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**'LESBIAN BUDDHISM?'**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**DECLARATION**

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V J Rylance

## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis 'Lesbian Buddhism?' argues that lesbian sexual identity is a necessary category of analysis in Western Buddhism and lesbian Buddhists' current lack of recognition indicates a hiatus in knowledge and the exclusive nature of Buddhist Studies. Arguments are presented in three sections that outline the problem, describe its context and propose a political solution.

Sexual identity is an indigenous aspect of western culture where invisibility is a recognised mark of lesbians' oppression. In Buddhist studies, the interests of gay men are represented, while lesbians' interests remain invisible. Western lesbian Buddhists must negotiate religio-cultural contexts that have been influenced by Christian morality, and to explicate their anomalous and problematic circumstances, the thesis juxtapositions a report of Christian lesbians and gays with an account of Buddhist doctrines.

Historically, Buddhist traditions have colluded with disparaging attitudes towards women, and many Buddhist women are applying feminist theological methods to revise androcentric understandings and practices. The thesis calls upon the western convention of naming Buddhist understandings according to their cultural influences, together with the feminist theological method whereby women in minorities whose religious interests have been overlooked have exercised the 'power to name' their views and experiences.

Because lesbian Buddhists have been reluctant to identify themselves, the specificity of their experiences remains unacknowledged. The convention of defining 'lesbian' solely in sexual terms might be responsible and is supplanted here by a focus upon lesbian culture, the source of lesbians' shared values and understandings. This shift also allows the recognition that lesbians' adaptations of Buddhism might be culturally consistent. It is argued that the distinctive cultural aspects of lesbians' lives and the convention of naming Buddhism according to cultural influences, together with the lack of recognition given to lesbian Buddhists and feminists' reclamation of the 'power to name', support the name 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

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Be lamps for yourselves;  
use the *dhamma* as a lamp;  
do not turn for a lamp to others.<sup>1</sup>

## ***Introductory Chapter***

### ***Introduction***

I am a lesbian Buddhist feminist, and because lesbianism has always felt instinctive and natural to me, my thesis is based on the premise that sexual preference is beyond conscious volition and social coercion. The various cultural significances attached to 'lesbianism' have influenced my experiences and worldview profoundly, and a non-normative sexual orientation has rarely ensured an unqualified welcome in religious contexts. Buddhist sources often remain silent about sexual orientation, frequently assuming a heterosexual norm that at best ensures my discomfort and at worst excludes me. Where silence results in assumptions of heterosexuality it colludes with and reinforces the oppression of alternatives. Furthermore, religious institutions' silence about social opprobrium colludes with its negativity, and the silence in Buddhism colludes with forces of ignorance and suffering. The work for this study has often felt like a meditation upon a religious tradition that advocates mindfulness and compassion while it ignores the needs of people who are frequently stigmatised.

I am elated when I find Buddhist references to homosexuality; however, few references have satisfied my egalitarian sensibilities, and many Buddhists seem convinced that considerations of sexual orientation and identity are somehow unBuddhist. The lack of consideration given to lesbian Buddhists ensures a lack of clarity about our moral status, which has caused me sufficient consternation to complete this thesis. The study combines my concern about the relationship between lesbian sexual identity and Buddhism with the knowledge that Lesbian Studies and Feminist Theology are arenas with acknowledged political agendas in which lesbian-feminists' views are validated.

This study is conducted from a lesbian-feminist Buddhist standpoint with the intention of supporting lesbian Buddhists and challenging



ignorance and heterosexism in Buddhism. It is a liberatory project, thoroughly political in its standpoint and analyses, and thoroughly Buddhist in its aim to reduce ignorance and suffering. While ultimately gender and sexuality have no Buddhist significance *per se*, this thesis addresses the mundane circumstances in which the *dhamma* is taught and practiced to argue that Western Buddhism must consider sexual identity because it is a relevant western cultural phenomenon.

Lesbian Buddhists' circumstances are addressed in three ways. Firstly, the thesis draws attention to and explores possible reasons for the current level of ignorance about lesbian Buddhists. Secondly, misconceptions of relationships between the *dhamma* and lesbian identity are challenged. Finally, the banner 'Lesbian Buddhism', under which alliances may be forged and knowledge accumulated, is promoted. The name 'Lesbian Buddhism' reflects the politics of naming:

What is certain is that the politics of naming is at the heart of lesbian studies. It is not so much 'the lesbian' which we study, as the multiple, shifting processes which the lesbian body inhabits and enacts at the permeable meniscus between the social and the self.<sup>2</sup>

The title, 'Lesbian Buddhism?' may give the impression that lesbian Buddhists are a uniform group; however, rather than diminishing differences between lesbian Buddhists, the thesis aims to increase the possibility of lesbian Buddhists' differences being recognised.

My research has been shaped by many things. In addition to a lifetime lived as a lesbian, reading lesbian literature, and engaging with lesbian politics, during the early 1990's, I attended the first evening class in Lesbian Studies, taught by Dr Sonya Andermahr, a senior lecturer in English and Women's Studies. During this course, I engaged with academically validated studies by, for and about lesbians. Nevertheless, in my later undergraduate course in Comparative Religions, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University, gender awareness was rare and sexuality hardly mentioned. The exception was a course entitled, 'Gender and Religion', convened by Julia Leslie, who subsequently became my postgraduate supervisor. The approach of the thesis has been influenced by the academic values prevalent in the places I have studied,

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<sup>1</sup> *Digha Nikaya* II, 100, trans. Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'Buddhism: The Doctrinal Case for Feminism', pp.91—104, in *Feminist Theology*, No.12.

and the foundation year of postgraduate research was supervised by Grace Jantzen at the Centre for Culture, Religion and Gender, at Manchester University, while subsequent years were spent at the Centre for Gender and Religions Research at SOAS.

The thesis has taken a decade of part-time study to complete, during which time few things have remained stable. The personal challenges faced include my mother's illness and death; the illness and death of my supporter and supervisor, Julia Leslie; and, my own deteriorating health. These circumstances have resulted in a deep appreciation of Sue Dolby's open-handed generosity and the unstinting support of Prof. Brian Bocking, without which I would not have been able to complete this study.

### ***A. Methodology and Literature Review***

The original methodology for this research included a survey of lesbian Buddhists to ascertain what, if any, relationship existed between Buddhism and their sexual identity. Between September 2001 and March 2002, I conducted a pilot study, which involved producing a questionnaire, placing advertisements and chasing responses.<sup>3</sup> Respondents were difficult to find, and only four completed questionnaires were returned. This was sufficiently meagre for me to invite two friends to take part and to complete a questionnaire myself, which provided a total of seven completed questionnaires. A brief analysis revealed respondents to be of various ages and various Buddhist traditions, and that they had come out as lesbians at different stages in their lives, in different socio-political contexts and had different attitudes towards both lesbianism and Buddhism. This variety indicated the need for a larger survey than I had anticipated, and together with the difficulties of finding respondents, indicated that the survey would require a different approach. Personal visits to Buddhist centres to conduct face-to-face interviews might lead to a higher response rate, more comprehensive answers and ensure a representative survey. However, this more time-consuming and costly process would require additional funding that was not available.

I discounted relying upon a small survey because of its potential to produce an anecdotal ethnography that might support any agenda. I then

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<sup>2</sup> Tamsin Wilton, 1995, *Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda* (London, Routledge), p.49.

faced two alternatives: abandoning the thesis or drawing upon established sources to argue for lesbian Buddhists' greater representation. Choosing the latter shifted the focus of the thesis away from issues raised in a survey of anonymous contacts and towards issues I could demonstrate either in Buddhist sources or in established academic contexts. Omitting the survey has allowed me greater freedom to explore Buddhist principles and teachings and to address issues I consider important. The lack of works by and about lesbian Buddhists made it impossible to seek expert advice, and the originality of the thesis lies in the construction of comprehensive arguments from a variety of sources, few of which have addressed the issue of lesbian sexual identity in Buddhism. The thesis presents evidence of the discouraging influence of Buddhist teachings and traditions and western lesbian Buddhists' reluctance to identify themselves, which counter evidence of lesbians' increasing political profile since the second half of the 20th century, and the challenges they have made to negative religio-cultural influences.

This study advocates the recognition of difference in all contexts; however, for clarity of argument and ease of reference, it relies upon normative concepts of male/female sexual differentiation, and issues related to trans communities ('trannies') remain largely unaddressed. Throughout, the study refers to 'normative' and 'marginalised' social and religious groups and contexts, and normative perspectives may be specified by the word 'mainstream'. Gender differentiation is a necessary criterion, and while 'lesbian' refers exclusively to lesbian women, 'gay' in this thesis refers exclusively to gay men. 'Gay' is understood to be an identity that has been self-claimed, usually by men, and occasionally by women, whose primary emotional and/or sexual attractions are to people of the same sex. The word 'gay' has been used since the 12<sup>th</sup> century in French, and the 17<sup>th</sup> century in English, and since the 1930's has been chosen by homosexual men to refer to themselves.<sup>4</sup> The increasing political awareness and activism during the 1970's ensured that it became a positive self-identity.<sup>5</sup> Lesbians were included under its remit almost by default, and lesbians' identification as

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<sup>3</sup> Adverts were placed in *The Pink Paper*, the Older Lesbian Network newsletter, the *Kenric* newsletter, and *The Manchester Lesbian Newsletter*, between December 2001 and March 2002.

<sup>4</sup> 'Gay' in George E Haggerty, ed., 2000, *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* [NY & London, Garland], p. 362.

<sup>5</sup> 'Gay' in George E Haggerty, ed., 2000, *Gay Histories*, p.362.

'gay' often marks aversion to the word 'lesbian'.<sup>6</sup> This process of avoidance endorses negative connotations of 'lesbian', deprives lesbians of a language with which to specify their experiences, and fails to acknowledge that the sexuality and culture of men and women are different. Thus, while 'gay' may sometimes refer to gay men and lesbians, in this work it refers exclusively to gay men. The historical circumstances of the word 'lesbian' are explored in Chapter Two, section C, 'Lesbians' Disappearance'.

This is the first academic study of the circumstances of lesbians in Buddhism, and to ensure the arguments are comprehensive, it is necessary to include some basic elements from Lesbian and Buddhist Studies. The appearance of lesbians in academic Buddhist Studies is currently limited to a discursive nod in their direction in the few studies focused upon the interests of gay men (see Chapter Three, 'Lesbians in Buddhist Studies'). While gay men's circumstances are not the focus of this study, some of the issues they raise may be relevant to lesbians. Homophobia affects both lesbians and gays, although the privilege and prejudice attending their respective genders has resulted in different sets of oppression. Gay theologies are based in the experiences of men, who may be privileged and enjoy high status in religious contexts, while lesbian theologies look to the experiences of women, who are often denigrated and overlooked in religious contexts. Negativity often attends women's gender and sexuality, and Lesbian Studies address both these areas.

This thesis presents a broad topic and its debates are constrained by the word count. The arguments do not lend themselves to the strict segregation of disciplines, so that chapters are not confined to a single discipline. A flexible approach to disciplinary boundaries allows the methodology to be tailored uniquely. The study relies largely upon academic sources that have been constrained by disciplinary boundaries and priorities, which ensure they are capable of representing only partial views.<sup>7</sup> To overcome such bias and uncover invisible assumptions, as well as affording a stable basis from which to interrogate texts, Grace Jantzen

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<sup>6</sup> 'Lesbian', in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., 2000, *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* [NY & London, Garland], p.453.

<sup>7</sup> Grace Jantzen, 1998, *Becoming Divine: towards a feminist philosophy of religion* (U.K., Manchester University Press), pp.22—26. Grace Jantzen critiqued the traditional methods used in philosophy of religion for their reliance upon science, saying that, contrary to popular belief, scientific knowledge is based on socially constructed paradigms that may undergo shifts (p.23). Furthermore, literature, psychoanalysis, and social or political theory have been largely ignored or treated with contempt (p.23), and the aim of any project influences the means.

advocated engaging with topics or 'texts' from at least three perspectives: religion, culture and gender.<sup>8</sup> In his book, *Orientalism and Religion*, Richard King translated these perspectives into religion, culture and politics, which are the perspectives adopted here.<sup>9</sup> While this thesis refers to several disciplines it relies upon three disciplinary areas that are presented as subheadings in this methodology and literature review: 'Religion: Mainstream Buddhist Studies', 'Culture: Lesbian Cultural Studies', and 'Politics: Feminist and Lesbian Theologies'. Some chapters in the thesis contain literature reviews that are threads of argumentation, and repetition is minimised by these being referenced in the literature reviews below.

The primary religious focus is Buddhism and by implication Buddhist Studies; however, 'mainstream' Buddhist Studies has failed to consider adequately the influences of gender and sexual orientation. This study acknowledges the political aspect of women's studies of Buddhism, which are differentiated from mainstream Buddhist Studies and classified 'feminist theologies'. The following subsections consider Buddhist Studies under two headings: 'Religion: Mainstream Buddhist Studies', and 'Politics: Feminist and Lesbian Theologies'. Because few mainstream or feminist Buddhist theologies have considered women's same-sex sexuality, it is necessary and helpful to refer to lesbian and gay Christian theologies to illustrate the significance of sexual orientation in western religious culture. These theologies assume Christian norms and reflect Christian perspectives; however, they are used largely in an illustrative manner to substantiate the ability of lesbian theologies to reflect often radical alternative religious understandings.

The purpose of the thesis is to draw attention to the lack of recognition given to lesbians in Western Buddhism, and while the thesis is located wholly in western cultural contexts, the arguments refer to at least three cultural contexts: mainstream western, marginalised lesbian, and the indigenous cultures of Buddhist traditions. Knowledge of Buddhist cultures facilitates a better understanding of Buddhist teachings and traditions; however, Buddhist Studies have rarely explored the various attitudes demonstrated towards homosexuality in Buddhist cultures, and the thesis draws attention to this deficiency.

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<sup>8</sup> Grace Jantzen, 14.10.99, 'Research Methods in Religion, Culture and Gender' lecture at Manchester University.

<sup>9</sup> Richard King, 1999, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India and 'the mystic East'* (London & NY, Routledge), p.1.

The third area of methodological triangulation is 'Politics – Feminist and Lesbian Theologies'. Widespread androcentrism and the subordination of women in both Buddhism and Christianity support the view that, whether self-consciously or not, the writings of women in these religious contexts have political significance. Feminist theologies focus largely upon gender issues, while lesbian theologies address issues of both gender and sexual orientation. The lack of lesbian Buddhist theologies is the *raison d'être* for this study, which deploys the disciplinary resources of feminist theology and lesbian and gay Christian theologies to interrogate the circumstances whereby lesbians remain largely unacknowledged and unaddressed in Western Buddhism.

### **i. Religion: Mainstream Buddhist Studies**

The first to engage in Buddhist studies were Indian monastics of the second century BCE, and the tradition of monastic study has been maintained throughout Buddhism's history.<sup>10</sup> Western Buddhist scholarship was instigated through the collection, translation, and interpretation of texts during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1837, the British resident to the court of Nepal, Brian H Hodgson, collected Sanskrit texts and posted them around Europe.<sup>11</sup> One of the recipients was the French scholar Eugene Burnouf, who, in 1845, published the first study to regard Buddhism as a unity, *L'Introduction a l'histoire du bouddhisme indien*, and in 1852, he published the first translation of the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>12</sup> This is not the place for a comprehensive review of the development of Buddhist Studies since Burnouf, but it is possible to note that until quite recently they were overwhelmingly textual, philological and historical. Leading scholars were interested mainly in Buddhism's ancient origins and paid little attention to extra canonical texts and atypical practices. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of social sciences saw Buddhist Studies turning towards anthropological methods and a growing interest in Buddhist communities and the role of Buddhist ideas, practices and institutions in various social and cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis R Lancaster, 1987, 'Buddhist Studies', pp.554—560, in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (NY, Macmillan), Vol.2, 'AUTH—BUTL', p.554.

