a morality of conformity, contrary to the notion that we are standing at the threshold to a morality of choice, appears to be without foundation. At best, we are transforming morality from an
external and oppressive iron cage to an inner voluntary incarceration of desires and preferences. Thus, we should instead talk about the existence of a choice of conformity or conformity of choice in which people subject themselves to the agendas stemming from persisting uncertainties and insecurities and more or less voluntarily choose to embrace the old and rigid dichotomies of healthy and unhealthy sexuality. Michel Foucault, in an interview conducted close to his death, mentioned that the freedom of sexual choice was not a matter of necessarily deciding to choose. One also had the ability to manifest a choice or not at all (Foucault 1983:12). That is the important lesson of living in the late modern society.

**From Pre-Modern Pleasures to Post-Modern Perversions?**

Conformity of choice or its twin choice of conformity is a ‘better safe than sorry’ attitude towards sexuality and sexual expression. Expressed in a different manner, it often does not entail a choice at all because the options available appear to be between the devil and the deep blue sea. The choice of conformity or the conformity of choice is thus a comforting act of no choice. Simultaneously, it is only a second best to a morality of choice that often cannot be achieved under late modern conditions where sexual deviance is finding its way back in through the door that we thought the sexual revolution of the 1960’s slammed once and for all. The aforementioned politicisation and moralisation of sex triggers off an environment of constant vigilance and surveillance towards those who appears to be transgressing the now invisible almost sacred line separating acceptable from unacceptable practices and conduct in the realm of sex. We have found new subtle ways to categorise and label that were not thought of in the same severe fashion in early modernity.

Take as an example the almost innocent way that Foucault (1978) described the child molester who played ‘curdled milk’ with the young girls of the local community. He was looked upon in the same fashion as the local nutcase who was unaware of the severity and thus not responsible for his actions. Today such matters are dealt with in a much more direct fashion than the interrogation of the child molester. We have moved from positively socially sanctioned pederasty in ancient Greece via acceptance of such deviance in early modernity to criminalised paedophilia in late modernity. The fear of paedophilia
has to do with many different social factors and especially the new valorisation of youth in contemporary societies. This has meant that every violation against children is regarded as an assault on society’s core values. We are currently mortified that something might happen to the most precious of our possessions and this mortification permeate every single aspect of human social intercourse. As Bauman poignantly put it regarding the condition we are now facing: “Today’s fears emanate from the sexual desire of the parents, not of the children [...] Children are now perceived mainly as sexual ‘objects’ and potential victims of their parents as sexual ‘subjects’ [...] The spectre of sex, therefore, also haunts family homes. To exorcize it, one needs to keep children at a distance - and above all abstain from intimacy and overt, tangible manifestations of parental love” (Bauman 1998b:29-30). Bauman has also with perspicacity noted that it is not merely the idyllic family homes that are now faced with a new type of sexual harassment but that another dimension also exists outside of the home. The scientists of sex and the all too willing politicians often support our fear of sexual harassment, as paedophilia and incestuous relations within the four walls of the home or sexual harassment in the work place. This development has gone too far and moved away from the desire to keep sex offenders threatening our children at arm’s length to including ever more practices that may be initiated by harmless or even loving intentions. Paedophilia, which undermines any sexual ethic erected on mutual consent and responsible conduct, is just the most flamboyant example of our fear of sexual deviation. Let me recapitulate the words of Jeffrey Weeks to capture the consequences of this development: “The relationship between adults and children has become particularly fraught, the subject of constant negotiation and renegotiation, as a whole series of moral panics and public controversies ranging from the fear of video violence to the now perceived endemic threat of paedophilia underlines” (Weeks 1998:41).

We have moved into a society thoroughly permeated by a sexual Unsicherheit (the trilogy of insecurity, uncertainty and unsafety). This also has wider social implications and repercussions. Bauman notes about this feeling of unease that a ‘spectre’ of sexual hysteria is walking amongst us:
Complimenting the beauty or charm of a workmate is likely to be censured as sexual provocation, and the offer of a cup of coffee is sexual harassment. The spectre of sex now company offices and college seminar rooms; there is a threat involved in every smile, gaze, or form of address. The overall outcome is the rapid emaciation of human relations, stripping them of intimacy and emotionality, and the wilting of desire to enter them and keep them alive [...] The spectre of sex, therefore, also haunts family homes. To exorcise it, one needs to keep children at a distance – and above all abstain from intimacy and overt, tangible manifestations of parental love (Bauman 1997:148-149).

This leads to a ‘radical impersonalisation’ of human relationships, superficiality and artificiality of expression and a numbing of feelings. The reason behind this development is to be found in the simultaneous liberation and renewed repression in our late modern age – this leads to confusion, aggression and unresolved questions of a sexual and moral nature.

Our contemporary sexual climate is a hybrid between sexual liberation on the one hand and a paranoid suspicion on the other. There is naturally a tension between these. Bauman has remarked this by stating that postmodern culture eulogizes the delights of sex and encourages every nook and cranny of the Lebenswelt to be invested with erotic significance. It prompts the postmodern sensation-seeker to develop in full the potential of the sexual subject. On the other hand, though, the same culture explicitly forbids treating another sensation-seeker as a sexual object (Bauman 1998b:32).

We can here see the paradox of late modern existence – the respect for others as subjects while also necessarily being able to regard them as objects for our insatiable sexual lust and desires. The conflict is not resolvable as long as we do not have any sound moral guidelines on the one hand or rely exclusively on the notion of unrestricted freedom of choice on the other. Liberation has quickly turned into a new iron cage, just as moralism does not go away overnight even if it seems inappropriate and outdated to most. Another and less ‘hard core’ example of this than the aforementioned illustrious case concerning paedophilia could also be given. Thus, on the evident disparate relationship and gap
between the public law and private morality the British therapist Roy Eskapa writes of a relatively harmless example of moral transgression: “Technically, hundreds of thousands of Californians and millions of American citizens, heterosexual and homosexual, are criminals because they indulge in genital stimulation, using mouth and tongue. In fact, a husband and wife can each receive a sentence from five years to life in the state prison for performing fellatio and/or cunnilingus together. Needles to say, the same penalties apply for lesbians and homosexual men” (Eskapa 1995:330). These people are certainly not the moral majority but rather the oral majority, as it were, of the population. Although these laws are hardly ever followed they nevertheless point to a layer of moral evaluation - respectively approval or disapproval - regarding what goes on in peoples’ private bedrooms even between married, well-informed, enlightened, acquiescing and consenting adults. Here we see that moralism still persist some places that we generally regard as the ‘enlightened avant-garde’ of Westernised late modernism who were the instigators of the sexual revolution.

Thus, the notion of ‘sexual revolution’ so commonly ascribed to the transformations of sexual morality, identity and politics of the 1960’s is itself laden with normativity and its descriptive power is also limited. As Jacqueline Scott observes in her empirical investigation of sexual morality in the 1990’s:

The so-called sexual revolution that occurred in the 1960’s was by no means the first and doubtless will not be the last. Indeed, the term ‘sexual revolution’ was coined at least forty years earlier to describe the changing sexual mores and behaviour of the 1920’s and has been used to describe different periods throughout the intervening years. The term ‘revolution’ is charged with meaning and implies a purposive overthrow of traditional sexual morality (Scott 1998:815; cf. also Martin 1996).

So where it is normally assumed that the sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s automatically lead to increased liberation and a relaxed attitude towards sex, something came in through the backdoor. Volkmar Sigusch has analysed and described this development by referring to the ‘neosexual revolution’. This revolution contains an equal amount of repressive and liberating potentials
What is now characteristic of sexuality, primarily due to the developments described earlier in this essay, is that it has lost a lot of the positive mystified aura in which it was previously shrouded. As a consequence it has instead been demystified and stripped of its gown of pleasure and hedonism and stands in a more negative light because of its association with violence, abuse, harassment and disease. At the same time sexuality has been targeted by market mechanisms and turned into a commodity which has resulted in a ‘banalisation of sex’. Sigusch goes as far as describing the predominant sexual form as a new ‘self-disciplined and self-optimised lean sexuality’. I believe that this is a very accurate snapshot of sexuality in a time marked by excessive liberation as well as equally excessive and subtle ways of circumscribing and streamlining sex. The ‘pockets’ previously untouched by sexual morality and law are now entirely dissolved and everywhere a permeating discourse is prevalent and “the discourse in question is one that leaves nothing and no one overlooked” (Sigusch 1998:342). This is reminiscent of Victorian morality that could see a sexual gesture and hear an expression of inappropriate lustfulness or improper erotic expressions in every single human touch or word. Although Sigusch, whose view I generally agree with, claims that the old perversions have become ‘undemonised’, it is instead my contention that the old perversions have been ‘repacked’ in new guises and hitherto unknown ways morally to deal with sexual issues. Sexual morality is now shot through with ambivalence, grey-zone areas, ambiguity, tergiversation and double moral standards. In this climate, Marianne Valverde pondered:

The time is ripe for realizing that the endless production of sexual images and sexual practices that we are experiencing today is neither completely repressive (as the guardians of morality would have it) nor is it completely progressive (as certain advocates of ‘sexual liberation’ would have it). As Foucault has argued, bourgeois society is not characterized by repression as much as for its multiplication and intensification. There will always be yet another frontier, yet more shocking sex acts, and faced with this sea of endlessly collapsing barriers, we must stop to ask: liberation for what (Valverde 1980)?
My proposal is that this frontier, if it does not emerge naturally and ‘by itself’, will have to be invented and constructed. Sexuality and the control of it move in mysterious ways. If the sexual sphere suddenly dried out, and there were no more shocking sex acts to be discovered, then we would surely be swimming in stagnant waters. Therefore, we will always have to invent new boundaries and categories that can satisfy our appetite for moral condemnation of what we regard as preposterous polymorphous sexuality. Many of these boundaries and categories appear to be thoroughly out of touch with contemporary social life in general.