<sup>11</sup> Donald S Lopez, 1999, *Prisoners of Shargri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press), p.157.

<sup>12</sup> Eugene Burnouf, 1845, *L'Introduction a l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* (place & pub unknown); and, 1852, *The Lotus Sutra* (place & pub unknown), cited by Peter Harvey, 1990, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history and practices* (Cambridge, University Press), p.300.

contexts.<sup>13</sup> These developments have more recently included studies of Buddhism in the West.<sup>14</sup> Under the increasing influence of postmodern approaches, studies of Buddhism have become interdisciplinary, thereby benefiting from wider influences that have resulted in a growing body of postcolonial and feminist literature.<sup>15</sup>

Most significant for this thesis is the influence of various prejudices in Buddhism and Buddhist Studies, and Edward Said and Richard King have studied the influence of colonialism and racism in the academy, while centuries of racist assumptions are now being challenged by post-colonial analyses.<sup>16</sup> Talal Asad's critique of religious studies acknowledges the power of academia to validate information, which Richard King has considered in the Indian and Asian contexts most relevant to Buddhism.<sup>17</sup> King argues that historical views are most accurately read in their original social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.<sup>18</sup> Postcolonial Buddhist studies reveal that the politics of representation are already a Buddhist issue; nevertheless, opponents of feminism in Buddhism object to its political status, and some academic departments may be less anxious than others to address the equally political but more contentious areas of compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia.<sup>19</sup>

While focusing upon the contexts of Christianity and Islam, Talal Asad considers practitioners' voices to be particularly important, and comments on anthropologists' manipulating the 'power of representation'

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of such studies include: R F Gombrich, 1971, *Precepts and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford, Clarendon); M Spiro, 1967, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Place?, Allen & Unwin); and, Milford E Spiro, 1970, *Buddhism and Society* (New York, Harper & Row).

<sup>14</sup> Examples include: Stephen Batchelor, 1994, *The Awakening of the West: the Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley, Parallax Press), and Charles S Prebish, & Kenneth K Tanaka, eds., 1998, *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, University of California Press).

<sup>15</sup> Examples include: Frank J Hoffman & Mahindra Deegalle, eds. (1996) *Pali Buddhism* (Surrey, Curzon); and, Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: a Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, SUNY). For more information about various aspects of contemporary Buddhist Studies, see, for example, Lindsay Jones, ed., 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (US, Gale, MacMillan).

<sup>16</sup> Edward Said, 1991, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, Penguin); Stephen Batchelor, 1994, *The Awakening of the West: the encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley, Parallax Press), pp.234—235; Richard King, 1999, *Orientalism and Religion*.

<sup>17</sup> Talal Asad, 1993, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press), 198—199; Richard King, 1999, *Orientalism and Religion*, p.49.

<sup>18</sup> Richard King, 1999, *Orientalism and Religion*, p.89.

<sup>19</sup> Postcolonial challenges in Buddhist Studies are presented in Frank J Hoffman and Mahindra Deegalle, eds., 1996, *Pali Buddhism* (Richmond, Curzon).

and giving their own views preference over the views of the people they studied.<sup>20</sup> The ability of Buddhists to represent themselves in western contexts has been hindered historically by the separation of Theology from other academic areas and the orthodoxy that said personal religious commitments necessarily interfered with academic rigour. This resulted in Buddhist scholars with various religious commitments being required to produce studies that critically analysed Buddhist data at a distance from tradition, and the separation of Buddhist literature into academic studies and studies written by Buddhists.<sup>21</sup>

The lack of a Western Buddhist theological discipline has ensured academic Buddhist studies have been unable to critique the world and Buddhism from within a tradition. More recently this has been challenged by the work of Rita Gross and in the edited volumes, *Pali Buddhism* and *Buddhist Theology*.<sup>22</sup> Many academic institutions now recognise that all views are situated, and recommend the open acknowledgement of personal influences. Nevertheless, the historical circumstances in Buddhist Studies and Buddhology have made it impossible to distinguish the works of Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Arguing the need to distinguish them, Roger Corless observes that some Buddhist traditions regard non-Buddhist understandings as mistaken.<sup>23</sup> The category 'Buddhist Theology' clearly specifies work by a Buddhist: a theologian stands within a religious tradition, is trained in the use of its tools, and the theological process constructs dialogues between it and the contemporary world. Arguments about the use of the term 'theology' in Buddhism are included in Chapter Eight, section C, 'Lesbian Buddhist Theology'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Talal Asad, 1993, *Genealogies of Religion*, pp.198—199.

<sup>21</sup> Roger R Jackson and John J Makransky, 2000, 'Preface', pp.ix—x, in Jackson & Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology, Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Richmond, Sy, Curzon Press), p.ix.

<sup>22</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, SUNY), p.13; Frank J Hoffman and Mahindra Deegalle, eds., 1996, *Pali Buddhism*; and, Roger R Jackson and John J Makransky, eds., 2000, *Buddhist Theology*.

<sup>23</sup> Roger Corless, 2000, 'Hermeneutics and Dharmology: Finding an American Buddhist Voice', pp.95—107, in Roger R Jackson and John J Makransky, *Buddhist Theology*, pp.98, 96.

<sup>24</sup> A tradition of 'scholar practitioners' has been recognised in Western Buddhism, and 'scholar practitioner' might be an acceptable name for a 'Buddhist theologian' (Charles S Prebish, 2010, 'Scholar-practitioners in Buddhist Studies', pp.678—680, in Damien Keown and Charles S Prebish, eds., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* [London & NY, Routledge], p.678). Charles Prebish estimates that scholar-practitioners number at least twenty-five percent of western Buddhologists, and that a further twenty-five percent of western scholars of Buddhism are Buddhists who are careful



Mainstream Buddhist Studies frequently fail to acknowledge that the experiences of men and monks are routinely taken as the norm from which the experiences of women and nuns may differ. Before the 1980's, few Buddhist studies acknowledged differences between men and women, a very early and notable exception being I B Horner's monograph, *Women under Primitive Buddhism*, published in 1930.<sup>25</sup> Further information is provided about women's Buddhist studies below, in section A.iii, 'Politics: Feminist and Lesbian Theologies'. Androcentrism is an issue still to be addressed in Buddhist studies and traditions. While reporting women's circumstances and validating their experiences, feminist studies have acknowledged women's standpoints, from which many modern Buddhist women have engaged creatively with Buddhist teachings and traditions (see Chapter Seven, 'Western Women's Buddhism').

Since Burnouf's publications, Buddhist traditions have been recognised as stemming from a common source and representing a single religion.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Buddhism's unity does not signify all Buddhist traditions being the same, and it is necessary to clarify what 'Buddhism' signifies in this study. Isolated from any traditional qualification, the term 'Buddhism' acknowledges the various understandings that have their roots in the Buddha's teachings, and this study adheres to this convention. This study aims to extend the recognition of lesbians' religious expressions, and to support lesbian Buddhists in claiming their human right to the freedom of religious expression.<sup>27</sup>

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not to make any public expression of their religiosity for fear of professional reprisal (Charles S Prebish, 2010, 'Scholar-practitioners in Buddhist Studies', pp.679—680). Despite precedents that refer to 'scholar practitioners', questions remain about an appropriate name for scholar-practitioners' works, whereas 'Buddhist theologians' unquestionably produce 'Buddhist theologies'.

<sup>25</sup> I B Horner, 2007 (1<sup>st</sup> edn 1930, London), *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass).

<sup>26</sup> Eugene Burnouf, 1845, *L'Introduction a l'histoire du bouddhisme indien*.

<sup>27</sup> The Human Rights Convention enshrines the right to respect for private and family life and includes the right not to be treated differently because of your race, religion, sex, political views, or any other status, without objective justification. The Human Rights Act, 1998, says, 'If a court's determination of any question arising under this Act might affect the exercise by a religious organisation (itself or its members collectively) of the Convention right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, it must have particular regard to the importance of that right' (Chapter 42, Section 13, 'Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion', on 16.08.07, from [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga\\_19980042\\_en\\_1#pb5-11g13](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga_19980042_en_1#pb5-11g13)). Thus, a sincerely held religious belief may negate individual human rights, and any tendency towards negating lesbian Buddhists' expressions may be countered by Lesbian Buddhism's status as a collective cultural referent.

The Buddhist path relies upon moral and ethical behaviours, and knowledge of their relationship to Buddhism's soteriological goal is essential. Sexuality is an area of great temptation to immoral behaviour and any relationship between sexuality and morality is soteriologically significant. This study focuses only upon Buddhism as represented, taught and practiced in western contexts. Nevertheless, observations of the under representation of lesbians implicitly refer to the whole of Buddhism, not just its Western forms, and while some traditions claim to be inclusive, very little Buddhist literature reflects a lesbian perspective or addresses lesbians' moral and ethical concerns or their political status. Even in traditions where attempts at inclusivity are made, the issue of sexual identity needs to be revisited, not only to consider its significance in western culture and Western Buddhism, but also to facilitate understanding lesbian Buddhists' status and ability to express their concerns.

Buddhism's historic roots outside western contexts required the skills and methods appropriate for cross-cultural analyses; nevertheless, as Buddhism becomes increasingly established in the West, Buddhist Studies must consider the influence of western social and cultural mores. It is inadequate to assume that Western Buddhists will adopt traditional Buddhist understandings to the exclusion of their own indigenous culture. The social sciences have revealed significant social differences being marked by class, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, which must be considered by Buddhist traditions in western contexts and in studies of Western Buddhism. Nevertheless, mainstream studies have marginalised such concerns and have wholly ignored women's sexual orientation.

There are two notable exceptions to the failure of mainstream Buddhist studies to address sexual orientation. Peter Harvey devotes a whole chapter in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* to 'Homosexuality and Other Forms of "Queerness"', in which he reports traditional Buddhist views from an uncritical, mainstream perspective.<sup>28</sup> Bernard Faure reveals a similarly uncritical attitude towards traditional methods of Buddhist Studies in his two books about Buddhism, sexuality and gender.<sup>29</sup> The first volume, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*, addresses men's

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton, Princeton University Press), and Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).

sexuality, and includes two chapters on 'homosexuality' or 'male love', while the second volume, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*, deals with the status and agency of women, and addresses women's roles in relation to celibacy and heterosexuality. These two books represent a substantial contribution to the study of sexuality and gender in Buddhism; nevertheless, they reiterate androcentric views and address circumstances that are of questionable value to lesbian Buddhists. My reluctance to call upon Faure's works is explained fully below, in section A.iii.b, 'Lesbian and Gay Theologies'.

Instances of homophobia in Buddhism are reported in the 'Prequel', while the inadequacy of lesbian Buddhists' representations is demonstrated in Chapter Three, 'Lesbians in Buddhist Studies'. These two chapters reveal the forces that oppress and deny lesbians in Western Buddhism being largely unopposed. Very little, if anything, is known of lesbian Buddhists, and this study thus extrapolates from examples of lesbian activism in Christianity for a useful parallel of the operation of homosexuality in religious contexts. Christianity is the dominant western religion, and lesbian Christian theologies are a necessary political response to western religio-cultural norms and assumptions. A direct comparison of Christianity and Buddhism would not compare like with like and would elicit very little beyond the recognition of two separate religious traditions with distinct philosophies and practices. Christianity has a history of openly condemning homosexual practices and homosexuals, while the circumstances attending homosexuality in Buddhism are more insidious. Buddhism's denial of 'self' or identity combined with an emphasis upon honouring tradition, has maintained attitudes considered inappropriate in progressive western contexts, and the scarcity of information has maintained uncertainty about traditional Buddhist understandings of sexual morality. Attention is drawn to lesbian Buddhists' lack of visibility by juxtapositioning chapter three's review of the circumstances of lesbians in Buddhist Studies with chapter four's description of lesbian Christians' circumstances. Oppression manifests differently in Christianity and Buddhism; however, juxtaposing lesbians' circumstances contrasts the positive assertions made by lesbian Christians with the silence and invisibility of lesbian Buddhists.

## **ii. Culture: Lesbian (Cultural) Studies**

Western lesbian Buddhists may move between three cultural contexts in which sexuality has different understandings: mainstream western culture in which normative attitudes towards gender and sexuality are embedded; marginalised lesbian culture in which androcentrism and heterocentrism have little currency; and the non-western cultures in which the *dhamma* has historically been situated. The thesis may occasionally refer to non-western cultural contexts when they are relevant. Mainstream western culture enshrines normative values and expectations and is the context in which lesbian culture has been recognised and against which it may be read. Nevertheless, mainstream religious and social studies have often regarded lesbians solely in terms of sexual activity and desire, and placing lesbian culture at the centre of this study reflects lesbians' lives having wider involvements and significances. Lesbians, like heterosexuals, are social, cultural and religious subjects, and this is reflected in the name, 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* was a necessary precursor of Lesbian Cultural Studies and Queer Theory because it re-defined understandings of sexual orientation to encompass social forces.<sup>30</sup> Foucault's genealogy presented the body as the interface between internal mental and physical forces and external social forces, and by describing sexuality as structured within a punitive framework, he depicted sexual repression as part of a larger socio-cultural dynamic.<sup>31</sup> Foucault's work has been criticised for its lack of both gender awareness and attention to women's sexuality.<sup>32</sup> Nancy Hartsock critiqued Foucault for saying nothing about the specificity of the bodies being regulated by social forces: the body was a void, an empty space around which discourses of power, gender, and sexuality were framed.<sup>33</sup> Foucault's depiction of an older man's sexual encounter with a young girl has been condemned for disregarding issues of power and consent.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Foucault's recognition of the power of asserting and resisting social and cultural norms ensured 'reality' and 'truth'

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, 1978, *The History of Sexuality: 1, The Will to Knowledge* (London, Penguin).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Foucault, 1978, *The History of Sexuality* (NY, Pantheon), p.11, cited by Gayle S Rubin, 1993, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', p.10

<sup>32</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth, 1995, *Space, Time and Perversion*, p.219.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Hartsock, 1990, 'Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?', pp.157—175, in Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London & NY, Routledge), pp.166—172.

<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, 1978, *The History of Sexuality*, pp.31—32.

were no longer the property of those with sufficient wealth, power, or education to impose their understandings and values.<sup>35</sup> The subsequent movement towards social constructionist ideals in academic works has resulted in an increasing awareness of 'difference', and the recognition that lesbians are a heterogeneous group whose cultural practices may cross over into the mainstream.<sup>36</sup>

Lesbian culture reflects a concentration of female priorities, and has little in common with gay men's culture beyond the need for positive assertion. Lesbians are found in every social group and it is not always possible to distinguish their oppression from class, gender, race and ethnic oppressions. Radical women of colour have argued that the invisibility of lesbian women of colour is not analogous to colour discrimination, but is another effect of patriarchal heterosexism.<sup>37</sup> Lesbian identity has been analysed from the perspective of women of colour by Bidy Martin.<sup>38</sup> Issues of race and sexual orientation have a tendency to disappear when the focus is elsewhere, for example, on gender or class (see Chapter Two, section C, 'Lesbians' Disappearance'). In 1995, Elizabeth Grosz described lesbianism as the domain of the untheorised and inarticulate and contrasted prejudice based in what a person is (race and/or gender) with that based in what a person does (sexual acts).<sup>39</sup>

The realisation that the feminist position was necessary but insufficient to address lesbians' circumstances ensured that Lesbian Studies became a separate discipline. Sue-Ellen Case clarified that the catechism invoked at the outset of many feminist works, 'working-class-woman-of-colour', did not include the lesbian position, and lesbians are often mute and invisible in feminist discourse.<sup>40</sup> In two landmark essays, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', and, 'Thinking Sex: Notes

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<sup>35</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press), p.173.