Thus, a late modern sexual morality must be build on late modern values, which does not mean relativism let alone nihilism, as it is often assumed. There is, however, a tension between nihilism and authoritarian moralism in contemporary sexual politics that stems from a tension also found in the realm of identity politics in general. Identity politics, which emerged in the U.S.A. during the latter part of the years of sexual liberation in the 1970’s, placed the personal in opposition to the social, which was somewhat the marker of a transition from a decisively modern to a late modern era: “Faced by a modern evangelical fervour, which seeks to tell us what is right or wrong, good or bad, what we may do, or more likely what we must not do, we too, like the languid Lord Melbourne, might prefer to affirm the privacy or the personal sphere, to construct the ‘thick walls’ that might protect the individual and his or her most personal pleasures and desires from outside interference” (Weeks 1991:1). This tension between public morality and private choice is not altogether morally unresolvable. However, it does not mean that we have to accept a mediocre morality that everybody can necessarily support. As Foucault made clear, “the search for a form of morality acceptable by everyone in the sense that everyone would have to submit to it, seems catastrophic to me” (Foucault in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1987:119). This means that the mediocre morality of the aforementioned fair-weather liberals, despite its liberal outlook, can have catastrophic consequences if it is allowed to prevail because it either is entirely detached from moral considerations on the one hand or wrapped in moralism on the other hand depending on whether the fair-weather liberals decide to support the emancipated libertarians or the reactionary conservatives.
Above I have described how the sexual revolution has moved from the trenches to the barricades but also how this has not necessarily meant an unrestrained freedom of choice. We have become liberated as well as repressed anew. Which tendency is the strongest is hard to say. However, Cas Wouters (1998:188) writes that we have passed through a process of informalisation of “topics and practices such as premarital sex, sexual variations, unmarried cohabitation, fornication, extramarital affairs, jealousy, homosexuality, pornography, teenage sex, abortion, exchange of partners, paedophilia, incest and so on”. This ‘informalisation’ has meant that there is a heightened sexual awareness that may contribute to a widespread democratic dialogue on matters pertaining to sexual morality. As a consequence I would advocate a notion of ‘sexual democracy’ in which we seek to develop some general guidelines that on the one hand protects possible victims of sexual offences and harassment but that at the same time also protects sexual minorities from prosecution based on notions of sexual deviance that are out of touch with contemporary social life in general. Sexual democracy is a state of affairs in which the unopposed power of experts, medical, moral or political, to pass judgement is declining (cf. Béjin 1985b) and where people are allowed to practice the sexuality they prefer under the condition of mature and responsible conduct. However, as André Béjin also points out sexological expertise and sexual democracy do not need to stand in mutual opposition to each other. Late modernity, thus, can move in many different directions – this is refreshing as well as challenging.

The Late Modern Cinderella Search for Morality and Sexuality

In this final part of the essay, let me try to conclude on the above discussion, if it is at all possible to conclude on such elusive subjects as morality and sexuality on such inconclusive grounds as those presented above. Moreover, I will finally attempt to state my own position regarding the issue of late modern morality and sexuality, which have been latent in many of the previous pages but which should now be presented as a more general, however, tentative position.

The era of modernity is on its way, slowly but surely, into the history books and annals of civilisation. However, many of the ideals modernity held so dearly have not completely disappeared, nor have they been fully replaced by
others more appropriate to the problems facing the current times. One of the main proponents of a decisively post-modern understanding of our contemporary social condition, Zygmunt Bauman (1991), contends that the sign of the modern age was the quest for order, certainty and the erosion of uncertainty. These signs have not withered away over night and in times marked by the exactly opposite - chaos and uncertainty - the attempts to construct order and certainty are intensified at individual and collective levels. Bauman suggests that this is due to the desire to avoid the spectre of ambivalence, which is the thorn in the side of the grand modern project of streamlining, uniformity and conformity and which has not and probably never will successfully be entirely exorcised. Another equally capable analyst of modernity, Anthony Giddens (1990), described late modernity as a double-edged sword with one side of the edge representing choice and the opposite side representing limitation of choice, what he termed respectively the opportunity or optimistic side and the pessimistic or sombre side. The simultaneous existence of both positive and negative consequences of life is probably universal to the human condition but in late modernity the dividing line between the opportunity side and the pessimistic side is becoming increasingly blurred and opaque. This is due to the fact that late modernity is an interlude, an intermezzo, between a distinctively modern and a post-modern age. As Paul Robinson noted:

As moderns, we remain permanently divided between a Romantic past, whose repressions we would gladly rid ourselves of, and a deromantized future, whose emotional emptiness we fear even while we anticipate its freedom. It is precisely in this antithesis of Romantic and anti-Romantic impulses that the distinctly modern element in sexual modernism is to be located (Robinson quoted in Douglas & Attwell 1988:17).

The sexual late modernism, however, is to be located in an entirely different though equivalent antithesis, that between a modern morality longing for security, certainty, and predictability and a post-modern morality's desire for freedom, dissolution of constraint and the infinity of choice. The sexual revolution as well as the neosexual twin of this promised the latter but as we saw above have not delivered without creating new constraints. As Jacqueline
Scott’s recent analysis of sexual morality proves, “the changes have not been as revolutionary as is often claimed. The language of sexual revolution has a momentum of its own and catapults us into the era of risk society, when if not quite ‘anything goes’, there is at least an almost limitless range of acceptable choice” (Scott 1998:840). Choice, thus, is weighed down with risk.

Just as the late modern social order is marked by this duality, so is the contemporary sexual universe: “The contemporary sexual landscape is haunted by a double-headed spectre: the irredeemable diversity of sexualities, the fact of otherness confronting us in all our dealings with individuals and collectivities; and the necessity of choice” (Weeks 1995:58). Our freedom of choice necessitates that we, at one point, actually choose, that choice is only a temporary state awaiting final redemption and confirmation through the making of a choice. The contemporary predilection for diversity, reflexivity, difference, self-actualisation and choice appears as one of the dominant features of this late modernity and essential to achieving happiness. But choice has two sides to it: an opportunity side as well as a more harmful one. This was pointed out by the prominent sociologist Charles H. Cooley back in 1902:

Choice is like a river; it broadens as it comes down through history - though there are always banks - and the wider it becomes the more persons drown in it. Stronger and stronger swimming is required, and types of character that lack vigor and self-reliance are more and more likely to go under (Cooley in Simon 1996:70).

Choice, regarded by many as the supreme good, can therefore have devastating consequences personally as well as socially if it floods society without providing any life vests for the bad swimmers. The price - some would say too high a price - we have to pay for freedom of choice is the potentially harming and devastating effects of anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty pervading social life; insecurities about whether or not we made the right choice and whether or not the choice will be socially sanctioned and accepted. The moral limitations on choice have presumably been slackened, at least on the surface, and people appear to have ever more important choices to make - particularly in the sexual realm of life - and the choices seem to be made voluntarily and based on
freedom, reflexive knowledge and a sense of personal meaning. As I have tried to demonstrate above, the individual as well as the social consequences may well be detrimental to the original intention of the craving for choice, namely self-constitution and autonomy. The immanent danger of choice may transform *homo sexualis* into what Norbert Elias (1994) termed *homo clausus* - the lonely, self-contained and almost solipsistic human being. The more positive aspects of living in a late modern age with uncharted areas waiting to be explored, with choice no longer as the highest, most unattainable good, with new horizons to appear, is that people today apparently have a deep-rooted sense of and personal responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the project of the sexual self. As long as choice is coupled with responsibility, the positive sides of self-determination may well exceed the negative aspects.

Many different institutions seek to provide us with guidelines for making our choices regarding sex and thus late modernity reveals “a cacophony of discourses on sexuality - medical, religious, therapeutic, juridical and others - that tell us how to categorise our sex life, its problems and its prohibitions” (Mottier 1998:115). These discourses, however important they may be for a sociological understanding of the historical transformation of sexuality, cannot provide the adequate means for a re-enchanted sexuality, for a liberation of sexuality from the moral bonds strapping it down, since they themselves are the tangible expression of moral evaluations, judgements and objectifications of sexual reality. This liberation can be achieved only through the subversive actions of people in their everyday lives, in the daily struggle to construct sexual selves and identities and in the attempts to influence the political decision-making on sexuality. But we have seen that the discourses are not separated entirely from social life. They may play an active part in how people conceive of themselves and others. Thus, it is possible to find aid, inspiration and assistance in certain parts of contemporary sociological theory, from specific schools of thought oriented toward action, or *praxis*. I am thinking here of the valuable insights and practical impact of recent feminist theory, variants of critical theory and queer theory on contemporary discourses surrounding sexuality. These approaches have opened our otherwise tightly shut eyes and highlighted aspects of sexuality that we were heretofore accustomed to overlook. We must move from a stagnant and static perspective on human
sexuality to critical sexual theory that constantly questions and critically counters contemporary attitudes, practices and structures (cf. Sigusch 1988).

These theories also contain overt political statements that offer some guidelines for achieving a liberation of sexuality. Looking at some of the most prevalent examples, I will in the form of central concepts try to combine Seidman’s (1991) pragmatic ethic with Weeks’ (1998) radical humanism. This would entail that we would be orienting ourselves equally toward ideals of choice, sexual equality, tolerance, diversity, otherness, authenticity and autonomy. This approach has to be coupled with responsibility and solidarity in order not to become excessively concerned with individual self-expression and self-realisation. In the words of David Held in his description of ‘democratic autonomy’, which could also stand as a sign of a sexual sphere liberated from conservative moralism as well as self-centred cynicism:

Individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives; that is, they should enjoy equal rights (and accordingly equal obligations) in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them, as long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others (Held 1987:290).

Moreover, and directly coupled to the sexual sphere, it entails a rejection of perversity or deviance as acceptable descriptive terms for the actions and orientations of others, a respect for sexual minorities, and a reliance on the social responsibility of people for themselves as well as for others. A sexual morality of the early third millennium must be based on the acceptance of continuous change, the assumption of the emergence of what has been characterised as a moment of transgression (Weeks, 1995), which is the moment when the previously repressed returns (Giddens 1991), when the world is once again re-enchanted (Bauman 1992), when the wonders of sex never cease to overcome us, when sexuality is not merely a clinical issue subjugated to a sinister scientific logic and terminology but also an emotional sphere waiting to be discovered and continually rediscovered. From this follows that important questions arise, inasmuch as late modernity, with its radicalisation of the characteristics of modernity, poses new and unprecedented problems to be
solved, territories to be explored, and issues to be confronted. For example, what is the impact of the postulated end of masculinity (MacInnes 1998) and equally femininity on sexuality as well as morality? Which type of values will dominate in the decades to come - masculine or feminine values, or a hybrid of both? And with what consequences for identity formation? Are we, as we so loudly proclaim, finally free from the heterosexual phallocentrism of the past? And perhaps most importantly, where do we go from here? While answers to these questions cannot be explored further here, it is important to realise that answers to questions about social life - and especially about the erotic sphere - are never final and always remains open to conflicting interpretations. This is at once breath taking as well as frustrating – that we will never arrive at any definitive answers and that our search will always remain without an objective end and stretch as a horizon we can never reach.

In this essay I have sought to present an alternative version of the recent history of sexuality by focussing on selected issues pertaining to this historical development. I have tried to explicate the link between private sexual preferences and public representations of sexuality, these being moulded by both moral constraint as well as moral encouragement in an age which, on the surface, is marked by freedom of choice, contingency and rapid change as Jeffrey Weeks stated: “The sexual order, with its fixing of sexual identities under the banner of Nature, Science and Truth, has all but gone [...] The contemporary sexual world appears as irrevocably pluralistic” (Weeks 1995:27). These hallmarks of late modernity both create optimism and relief as well as pessimism and anxiety. To recapitulate some of my main points, as already Foucault (1978) noted, the history of sexuality is not a one-way street but is a continuously evolving story of the social push and pull mechanisms, of forces and powers working to constrain as well as liberate sexuality. Second, that the science of sex in late modernity, as in those phases prior to this, has been unable to discover the universal laws governing human sexual conduct and has similarly failed to abandon a morally imbued position. This should not be regarded as a defeat but as something to learn from. Third, that the ability to accomplish and construct sexuality for human beings has not necessarily been enhanced by the supposedly more liberal attitude towards sex in contemporary society but rather, has created an illusion of choice and self-constitution. And
finally that sexuality is, and always has been, a social construction created by supply and demand understood as the constant negotiation between private desire and the public moral and normative regulation of behaviour.

In this way, sexuality can be understood as a private construction sandblasted by the winds of change in wider society, a harness of individuality and choice corroded - to utilise Richard Sennett’s (1998) powerful term - by social demands, obligations and expectations. The negotiation of sexual identity and sense of belonging is not just a part of everyday life and politics, as Giddens proposed: “Somehow [...] sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, a prime connecting point [...] between body, self-identity and social norms” (Giddens 1992:15). Apart from this it is also present in the social sciences, which have set their goal as the demystification of sexuality or, what Veronique Mottier (1998) echoing Guy Debord terms, the spectacle of sex. William Simon, the late American proponent of sexual scripting theory, was optimistic to the prospects of finding the some kind of ultimate truth about sex in the near future: “The sexual future in whatever form it is conceived may in fact be brighter than life today encourages us to expect. [Hence], the future of the sexual is only in the most minimal sense in the control of what presently constitutes the sexual” (Simon 1996:19). Although we do not have an empty void ahead of us in our search for knowledge and understanding of sex, we are still far from the finishing line – or more precisely, a receding horizon. There is no reason whatsoever to be excessively optimistic, or pessimistic for that matter, that the mystery of sex will eventually be solved in the years to come. This essay has been but a preliminary attempt to theorise sporadically about the historical construction and deconstruction of the sexual. To believe that sexuality can ever be entirely cut loose from morality or social convention is a utopian fantasy. To borrow a phrase from Marx and Engels, sexuality today has nothing to lose but its chains. It still has, and always will have, a world to win.

Notes
1 The contemporary unease and confusion in social theory about how much determination in human behaviour is to be accorded to nature and how much to pin on culture was shown with clarity by Sheyla Benhabib who, although belonging to a constructivist position, still expressed implicit reservations about the social nature of the sexual by remarking that
“culture does not ‘construct’ everything, the human body is not a tabula rasa on which all is inscribed by mechanisms of agency and socialization. The body is an active medium with its own dispositions and ‘habits’, which process, channel and deflect the influences which come to it from the outside, in accordance with its own accumulated modality of being toward the world” (Benhabib 1992:236). The entire discussion about the primacy of nature or nurture is, as I see it, an academic dead end. Few would oppose a position, that by critics perhaps would be labelled essentialism, in which there is a natural core in human beings that is moulded as well as transformed throughout the span of a human life by social surroundings. Jennifer Harding provides the following insightful and clear-cut definitions of respectively ‘essentialism’ versus ‘constructionism’ in sexology: “‘Essentialism’ entails the belief that sexuality is purely a natural phenomenon, outside of culture and society, made up of fixed and inherent drives, and that nature and these drives dictate our sexual identities […] Essentialists tend to subscribe to the belief that sexual instinct, rightly or wrongly, is held in check by social, moral, medical mechanisms […] ‘Constructionism’ entails the belief that sexuality has no inherent essence but must be understood as a configuration of cultural meanings which are themselves generated within matrices of social (power) relations […] Constructionist approaches have been explicitly concerned with power and politics – that is, the ways in which the construction of the sexual has the effect of privileging some sexual forms and denigrating others” (Harding 1998:8-9). These are ideal-types of respectively essentialism and constructionism, which are both best seen as the poles of the same continuum with many different possible positions along the line (cf. Jacobsen 2001).

2 In his interesting discussion of Elias’ and Foucault’s views on the historical process of civilising and disciplining individuals and societies alike, Dennis Smith (1999) proposes several idiosyncratic and original perspectives.

3 An etiological myth is a story about the origin and perpetual continuation of a given phenomenon, its emergence and persistence. As Bauman more aptly puts it: “Ostensibly, etiological myths are stories about the ‘origins of it all’, about the one-off event from which something started [...] they also spell out the conditions that must be met in order to ensure that the phenomenon in question does happen over and over again - that its happening was not a one-off event” (Bauman 1998a:11-12).

4 Although for many of us the Ten Commandments appear to be antediluvian, if not entirely irrelevant to contemporary sexuality and morality, I suggest a brief skimming of Kieslowski and Piesiewicz’ brilliant filmic and literary masterpiece Dekalog (1990) in which present day stories from Poland are used to talk about the Ten Commandments and their influence on
human behaviour regarding the harsh realities as well as fantasies and yearnings of sex, love and desire.

5 In Janet E. Halley’s (1993) essay on the construction of heterosexuality, we also encounter the more legislative aspects of the classification of people as, respectively, homosexuals and heterosexuals. She shows how this is biased in favour on the latter and at the expense of the former.

6 In a brief, yet illuminating, comparison of the theories of Max Weber and Sigmund Freud on sexuality, Gail Hawkes (1998) focuses on the themes of civilising, modernising and rationalising, and their consequences for human sexual desire and pleasure.

7 Edward Sagarin (1971), John Gagnon (1975) and Jeffrey Weeks (1989) contain comprehensive discussions and illustrations on the history of scientia sexualis. One of the most illuminating pieces of work on the history of sexology, however, is Vernon Bullough’s (1994) brilliant introduction to science in the bedroom and how sexual research has been conducted.

8 As Gail Hawkes (1996) illustrates, behind this negative construction on sexuality primarily lies the fact that the bourgeoisie, the class that presumably embodies and symbolises the modern spirit with its entrepreneurship, liberal-mindedness and sense of proportion, wanted to detach itself from the filthy sexuality of the lower classes as well as from the perversity and carnal pleasures of the decadent aristocracy. Therefore, the middle-position of the bourgeoisie turned out to be excessively restrictive. This is particularly interesting in connection to my conceptualisation of the so-called fair-weather liberals.

9 Connell and Dowsett (1999) rightly contend, that the nativism of the sexology of the 19th century started out as a religious variant and later, as I have illustrated, was replaced by a scientific nativism. Nativism implies that sexuality is pre-social making the impact of culture on sexuality rather limited.

10 As noted by amongst others Jeffrey Weeks (1989), Havelock Ellis actually combined a cultural relativism with a biological determinism. Therefore, Ellis’ work cannot be regarded as a one-sided natural scientific approach to sexology.

11 A superb introduction to the ideas of Freud on sexuality and its rather dismal state in modernity can be found in Herbert Marcuse’s (1956) Eros and Civilization.