<sup>36</sup> Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', pp.14—15.

<sup>37</sup> Gloria Anzaldua, 1987, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute), cited under 'Women of Colour', p.305—306, in Maggy Humm, 1995 (2nd edn.) *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf), p.306.

<sup>38</sup> Bidy Martin, 1993, 'Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]', pp.274—293 in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M Halperin, eds., 1993, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (NY & London, Routledge).

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the politics of bodies* (NY & London, Routledge), p.224.

<sup>40</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, 1993 (first published 1988), 'Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', pp.294—306, in Henry Abelove, et al, eds, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p.295.

for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', Gayle Rubin pointed out that once a category has been identified as 'normal' its opposite automatically becomes 'deviant', and the process that normalises heterosexuality is a form of social control that is antagonistic towards lesbians.<sup>41</sup> Thus, while the politics of gender and sexual orientation are related, they are not the same.

Lesbian Studies reflect a wide range of political and theoretical perspectives, and some have highlighted the limiting nature of classifications that have previously polarised lesbian positions.<sup>42</sup> During the 1980's, Lesbian Studies debated lesbians' role in society in terms of 'everywoman' or 'guerrilla'. 'Lesbian as everywoman' is presented in Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', first published in 1980, which relates 'lesbian' to the potential for love and affinity between *all* women.<sup>43</sup> 'Lesbian as guerrilla' is presented in Monique Wittig's 'One is not born a woman', first published in 1981, which relates the challenge lesbian existence presents to essentialist assumptions of womanhood, such as women's availability for men and the equation of 'woman' with 'mother'.<sup>44</sup> During the 1980's, these competing views of lesbians combined with excessive boundary setting and political correctness and brought about 'the lesbian sex wars', reported comprehensively by Cheshire Calhoun.<sup>45</sup>

Landmark Lesbian Studies include Teresa de Lauretis' 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', which explored the problems of lesbian visibility in relation to definitions of gender, and Danae Clark's 'Commodity Lesbianism', which focused upon the relationship between capitalism and lesbian politics and was among the first to consider lesbians

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<sup>41</sup> Gayle S Rubin, 1975, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', pp.157—210, in Rayna Reiter, ed, *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (NY, Monthly Review Press); Gayle S Rubin, 1993 (first published in 1984), 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', pp.3—44 in Henry Abelove, et al, eds., *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p.33—34.

<sup>42</sup> Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', pp.9—21 in Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermahr, *Straight Studies Modified* (London, Cassell), pp.10—11.

<sup>43</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993 (first published 1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', pp.227—254, in Henry Abelove, et al, eds, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*.

<sup>44</sup> Monique Wittig, 1993 (first published 1981), 'One is not born a Woman', pp.103—109, in Abelove, et al, eds., *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p.104.

<sup>45</sup> Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', p.12; and, Cheshire Calhoun, 1994, 'Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory', pp.562—73 in *Ethics*, 104; Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'The Gender Closet: Lesbian Disappearance under the Sign "Women"', pp.209—32 in Martha Vicinus, ed., 1996, *Lesbian Subjects: a Feminist Studies Reader* (Bloomington, Indiana Uni. Press), pp.216—218.

in relation to cultural phenomena.<sup>46</sup> In *Lesbian Studies: Setting the Agenda*, Tamsin Wilton critiqued feminist and mainstream analyses for their erasure of lesbians' views, and the chapter on Cultural Studies considers the implications of a lesbian gaze for the visual arts.<sup>47</sup> The field of Lesbian and Gay Studies is mapped by Diana Fuss, in *Essentially Speaking*, and Henry Abelow, Michele Aina Barale and David M Halperin have gathered together and published many important articles in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*.<sup>48</sup>

Jacqueline Zita describes Lesbian Studies as an overarching context in which the multiplicity of references to and articles about lesbians may be contained,

Lesbian studies . . . is located in an academic space opened up historically by the theoretical and practical inadequacies of women's studies, feminist theory, gender studies, queer theory, ethnic, race, and global studies, post-modernism, poststructuralism, cultural studies, social movement theory, and a variety of movement politics emerging from, or since, the 1970's. In addition, lesbian studies is a positive space in which knowledge is produced from lesbian perspectives, leaving open to intellectual and political debate what determines such perspectives and criteria for knowing.<sup>49</sup>

Lesbian Studies report the view from sites identified as lesbian, whereas Lesbian Cultural Studies use the methods of Cultural Studies to consider the production and negotiation of cultural meanings and explore the ways in which culture may be transformed into resistance. Sonya Andermahr's article, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', traces the evolution of Lesbian Cultural Studies, and observes that, while many Lesbian Studies do not fit neatly into the category of Lesbian Cultural Studies, they have been crucial to its developing literature.<sup>50</sup>

Cultural Studies emerged from a series of historical trends that included the decentring of European geopolitical power after World War II; the rise of myriad social and liberatory movements in the 1950's and 60's;

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<sup>46</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, 1993 (first published in 1988), 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', pp.141—158, in Henry Abelow, et al, eds, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*; Danae Clark, 1993 (first published in 1991), 'Commodity Lesbianism', pp.186—201, in Henry Abelow, et al, eds, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*.

<sup>47</sup> Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', p.11.

<sup>48</sup> Diana Fuss, 1989, *Essentially Speaking* (NY & London, Routledge); Henry Abelow, et al, eds, 1993, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*.

<sup>49</sup> Jacqueline N Zita, 2000, 'Lesbian Studies at the End of the Twentieth Century', pp.464—465, in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia* (NY & London, Garland), p.464.

the development of an academic focus upon social criticism that legitimates the study of popular culture; and the recognition that identity politics are a means of repairing structural inequalities in the social system.<sup>51</sup> Traditional approaches to culture assumed audiences of mass culture were abstract collectives who passively imbibed the meanings of cultural commodities, whereas Cultural Studies insist on the diversity and agency of cultural consumers.<sup>52</sup> Cultural Studies focus upon subjectivity and power and blend ideas and methods from the humanities and social sciences to examine the diverse relationships that produce cultural meanings and values.<sup>53</sup> Studies consider the production and use of cultural forms that arise in relation to contexts and how identities are formed and transformed through social discourse. Often dubbed 'cultural materialism', this approach maintains culture can never be understood independent of society and its governing conditions.<sup>54</sup>

The understandings and practices of individuals originate in social contexts, are historically specific, and their circulation produces and reproduces cultural meanings.<sup>55</sup> Cultural Studies demonstrate aspects of everyday life functioning to reproduce and naturalize social power structures.<sup>56</sup> For example, the media's reiteration of idealized heterosexual romance and family life promotes them as universal ideals and maintains their normative status, which is reinforced when alternatives are devalued and representing lesbians and gays as 'other' reinscribes their marginal status. Cultural Studies demonstrate how the ordinary acts of ordinary people in everyday life maintain normative patriarchal and heterocentric ideologies, and how everyday cultural exchanges may be acts of political endorsement or resistance.<sup>57</sup>

Any group excluded from mainstream cultural representation may be required to re-construct aspects of culture in terms relevant to them.<sup>58</sup> As one such group, lesbians must either structure their experiences through

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<sup>50</sup> Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', p.10.

<sup>51</sup> Elena Glasberg, 2000, 'Cultural Studies', pp.214—217, in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia*, p.214—215.

<sup>52</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies', on 8.4.09, at [http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/cultural\\_studies.html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/cultural_studies.html).

<sup>53</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>54</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>55</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>56</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>57</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>58</sup> Shirley Ardener, ed., 1977, 'Introduction', pp.vii—xxiii, *Perceiving Women* (NY, Halsted Press), p.xii.



dominant heterosexual models or transform the models into lesbian equivalents or readings, which the mainstream might regard as subversive. This process of 'resistant subcultural consumption' is sometimes referred to as 'bricolage', defined by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as, 'creation from whatever is immediately available for use.'<sup>59</sup> The word has various significances in different disciplines, and in general 'bricolage' involves converting mainstream forms and commodities into signs with meanings beyond their original significance.<sup>60</sup> An example of bricolage in Lesbian Cultural Studies is the lesbian reading of the classic film *Calamity Jane*, which foregrounds the female friendship and converts it into something more, while the heterosexual relationships are regarded as masquerades with secondary significance.

For lesbians, the importance of Cultural Studies stem from their understandings of cultural production and consumption and concern with social and sexual politics.<sup>61</sup> Cultural Studies recognise that 'everyday' cultural consumption may foster values consistent with alternative identities, and the production of new cultural forms may be consonant with emancipatory interests.<sup>62</sup> Cultural Studies may develop critiques of contemporary culture, expose social inequalities, and promote modes of resistance, which are consistent with a lesbian political agenda. In academic circles, the emergence of Lesbian Cultural Studies ensured the question was no longer of Lesbian Studies being inside or outside the academy; rather, they were now inside, but otherwise.<sup>63</sup>

During the 1990's, queer studies developed as a separate field of enquiry dedicated to examining all things that fall into categories of 'normative' and 'deviant', particularly as they relate to sexuality.<sup>64</sup> The OED gives 'queer' a primary meaning of 'odd', 'unconventional', or 'out of the ordinary', and to 'queer' sexuality is to render it strange and unsettled.<sup>65</sup> 'Queer' promotes the notion of sexual alterity by challenging the status of

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<sup>59</sup> 'Bricolage' in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on CD-ROM*, 2002, v.2.0 (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

<sup>60</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'. The term 'bricolage' is used in other areas, including music, visual arts, cultural studies, philosophy, biology, education, fashion, television, information technology, and business.

Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>61</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>62</sup> Brett Farmer, date?, 'Cultural Studies'.

<sup>63</sup> Gabrielle Griffin and Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'Introduction', pp.1—7, in Gabrielle Griffin and Sonya Andermahr, *Straight Studies Modified*, pp.6—7.

<sup>64</sup> Craig Kaczorowski, date?, 'Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies' on 8.4.09 at [http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/gay\\_lesbian\\_queer\\_studies.html](http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/gay_lesbian_queer_studies.html).

heterosexuality as a naturalized socio-sexual norm.<sup>66</sup> Queer studies regard all sexual behaviours, sexual identities and categories of normative and deviant sexuality as constructs that signify social meanings: they become social constructs.<sup>67</sup> For queer theorists, sexuality is a complex array of social codes and forces, forms of individual activity and institutional or political power, which interact to shape concepts of 'normative' and 'deviant'.<sup>68</sup>

As a word and as a movement, 'queer' embraces more than 'lesbian' and 'gay', and may include 'deviant heterosexual fetishists, pornographers, pimps, voyeurs, and paedophiles'.<sup>69</sup> 'Queer' is the arena in which all deviant sexual groups may come together to challenge sexual hegemonies. Queer Theory, which seeks to transcend and erode the key binaries of gender and sexuality, entered the Academy during the 1990's, introduced in the works of Eve Sedgwick, Jonathan Dollimore, and Judith Butler.<sup>70</sup> However, during the 1970's, Luce Irigaray had observed that women had not achieved a status beyond being man's 'other' and warned of the dangers of displacing the gender binary before women have an established independent identity and subjectivity.<sup>71</sup> In 1995, Elizabeth Grosz wrote of lesbian-feminists' concern at queer's deliberate confusion and denial of the distinctive cultures of men and women.<sup>72</sup> The fluidity of gender and sexuality is ensured by their reliance upon historically and culturally variable constructs, and by focusing upon this, queer challenges essentialist notions derived from fixed concepts.<sup>73</sup> 'Queer' reflects a common status of sexual marginality and exclusion, and its representation of diverse choices and states demonstrates its consonance with postmodern trends. Mainstream attitudes towards women's sexuality and gender are contested in three areas: queer theory, which critiques fixed or stable assumptions; feminism, which asserts the need for gender awareness and agitates to improve women's circumstances;

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<sup>65</sup> 'Queer' in 2002, *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* on CD-ROM, V.2.0.

<sup>66</sup> Craig Kaczorowski, date?, 'Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies'.

<sup>67</sup> Craig Kaczorowski, date?, 'Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies'.

<sup>68</sup> Craig Kaczorowski, date?, 'Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies'.

<sup>69</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth, 1995, *Space, Time and Perversion*, pp.249—250.

<sup>70</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1991, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Brighton, Harvester Wheatsheaf); Jonathan Dollimore, 1991, *Sexual Dissidence: Auguste to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford, Oxford University Press); Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London & NY, Routledge), and 1993, *Bodies That Matter: the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London & NY, Routledge).

<sup>71</sup> Margaret Whitford, 1991, 'Introduction', pp.1—15, in Margaret Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell), p.13.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space, Time and Perversion*, p.222.

<sup>73</sup> Craig Kaczorowski, date?, 'Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Studies'.

and, lesbian scholarship, which focuses upon both gender and sexuality and any tensions between the two to ensure lesbians' visibility.<sup>74</sup>

A review of queer Christian literature is included in Chapter Four, section C.iv., 'Queer', while section D, 'Lesbian, Gay and Queer', elaborates the attitude taken in this thesis, which is that these different perspectives co-exist and address different issues. At least four Buddhist sources reflect a queer approach to sexuality. *Queer Dharma* volumes one and two have the subtitle, 'Voices of Gay Buddhists', and their contents are largely the anecdotal accounts of men.<sup>75</sup> The anthology, *Que(e)rying Religion*, has two Buddhist articles. 'Male Cross-Gender Behaviour in Myanmar (Burma) – A Description of the Acault', in which 'acault' is the name for a man possessed by a female spirit and regarded as a third sex in Burma, a Buddhist society.<sup>76</sup> The second article, 'The Compatibility of Reason and Orgasm in Tibetan Buddhism: Reflections of Sexual Violence and Homophobia', by Jeffrey Hopkins, also focuses upon male experiences of sexuality while making a case with relevance for lesbians.<sup>77</sup> Hopkins argues that while practices of sexual yoga are almost always explained in terms of heterosexual acts, those with their foundations in the doctrine that the blissful mind of clear light pervades all experience, described by Gedun Chopel, may be performed by homosexual partners and should be done with whatever type of partner evokes the most intense feelings.

Tamsin Wilton has observed,

In order to survive and resist, any marginalised/stigmatised group is obliged to establish at least a rudimentary sense of group identity, or a uniting essence around which to organise. Queer bashers and influential homophobes are not about to modify their behaviour on being told that their aggression is directed against a semantic chimera. Identity politics may appear, from the protected enclave of the academy, to be intellectually naïve and pragmatically divisive, but identity is strategically essential to the struggles of oppressed groups, as feminists and black women have insisted.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Sonya Andermahr, 1997, 'There's Nowt So Queer as Folk', p.20.

<sup>75</sup> Winston Leyland, ed., 1998, *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists* (San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press); Winston Leyland, ed., 2000, *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists Volume 2* (San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press).

<sup>76</sup> Eli Coleman, Philip Colgan, and Louis Gooren, 1999, 'Male Cross-Gender Behaviour in Myanmar (Burma) – A Description of the Acault', pp.287–293, in Gary David Comstock and Susan E Henking, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion: a Critical Anthology* (NY, Continuum).

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey Hopkins, 1999, 'The Compatibility of Reason and Orgasm in Tibetan Buddhism: Reflections of Sexual Violence and Homophobia', pp.372–383, in Gary David Comstock and Susan E Henking, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion*, p.379.