12 Alfred Kinsey was one of the only sexologists to overtly claim that his ambition was to present a value-free approach to the study of human sexuality (Hawkes 1996:64). Of course, like the rest of the sexologists, Kinsey was haunted by moral and normative ideals.
On several occasions, Freud mentions that perversion is not a unique but rather ubiquitous phenomenon. Hence, ‘the disposition to perversions of every kind is a general and fundamental human characteristic’ (Freud in Hawkes 1998:103). The morality of Freud is most striking in his psychoanalytic practice, according to which it is possible to eliminate and cure, through confessional and therapeutic techniques, peoples’ abnormal, yet natural, dispositions toward what he termed *polymorphous sexual perversions*. As the American writer on gay culture, Jeffrey Escoffier has noted on the so-called *polymorphous perverse sexuality* and the way it is constructed: “*polymorphous perversity reflects sexuality before it is unified and narrowly focused on heterosexual intercourse. The libidinal energy of perverse desire, tirelessly tamed and harnessed by hegemonic social structures, repeatedly erupts to shatter dominant social patterns, identities, and norms. It is a steady current throughout...history sustained by sexual subcultures and dissenters who resist the heteronormative organization of desire*” (Escoffier 1998:7).

If one takes a radical position and decides to follow Foucault to the extremes, it can be argued that any kind of theorising about sexuality is a violation of peoples’ self-image and self-understanding and that sexology, no matter how liberally and open-mindedly expressed, will necessarily subjugate sexuality to categories, ideal types and stereotypes. As Ira Reiss captures brilliantly when discussing sexual science and its way of dealing with its subject-matter: “*The total reality that most human beings feel is embodied by sexuality will never be fully captured by one, or even all, scientific approaches. Surely, the ethical questions and many of the aesthetic questions regarding sexuality are beyond the coping ability of an empirical science. Science cannot define for us the good and the beautiful*” (Reiss 1983:179).

It is necessary to recall that any attempt to categorise phases of developments will willy-nilly suffer from simplification, rigidity and selectivity. The periodisation presented here is no exception to such a critique. However, when the purpose is to provide a general picture of the development from one phase, modernity, to another, late modernity, some level of generality and formalisation is required. I am well aware that the postulating three phases of the main drift in the history of sexology, as I have outlined here, produces an analytical distinction that does not do justice to everything written within this realm of social thought. Therefore, I urge the reader to bear with any unconscious omissions or conscious choices on my behalf. Any model, no matter how ingeniously constructed, must necessarily involve a reduction of the complexity of reality and simplification.

Any kind of typology, of course, rests on analytical distinctions and ideal typical features of occurrences in everyday life and is not a precise picture of the diversity and multifaceted
complexity of positions people can take in the debate and discourse on sexuality. In this respect, my own typology also suffers from oversimplification.

17 Jeffrey Weeks (1995, 1998) has noted the two distinct sides of the same coin in the New Right movement: “The paradox of the 1980s in countries like Britain and the USA was that an extreme economic individualism coincided with attempts at social authoritarianism: at restoring traditional values, the traditional family, tightening the barriers against radical change” (Weeks 1998:44). Whereas the libertarian strand in the New Right offers a morality of choice, the Conservative variant is still heavily biased toward the morality of conformity. For an interesting presentation of the New Right ideology on amongst other issues sexuality in Britain, Anna Marie Smith’s (1994) book offers exciting insights. For a more general discussion of the inherent instability of the New Right ideology see my Utopia – A Critical Analysis of the New Right (Jacobsen 1994).

References


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**The Homosexual Hierarchy**

- Sporadic Sociology in Houston, Texas
Preliminary Remarks and Reflections

This is a sociological essay on what some would prefer and demand to label ‘deviant’ sexuality. However, even in the most abnormal or aberrant of human activities, normality prevails, even in the most obscure, the ordinary presides. Hereby I am in no way whatsoever suggesting or insinuating that ‘homosexuality’ is equal to deviance or the abnormal but that this sexual orientation in the general public mind and especially in American society and the Bible Belt of the neo-conservative South has been looked upon at best as ‘secondary sexuality’ and at worst as a moral cancer festering at the fabric of society. Thus, being labelled as ‘deviant’ is the outcome of often relatively complex social and moral processes aimed at creating boundaries between opposites, constructing hierarchies between what is originally from the hand of nature equal and aiming sanctions differentially at these now unequally constructed phenomena. Erich Goode poignantly defined ‘deviance’ as follows and which suits my purposes here very well: “By deviance I mean one and one thing only: behaviour that some people in a society find offensive and which excites – or would excite if it were discovered – in these people disapproval, punishment, condemnation, or hostility […] It is based on a judgement made by somebody. It isn’t simply behaviour, but behaviour that is evaluated in a certain way” (Goode 1978/2000:24-25). Homosexuality is a prominent but in no way an exclusive example of such ‘deviance’ in the midst of American society. This is the topic of this empirical essay by looking at so-called ‘deviant’ sexuality, its construction and maintenance in a closed community in a society placing a negative price on its expression and presence.

Moreover, the essay deals with many other aspects that in some way or the other is intimately related to the sexuality of a group of people living in an almost insular area of a large American city in which they daily through ordinary as well as extraordinary actions have to construct individual as well as collective identities. They do this vis-à-vis a general social disapproval and sexual stigma attached to their very being which is typical of American and especially southern mentality. Already English social historian Geoffrey Gorer in his classic analysis of American national mentality and folk character many decades ago stated how “among the generality of Americans homosexuality is
regarded not with distaste, disgust, or abhorrence but with panic; it is seen as an immediate and personal threat” (Gorer 1948:97). This still holds true, I believe, especially in a southern city as Houston, Texas, and my observations must be seen in this climate of hostility, labelling and devaluation. However, this climate is moved from the external environment to the work also in the internal circles among the homosexuals themselves, as I shall seek to illustrate below.

Thus, what professor of social work, Geoffrey Pearson (1975), termed ‘the deviant imagination’ works well both outside ‘deviant’ environments and communities as a stigma attached to the actions and orientation of those inhabiting them as well as it works well within these environments as a way of measuring one’s deviance compared to others in one’s own situation and to distance oneself from them. In this respect, the stigmatised homosexuals reproduce and assimilate to some of the ‘objective’ standards for acceptable sexual behaviour based on the hetero-normative assumptions about ‘good’ or ‘proper’ sexual identity while simultaneously also engaging in spectacular displays of resistance against hetero-normative norms. Thus, resistance as well as acceptance constitutes two cornerstones and repertoires of action in the construction of homosexual identity in Paradise (cf. de Certeau 1988). In this fashion they are instrumental in reproducing many of the stereotypical patterns of thought prevalent among heterosexuals heavily influenced and even biased by heteronormative sexual standards while also turning their backs on them.

Thus, simultaneously, in their attempt to distance themselves from heterosexual standards, expectations and ‘prudish’ morality, they came to imitate and define the very same reality they were originally opposing. Moreover, William I. Thomas in his famous theorem stated that a situation would become real in its consequences if those carrying it out defined it as such. In the case of this study that proved correct in the way that many of my subjects were stigmatised as deviants which meant that their actions also became deviant and more extreme and perhaps even deviated more than would have been the case had they not been labelled in the first place. It was as if the stigma attached to many of them made them think that ‘anything goes’, as they were already regarded as being beyond redemption. This could, as we shall see, entail severe consequences for themselves as well as others.
Before I get too involved in presenting some of the conclusions derived from the study, let me instead summarise the groundwork underlying these conclusions. First, theoretical cerebral hygiene was practised and therefore only a very limited amount of explicit references will be made during the presentation below. The empirical material will most of the time be allowed and supposed to speak for itself although it will be presented in a very comprised manner. Second, the actual duration of the study was approximately three months where I at least a couple of times a week would visit the people in the homosexual community and stay for a considerable period and often staying over night with friends in the neighbourhood. However, despite my many and frequent visits, the picture painted by no means aspires to be what Clifford Geertz (1973) described as ‘thick description’ in which a very accurate, detailed and in-depth description is presented by the researcher. Hence, my study can best be characterised as ‘sporadic sociology’ – which I will describe as non-systematic, subjective, exploratory, sensitive, multi-methodical, curious and creative (cf. also Jacobsen & Chatterjee 2001 for an equally sporadic piece of work on other aspects of life in Houston, Texas). This also means that the description in no way whatsoever aspires to be neither an exhaustive nor a complete account of the many aspects making up either sexual identity or daily activities among the people under study. I have selected some of the more spectacular and ‘extreme’ examples from my recollection of the events in order to specify some central aspects of the observations. Third, methodical and ethical considerations will not occupy the following pages as I have treated these more generally in extensive coverage elsewhere (cf. Jacobsen & Kristiansen 2001). However, needles to say that my sporadic observation of these people, which occurred entirely without their explicit knowledge or their expressed informed consent, contains many ethical dilemmas. This is the reason why they all must remain anonymous and are presented as fictitious characters instead of real human beings below. Although anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker (1966) stated that all our everyday lives were similar to some kind of fieldwork, and thus allowed for prying and snooping activities, this does not mean that we necessarily need to treat friends, family or people we come into close contact with as research subjects just because we happen to be sociologists. However, this was what happened in this case. Finally, I would,
however, like to admonish the reader that ethically the study does not follow what would be regarded as the ‘pure’ path and contains elements that ought not to be extrapolated as advisable or role models for others – especially students of sociology - to admire. After these initial instructions to the reader, let me start out be presenting the empirical field in a somewhat and consciously ‘dramatised’ manner (Hall 1994).