<sup>78</sup> Tamsin Wilton, 1995, *Lesbian Studies*, p.42.

Because queer theory denies the stability of sexual identity it addresses different issues from the ones necessary to defend against the negative political forces that have targeted stable sexual identities, and 'queer' and 'lesbian' politics address different issues. One response to queer's political naiveté has been to assume an identity for strategic or political purposes and to self-consciously adopt a method of strategic essentialism. This move facilitates alliances that may effectively challenge prejudice and oppression: an advantage that may outweigh any theoretical inadequacy. In practice, an identity may reflect a changeable but shared perspective, quality, knowledge or culture, and a common name may reflect this common ground and not be as unfounded as queer theory implies.

Consonant with Foucault, Judith Butler observes that identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression.<sup>79</sup> Butler argues that claiming an identity, such as 'woman', 'queer', 'gay', or 'lesbian', is necessary to challenge oppression, and that such identities,

. . . will be necessary to refute homophobic deployments of the terms in law, public policy, on the street, in 'private' life. But the necessity to mobilise the necessary error of identity (Spivak's term) will always be in tension with the democratic contestation of the term which works against its deployments in racist and misogynist discursive regimes.<sup>80</sup>

Understandings in this study are consistent with this quotation, and 'lesbian' is a theoretically provisional category necessary for challenging heterosexist assumptions, promoting positive understandings and identifying cultural consistencies.

In both Buddhist and postmodern contexts, the 'truth' of lesbians' identity—if identity can be said to have such a singular aspect—is that it is fluid and lesbians' lives are many and varied. Nevertheless, lesbians may form alliances for social and political purposes and gather in communities focussed upon common interests. One of the essential assumptions underpinning this thesis is that, as social animals, human beings have an innate drive towards social acceptability. While recognising the diverse experiences and values of individual lesbians and their unique cultural matrix, this study deploys strategies of essentialism to ensure lesbians'

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<sup>79</sup> Michel Foucault, 1978, *The History of Sexuality*, p.146; and, Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, pp.13—14.

acceptability in social and religious contexts and to increase awareness of lesbian Buddhists.

### **iii. Politics: Feminist and Lesbian Theologies**

Feminist works are necessarily political and the secondary status and under-representation of women in many religious traditions is the *raison d'être* of Feminist Theology. The hermeneutic of difference at the heart of feminist theology ensures its ability to embrace all kinds of women and all kinds of religions.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, as Chapter Two demonstrates, feminist works cannot be relied upon to represent lesbians' interests, and the arguments for 'Lesbian Buddhism' must rely upon the methodological and literary resources of Feminist and Lesbian and Gay Theologies, about which information is presented in the following sections.

#### *a. Feminist Theologies*

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the second wave of feminism saw women entering the academy in sufficient numbers to establish Women's Studies as an interdisciplinary field of enquiry characterised as the academic arm of the women's movement.<sup>82</sup> Some of the most influential articles from this time are collated in *Feminisms: a reader*, by Maggie Humm.<sup>83</sup> In a similar vein, *Feminisms: A Feminist Studies Reader*, edited by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, represents various feminist perspectives in a cross-section of academic articles.<sup>84</sup> The rise of women's studies resulted in an increasingly critical awareness of women's religious participation and exclusion, and one of the first feminist theologies of the second wave was Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex*, which, together with Daly's subsequent theologies, reflects a radical feminist stance (see below, section A.iii.b, 'Lesbian and Gay Theologies').<sup>85</sup>

The eclectic nature of Feminist Theology has been considered by Linda Hogan, who claims that while androcentric texts and traditions may

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<sup>80</sup> Judith Butler, 1993, *Bodies That Matter*, p.229.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, pp.41, 163, 166—177.

<sup>82</sup> Darlene M Juschka, 2001, 'General Introduction', pp.1—22 in Darlene M Juschka, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion* (London & NY, Continuum), pp.4—5; Mary Margaret Fonow, 2000, 'Women's Studies', pp.813—816, in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories*, p.813

<sup>83</sup> Maggie Hum, ed., 1992, *Feminisms: a Feminist Studies Reader* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester).

<sup>84</sup> Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds, 1997, *Feminisms* (Oxford & NY, Open University Press).

<sup>85</sup> Mary Daly, 1968, *The Church and the Second Sex* (US, Harper & Row).

reign supreme in traditional theologies, women's experience and praxis are the primary resources in feminist theologies.<sup>86</sup> Praxis is considered implicit to women's religious experience, and women's experience and praxis refer to the liberating activities that change consciousness and transform understanding. The notion of 'praxis' militates against a static and conceptually stable theology, which some theorists consider desirable. The life experiences, commitments, and priorities of those who articulate theology are inextricably bound to theology itself, and this realisation has endorsed difference being a key hermeneutic principle. Because no homogeneity exists among women, universalism is not an appropriate attitude for feminist theology to adopt.<sup>87</sup> A theology based on women's experience and praxis and sensitive to racial, class and sexual differences must recognise different priorities, and a hermeneutic of difference is central to feminist theological interpretations.<sup>88</sup> The political consciousness and activism of marginalised women have challenged universalising tendencies in feminist works, and resulted in an awareness that the search for a common female experience cannot begin from assumptions of sameness. Commonality is not coterminous with sameness, and the search for commonalities among women must be based in the recognition of their particularity and diversity.<sup>89</sup> The stance taken by individuals reflects the influence of their community and an emphasis upon the communal nature of each woman's experience minimises universalism and relativism. It facilitates realistic assessments that are responsive to the contextual character of experience and allows women to be identified by their position in a network of relations and communities.<sup>90</sup>

The accusations of relativism often hurled at feminist theologies based in experience and praxis may be limited by three things: firstly, an appeal to pragmatism and an appreciation of the embodied nature of all knowledge; secondly, rather than having ontological foundations, feminist theologies have experiential bases that provide ethical foundations and inspire ethical values; finally, by focusing upon the experience of communities, rather than individuals, feminist theologies reflect an appreciation of the contextual

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<sup>86</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, pp.9—10, 142

<sup>87</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, pp.59, 166.

<sup>88</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, pp.167—168.

<sup>89</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, p.61.

<sup>90</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, p.171—172.

nature of all truths.<sup>91</sup> Hogan joins with Daly in understanding that 'together' means each according to her own lifetime, and 'the moving presence of each self calls forth the living presence of other journeying/enspiriting selves.'<sup>92</sup> Describing feminist theologies as prototypes allows the epistemological consequences of the fractured nature of their primary resources to become integral to each project, and as prototypes, feminist theologies acknowledge their conceptual instability and renounce any attempt to service a universalist position.<sup>93</sup>

Feminist Theology has developed as a discipline and its methods have been formalised in predominantly western Christian contexts. By comparison, women's Buddhist studies/theologies appear to be a haphazard collection of academic and non-academic women's writings, executed in various styles. No study has reflected upon the methods used by Buddhist women with a view to formalising them. Nevertheless, whether knowingly or not, many Buddhist women have applied similar methods to those used in Christian feminist theologies. Reflecting an ethic of difference, Ursula King has worked tirelessly to present a clear and powerful call for the recognition of feminist theologies originating in all religious contexts.<sup>94</sup> In postmodernity, disciplinary boundaries are blurred, and in 1995, King observed that because of their cross-cultural and interdisciplinary nature, Feminist Theology and Women's Studies have 'transdisciplinary orientations'.<sup>95</sup>

Gendered observations were exceptional before Women's Studies entered the academy. I B Horner's book, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, published in 1930, was the first to consider the position of women in Buddhism and to reveal the processes whereby they were valued less than men.<sup>96</sup> Rita Gross's 1993 monograph, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, was the first study to consider the position of modern women in Buddhism from a

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<sup>91</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, p.170—171.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Daly, 1978, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, Beacon Press), p.366, cited by Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, p.174.

<sup>93</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience*, p.176.

<sup>94</sup> Ursula King's oeuvre includes: 1987, *Women in the World's Religions: Past and Present* (NY, Paragon); 1993 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise* (London, Macmillan); ed., 1994, *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (London, SPCK); ed., 1995, *Religion and Gender* (Oxford, Blackwell); ed., 1998, *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age* (London & NY, Cassell).

<sup>95</sup> Ursula King, 1995, 'Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religions', pp.1—55, in Ursula King, ed., *Religion and Gender*, p.14.

<sup>96</sup> IB Horner, 1930, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen* (London), available as a reprint from Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.

self-proclaimed feminist position.<sup>97</sup> Gross observed western religious traditions having a sizeable body of feminist theological works to draw upon, while Buddhism had no comparable resource and remained uninformed about the roles of Buddhist women and indifferent or hostile to input from feminists.<sup>98</sup>

Feminist methods in Christian Biblical studies have emphasized the importance of noticing what is not there as much as what is.<sup>99</sup> In Buddhist studies, women's secondary status and under-representation, together with endemic androcentrism, require similar techniques to uncover women's circumstances and may involve a trail of probing questions. In Christianity, the observation that the primary sources have been written by men, conveyed by men, and canonized by men, resulted in conjecture about what early Christian women were thinking, feeling, wanting, hoping for and wondering about.<sup>100</sup> Such questions have been central to feminist critiques of Biblical materials, resulting in a variety of explorations and expositions, while few Buddhist sources have questioned men's authority to define the canon and what constitutes 'Buddha's words'.<sup>101</sup>

Bernard Faure observes that women are rarely considered in Buddhist literature, and woman's nature is frequently regarded as negative in contrast to man's positive nature.<sup>102</sup> The discrimination faced by Buddhist women has been addressed sympathetically by some male scholars. Alan Sponberg identified four attitudes towards women in Indian Buddhist literature: soteriological inclusiveness, institutional androcentrism, ascetic misogyny, and soteriological androgyny.<sup>103</sup> The feminist theologian

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<sup>97</sup> Rita M Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: a Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, NY, SUNY).

<sup>98</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, pp.19, 115.

<sup>99</sup> June O'Connor, 1995, 'The Epistemological Significance of Feminist Research in Religion', pp.45—63, in Ursula King, *Religion and Gender* (Oxford, Blackwell), p.51.

<sup>100</sup> June O'Connor, 1995, 'The Epistemological Significance', p.52.

<sup>101</sup> June O'Connor (1995, 'The Epistemological Significance', p.52) cites the following examples of feminist theologies asking such questions: Rachel Conrad Wahlberg, 1975, *Jesus According to a Woman* (NY, Paulist Press); Letty M Russell, 1976, *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia, Westminster); Phyllis Trible, 1978, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, Fortress); Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, 1982, *The Women Around Jesus* (NY, Crossroad); Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 1984, *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, Beacon); Denise Lardner Carmody, 1988, *Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts* (NY, Crossroad).

<sup>102</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (New Jersey, Princeton University), p.14.

<sup>103</sup> Alan Sponberg, 1992, 'Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism', pp.3—36, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany, SUNY).



Rita Gross finds Tibetan Buddhism exceptional because it advocates an ideal that combines the male and female in 'androgyny', while Sponberg goes no further than to observe that any focus upon androgyny has not translated into sexual equality.<sup>104</sup>

Historically, western academics have approached Buddhism philologically with a view to uncovering the meanings of texts, which has often resulted in the uncritical acceptance of traditional understandings of women's secondary status. Sue Hamilton has worked with the Pali texts and, in addition to the exegesis presented in *Identity and Experience* and *The I of the Beholder*, she has argued that women should take the *dhamma* into their own hands and reformulate Buddhist understandings in light of feminist imperatives.<sup>105</sup> Innovations by modern Buddhist women have been referred to as 'Women's Buddhism', and many of those instigated by western women are reported in Chapter Seven, section B, 'Women's Middle Way'.<sup>106</sup>

Christian and Buddhist women have deployed methods of re-reading, reconceiving, and reconstructing (the 'three R's') texts and traditions from a woman's perspective.<sup>107</sup> 'Re-reading' requires the re-examination of religions with a view to women's presence and absence, their recognition and denial.<sup>108</sup> Anne Carolyn Klein has re-read aspects of Buddhism from a modern western women's perspective, and used the Great Bliss Queen, a figure of enlightenment, to bridge cultural differences.<sup>109</sup> 'Reconceiving' requires 'the retrieval and recovery of lost sources and suppressed visions', which have been described as reclaiming women's heritage.<sup>110</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism, Miranda Shaw has reconceived women's presence and roles, and

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<sup>104</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, pp.119, 221—288, 295—298; Alan Sponberg, 1992 'Attitudes toward Women', p.28.

<sup>105</sup> Sue Hamilton, 1996, *Identity and Experience* (UK, Luzac Oriental); Sue Hamilton, 2000, *The I of the Beholder* (Surrey, Curzon); Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'Buddhism: The Doctrinal Case for Feminism', pp.91—104, in *Feminist Theology*, No.12, May.

<sup>106</sup> 'Women's Buddhism' is part of the title of Ellison Banks Findly, ed., 2000, *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal* (Boston, Wisdom).

<sup>107</sup> June O'Connor, 1989, 'Rereading, Reconceiving, and Reconstructing Traditions: Feminist Research in Religion', pp.101—123, in *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 17, pp.102—104, cited by Ursula King, 1995, 'Introduction', pp.14—15.

<sup>108</sup> June O'Connor, 1989, 'Rereading, Reconceiving, and Reconstructing', pp.102—104, cited by Ursula King, 1995, 'Introduction', pp.14—15.

<sup>109</sup> Anne Carolyn Klein, 1995, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists and the Art of the Self* (Boston, Beacon Press).

<sup>110</sup> June O'Connor, 1989, 'Rereading, Reconceiving, and Reconstructing', pp.102—104, cited by Ursula King, 1995, 'Introduction', p.15.

argued against simplistic assumptions of female subordination.<sup>111</sup> 'Reconstruction' may require the use of new information or historical imagination to recreate the past and allows reassessments of women and their roles.<sup>112</sup> In one of the first women's studies of Buddhism, Tsultrim Allione reconstructed the positions of six forgotten female mystics in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy.<sup>113</sup>

Buddhist women have considered understandings in both indigenous Buddhist and western contexts, and there is an increasing awareness of their mutual influence. In 'Sex, Dependency, and Religion: Reflections from a Buddhist Perspective', Kendra Smith considered differences between Asian and western psyches.<sup>114</sup> Smith related differences between the structures of family and society in the east and west to the Buddhist quest. As a clinical psychologist, Smith used largely western 'psychiatric theory' to analyse Buddhism's traditional ambivalence towards woman, and believes it to be rooted in men's 'dependency conflict', or their need to compromise between fusion and separation.<sup>115</sup> Thirteen years later, Rina Sircar based the observations of her book, *The Psycho-Ethical Aspects of Abhidhamma*, in Buddhist sources, and observed that the *Abhidhamma's* many topics go beyond the intellectual and emotional boundaries of western psychology and have the potential to enrich non-Buddhist western fields of philosophy and psychology.<sup>116</sup> Cross-cultural analyses have sometimes resulted in western feminists making racist assumptions, which have been critiqued in Wei-yi Cheng's study of nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, while racism in western Buddhist contexts has been researched by Sharon Smith.<sup>117</sup>

Buddhist women's writings cover a wide range of subjects. Meditation is an important aspect of Buddhist practice, and two books by Charlotte

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<sup>111</sup> Miranda Shaw, 1994, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press).

<sup>112</sup> June O'Connor, 1989, 'Rereading, Reconceiving, and Reconstructing', pp.102—104, cited by Ursula King, 1995, 'Introduction', pp.14—15.

<sup>113</sup> Tsultrim Allione, 1986 (first published 1982), *Women of Wisdom* (England, Arkana).

<sup>114</sup> Kendra Smith, 1987, 'Sex, Dependency, and Religion', pp.219—231, in Ursula King, ed., *Women in the World's Religions* (NY, Paragon), pp.220—221, 229.

<sup>115</sup> Kendra Smith, 1987, 'Sex, Dependency, and Religion: Reflections from a Buddhist Perspective', pp.219—220.

<sup>116</sup> Rina Sircar, 1999, *The Psycho-Ethical Aspects of Abhidhamma* (Lanham, Ma., University Press of America), pp.ix—x.

<sup>117</sup> Wei-yi Cheng, 2004, *Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka: a critique of the feminist perspective* (PhD thesis, SOAS, London University), published in 2006, by Routledge; Sharon Smith, 2000, 'Widening the Circle: Black Communities and Western Buddhist Convert Sanghas, in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, No.7, on 5.4.10, at [www.buddhistethics.org/7/smith001.html](http://www.buddhistethics.org/7/smith001.html).

Joko Beck, a leading teacher at the Zen Centre in San Diego, describe the ways in which meditation may assist with the problems of everyday life. In a similar vein, articles by Maura Sills, a co-founder of the Karuna Institute, and Christina Feldman, a co-founder of Gaia House, consider the role of meditation in everyday life.<sup>118</sup> The most appropriate form of teacher/student relationship has been an important subject for a number of American Buddhists concerned about abuses by Buddhist leaders.<sup>119</sup> In addition to reporting women's experiences and passing on Buddhist teachings and information, books and articles have described some extraordinary life stories of women. For example, the biography of Tenzin Palmo, an English woman, tells how she sailed to India in 1964, became a Tibetan nun and retreated to a cave for twelve years.<sup>120</sup> The various circumstances of Buddhist women throughout the world are reported in several volumes edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, including *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* and *Buddhist Women Across Cultures*.<sup>121</sup>

Edited volumes are a common vehicle for Buddhist women's writings and their rich diversity of approaches provide a wealth of information. However, accessing specific information is often difficult, and the presentation of Ellison Banks Findly's volume, *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women*, is typical.<sup>122</sup> The book contains thirty-two articles under five headings: 'Ordination, Affiliation and Relation to the Sangha'; 'Teachers, Teaching and Lineages'; 'Political and Social Change'; 'Art and

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<sup>118</sup> Charlotte Joko Beck, 1989, *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* (San Francisco, Harper); Charlotte Joko Beck, 1993, *Nothing Special: Living Zen* (San Francisco, Harper); Maureen Sills, 1996 'Saying Yes to Love', pp.174—185, in Martine Batchelor, ed., *Walking on Lotus Flowers* (London, Thorsons); Christina Feldman, 1996 'The Dharma and Family Life', pp.186—197, in Martine Batchelor, ed., *Walking on Lotus Flowers*.

<sup>119</sup> Articles about abuses of power include: June Campbell, 2002 (revised edn.), *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity and Tibetan Buddhism*, pp.98—127; Gabriele Kustermann, 2000, 'Sexual Conduct and Misconduct: Buddhist Ethics in the West', pp.285—293, in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream* (Richmond, Curzon); various authors under the heading 'Conspiracy of Silence: the problem of the male teacher', pp.210—258, in Sandy Boucher, 1993, *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (Boston, Beacon); and, Rita Gross, 1998a, 'Helping the Iron Bird Fly: Western Buddhists and Issues of Authority', pp.60—74, in Rita Gross, *Soaring and Settling* (NY, Continuum).

<sup>120</sup> Vicki Mackenzie, 1999, *Cave in the Snow: a Western Woman's Quest for Enlightenment* (London, Bloomsbury), pp.31—32.

<sup>121</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., 1988, *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Ithaca, Snow Lion), and 1999, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (Albany, SUNY).

<sup>122</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, ed., 2000, *Women's Buddhism*.

Architecture'; and, 'Body and Health'.<sup>123</sup> Each heading may contain information about any Buddhist tradition, in any country, and the writing styles vary between the poetically lyrical to the rigorously academic. In the contents table, Findly has marked academic articles with a star; however, many variables remain and Findly's introduction describes some of the authors' approaches and styles.<sup>124</sup> Each article might be the observations of a cross-cultural study—from any culture, to any culture—and be the perspective of Buddhist insider, outsider, feminist, non-feminist; or it might be an anecdotal account, and represent personal opinion or doctrinal exegesis, and a single article might combine many of these things. Such variability may pose no problem for the reader in search of general information; however, the lack of a consistent and comprehensive index or classificatory system is problematic when looking for specific information. The inability to identify different western cultural influences in western women's writings gives the impression that western society and culture are immaterial to women's experiences of Buddhism. The political consciousness that has ensured an inclusive methodological imperative in feminist theology is missing in Buddhist women's writings.

Mary Daly, a well-established lesbian-feminist theologian, was the first to observe that women lack the ability to name, and strategies of 'naming' are now closely associated with Lesbian Studies and Feminist Theology.<sup>125</sup> Chapter Seven, section C.i., 'Feminist Naming', describes how Christian women with minority status have adopted strategies of naming to challenge their lack of representation. Naming this study 'Lesbian Buddhism?' is a feminist theological strategy intended to raise the profile of lesbian Buddhists, to acknowledge their differences and facilitate Buddhist debates of sexuality and sexual culture. It also draws attention to the tendency of Buddhist studies to ignore the variability of western cultures. Naming is an important strategy at the heart of this thesis, and is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, section C, 'Naming'.

### *b. Lesbian and Gay Theologies*

Modern Buddhist studies may prioritise differences between Buddhist traditions and differences between men and women and overlook differences

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<sup>123</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, ed., 2000, *Women's Buddhism*, p.vii—ix.

<sup>124</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction', pp.1—14, in Findly, ed., *Women's Buddhism*, pp.6—7.

within traditions and between women. Indeed, mainstream studies may give the impression that Buddhist women are a homogeneous group. While the need for Buddhist women's representations has been widely recognised, the need for the representation of different groups of women, such as lesbians, is rarely considered. Negative references to homosexuality in Buddhist contexts are gathered in the 'Prequel', while Chapter Three, 'Lesbians in Buddhist Studies', presents a report of the Anglo-American literature referring to lesbian Buddhists. Some sources referred to there are included in this review of Christian and Buddhist lesbian and gay literature and methodologies.

It has sometimes been inferred, and might well be true, that a lesbian Buddhist might find life as a *bhikkhuni* an attractive alternative to heterosexual marriage. Nevertheless, while the *Vinaya* are often explicit in references to male sexual acts, there are no explicit references to lesbian sexual acts or relationships. *Pandakas*—whose modern status and equivalence with lesbians is questioned in Chapter Three, section A.i., 'Philology'—are excluded from ordination, and the *prajika* rules in the *Vinaya* ensure that nuns who engage in 'the sexual act' or consent to a 'lusting man's rubbing' or to his approaching her for the purpose of 'that unrighteous act' are expelled.<sup>126</sup> The *Vinaya* rules are explicit in the behaviours they refer to and they do not refer to sexual relationships between women. For example, the rules requiring two nuns sharing a single bed or blanket to confess do not mention touching or rubbing.<sup>127</sup> Other rules offer more detail, such as that which requires a *bhikkhuni* to confess 'genital slapping' or 'the insertion of a dildo', but fail to mention a partner, while the rules that require the confession of a *bhikkhuni* who requests another woman to rub or massage her do not refer to sexual contact or stimulation.<sup>128</sup> Even a *bhikkhuni*'s ablutions are restricted in explicit detail, and during bathing she is limited to inserting two fingers to the depth of two

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<sup>125</sup> Mary Daly, 1985 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1973), *Beyond God the Father* (London, The Women's Press), pp.7—8; Tamsin Wilton, 1995, *Lesbian Studies*, p.49.

<sup>126</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, trans., the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/The Bhikkhunis' Code of Discipline* (Access to Insight), 'Prajika', Nos. 1, 5, & 8, at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhuni-pati.html>, on 25.9.07.

<sup>127</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, trans., the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/The Bhikkhunis' Code of Discipline*, 'Pacittiya', Pt.4, Nos. 31 & 32.

<sup>128</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, trans., the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/The Bhikkhunis' Code of Discipline*, 'Pacittiya', Pt. 1, Nos. 3 & 4, and Pt.9, Nos.90—93.

joints into her vagina and any more is to be confessed.<sup>129</sup> The rules are detailed and explicit and it seems unlikely that references to lesbian relationships would rely upon insinuation. Thus, beyond heterosexual relationships and masturbation, the *Vinaya* remain silent about women's sexuality. Nancy Schuster Barnes has indicated that traditional Buddhist accounts of nun's experiences were recorded by monks, and relied upon men's approval, and it is possible that monks remained ignorant of sexuality between women that was independent of men.<sup>130</sup>

Bernard Faure has suggested that negative views of women may be responsible for lesbian Buddhists' invisibility.<sup>131</sup> Faure has observed the predominantly male nature of Buddhist sexual discourse in which women are almost always passive and the few women's voices often reiterate androcentric views,

We have very few documents written by Buddhist women, and even those, like those of many female Christian mystics, use a predominantly male language and imagery. From a certain feminist standpoint, one could even consider that their discourse reinforces dominant male norms instead of rejecting or subverting them.<sup>132</sup>

In Buddhist discourse, 'woman' is often featured not as a person in her own right, but as one pole of attraction or repulsion in a male discourse, which renders lesbians' representation problematic.<sup>133</sup>

Cabezón's edited volume, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, enjoys a high profile as a modern source of information about Buddhism and sexuality, but there are few references to lesbians.<sup>134</sup> Sexuality and gender have equal billing in the title, but while eight chapters are devoted to gender, only two address sexuality. In these two chapters, the focus of Gordon Schallow's, 'Kukai and the Tradition of Male Love in Japanese Buddhism' is clearly upon men, while the use of 'homosexuality' in the title of Leonard Zwilling's article, 'Homosexuality as seen in Indian Buddhist texts', indicates the inclusion of both lesbians and gays.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, male pronouns are

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<sup>129</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, trans., the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/The Bhikkhunis' Code of Discipline*, 'Pacittiya', Pt. 1, No.5.

<sup>130</sup> Nancy Schuster Barnes, 1987, 'Buddhism', pp.105—133, in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Women in World Religions* (Albany, NY, SUNY).

<sup>131</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, p.81.

<sup>132</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, p.11.

<sup>133</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, p.14.

<sup>134</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón (ed.), 1992, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*.

<sup>135</sup> Gordon Schallow, 1992, 'Kukai and the Tradition of Male Love in Japanese Buddhism', pp.203—214, in Jose Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and*

used throughout this fifteen-page article, and only seven sentences refer to lesbians. Throughout Buddhism, the paucity of information about lesbians has been observed by Cabezon, Harvey and Zwilling and Sweet.<sup>136</sup> The lack of references to lesbian Buddhists is the reason why this study must rely upon 'homosexual' Buddhist resources, which may reflect only men's circumstances. Nevertheless, non-heterosexual perspectives might have salience for lesbians. The scarcity of lesbian and gay Buddhist resources has provided the impetus for this study's reliance upon Christian sources to illustrate the potential for, and academic status of, lesbian and gay theologies.

Feminist and lesbian theologies use the same methods to challenge androcentrism, while the methods used by lesbian theologies to challenge heterocentrism are unique. The 'three R's'—rereading, reconceiving and reconstructing—described as feminist theological methods have additional significance in lesbian theologies because lesbian relationships do not feature in the Bible. Re-reading texts is thus an essential process to facilitate lesbians' inclusion in scriptures, and lesbian theologies may speculate about relationships between women in the Bible. Christianity has always acknowledged the spiritual dimensions of heterosexual relationships, and lesbian theologies have re-conceived 'the religious' and 'the divine' to allow lesbians' relationships a similar privilege. For example, Carter Heyward reconceived the erotic as the divine, while Elizabeth Stuart reconfigured 'the power of the erotic' into 'the power of passion'.<sup>137</sup> 'Affirmations' and 'recreations' are two of the four methods specifically identified in *Lesbian and Gay Theologies*, examples of which are found

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*Gender*; Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as seen in Indian Buddhist texts', pp. 215—230, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. Use of the word 'homosexuality' is considered in Chapter Two, sections C, 'Lesbian's Disappearance', and D, 'Queer', and Chapter Three, section A, 'Lesbian Buddhists as Homosexuals'.

<sup>136</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p.422; Leonard Zwilling and Michael Sweet, 2000, 'The Evolution of Third-Sex Constructs In Ancient India: a Study in Ambiguity', pp.99—132, in Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, eds., *Invented Identities: the interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press), p.100; and, Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.81—101, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality in World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pa., Trinity Press), p.83, 85.

<sup>137</sup> Carter Heyward, 1989, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco, Harper & Row), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Hampshire, Ashgate), pp.51—55; Elizabeth Stuart, 1995, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Theology of Lesbian and Gay Relationships* (London, Mowbray), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Hampshire, Ashgate), pp.58—61.

below, and 'reconstruction' has been a necessary process to allow lesbians to identify with religious teachings and scriptures.

The marginal position of lesbians in particular ensures the radical nature of Lesbian Theologies, which may be inspirational for those looking to challenge patriarchal and heterocentric religious influences. Mary Daly is a leading lesbian theologian whose oeuvre includes *The Church and the Second Sex*, *Beyond God the Father*, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, and, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*.<sup>138</sup> In the early 1970's, Daly renounced Christianity because of its underlying misogyny and referred to her subsequent works as 'post-Christian', a stance adopted by a number of feminist theologians.<sup>139</sup> Remaining within Christianity, Grace Jantzen was consistently innovative, and her works contributed to the establishment of the feminist philosophy of theology. In her book, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Jantzen assessed the role of gender in relation to mysticism, while her study, *Becoming Divine*, introduced French feminist thought to western feminist theology.<sup>140</sup>

Several Biblical texts, sometimes referred to as the 'texts of terror', have historically been taken to represent God's opposition to same-sex sexual activity.<sup>141</sup> The influence of these texts has caused many modern lesbians and gays to regard the Bible as oppressive and irrelevant.<sup>142</sup> To restrict the texts' influence, lesbian and gay Christian theologies have deployed methods of translation, contextualization, affirmation and re-

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<sup>138</sup> Mary Daly, 1968, *The Church and the Second Sex* (US, Harper & Row); Mary Daly, 1985 (1<sup>st</sup> published in 1973 by Beacon), *Beyond God the Father* (London, The Women's Press); Mary Daly, 1979, *Gyn/Ecology* (London, The Women's Press); Mary Daly, 1984, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (London, The Women's Press).

<sup>139</sup> Mary Daly, 1992, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (San Francisco, HarperCollins), pp.172—174. Notable examples of post-Christian feminist theologies include: Carol Christ, 1986 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston, Beacon); Christine Downing, 1984, *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (NY, Crossroads); Ntozake Shange, 1990, *for coloured girls who have considered suicide, when the rainbow is enuf* (London, Methuen Drama).

<sup>140</sup> Grace M Jantzen, 1995, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press); Grace Jantzen, 1998, *Becoming Divine*.

<sup>141</sup> Phyllis Tribe, 1984, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (UK, SCM Press), cited by Deryn Guest at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1.04. Also see Chapter Four, section B, 'Texts of Terror and Christian Attitudes'.

<sup>142</sup> Nancy Wilson, 1995, *Our Tribe* (San Francisco, Harper), p.65, cited by Deryn Guest at [http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural\\_scrap.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural_scrap.htm), on 10.9.06.



creation.<sup>143</sup> These methods may also be recognised in lesbian and gay Buddhists' works.