**Place and Personae**

As Hans-Georg Soeffner stated in his presentation of rituals in contemporary society, “before Boccaccio lets his heroes begin narrating their ‘novellas’, he recounts, in the form of a frame story, where his narrators are and why they are narrating”. Here I will, however, start out in a somewhat similar fashion by narrating the ‘frame story’ for my homosexual ‘heroes’ whose actions and attitudes constitute the framework below.

Let us denote the place of observation ‘Paradise’ in lack of a more suitable and covering name although there was nothing celestial about the condominium either architecturally or otherwise. However, it has proved to be a retreat for a number of individuals that most certainly not – due to lifestyle choice, educational level, sexual preference, career ambitions etc. - constitute the core ideals of conservative American society. Paradise is in many ways a haven in a heartless and homophobic Houston where these odd individuals and alternative people mutually support each other and create an identity that is intimately connected to the condominium area and its almost notorious reputation for being inhabited by so-called ‘white trash’. The income level is generally low, alcohol and marihuana abuse prevalent, sexual preferences are far from the ‘normal’ monogamous heteronormative, future orientations rather sinister and the general view of the surrounding society is pessimistic. However, most people would not notice these aspects of life in Paradise if merely passing by or stopping in for a moment or two. On the surface everything looks as if it is perfect American middle-class idyll but if one digs deeper it becomes obvious that dissatisfaction and a turning away from the ideology of middle-class values is a predominant feature of many aspects of life for the inhabitants I came to know relatively intimately.
In order to secure absolute anonymity and to follow the strand in sociology of performing and constructing typification originating in the sociology of Simmel and reappearing occasionally up to the recent writings of Bauman, I will here present some characteristics of the inhabitants of Paradise who will be mentioned below. These typifications will allow for them to remain anonymous and for me to dramatise the events slightly. These people are The Preacher, The Performer, The Poet, The Partners, The Pretty Girl, The Pretender and The Parasite (visiting white trash from the Mid-West). A brief presentation is necessary in order to grasp the simplicity of these constructed individual personae as well as the complexity of the social intercourse they daily engaged in with each other.

The Preacher was a younger man who has contracted the HIV virus already in the mid-1980’s during the years of panic amongst homosexuals but who still survived on a heavy daily dose of medication. He was a cynic but still believed that his personal experiences, convictions and values ought to be shared as exemplary to the others in Paradise. He would often sit and preach during the afternoon or evening sessions in the patio, which was a place similar to the so-called ‘impluvium’ of the classical Romans and Greeks meant to keep strangers away, especially when slightly intoxicated by medicine, marihuana or alcohol. Moreover, the bitterness of his own personal plight made him aggressive towards the world of the heterosexuals and he would often make fun of the lack of spiritual and sexual insights of heterosexuals. Meanwhile the others would sit and listen and – perhaps due to the somewhat desperate situation of The Preacher – would nod and agree silently.

The Performer was the typical drag queen with an appetite for outrageous displays of affection, hysteria, self-pity and pride. He would love to dress up and put on make up and by way of speaking or acting display a very extrovert personality although he when in more intimate circumstances appeared more timid and even shy. He worked in what many would describe as a typical gay profession as a hairdresser and he liked physical contact even with semi-strangers. The drama queen quality in him meant that he constantly craved attention and even required others to pronounce his ordinary American name with a French accent. He would not engage in gay identity politics or express discriminating attitudes towards heterosexuals and he would sometimes laugh
in the face of The Preacher when this person became excessively agitated or aggressive.

The Poet was the quiet and lonely guy who primarily wanted to sit by himself and read, engage in intellectual or cultural conversation and who had travelled extensively earlier in his life. He was in the possession of hundreds of books ranging from comedy books to thick-as-a-brick works of an intellectual nature. He also possessed a huge collection of video films and loved to talk about films and literature. Moreover, he would be the one who hardly ever engaged in public discussions in the patio but always showed up as if from nowhere and sat in the background without commenting. He was more ‘Europeanised’ in his behaviour than the others in Paradise who were typical southern born and bred.

The Partners were an odd couple of two relatively older men living with their chubby dog and who would be the party animals who always invited everybody in for drinks and social intercourse. They were humorous but unfortunately both of them had a severe alcohol problem. They would instigate all kinds of foolish and funny arrangements and always be the last ones who went to bed. It appeared later that one of them was fatally ill and died shortly after I left the field.

The Pretty Girl was the typical American cheerleader with a very beautiful and attractive body but who did not possess a single original thought. She was, I was told by other more locally acquainted colleagues, a true Texan woman raised to be beautiful, stupid and to be looking for a wealthy husband. She was incapable of holding a job for long and appeared to be searching endlessly for love, money, affection and something more lasting than her vanishing beauty.

The Pretender was my primary source in the field and the person introducing me to this strange place. She worked hard and had lived hard with men in abusive relationships and had a background in a dissolved family. She in a cumbersome fashion organised parties, outings, matchmaking and social arrangements of all different sorts at the same time as she herself was desperately lonely. She pretended to be this happy and smiling person although she was weeping behind the mask. Both The Pretty Girl and The Pretender were straight and did not involve themselves in the homosexual lifestyle although the
bohemian flamboyance associated with it appeared to attract them despite their conservative upbringing.

These were all the permanent residents in Paradise but The Parasite was a man from the Mid-West staying for a couple of weeks and who with his extremely primitive behaviour and boisterous attitude became the centre of attention throughout this period. All the men mentioned above were gay. They all smoked marihuana regularly and drank heavily and met frequently in the patio to discuss and debate the issues of the day and engage in often rather fierce condemnations of American society and heterosexuals in general. Homosexuals primarily occupied the condominium area but also people with more ‘ordinary’ and mainstream sexual representation stayed there but remained indoors or went elsewhere when they wanted to socialise. These constituted the characters and the location of my sporadic study and below I will go into some detail with a selected amount of conspicuous examples of the way that these people attempted to create a coherent identity in this place called Paradise.

**Homo Hunting**

The people described above inhabiting Paradise were generally socially active within the four walls of the condominium whereas their external contacts appeared to be severely limited to the occasional or obligatory visits to work or for more recreational purposes. Even contact to families and friends outside the condominium seemed to be kept to a minimum. Most of them expressed, and especially The Preacher and The Poet, that normal American society had nothing to offer and that they had chosen their secluded lifestyle voluntarily in order not to be contaminated by the heterosexual morality and low standard of life of American middle-class ideals. Apart from The Pretender, The Performer and occasionally also The Pretty Girl, none of the residents I came to know occupied a permanent position at the labour market. This meant that they could spend quite a lot of the day reading, watching TV, daydreaming, sitting around in the patio, discussing and debating matters of the day and socialising exclusively within their own circles. It also meant, however, that their first-hand knowledge of surrounding society was limited and based on biased presuppositions about heterosexuals, memories of previous bad experiences and a notable lack of being up-to-date regarding especially contemporary political
debates on sexual issues. They appeared to be stuck in preconceived, antediluvian or outdated views, but they nurtured these and based quite a distinctive amount of their general life wisdom on these few, impressionistic and scattered pieces of information. They also continuously reinforced their own relatively limited insight into surrounding social arrangements and even The Pretty Girl and The Pretender, being straight, appeared to accept the view of the world proclaimed with particular ferocity by The Preacher. Occasionally, The Poet would attempt to present a more nuanced and contemplated perspective but his ideas would quickly and effectively be shot down as being counterproductive for the views of especially The Preacher. In some of the discussions The Performer would sometimes also interfere with outrageous comments, points of view so radical and obscure that even The Preacher would have to distance himself from them. The latter believed that he expressed the ‘true’ opinions of the gay community whereas the others, who were not inflicted by the AIDS virus, were unaware of the consequences of living life to the full and accepting the real and genuine homosexual lifestyle. In an interview I conducted with The Preacher he revealed that he felt a strong urge to distance himself from the ‘softer’ homosexuals such as The Poet and The Performer as well as The Partners who, in his view, were only experiencing the top of the iceberg regarding gay life and whose homosexual identity constituted a shallow pulp. His much more hardcore homosexual identity permeated his existence in a thorough fashion from choice of literature, music and TV programs, choice of company, choice of ideology, choice of lifestyle, choice of expression, etc. His hostility, thus, was aimed not merely at the ‘old’ enemies represented by heteronormative morality but equally against the ‘new’ enemies from within the ranks of the homosexuals themselves. It appeared from this, which is apparently typical of many other minority groups and their at times complex identity construction, that they wanted to be different but wanted somebody to be different from as well as somebody to be different together with. According to The Preacher these betrayed their homosexual background by regarding homosexuality as a sort of coat-hanger identity, as something to be put on and taken off whenever suitable or opportunistic for their lives. His views, it appeared, were without any grounding in reality whatsoever and were primarily used as a way to create a status system of superior and inferior within the ranks
of the homosexuals where he would appoint himself a place among the former group. The interesting thing, however, was that the others appeared uncritically to accept their position in the hierarchy he constructed.

One of the favourite pastimes of those residents within the condominium who as mentioned had a surplus of spare time was to engage in what I would term ‘homo hunting’. Despite the often almost aggressive attitudes expressed against heterosexuals and the heteronormative American society, the inhabitants of Paradise also turned their aggression and loathing and self-hatred inwards towards their ‘own’. This happened frequently during my observations and stays at Paradise and would take place whenever The Preacher, The Pretty Girl and sometimes also The Performer went driving in the former person’s car and invited me along. It was not exactly a ‘joy ride’ but more appropriately it could be termed ‘homo hunting’. In the neighbourhood in which Paradise was located the surrounding houses and streets were inhabited by a mixture of other homosexuals, bohemians and liberal-minded people. Moreover, a concentration of restaurants, bars, discos and other entertainment premises made the neighbourhood lively and flamboyant during night-time. It was, moreover, known to be the red light district of Houston. This environment also attracted prostitution and especially male prostitution that – due to the very strict Texan law – took place in dark alleys and away from the main traffic areas behind bars, in parking lots and in driveways. Thus, the kind of male prostitution was primarily concentrated on street level and especially the drag queen prostitution and transvestite variant was prevalent.

This kind of gay expressionism, prostitution and transvestism, infuriated the more ‘conventional’ gayhood of The Preacher who would instigate the homo hunting events. He appeared to regard these transvestite and cross-dressing prostitutes as an insult to his gay pride and was successful in persuading some of the others in Paradise to participate in the mocking and degradation of these, it seemed to me, unhappy and disadvantaged men. This would take on the ritualised form of driving down the alleys searching for the prostitutes who would quickly out of the darkness come up to the car hoping to find customers for their shady business. They would normally be dressed in colourful clothing that exhibited more body than it would hide. The Preacher would then roll down the window and initiate the degradation by appearing to
be interested in purchasing sexual favours. We would all sit silently in the back and follow the incident closely. All of a sudden The Preacher would then reach out of the window and seek to grab the hair or the arm of the prostitute and start shaking him or shouting ‘bitch’ and equally derogatory words after the man. The result would most often be that the prostitute would flee but other times a short physical scene would take place. Then The Preacher would speed up and drive away laughing and satisfied with his ‘successful degradation ceremony’ in Harold Garfinkel’s (1956) terms of the homosexual prostitutes. I would partake in this homo hunting quite a few times and witness how the scene would be almost identical each and every time. After each event the others in the car would congratulate The Preacher and it would be a laughing matter for the rest of the evening. This could naturally be interpreted as a prank or as high jinks but even the most playful of pranks may contain more serious aspects and intentions.

There was an almost ritualised aspect in the homo-hunting practise and each time it would serve as a way to distance oneself from the elements within the homosexual community who were regarded as impure, embarrassments and as deserving of this kind of harsh treatment. Upon return to Paradise there would normally be a lot of bragging and even The Partners and The Poet would fuel the fire by applauding and laughing when the stories were told over and over again. It appeared to serve an integrating function. The ritual aspect was thus evident in the fact that it was repeated on a regular basis, it created an insider-outsider status, it was a symbolic representation of superior and inferior, degradation was employed, and around it a hierarchical community was constructed based on who dared to be the one insulting and mocking the prostitutes. This, however, was not the only strategy employed in order to obtain these results.

**Sex with Strangers**

Many of the day-to-day routines of the inhabitants of Paradise was aimed at reinforcing internal solidarity while keeping the ‘filthy’ homosexuality from the outside at bay together with the equally contaminating heterosexuality. This way sometimes manifested in spectacular fashion as the homo hunting above illustrated. Even more outrageous was the contest among some of the
inhabitants of Paradise consisting of having sex with as many strangers as possible. As a stranger myself, I quickly became acquainted with this aspect of the internal pecking order where status was bestowed upon those who in specific ways exhibited extreme displays of disapproval of the lifestyles of either conventional heterosexuals or equally unacceptable variants of other homosexuals such as drag queens, transvestites, prostitutes or a combination of these. They were all to different degrees a thorn in the side of the self-ascribed ‘pristine’ way of life of the inhabitants in Paradise. Sex with strangers – in large amounts - was a way, at least this was how I interpreted their actions, to distanciate themselves from surrounding social order and its phoney morality.

However, there was an unwritten rule among the residents in Paradise – they did not practise sex within their own circles and it would have been regarded as inappropriate and improper to approach any of the other residents for sexual purposes. Enter The Parasite. He was unfamiliar with this unwritten rule and during his visit lasting almost a week he was coming on to everybody and everything within arm’s length including the observing sociologist whom he regarded as an easy target due to my Scandinavian background. This kind of behaviour would contribute to a tense atmosphere where everybody avoided contact with each other, stayed away from the patio and generally kept away from social intercourse especially with The Parasite and his hosts, The Partners. But nobody told the visiting homosexual that his behaviour was detrimental to the normal functioning of the small community. The last night of his stay it culminated during a farewell party in ‘honor’ of The Parasite. He was coming on more aggressively than ever, being turned down for almost a week, and this resulted in a somewhat comic verbal exchange of words followed by a physical exchange of blows and punches between himself, The Preacher and The Partners leaving the drunk Parasite, who had contributed to nothing constructive during his stay apart from emptying Paradise of its relatively large portion of alcohol, bleeding and somewhat baffled. He would leave the next day without knowing why he had been treated in this harsh manner. The morale was that sex with strangers was acceptable, but sex with ‘one’s own’ neighbours was despised and regarded as almost incestuous.

Sex with strangers would, just as the aforementioned homo hunting, be a way in which one could earn the respect and status among the residents. This
meant that one was required to report openly to the others what one had been doing, to whom, how and under what circumstances. It was a kind of confession where one’s ‘sins’ were counted and evaluated by the others. This would normally go on during nights of heavy drinking and one story would almost automatically trigger off the next more horrendous contribution. The residents, and especially the homosexuals, had a very active sex life even if half the stories should appear to be untrue. Most of the stories were relatively trivial and did not distinguish themselves from stories told by heterosexuals living an active sex life, I presume. However, some of the sexual acts were rather extreme and concerned sex of a nature that was not only illegal but which could also have fatal consequences for those involved.

For example, The Pretender admitted during a formal interview, which was supposed to be part of a small project I was working on titled *My Favourite American Perversions*, which to this date has remained unfinished, that he had casual unprotected sex on a regular basis with strangers found in bars and in the streets. He did not inform them of his condition and practised sex with them despite the fact that this could infect them with the HIV virus. He stated that this activity took place on a regular basis and that most of the encounters would take place in public rest rooms or in private homes. When I confronted him with the amoral and not to mention illegal nature of this, he would just laugh and say that this was not his responsibility and that he was merely doing what everybody else were doing. He was blind to the fact that his actions would potentially harm innocent people who had nothing against him or his sexuality and he was so bitter of what he regarded as preaching heterosexuals and equally sacrilegious homosexuals that he could not care less about the well-being of others. This was an extreme example of the contest consisting of having sex with strangers that was never explicitly stated but which was implicitly practised. It also placed the observing sociologist in an uncomfortable position due to this ‘intimate’ as well as ‘guilty knowledge’ (cf. Jacobsen & Kristiansen 2001).

Although numbers are often said not to count when it comes to sexual relationships and experiences, this was exactly what they did in Paradise. Here quantity was a mark of distinction and sex with strangers and as many as possible counted when credits were given and status passed on. Not only The
Preacher would practise sex with strangers in a proportionally extensive and intensive way although he would brag more openly about it and perform it in a more preposterous manner. Also The Performer, The Poet and The Partners – despite their status as a couple – would engage in this kind of activity although keeping it more to themselves until intoxicated by dope or drinks would make them admit to this promiscuous and hedonistic homosexual lifestyle. This also rubbed off on the heterosexual Pretty Girl and Pretender who through an attempt at creating an active sex life appeared to imitate the homosexuals in order not to appear to be less brave and more boring than the rest of the residents. They would, however, not participate in the more outrageous activity of picking up strangers in bars and the streets in order merely to show off to the others or in order to mock the sexuality of others and as pay back for personal bitterness and defeat.

From the above subjective interpretation and contracted presentation, both homo hunting and the casual sex with strangers as well as the almost public bragging about both ‘rituals’ reminds me of how the homosexuals in Paradise appear to go through what Erving Goffman (1961) in quite another context termed ‘a moral career’. Through this ‘career’ you distinguish yourself and this is one of the major reasons behind The Preacher’s domination, which was based on his ability to assert himself through spectacular, outrageous and sometimes almost dangerous actions. No doubt he himself saw them as heroic and he was capable of seducing and convincing the other residents – especially the psychologically weaker men among the homosexuals as well as the easy targets of the heterosexual Pretty Girl and Pretender - that this was the right attitude to confront outsiders with. This clearly gave him the edge in the small community and assured that his position within it was continuously reproduced and reinforced. The only thing that seemed to be able to dethrone him as the ‘leader of the pack’ was his deteriorating health due to AIDS which, as also Max Weber noted, was the prime reason behind the problem of succession in charismatic leadership.

**Hierarchy Within and Without**
All the above reports concern the actions of definable individuals in a microcosm consisting of a small homosexual community. We may wonder how it does relate to broader social configurations and whether these actions and behavioural patterns are merely idiosyncratic or indicative of more encompassing social landscapes? To answer such a question solely based on sporadic sociology would be haphazard and would not necessarily reveal the true nature of either the small microcosm or the larger macro chaos. However, lacking more empirical groundwork, I will here merely seek to extrapolate some general ideas that can be derived from the above ‘study’.