Scriptures' status as religious authority demands accurate translations; nevertheless, lesbian and gay Christians must approach established translations with a hermeneutic of suspicion to discern the behaviours being condemned. The anachronistic use of language is an issue for all who translate ancient texts, and rather than revealing original understandings and meanings attached to sexuality, the choice of words may reflect modern prejudices. For example, Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9) uses the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, whose translations are subject to debates.<sup>144</sup> *Malakos* is often translated into 'weak' or 'effeminate' and used in relation to heterosexuals.<sup>145</sup> *Arsenokoitai* is typically translated as 'abusers of themselves' or 'sodomites' and might apply equally to heterosexuals and homosexuals.<sup>146</sup> In some Bibles, both words have been combined and translated variously as, 'those who participate in homosexuality', 'homosexual perversion', and, 'sexual perverts'.<sup>147</sup> In 1970, *The New English Bible*, produced and approved by the Joint Committee of Churches in Great Britain, chose 'homosexual perversion'.<sup>148</sup> 'Homosexual' was not used widely before the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its use to translate first-century Greek may misrepresent the original meaning, while 'pervert' is value driven and goes beyond the original text's remit. For any theologian considering sexuality and referring to texts, a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is essential.

In Buddhism, the problems of translation have been considered by Bernard Faure and Leonard Zwilling and Michael Sweet, while an article by Leonard Zwilling has considered if the word '*pandaka*' might be translated as an equivalent for modern understandings of 'homosexual'.<sup>149</sup> Chapter Three,

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<sup>143</sup> Deryn Guest, 2006, at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural\\_scrap.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural_scrap.htm), on 10.9.06.

<sup>144</sup> A list of various Bibles and their translations are available at [www.christiangays.com/articles/malakoi.shtml](http://www.christiangays.com/articles/malakoi.shtml) on 10.9.06.

<sup>145</sup> Jeremy Townsley, (date?), 'Translations of "Malakoi" and "Arsenokoitai" Through History (I Cor 6:9)', at [www.christiangays.com/articles/malakoi.shtml](http://www.christiangays.com/articles/malakoi.shtml), on 10.9.06.

<sup>146</sup> Jeremy Townsley, (date?), 'Translations'.

<sup>147</sup> *The Bible*, 1958, *The Amplified Version*; 1958, *The New English Version*; 1971, *The Revised Standard Version*, cited by Jeremy Townsley, (date?), 'Translations'.

<sup>148</sup> *The New English Bible*, 1970, the Joint Committee of Churches in Great Britain (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

<sup>149</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, pp.214—218; Leonard Zwilling and Michael Sweet, 2000, 'The Evolution of Third-Sex Constructs', pp.99—132; Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.204—205

section A.i., 'Philology', considers some of the problems of finding cross-cultural and trans-historic equivalences between Buddhist texts and modern western understandings. The problems are exacerbated by Buddhism's recent advent into the West, where, unlike Christianity, Buddhist understandings have no established legacy and silence and negation appear the 'order of the day' with respect to sexuality and sexual orientation.

Contextualisation is a method that takes social and cultural phenomena into account and may place the author and reader in a 'hermeneutic circle'. Texts are created and read in social and cultural contexts that leave their marks. An example of the difference made by contextualisation is found in the work of Christian scholars on the cultural codes of male honour and shame that shaped understandings of the threats posed to Lot's guests in Sodom (Genesis 19).<sup>150</sup> The group of men from Sodom surrounding Lot's house were intent upon raping his foreign male visitors, and traditional readings and translations suggest this was the result of an erotic male homosexual attraction. However, when the rape is regarded as intended to dishonour the visitors by threatened their masculinity it is convincingly understood as a depiction of xenophobia and phallic power. Martti Nissinen has argued that the gang rape of male enemies has always been a way to disgrace and subdue them, and this text should be read in terms of male honour and shame.<sup>151</sup> Contextualizing this story shifts its emphasis from male homosexual attraction to male sexual violence and xenophobia.

In Buddhism, Cabezon highlights the need for contextualisation by observing that western constructs of gender and sexuality should not be expected to be a perfect fit in other cultural contexts.<sup>152</sup> It is questionable whether the understandings of modern western Buddhists conform to the original understandings of traditional Buddhist teachings, which require knowledge of the cultures in which they were formulated. Like many other western Buddhists who belong to minorities, lesbian Buddhists must currently set aside both mainstream and minority western understandings

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<sup>150</sup> Martti Nissinen, 1998, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: a Historical Perspective* (Augsberg, Fortress), p.48, cited by Deryn Guest, on 10.9.06, at [http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural\\_scrap.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural_scrap.htm).

<sup>151</sup> Martti Nissinen, 1998, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p.48, cited by Deryn Guest on 10.9.06, at [http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural\\_scrap.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/scriptural_scrap.htm).

<sup>152</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.86.

and develop new understandings that incorporate the cultural influences inherent in Buddhist teachings. This process requires rarely acknowledged compromises.

Any negative understandings may be countered by affirmations. The ability to call upon a list of 'the great and the good' acts as an affirmation and has long been a technique used by lesbians and gays to diminish any sense of inferiority and shame. Naming an ancestry from among the figures in the Bible was a defence employed most famously by Oscar Wilde during his trial in 1895. When asked, 'What is the "Love that dare not speak its name"?', Wilde responded,

'The Love that dare not speak its name' in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'Love that dare not speak its name', and on account of it I am placed where I am now.<sup>153</sup>

The facts of relationships between Biblical figures are impossible to establish, and assuming they have been homoerotic renders them a part of lesbian and gay heritage. Readings from lesbian and gay perspectives are often invoked at celebrations of same-sex partnerships, and the validation of homosexual relationships ensures the validity of such readings.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, positive readings continue to be controversial and to invite criticism.

In Buddhism, John G Jones's reading of the *Jataka* tales affirms homosexuality, and although this has been critiqued by Peter Harvey, Cabezon confirms that some *Jataka* tales have homoerotic readings.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Transcript of 'Testimony of Oscar Wilde examined by Sir Edward Clarke', in 1895, at <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/FTRIALS/wilde/Crimwilde.html> on 27.3.10

<sup>154</sup> A list of affirmative texts, including Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, The Roman centurion and his servant boy, the women missionary couples referred to by Paul (Romans 16.12 refers to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Philippians 4.2 to Euodia and Syntyche), Paul's close relationship with Silas, Barnabas and Timothy and the eunuchs, and Jesus himself, are provided in Nancy Wilson's book *Our Tribe, Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible* (1995, San Francisco, Harper).

<sup>155</sup> John G Jones, 2001 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1979), *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha: The Jataka Stories in Relation to the Pali Canon* (Cybereditions, Christchurch, NZ); Peter

These arguments are elaborated in Chapter Three, section A.iii., 'Re-reading Jataka Tales'. Nevertheless, Jones' androcentric work illustrates the potential for lesbians to re-read texts from their perspective.<sup>156</sup>

Modern lesbians and gays find themselves accepted in contemporary literature, and to enable their identification with the sacred, some Christian theologians have recreated a canon by giving contemporary texts a status on a par with scripture.<sup>157</sup> It has been argued that rendering the 'Texts of Terror' into affirming texts is impossible, 'as if Leviticus and Romans could be compelled to relinquish their homophobic thrust'.<sup>158</sup> David Comstock has assembled a collection of modern texts he described as 'scriptural', which include E M Forster's *Maurice*, Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Audre Lord's *Sister Outsider*, and Beth Brant's *Mohawk Trail*.<sup>159</sup>

The need to re-create Buddhism has been observed by Kate O'Neil, a lesbian Buddhist, who wrote that Buddhist teachings of ego reflect an androcentric need to let it go that is misplaced in contexts where women are struggling hard to claim one.<sup>160</sup> O'Neil also wrote of the need to reduce sexist and homophobic language and to confront the silence and fear that may attend lesbian and gay sexualities.<sup>161</sup> Many of the ways in which Buddhist women are re-creating Buddhism are reported in Chapter Seven, section B, 'Women's Middle Way', and although some of the women referred to might be lesbians, few have come out.

Buddhist Studies of same-sex sexuality among men include works by Paul Gordon Schalow and Bernard Faure, who report homosexuality among Japanese monks, while Leonard Zwilling has researched the *IDob ldobs* of Tibet, a semi-military monastic fraternity who openly engaged in

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Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, pp.422—423; Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.86.

<sup>156</sup> John G Jones, 2001 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1979), *Tales and Teachings*, pp.79—80, 107, 113—115; Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.89.

<sup>157</sup> Deryn Guest at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 01.04.

<sup>158</sup> J Michael Clark, 1989, *A Place to Start: Towards an Unapologetic Gay Liberation Theology* (Dallas, Monument Press), p.3, referring to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and Romans 1:26—27, cited by Guest, 'Module 2' at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest) on 01/04.

<sup>159</sup> Gary David Comstock, 1993, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press), p.109, cited by Deryn Guest at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 01.04, citing E M Forster, 1971, *Maurice: A Novel* (NY & London, Norton & Co.); Toni Morrison, 1973, *Sula* (NY, Knopf); Audre Lord, 1984, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedome, Ca., Crossing Press Feminist Series); and, Beth Brant, 1985, *Mohawk Trail* (US, Firebrand Books).

<sup>160</sup> Kate O'Neil, 1996, 'Sounds of Silence', pp.19—37, in Marianne Dresser, ed., *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier* (Berkeley, North Atlantic Books), p.29.

<sup>161</sup> Kate O'Neil, 1996, 'Sounds of Silence', pp.29—32.

pederasty.<sup>162</sup> Cabezon suggests the existence of positive representations of male homosexual relationships in Japanese and Tibetan sources testify to Buddhism's 'essential neutrality' towards homosexuality.<sup>163</sup> However, Cabezon ignores Leonard Zwilling's equation of *'pandaka'*, who have traditionally been stigmatised and excluded from ordination, with modern understandings of 'homosexual'.<sup>164</sup> Cabezon also overlooks widespread Buddhist disparagements of women and the lack of a discourse about women's same-sex sexuality (see Chapter Three, section A.ii., 'Gender Confusion').<sup>165</sup>

Feminist methodologies are necessary to present views of Buddhist women that do not rely upon men or patriarchy. An analysis of the approach adopted by Faure in his two volumes on male sexuality and female gender, respectively, justifies this study's division of Buddhist Studies into 'mainstream' and 'feminist'. Faure's methodological critique is directed at feminist works while he fails to critique the methods that oppress women. Faure claims to have feminist sympathies and acknowledges the patriarchal oppression suffered by many Buddhist women; nevertheless, he directs criticisms at the methods used to challenge androcentrism that facilitate alternative perspectives.<sup>166</sup> While the introduction to his volume about men has no critique of traditional androcentric and univocal scholastic methods, his introduction to the volume about women has copious criticisms of feminist methods.<sup>167</sup> Faure, who acknowledges the pervasive influence of patriarchy, observes that, 'all models . . . become counterproductive when they are determined by an ideological or political agenda, and are flawed from a historian's viewpoint'. This argument, directed at feminism, fails to acknowledge that traditional scholastic methods founded in patriarchal values are no less influenced by a political ideology that is hegemonic and

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<sup>162</sup> Paul Gordon Schalow, 1992, 'Kukai and the Tradition of Male Love in Japanese Buddhism', pp.215—230, in Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, pp.207—278; Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.209—210.

<sup>163</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.82, 91—93.

<sup>164</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.204—205.

<sup>165</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.204—208.

<sup>166</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press), pp.1, 4—6, 15.

<sup>167</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press), pp.3—14; Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial*, pp.1—19.

more insidious than feminism, which openly declares and defends its ideological commitments.<sup>168</sup>

With regard to Buddhism and sexuality, Faure confirms that, while terms existed for male homosexuality and pederasty, historically they applied only to men, and 'women are entirely out of the picture as sexual subjects (lesbianism), and appear as sexual objects only as foils or phantasms.'<sup>169</sup> It is difficult to assess what Faure believes this conveys to modern lesbian Buddhists. Lesbians' absence from the Bible has not prevented lesbian Christians from actively engaging with the texts and recreating how things might have been. While it is not possible to change the proven facts of history, it is possible to question what has been accepted as proven fact, to interrogate whose voices have been excluded and why, and to present circumstances that have traditionally been shrouded in silence in ways that are open and positive. Is it reasonable that Buddhist scholars, including Faure, write as though no lesbian Buddhist has existed, and appear to expect modern lesbian Buddhists to maintain a tradition of silence while simultaneously validation and praise are given to male homosexuality?

To someone familiar with feminist and lesbian methodologies, Faure's report signals the need for a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. I find it incredible that no Buddhist woman had what is understood today as 'a lesbian relationship' during the time the texts referred to by Faure were written. It is important to consider whether the lack of language and discourse about women's same-sex sexuality in patriarchal and heterocentric contexts reflect 'the historical truth' of women's relationships or whether these sources enshrine prejudiced views that have historically shrouded women's same-sex sexual relationships. Lesbian and gay theological methods challenge traditional techniques and facilitate alternative visions.

Despite acknowledging that many Buddhist women have spoken men's words, and recognising that, due to their historical exclusion, women's views and perspectives are in need of validation, Faure fails to acknowledge that the feminist methods he condemns facilitate women's subjectivity.<sup>170</sup> While Faure observes Buddhism being a male discourse, he fails to critique its self-referential (phallogocentric) projections upon women, and while looking to women for alternatives, he accepts uncritically the singular androcentric view as the truth of how it has been for Buddhist

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<sup>168</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial*, p.6.

<sup>169</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, pp.215—216.

women.<sup>171</sup> Faure regards male and female sex and gender differences as opposed, and describes his books as 'deeply concerned with the question of polarity'. Amid his rhetoric, Faure describes his books as a male-gendered history that makes no pretence of being neutral or objective.<sup>172</sup> Faure appears content to repeat traditional reports of the way it has been for women in hetero-normative, patriarchal contexts. Rather than critiquing the patriarchal views and methods that result in women's injustices, Faure directs criticism at the necessary corrective, feminist methods. While he acknowledges the complexities of social hierarchies that afford some women more power and privilege than others, he appears not to recognise that the feminist methods about which he is so scathing facilitate the only alternatives to patriarchal views.<sup>173</sup> As a lesbian-feminist production, this thesis is reluctant to call upon Faure's work for anything other than an example of mainstream historical work. In the history of western Buddhist scholarship, Faure's attitude is not unusual, and the classification of Buddhist studies/theologies as 'mainstream' and 'feminist' acknowledges their different perspectives.

The lack of a consistent classificatory and indexing system in edited volumes where diverse Buddhist women's experiences are often represented helps to maintain lesbian Buddhists' invisibility. Few publications reflect Buddhist women openly acknowledging their lesbian status, whether as authors or subjects of study. Sandy Boucher, an openly lesbian Buddhist, first attempted to represent lesbian Buddhists' in 1988, in *Turning the Wheel*, and while her conversations with many leading American Buddhist women were reported, the lesbians among them refused permission to be identified.<sup>174</sup> In 1996, the introduction to Marianne Dresser's edited volume, *Buddhist Women on the Edge*, recorded her intention that the book should represent those who had been marginalised, including lesbians. Dresser hoped to,

. . . open up the discussion of Buddhism in America to those whose voices have historically been marginalized or unheard. This applies generally to women, but also to sexual minorities, lesbians and bisexuals . . .<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*: p.11.

<sup>171</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial*, p.2, 331.

<sup>172</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial*, p.14, 18.

<sup>173</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *The Power of Denial*, p.17.

<sup>174</sup> Sandy Boucher, 1993 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1988), *Turning the Wheel*, p.xvii.

<sup>175</sup> Marianne Dresser, 1996, 'Editors Introduction', pp.xi—xvii, in Marianne Dresser, ed., *Buddhist Women on the Edge*, pp.xvi.

Lesbian voices were included in the volume; however, they were not indexed, and it is not possible to know whether all the lesbians identified themselves.<sup>176</sup> Research into connections between sexual orientation and religion as a whole is scarce, and mainstream studies often maintain or fuel notions of homosexuality being abnormal and perverse.<sup>177</sup> This is particularly so in cross-cultural research, which is often flawed by its reliance upon hierarchical and patriarchal western frameworks of sex and gender, as reported by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa (see Chapter Two, section B, 'Lesbians' Invisibility').<sup>178</sup> Lesbian and gay western Buddhists' ignorance about traditional understandings of sexual morality has been observed by Cabezon, who is currently researching traditional Buddhist understandings of sexuality.<sup>179</sup>

Dale Spender and Cheris Kramarae have assessed the impact of feminist scholarship in a range of disciplines over the last twenty-five years, and repeatedly reach the same conclusion: that feminist scholarship has occasionally disrupted, but has not dislodged the intellectual and material hegemony of majority culture.<sup>180</sup> Scholarship that decentres heterosexual male privilege may proliferate on the margins, and at times move closer to the centre, but it has never replaced dominant structures.<sup>181</sup> Rather than aiming for the wholesale disruption of Buddhist Studies, 'Lesbian Buddhism?' simply seeks to challenge the silence and invisibility that shrouds lesbian Buddhists.

## **B. Overview**

*Nibbana* requires the transcendence of both identity and sexuality; nevertheless, Buddhists cannot simply disregard issues related to sexual choices. Rather, Buddhists require any moral assessments of sexual choices to be made explicit, which would allow them to make informed choices. In

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<sup>176</sup> Marianne Dresser, ed., 1996, 'Editors Introduction', pp.xiv—xvi.

<sup>177</sup> Gary David Comstock and Susan E Henking, 1999, 'Introduction', pp.11—16 in Comstock and Henking, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion*, p.13.

<sup>178</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows: Challenging the Silence in the Study of Sexuality', pp.452—473, in Darlene M Juschka, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader*.

<sup>179</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex', pp.60—68, in *Buddhadharma: the Practitioners Quarterly*, Summer, Vol.7, No.4 [Boulder, Shambhala Sun Foundation], p.64.

<sup>180</sup> Randi R Warne, 2001, '(En)gendering Religious Studies', pp.147—156, in Darlene M Juschka, *Feminism in the Study of Religions: a Reader*, p.151, citing Dale Spender and Cheris Kramarae, 1993, *The Knowledge Explosion: Generations of Feminist Scholarship* (New York, Athens).

<sup>181</sup> Randi R Warne, 2001, '(En)gendering Religious Studies', p.151.



western contexts, in addition to underpinning sexual identities and the cultures built upon them, sexual choices are regarded as reflecting moral values. Buddhist teachings consider in great detail some of life's basics, and the need for this is contradicted when Buddhism fails to consider personally significant but socially contentious relationships. In western cultural contexts, lesbians have established human rights and egalitarian expectations, and their invisibility in Western Buddhism is problematic.

Buddhist teachings support the understanding that, regardless of its origins, self-hatred is not conducive to the Buddhist path and must be challenged. While Buddhist traditions and studies may acknowledge their androcentrism, their heterocentrism is rarely considered. Without acceptance, disclosure and reflection upon their sexuality, members of stigmatised sexual minorities cannot challenge the assumptions upon which such attitudes are based and they may be in danger of internalising hateful attitudes towards themselves. This thesis argues that in the complex cultural milieu of the West in which Western Buddhism is being fashioned, sexuality and culture influence lesbians' understandings; however, their circumstances have been ignored in Buddhism and Buddhist studies. Even on the rare occasions when they have not been ignored, lesbians' interests have been diminished and the extent of prejudice in Buddhism and Buddhist studies is revealed in the 'Prequel', which demonstrates a need for the thesis.

This thesis is presented in three parts that first establish the cultural contexts that render problematic the circumstances of western lesbian Buddhists before contextualising them and finally offering a solution. The first part, chapters one to three, elucidates the circumstances lesbian identity in the West and some of the problems with which it is associated in Western Buddhism. Chapter one demonstrates lesbian identity being indigenous to western cultures, while chapter two reports the significance of invisibility for lesbians. The first two chapters place the study in western cultural contexts, and describe the recognition and assertion of lesbian culture. The third chapter elucidates the problem at the heart of the thesis, the lack of lesbians' representation in Western Buddhism.

The second part of the thesis, chapters four to six, describes the contexts in which lesbian Buddhists' invisibility is understood and in which any solution must operate. Christian teachings and values underpin western religio-cultural norms, and chapter four describes the

circumstances of lesbian and gay Christians. By juxtaposing these with a conventional account of the most relevant Buddhist teachings, chapter five draws attention to differences between widespread western Buddhist understandings. Positive understandings of lesbians and lesbianism rely upon positive understandings of womanhood, and by reporting misogynistic Buddhist attitudes, chapter six considers an important reason for the lack of attention given to Buddhist women's same-sex sexuality and explicates the need for women's repositioning in Buddhism.

The final part of the thesis, chapters seven and eight, describes solutions to Buddhism's widespread misogyny and heterocentrism, respectively. Chapter seven details the circumstances of Buddhist women in the West, and argues that feminist theological imperatives require that women's differences are acknowledged. The feminist theological strategy of naming, together with Buddhist women's innovations being referred to as 'Women's Buddhism', vindicate the name 'Lesbian Buddhism'. While it is most likely that Women's Buddhism includes the work of covert lesbian Buddhists, the lack of politically engaged critiques and theological explorations from an openly lesbian Buddhist standpoint maintains hegemonic heterocentrism and lesbians' invisibility in Buddhism.

Chapter eight argues that, despite its variable and insubstantial nature, identity has social, cultural and religious significance, and lesbian identity and culture are capable of influencing perceptions of the *dhamma*. Chapter eight demonstrates that lesbian sexual orientation and identity are concerns with significance for all Buddhists, and argues that the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' challenges lesbian's invisibility in Western Buddhism. This thesis aims to reduce heterocentrism in Buddhism and to allow lesbian Buddhists to maintain their integrity and to balance Buddhist and lesbian aspects of their lives.

## Prequel

### **Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is the positive representation of lesbian Buddhists, the need for which is demonstrated in this report of attitudes towards homosexuals and homosexuality in Buddhist contexts. While positive references are hard to find, prejudiced and dismissive attitudes are often found in traditional and academic Buddhist sources. The first section, 'Attitudes in the Buddhist World', reviews attitudes found in 'The *Vinaya* and Precepts', 'Theravada/Southern Buddhism', 'Indo-Tibetan/Northern Buddhism', 'Eastern Buddhism', and 'Western Buddhism', while 'Two Reviews' analyses two summaries of Buddhist attitudes. The second section, 'Modern Prejudice', reports two instances of prejudice in modern Buddhist traditions and focuses attention upon the need to clarify and contextualise traditional Buddhist understandings of 'sexual misconduct'. The third section, 'Academic Attitudes', cites two academic sources trivialising and dismissing the concerns of lesbian and gay Buddhists. The extent to which the attitudes demonstrated in these accounts are maintained throughout Buddhism is unknown, largely because few traditions in western contexts have made clear statements of their understandings and the subject of sexuality is marginalised in Buddhist studies. Nevertheless, Buddhist contexts are often assumed tolerant of sexual minorities, and the range of negative attitudes evidenced here reveals alternative possibilities.

Buddhist literature makes few references to women's same-sex sexuality, and Bernard Faure observes the terms used historically for homosexuality and pederasty applied only to men, and that 'women are entirely out of the picture as sexual subjects (lesbianism), and appear as sexual objects only as foils or phantasms' of men.<sup>1</sup> The significance of lesbian Buddhists' invisibility may be a contentious issue, and while it has been noted by several male scholars, its causes and consequences have avoided academic scrutiny. Some observations substantiated in the body of the thesis are maintained in this chapter, and they include: the cultural significance of lesbians' invisibility, which is explained in Chapter Two, 'Lesbian Invisibility'; considerations of *pandakas* that are explored in

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton, Princeton University Press), pp.215—216.

Chapter Three, section A.i., 'Philology'; understandings of the precepts that are presented in Chapter Five, section C, 'Eightfold Path and Precepts'; and, negative views of 'woman' found throughout Buddhism and reported in Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women'. Few Buddhist attitudes towards homosexuality are expressed explicitly, and because they are often inferred, their effects are insidious.

## **A. Attitudes in the Buddhist World**

### **i. The Vinaya and Precepts**

Homosexual acts are not given any special metaphysical, philosophical, or doctrinal significance in Buddhism, and the Vinaya rules for monks/*bhikkhus* and nuns/*bhikkhunis* subject homosexual acts to the same penalties as similar heterosexual acts.<sup>2</sup> The *Vinaya* expressly forbid all penetrative sexual acts on penalty of expulsion, while non-penetrative sexual acts are discouraged by requiring their confession. In the *Bhikkhuni Vinaya*, references to lesbians may be implied when confessions are required of nuns who sleep in the same bed or share a cover.<sup>3</sup> However, the detail with which bodily contact and sexual acts are described throughout the *Vinaya* would counter suggestions that similar references to acts between women would be less than explicit and rely upon implication.<sup>4</sup>

Buddhist traditions following *Vinaya* rules that exclude *pandakas* from ordination might be regarded as practising prejudice against gay men. The relevance of '*pandaka*' to lesbians is questionable, and women's same-sex sexuality is invisible in both ancient and modern Buddhist contexts. Buddhist laity undertake the five precepts/*panca-sila*, whose primary directive on sexual morality, the third precept, is to refrain from 'sexual misconduct'.<sup>5</sup> While some Buddhist traditions understand homosexual acts to constitute 'sexual misconduct', traditional understandings are rarely reported in detail in western contexts, and many Western Buddhists interpret the precept liberally, and understand it to refer to sexual conduct likely to cause harm.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha: Queer Community in American Buddhism', pp.253—265, in Charles S Prebish and Kenneth K Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley & London, University of California Press), p.255.

<sup>3</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, trans., *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/Bhikkhunis' Code of Discipline* (Access to Insight), 'Pacittiya', Pt.4, Nos. 31 & 32, on 25.9.07 at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhuni-pati.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, trans., *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/Bhikkhunis' Code of Discipline*. Examples of explicit language may be found in 'Prajika', Nos. 1 & 5.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.253.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.253.

## ii. Theravada/Southern Buddhism

Buddhaghosa, a fifth century monk regarded by many as the greatest commentator on the Pali Canon, understood 'sexual misconduct' to be 'the will carried out through the body by an immoral means, to transgress against those whom one should not go into.'<sup>7</sup> Zwilling's claim that Buddhaghosa included men among 'those whom one should not go into' is contradicted by Harvey; however, most analyses focus upon the types of women men should not go into.<sup>8</sup> Only two undisputed sources include men in the forbidden list: Edward Conze, in 1959, and an anonymous author of a commentary on the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*.<sup>9</sup> The failure to include men has been regarded as either the tacit acceptance of homosexual acts or an oversight by authors' intent upon recording the most common ways of breaking the precept.<sup>10</sup> The social acceptance of homosexual relationships has been regarded by some Buddhists as a sign of moral decline, and Buddhaghosa observed that 'wrong practices', which include 'desire and attachment in men for men and women for women', occur as part of the cyclical rise and decline of the cosmos.<sup>11</sup>

## iii. Indo-Tibetan/Northern Buddhism

In India and Tibet, male homosexual acts feature in the *Saddharmasmrtyupasthanasutra* of the *Sikhsasamuccaya*, an anthology arranged by Santideva (685—763), and in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, by Gampopa (1079—1153).<sup>12</sup> While the former describes a variety of punishments waiting in a future life for men who indulge in sexual relations

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), pp.435 & 421, citing Buddhaghosa's *Commentary on the Majjhima Nikaya*, I.199.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.203—214, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany, SUNY), p.207; and, Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.421.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Conze, 1959, *Buddhist Scriptures* (Harmondsworth, Penguin), p.71; and, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, ed. Nathmal Tatia, p.63, cited by Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.207.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.421.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.421, citing Buddhaghosa's *Commentary on the Digha Nikaya*, 853 and the *Digha Nikaya*. III. V.70; and, Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.209, citing Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Cakkavattisutta* in the *Digha Nikaya*, IV, p.56.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.209, citing Vaidya, ed., *Sikhsasamuccaya*, p.45, *Peking Tripitaka Reprint*, Vol.37, p.152; and, Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.254, who also cites Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation by sGam.po.pa*, trans. Herbert V Guenther, 1971, (Berkeley, Shambhala), p.76.

with men, the latter deals with every aspect of Mahayanan practice, and its prohibitions include homosexual acts.

Northern Buddhism is associated with tantrism, which is noted for revelling in transgressions and regarding sexual yoga as a way to enlightenment. Nevertheless, tantrism may condemn homosexuality as sterile and counterproductive.<sup>13</sup> Historically, Tibetan laity have regarded homosexuality in a very negative light, and reports from Tibet in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century confined homosexuality to the paedophilia of lDob ldobs.<sup>14</sup> These irregular monks took part in athletic competitions, acted as police officers, saw to the running of monasteries, and engaged in non-penetrative sexual acts with boys.<sup>15</sup> While lDob ldobs were perceived as bad monks, they were held in high esteem and not regarded as the worst kind.<sup>16</sup>

#### **iv. Eastern Buddhism**

Chinese literary works between the beginning of the Han dynasty and the end of the Sung dynasty, 206 BCE to 1279 CE, give the impression that a liberal attitude existed towards homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> After this period, waves of sexual repression coincided with foreign incursions.<sup>18</sup> During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, homophobic attitudes became entrenched, culminating in harsh treatments meted out under the Communist regime, which included execution.<sup>19</sup> The Buddhist infrastructure was destroyed under early Communism, prior to which it is said that although emotional attachments between older and younger monks were common, homosexuality was rarely seen in monasteries.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John Stevens, 1990, *Lust for Enlightenment: Buddhism and Sex* (Boston & London, Shambhala), p.82.

<sup>14</sup> Melvyn Goldstein, 1964, 'A Study of the Ldab Ldob', *Central Asiatic Journal*, No.9, pp.123—141, cited by Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.81—101, in Arlene Swidler, *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Harrisburg, Trinity Press), p.93; and, Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, pp.424—425.

<sup>15</sup> Melvyn Goldstein, 1964, 'A Study of the Ldab Ldob', p.134, cited by Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.93; and Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.424—425.

<sup>16</sup> Melvyn Goldstein, 1964, 'A Study of the Ldab Ldob', p.134, cited by Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.93; & Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.424—425.

<sup>17</sup> Sandra A Wawrytko, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Chinese and Japanese Religions', pp.199—232, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality and World Religions*, pp.200—201.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra A Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese Religions', pp.200—201.

<sup>19</sup> Bao Ruo-Wang with Rudolph Chelminski, *Prisoner of Mao* (NY, Penguin), pp.188—190, cited by Sandra A Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese Religions', p.206; Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.425.

<sup>20</sup> H Welch, 1967, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900—1950* (Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press), p.118, cited by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.426.