The actions reported from Paradise naturally have something to do with the psychological ballast of the actual inhabitants but moreover also have something to do with general norms, values, morality, politics, power and law in contemporary American society - that is so-called ‘social constructions’. These constructions are specific from society to society and in the case of Paradise had to do with homophobic and heteronormative environments in which homosexuals had to navigate in Houston, Texas. One could legitimately suspect that this would lead the homosexuals to create a community based entirely on homosexual values and heterophobia but in fact they did something rather surprising. Before commenting on that we need to keep in mind that homophobia by no means is a new invention in American society, as already Geoffrey Gorer above reported. Recently, Jeffery Escoffier wrote how “Christian theology and procreative ideology – which were often conflated – condemned homosexual behaviour as sinful or detrimental to the survival of the species. Homophobia (as a phenomenon – the term was only invented in 1971) led people to stigmatize homosexuality and stirred up a fear of homoeroticism” (Escoffier 1998:5). The new thing, perhaps part of the so-called new ‘sexual politics’ centring on matters of identity, community, intimacy and liberty, is that homophobia also stems from within the homosexual ranks. Just like Afro-Americans will sometimes use the word ‘niggar’ as a derogatory term for those black whom they do not think highly of, so will homosexuals also regularly distance themselves from other gays by the utilisation of different strategies or rituals some of which I mentioned above. This was instrumental in creating not only external distance, where heterosexual norms were opposed, but also that an
internal homosexual hierarchy was constructed, where schemes and ways of bestowing power and status were copied from heterosexual norms.

This combination of disavowal and accept of social norms is in no way whatsoever unique for Paradise and it can be found in almost any kind of secluded community that is striving for recognition in a social structure that stigmatises the actions and lifestyles dwelling or perhaps even hiding there. Sexual stigmas are therefore a common feature of many kinds of social arrangements (cf. McIntosh 1968; Plummer 1975). For example, my good colleague, Annick Prieur (1998:24ff), discovered when investigating homosexual prostitution in Mexico City that certain categories of homosexuals are created solely on the basis of who they have sex with and that there are as many different names and labels applied as the Lapps have for different kinds of snow. These categories are ordered according to the choice of ‘aim’ and not the ‘object’ of sexual activity as in conventional Freudian terminology and constitute a symbolic hierarchy of homosexuality. However, these categories are not merely labels devoid of power or status but are instrumental in defining possession of authority and position within the small and secluded social group. The same goes for Paradise. Here The Preachers’ status was dependent upon him being ‘appointed’ through relatively simple ‘ceremonies’ yet a rather complex coordination of these operations being related to the behaviour he exhibited and instigated. Also The Poet would acquire status among the rest of the inhabitants because of his friendly, warm and hospitable nature. The reason behind their acquired status, I believe, is that The Poet and The Preacher both in many ways – consciously or unwillingly - approximated heterosexual lifestyles more than, for example, the other homosexual residents. This was expressed on behalf of The Poet as analytical intelligence, sophistication and knowledge and a somewhat value-neutral rationality whereas The Preacher would possess a more raw, masculine, hostile and stern aura without entirely verging on the primitive. These are all coveted values in Western thought and practice, some would say a paradoxical combination, and especially among the majority of heterosexuals have they always been valorised and celebrated as ‘true’ middle-class, white, Western, individualistic and self-contained values. The Partners as well as The Performer and The Parasite did not possess any of these traits of character, or at least did not exhibit them openly, and they were as a
consequence relegated to the lower levels of the homosexual hierarchy of Paradise. The two strait women, The Pretender and The Pretty Girl, would due to their heterosexuality support the ‘reign’ of The Preacher while also finding the lifestyle of The Poet fascinating and sympathetic. I am in no way insinuating that these valorised and coveted values pr. definition are heterosexual in origin but merely that heteronormative morality and politics have always staunchly defended and admired many of them.

The internal hierarchy is reinforced by the existence of the external hierarchy in American society between dominant heterosexuality and repressed homosexuality. Steven Seidman recently noted on the contemporary climate in which homosexuals must navigate in: “Since at least the 1950’s, a social division between a dominant heterosexual majority and a subordinate homosexual minority has been central to American society. This hierarchy has been maintained, until recently, by primarily repressive practices” (Seidman 2001:119). What has happened is that this maintenance is no longer a matter of ‘repression’ but instead of ‘normalisation’. Normalisation of homosexuality has normally been seen as a way in which the homosexual lifestyle has become generally accepted as ‘different’ yet deserving within the heterosexual society. However, we could also regard normalisation as a way in which heterosexual values and norms seep in through the cracks in homosexual communities and ‘contaminate’ them with heteronormative ideals and values. This could be termed ‘mainstreaming’. Many of the homosexuals tried to avoid as well as embrace ‘mainstreaming’. This means that “the struggle of any social group – whether it seeks to overturn stigmas, protect itself from violence, or create a new culture – is partly a quest for recognition as legitimate members of society” (Escoffier 1998:19). He goes on to state later that “the community that is politicized through identity politics can neither embrace the dominant society and its identity standards (that’s assimilation) nor maintain its political mobilization by rejecting dominant society completely (that’s separatism)” (Escoffier 1998:27). This does not merely happen with political communities but equally with everyday and sexual communities established through informal and ‘ceremonies’ of identification and distanciation.

The above discussion points to two different yet interrelated ways of creating internal coherence in a community living on ‘the edge’ of what is
regarded as normality whether homosexual or otherwise stigmatised. Group cohesion can be typically created by two different mechanisms – external distanciation and internal identification. In either case, the result is somewhat similar – that the binary opposition of ‘us’ and ‘them’ will surface. All the homosexuals I had contact with made it a habit to distance themselves verbally, physically and mentally from the other homosexuals and to frown upon the way they lived the homosexual life. They all had individual definitions of what constituted a genuine gay lifestyle. Therefore, they also turned their hostility and discrimination inwards to the other homosexuals who did not live up to these standards and expectations. Thus, even within a group of individuals, themselves segregated from and stigmatised by society, an internal pecking order is apparently being brought into existence based on the overlapping identity construction of inward as well as outward hostility. As sociological analyses of small group interaction and constitution have shown for decades, every group creates and constructs its own hierarchy. Homosexuals are no exception to this ‘iron law’. What is exceptional, though, is the laborious and meticulous way in which this hierarchy is erected and maintained both as a way to distance oneself from external morality and norms as well as an imitation of these. Constructing and maintaining homosexual community and identity, as with other kinds of identity and community formation, is thus a matter of identification and distanciation, belonging and separation (Jenkins 1996). Through this process, we acquire as well as are bestowed identities and positions within cultural formations or social structures. This takes place – on the interactional as well as structural level – within figurations of power. As Jeffery Weeks writes in his magnificent book Against Nature, “homosexual identities illustrate the play of constraint and opportunity, necessity and freedom, power and pleasure” (Weeks 1991:79). In this way, homosexual identities are not different from other constructions of identity – the main difference, however, is that the former notion of each pairing – constraint, necessity and power – are more prevalent in homosexual than, for example, heterosexual lifestyles. Positioning within the homosexual community clearly relies upon power. Not power understood in structural terms but in a much more subtle and micro analytical sense of the term as Michel Foucault developed and nurtured. He stated:
I would like to suggest [a] way to go further towards a new economy of power relations, a way, which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practise. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies (Foucault in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:210-211).

In another but equally central context he wrote the following ‘negative definition’ of what power is not, which I quote at length, thereby leading to an approximation of what power is:

By power, I do not mean ‘power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation, which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire body […] It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization […] Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (Foucault 1978:92-93).

The different utilisation of this micro power will determine one’s relative success in obtaining a privileged position in the homosexual hierarchy despite the fact that homosexual groups are often described in coherent and consensual terms. Internally, the homosexual community apparently serves the function of mutual cohesion:
The primary function of the homosexual group is psychological in that it provides a social context within which the homosexual can find acceptance as a homosexual and collective support for his deviant tendencies […] Homosexuals within the city tend to know each other, to recognize a number of common interests and common moral norms and to interact on the basis of antagonistic cooperation (Leznoff & Westley 1956:257).

As I have tried to present above, this picture is not necessarily a valid representation of reality. Antagonism, and especially the inward type of antagonism, appears from my sporadic study to be more profound and outspoken than is expressed in conventional literature on homosexual lifestyles.

‘Hierarchy starts at home’, could be the euphemism attached to this phenomenon of double distanciation – from one’s own as well as from the others. The hierarchy in the homosexual universe, as in so many other places, does not necessarily rely on access to certain economic resources as the almost deterministic term ‘class’ implies. This term is incapable of describing the processes involved in concrete social interaction but is good at describing stable social strata. In connection to the creation of intra-group relationships, the term ‘status groups’ is apparently more suitable. Let us recall the classic words of Max Weber:

In contrast to classes, status groups are normally communities. They are, however, often of an amorphous kind. In contrast to the purely economically determined ‘class situation’ we wish to designate as ‘status situations’ every typical component of the life fate of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour […] In content, status honour is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific style of life can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle (Weber 1925/1948:186-187).

There are many sources of power to define oneself in relation to the hierarchy or even to oppose or reorder the hierarchy. Some of the most common ones are wealth, age, strength, gender and knowledge. These very structural and ‘objective’ features, although they are always relative and not absolute, need to be supplemented by more psychological and subjective sources of individual
assertion. These may be such ‘soft’ but powerful features as power of persuasion, charm, argumentation, ability to create alliances, slyness and subtleness, etc. These are important and indispensable strategies when one wants to situate oneself and perhaps even improve one’s position in the homosexual hierarchy as well as elsewhere. Sociology needs to pay attention to such ‘softer’ features. Just as Jacque Lynn Foltyn (1996) has reported that medical patients being defined as ‘pretty’ would receive a better treatment in hospital than other patients, so sociologists ought also to take it into consideration that individuals may be comparatively better at achieving their ends due to such personal strategies and subjective traits of character as those mentioned sporadically here. Equally, that some individuals or groups of individuals may find it comparatively easier to construct and maintain a coherent identity than others due to the socially sanctioned label that is attached to parts of their existence – such as, for example, sexuality.

To summarise, subcultures or secluded communities will often, although they in principle are counter-cultures, come to assimilate and mirror the values of the wider social organization in which they are embedded. As Social Darwinists have illustrated for more than a century, social life tends to imitate that of nature. E. T. Hobhouse stated a long time ago, that ‘where biology ends, sociology begins’. This is also true when it comes to the creation of hierarchies, as we know them from the animal world. What we would define as ‘normal’ populations construct hierarchies regarding work, social organization, gender relations, etc. but also sequestered and secluded subcultural ‘abnormal’ populations create and uphold such hierarchies, as Goffman illustrated with his investigations of ‘total institutions’. Paradise was, naturally, no exception to the rule. The fascinating thing, however, was that this group consisting primarily of homosexuals, doomed and deemed ‘abnormal’ by the external environment of ‘normal’ American society, also utilised this strategy internally against their own. We know this phenomenon primarily from prisons, psychiatric wards, the homeless communities, prostitutes and other stigmatised social settings. However, we need to be aware that it is probably a universal and ubiquitous way of dealing with other human beings – we grade them, typify them, measure them, evaluate them, categorise and classify them and so forth. In this process we also in some way or the other come to compare them to us, to what we stand
for, to our values and our standards. This is the basis for the construction of human hierarchies whether on the individual or the collective level. These hierarchies become necessities for us when we navigate in a world consisting either of favourite familiars or uncertain strangers, when we seek to locate ourselves and our own values in comparison to those of others. It was typical of the people in Paradise that the accepted that The Preacher wanted his vision of the true homosexual life to become the norm to which especially the Partners, The Poet and The Performer should all aspire to conform. They, on the other hand, had their own personal standards, which they also attempted to present as the ‘true’ homosexual virtues when it came to lifestyle choices, number of partners, preferences regarding music, literature, clothing, etc. The perpetual competition between these different ‘definitions of the homosexual situation’, however, did not end up in a silent agreement or compromise but resulted in what Garfinkel has termed ‘degradation ceremonies’ and people losing ‘face’ in Goffman’s terminology. This would often take place, as described above, in certain outings where ‘homo hunting’ took place or through sexual suggestions and advances being made to strangers (such as myself) or more regularly through heated and aggressive debates about the nature of homosexuality and exchanges of experiences. Despite their differences, the residents in Paradise saw eye to eye on one thing – their condominium constituted a haven in a heteronormative society. However, it also ought to be observed about Paradise – what would appear to be the self-deception of the residents of the condominium - that they believed to live in a ‘liberal-minded’, ‘fashionable’ and ‘cultural’ area of the city although most others commented on the area as downbeat, white trash and lower middleclass. At the same time the prejudices of the residents were directed outwards towards other ethnic groups and especially those who had managed well in American society such as the Asians and the Jews. The black population or the Hispanics were hardly ever mentioned because they were the most disadvantaged groups. The pushes and pulls of external and internal hierarchies created many new targets for hostility that was simultaneously aimed inwards and outwards. This appeared to be the climate in which individuals in Paradise and the community in itself incessantly had to navigate.
Life Teaches Us a Lesson
Above I have presented a sporadic study of homosexual lifestyle in an insular community in one of America’s biggest cities. From the presentation of this community it appears appropriate to echo the words of Evelyn Hooker who stated that

the ‘challenge to science’ presented by the homosexuality in understanding the basic social and biological processes which determine the patterns of sexual behavior in man, their correlates and consequences, is a formidable one. To respond to that challenge and to make even a small contribution is to find the kind of satisfaction, which has always rewarded intellectual search and discovery (Hooker 1961:54).

My contribution presented above is indeed merely a small and sporadically grounded piece of work relating to specific aspects of the behavioural patterns of a specific group of homosexuals in a specific environment. Whether there are grounds for generalisation, only further studies can show.

The study has shown that every single aspect of everyday life can be used as a domain for sociological analysis including our own subjective experiences when we as sociologists travel by bus, sit in a park, dine in a restaurant, walk in the street, go for a drink, enjoy a football match, etc. Whether or not they ought to be is a moral or ethical matter that science must seek to take into consideration. All of these subjective and private experiences naturally contain scientifically valuable information and insight even if it cannot stand entirely alone and requires substantiation by more scientific and perhaps quantitative material. But it cannot and ought not to be discarded either even though it is impressionistic and relatively private. Such subjective life experiences were also the case for Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Goffman and the like although it was not explicated in their work. They had a life apart from that confined to their academic ivory towers and this life in a substantial fashion also had an impact on their scientific writings. My own observations and recollections reported above as a private individual also turned out to be material for this sporadic sociological investigation.
This brief essay has not aspired to paint the full picture of homosexual social life – in fact, far from it. It has merely suggested some understandings and observations derived from a sporadic study undertaken in connection to a research stay in Houston, Texas. Whether or not some crude extrapolations or generalisations can be drawn from the scattered material presented in a more literary form above will be up to the individual reader to decide. My ambition has merely been to present some thoughts and ideas and point out that even the most personal experience can and should be used at least as a backdrop for further and more systematic investigation of social reality. The Norwegian writer and artist Johan Borgen once stated in a televised interview, that “the person who has decided to write, can never refrain from observing himself even in the most intimate situations”. The implication of this quotation is also that we can never refrain, like it or not, from consciously or unconsciously to draw or rely upon subjective and private experiences from our everyday lives. We are not different personae – researcher and human being. This apparent duality is necessarily transformed into a hybrid as a human being that does not put on and take off its research identity as if it was a raincoat. If social science is indeed a calling, as Weberians would suggest, then it would be uncalled for if our curiosity ceased at the doorstep of our university offices and stopped short of taking the experiences we have beyond these into consideration. If this appeared to be the case, we would be more machinelike and less human. So even though my intention initially was not to use my contact with these people as a topic for my curious and insatiable research appetite, it nevertheless afterwards appeared to be a natural outcome of the unfolding events and the substance to be drawn from them. This naturally contains issues of an ethical and moral nature and implication. However, this is not my concern here and may the reader extract whatever fits his or her own purposes or at least have been able to find inspiration here or relate it to his or her own subjective experiences. A last word of caution; reality is as fascinating as it is dangerous – so be careful out there – for your own sake and for the sake of others.
References


POSTSCRIPT

The foregoing two essays have pointed to different yet interrelated aspects of human sexuality – how it is socially constructed, culturally circumscribed, morally moulded and maintained and historically altered and transformed. Through theoretical and empirically informed work, it has been shown that sexuality, although being a universal feature of human life, is culturally specific and contingent upon cultural norms, values and customs. Fully to understand and academically appreciate sexuality both as a subject-matter in its own right as well as a ‘window’ through which we can glimpse wider social and cultural changes is therefore essential. Eve Sedgwick thus opens her book *The Epistemology of the Closet* with the following suggestion on how to view sexuality in connection to cultural and social circumstances:

This book will argue that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition (Sedgwick 1990:1).

I agree with this point of view and the two foregoing essays have sought to illustrate how important a comprehension of human sexuality is to a more profound and thorough understanding of the human condition. Especially the investigation of the minority phenomena which different societies deem ‘deviant’ can help us in comprehending the majority of the social world in a more profound fashion despite their marginality and mysterious ‘deviance’: “Sexual ‘deviates’ are [...] an enigma, and it is the future of culture that they are challenging us to decipher through their obsessions” (Lotringer 1988). Not just the future of culture but equally the future of cultural theory and social science, I would add, are at stake in analysing and comprehending sexual ‘normality’ and sexual ‘deviance’. The specificities of sexuality can serve as a lens through which central aspects of the general and more encompassing transformations within the quotidian realm, the political sphere and the moral dimensions involved in the historical development from modernity via late modernity to postmodernity can be studied. Also the alleged transformation
from circumstances determined by constraint to conditions permeated by choice can be understood through the theme of human sexuality because it is located at the intersection of biology and culture.

This has been the ambition and aspiration of the foregoing monograph and the reader will have to decide if and to what extent this ambition has been achieved and fulfilled. Zygmunt Bauman with typical incisive wisdom captured the essence of the two essays in this monograph by stating:

There are many ways of being human, but each society makes a choice of the way it prefers or tolerates. If we call a certain assembly of people a ‘society’, implying that these people ‘belong together’ and ‘make a totality’, it is because of their choice (though seldom a ‘deliberate’ choice […] the choice cannot easily be abandoned). It is this choice, or the lasting sediments of it, that makes one assembly of people look different from another (Bauman 1998:83).

This goes whether we are talking about ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ groups, larger society or smaller sub-communities. These choices, however, are never made entirely without interference from history, tradition, convention, bastions of power and moral mentalities. It is an illusion – a postmodern aporia - to believe that we can construct everything from scratch and this goes also for sexuality. This does not mean a denial of human agency but a recognition that this agency is not free-floating. In the words of Stevi Jackson:

We need to weave these strands together in such a way as to recognize the force of cultural and ideological constructions of sexuality and the constraints of social structure but without denying human agency and therefore the possibility of resistance and change (Jackson in Adkins & Merchant 1996:3).

Although freedom of choice may appear to be unlimited in most spheres of life - and especially within the sexual realm - in our contemporary transitional epoch in world history, we must be wary not to forget that social forces run deep and dark like ferocious undercurrents below the calm and neat surface in everything we do and are.
References