In his treatise, *Ojo Yoshu/Essentials of Salvation*, the Japanese Tendai monk, Genshin (942—1017), said that homosexuals go straight to hell for their moral transgression and worldly attachments.<sup>21</sup> Zen masters have warned monks that homosexual sex with novices would result in bad karmic results and any teachings they gave being suspect.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Japan had a tradition of homosexual heroes and Japanese Buddhism had a tradition of male love. Of this phenomenon, Bernard Faure has observed,

Most authors agree that male homosexuality was relatively well accepted in Japanese society and became a prevalent feature of Japanese monastic life. It was seen as a kind of compensation for the prohibition against the presence of women in the monasteries, a prohibition particularly enforced under the Tokugawa rule . . . its transgressive nature diminished with time, so that it was eventually perceived as a privilege of the monks.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout Buddhism, the standard punishment for penetrative acts by monks is expulsion from the order, and only in Japan and in Korea, under Japanese influence, has this not been enforced.<sup>24</sup>

During the period when celibate monasticism was giving way to a married priesthood, Japanese Buddhism presented a variety of techniques to enhance the status of homosexual love affairs.<sup>25</sup> In a 14<sup>th</sup> century Japanese text, *Chigo Kannon engi/Kannon's Manifestation as a Chigo*, the *bodhisattva* Kannon rewards a devoted monk by appearing as a beautiful male *chigo*/novice.<sup>26</sup> This text belongs to a genre of literature called *chigo monogatari*/novice tales in which love affairs between older monks and novices/*chigo* are described. Tales report the tragic death of one of the lovers, whereupon the survivor assiduously pursues a religious life dedicated to praying for the lost lover.<sup>27</sup> A 15<sup>th</sup> century poem and three later texts testify that Kukai, the ninth century founder of the tantric Shingon school of

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<sup>21</sup> Bernard Faure, 1991, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, US, Princeton University Press), p.253, cited by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.428.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.428.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Faure, 1991, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p.255, quoted by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.428.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.428.

<sup>25</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.92.

<sup>26</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.91, citing Maggie C Childs, 1978, 'Chigo Monogatari', pp.127—151, in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol.35, No.2.

<sup>27</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.91.

Buddhism, introduced a tradition of male homosexual love into Japan.<sup>28</sup> In this tradition, the love of the *chigo* eventually gives way to *shudo*, literally 'the love of the young man', which forms the *samurai* pederastic ideal.<sup>29</sup> In *Kobo Daishi ikkan no sho/The Book of Kobo Daishi*, one text is said to have been revealed by Kukai to a monk as a boon for his prayers.<sup>30</sup> It describes in detail techniques for seducing a *chigo* and various positions for anal intercourse.<sup>31</sup> During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, homoerotic poetry was connected with Buddhist practice, and one significant poem is Ihara Saikaku's, *Nanshoku okagami/The Great Mirror of Male Love*.<sup>32</sup>

#### **v. Western Buddhism**

Few Buddhist traditions in western contexts have made their attitudes towards homosexuality known, and the resulting lack of clarity raises doubts of Buddhism having a liberal attitude. Buddhist traditions transplanted into the West often maintain and teach understandings developed in their previous contexts. Examples are found in traditions established by the late Venerable Master Hsuan Hua (1918—1995), a respected Chan monk from China, and Master Soen Sa Nim, from Korea. Master Hsuan Hua was one of the first to found monasteries in America and he understood homosexuality to plant the seeds of rebirth in lower realms of existence.<sup>33</sup> In the Korean tradition, Master Soen Sa Nim said that homosexuality is a result of *karma* and chanting appropriate mantras can transform a homosexual into a heterosexual.<sup>34</sup> While these understandings incorporate Buddhist teachings of rebirth and *kamma*, they fail to acknowledge western understandings that validate homosexuality. Soka Gakkai International (USA), one of the most popular traditions in the US, used to recommend gay male followers should

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.427.

<sup>29</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.91.

<sup>30</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.91.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Gordon Schalow, 1992, 'Kukai and the Tradition of Male Love in Japanese Buddhism', pp.215—230, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1992, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, pp.218—220.

<sup>32</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.92. This poem has been translated and published by Paul Gordon Schalow, 1989, *The great Mirror of Male Love by Ihara Saikaku* (Stanford, Stanford University Press).

<sup>33</sup> Bhikshu Heng Shure's compilation (no date), *Buddhism: Essential teachings* (Talmage, Ca, City of 10,000 Buddhas, privately circulated), p.65, cited by Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.255.

<sup>34</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.255, quoting from, 'An Interview with Bobby Rhodes' in *Turning Wheel*, Fall, 1995; and Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.426.



marry women and aim at becoming heterosexual; however, it has changed its outlook and practice, and is now willing to conduct same-sex marriages.<sup>35</sup>

Insight Meditation is an offshoot of Theravada Buddhism, and in the UK, teachers Jacqui and Alan James regard homosexuality as 'a problem area', understanding it to confuse the desire to blend masculine and feminine principles.<sup>36</sup>

It is to go on the wrong path through hatred . . . The rejection of one polarity which always accompanies homosexuality is a major stumbling block to the integration and transcendence of masculinity and femininity which signifies real progress on the meditative path.<sup>37</sup>

This heterocentric explanation assumes homosexuals hate the opposite sex, while the same principle applied to heterosexuals would accuse them of hating and rejecting their own sex. S N Goenka, a teacher of Insight Meditation in the US, believes homosexuality is dangerous because it mixes what he regards as male and female energies.<sup>38</sup> These examples from Insight Meditation appear to confuse gendered principles and bodies, and their understandings fail to recognise the social and cultural variability of sex and gender.

The Forest Sangha is a Thai meditative monastic tradition established throughout the world. It adheres to a *Vinaya* and while it 'allows the ordination of homosexuals who are able and willing to be celibate', it does not ordain *pandakas*, 'those who are not completely male', which may include some gay men.<sup>39</sup> For more about Thai understandings of '*pandaka*', see below, section Bi., 'Homophobia in Thailand'. In contrast to the Forest Sangha, the Soto Zen community at Shasta Abbey, California, sees no difference between the soteriological potential of homosexuals and heterosexuals and welcomes lay and monastic lesbian or gay members.<sup>40</sup> Soto Zen priest and clinical psychologist, Rev. Daizui MacPhillamy, has observed that,

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.256.

<sup>36</sup> Jacqui James & Alan James, 1987, *Modern Buddhism* (Wiltshire, Aukana), p.42, cited by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.430.

<sup>37</sup> Jacqui James & Alan James, 1987, *Modern Buddhism*, p.42, quoted by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.430.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.255, citing personal communications from Eric Kolvig, dated 18.8.1994.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.430, citing a letter of Ajahn Sucitto, dated 16.11.1995.

<sup>40</sup> Roshi D MacPhillamy, 1982, 'Can Gay People Train in Buddhism?', pp.27—32, in *Sexuality and Religious Training* (Hexham, Throssel Hole Priory), p.28, quoted by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.431.

Homosexuality is not an impediment to Enlightenment, and gay people are welcome in Buddhist training. How could it be otherwise? How could love between *any* sentient beings be contrary to the Buddha Nature . . . ? . . . The Buddhist mind understands that All is One *and* All is different.<sup>41</sup>

The Triratna Buddhist Community, formerly the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), was founded in 1967 by Sangharakshita, an English monk who adapted Buddhist teachings and practices in ways he considered suitable for the West. Order members do not follow a *Vinaya* and are not required to be celibate, and 'sexual misconduct' is understood to refer to sexual acts motivated by craving and violence.<sup>42</sup> Understandings of sexuality in Triratna/FWBO have developed through difficult periods of trial and error, including one period when some order members sought to keep clear of attachments by engaging in multiple heterosexual and/or homosexual relationships.<sup>43</sup> It is widely accepted that same-sex friendships avoid the tensions and projections of heterosexual friendships and facilitate greater trust and spiritual communication.<sup>44</sup> The transcendence of gender is regarded as an aspect of the spiritual path, and androgyny is encouraged by an institutional organisation that emphasizes gender segregation.<sup>45</sup> Triratna/FWBO welcomes lesbians and gays, and outreach activities have included introductory classes and retreats specifically organised for them. Like many Buddhist traditions, Triratna/FWBO believes sexuality is ultimately to be transcended and the ideal is contented celibacy.<sup>46</sup>

A survey of Buddhist groups in the San Francisco Bay area—a renowned centre of lesbian and gay culture—found that attitudes were either neutral or openly accepting of lesbians, gays and queers.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, based in observations of the laws in some States and the heterosexist assumptions of many people throughout the US, Roger Corless described attitudes in modern America as predominantly homophobic.<sup>48</sup> As a gay man, Corless observed,

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<sup>41</sup> Roshi D MacPhillamy, 1982, 'Can Gay People Train in Buddhism?', p.28, cited by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.430—431. Punctuation as per Harvey.

<sup>42</sup> Sangharakshita, 1990, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path* (Glasgow, Windhorse), p.142.

<sup>43</sup> Dharmachari Subhuti, 1994, *Sangharakshita*, pp.171, cited by Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.429.

<sup>44</sup> Dharmachari Subhuti, 1994, *Sangharakshita*, pp.172, cited by Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.428—429.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.429.

<sup>46</sup> Maitreyabandhu, 1995, 'Homosexuality: Has Everyone Got it Wrong?', *Golden Drum: Journal of the FWBO*, No.37, May/July, p.28, cited by Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.429.

<sup>47</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.257.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.257.

In various ways the authority structure tells us that we are monstrosities: the Christian Church tells us we are sinful, the law threatens to punish us, our parents disinherit us, our friends may desert us, and society at large does its best to ignore our existence. Faced with this opposition, we may on the one hand, try to stuff our feelings or deny them, and we will almost certainly develop self-hatred by internalizing society's homophobia. On the other hand, we may decide to 'come out' . . .<sup>49</sup>

In San Francisco, lesbian and gay Buddhists may gather in groups to practice, to heal the wounds caused by homophobia and gain the mutual support that assists the generation of wisdom and compassion.<sup>50</sup> Corless claims lesbian and gay communities reflect similar bonds to those in many Buddhist traditions; for example, the lineage bonds found in Gelukpa and Shin traditions; the cultural bonds found among Cambodians and Sri Lankans; and, the devotional bonds to a specific *dharma* teacher, such as Ajahn Cha and the Ven. Master Hsuan Hua.<sup>51</sup>

While homophobia is known among North American Buddhists, Jose Ignacio Cabezon has observed, 'To my knowledge, no gay Westerner has ever been denied Buddhist ordination because of his or her sexual orientation.'<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, Cabezon's claim would be contradicted if even one gay Buddhist had sought ordination in a tradition that maintained the *Vinaya* and regarded homosexuals as *pandaka*, which might be the case in the Thai Forest Sangha. Cabezon chose his words with care because women's same-sex sexuality is invisible in Buddhist literature, and the most blatant discrimination experienced by lesbian Buddhists is based upon their gender. While several modern Western Buddhist sources acknowledge the lack of references to lesbians in Buddhist literature, few have explored its basis in assumptions about women's sexuality. Limiting the view of women's sexuality to their reproductive capacity confines it to the patriarchal sphere, and the existence of women's sexuality independent of men may be inconceivable without evidence from lesbians' lives. In Buddhist Studies, questions remain muted of whether lesbian Buddhists' invisibility is more onerous than their open disparagement.

## vi. Two Reviews

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<sup>49</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.257.

<sup>50</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.264.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha', p.264.

<sup>52</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.94.

Cabezón and Harvey's summaries of Buddhist attitudes towards homosexuality present quite different analyses.<sup>53</sup> Cabezón over simplifies complex circumstances by assuming a singular Buddhist attitude. He observes that because its teachings are as neutral towards homosexuality as they are towards heterosexuality, Buddhism has been able to accommodate a variety of cultural mores.<sup>54</sup> Buddhist opinions about homosexual activities range from condemnation to praise, and Cabezón acknowledges Buddhists are as susceptible to homophobia as non-Buddhists.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, he fails to consider the often subtle but diverse effects of gender and heterosexual social pressures, before concluding,

It is possible, given the dearth of scholarship in this area, that a different pattern may emerge in the future: that in Buddhist societies cases of persecution or widespread discrimination against gay or lesbian people may find their way to the surface. I doubt that we will find this to be the case, however. . . . I suspect . . . this pattern of basic neutrality will be firmly established as the essential Buddhist view towards homosexuality.<sup>56</sup>

Although Cabezón's conclusion includes women in its reference to 'gay and lesbian people', the article ignored the less than neutral attitudes often displayed towards Buddhist women, and that the invisibility of lesbians is not a neutral attitude. Thus, Cabezón's 'essential Buddhist view towards homosexuality' might more accurately be described as an 'essential Buddhist view of male homosexuality'. Nevertheless, Cabezón presents his findings in ways that might be reassuring to lesbian and gay Buddhists and his work might be regarded as a Gay Buddhist Theology.

Harvey describes a continuum of Buddhists' attitudes towards (male) homosexuality that ranges from acceptance to rejection.<sup>57</sup> The circumstances whereby homosexuality was advocated in Japan is described by saying that resistance to the ideal of monastic celibacy led to homosexual activity being advocated and the trend against celibacy culminated in a married priesthood.<sup>58</sup> While close same-sex friendships have been accepted in most monasteries, outside Japan and Tibet homosexual activity has never

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<sup>53</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism'; Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*.

<sup>54</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.94—95.

<sup>55</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.82, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.95.

<sup>57</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.95; & Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, pp.433—434.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.434.

been accepted.<sup>59</sup> In China, homosexuality has been tolerated, while in Southern and Northern Buddhism it has been sporadically condemned as immoral.<sup>60</sup> Harvey suggests that where there is no evidence of persecution of people for homosexual activities, an attitude of 'unenthusiastic toleration' has existed.<sup>61</sup> The effect of culture upon demonstrations of homophobia is considered below, in section B.i., 'Homophobia in Thailand'. The least tolerant end of Harvey's continuum includes attitudes towards *pandakas*, whose description pulls no punches, 'In the case of the type of sexually dysfunctional passive homosexual known as a *pandaka*, ordination has been barred, and the spiritual potential in the present life of such people seen as limited.'<sup>62</sup>

The spectrum of Buddhist attitudes towards male homosexuality might lead to the conclusion that Buddhist teachings cannot be fully understood in isolation from their cultural contexts. While the Buddha warned about monks being too devoted to one and other, he did not condemn non-penetrative homosexual acts, and this has enabled Buddhism to adapt to various sexual mores.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the lack of a central unifying authority, such as a Pope or a Bible, has allowed each Buddhist tradition to determine its understandings and practices.

Because Cabezon and Harvey failed to recognise sexuality being a socio-political construct, they failed to recognise heterosexuality being hegemonic. Their lack of political acuity also resulted in their analyses failing to consider that traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women might have resulted in ignorance of women's same-sex sexuality. Both failed to consider whether women were regarded as capable of sexuality independent of men, and whether silence about women's sexuality might be more detrimental to modern lesbian Buddhists than outright disapproval because silence precludes recognition.

### **B. Modern Prejudice**

This section reveals that negative understandings of homosexuality are endorsed in two modern Buddhist contexts. The first example, 'Homophobia in Thailand', reports a senior monk in the Thai *sangha* calling for the

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, pp.433—434.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.434.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.434.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.434.

<sup>63</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.208, citing *Anguttara Nikaya* III, pp.507—508 (Nava Nalanda Edition); Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.94—95.

expulsion of gays from the order and for restrictions to be placed on their ordination.<sup>64</sup> The second example, 'Sexual Misconduct in Tibet', reports the Dalai Lama's explanation of the classification of homosexual acts as 'misconduct' in Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>65</sup>

### ***i. Homophobia in Thailand***

Different cultures throughout the world have constructed consistently negative understandings of homosexuality. In Theravada Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka and Burma, before the colonial era, there were no legal statutes against homosexual acts between consenting adults, and where there has been no colonial experience, such as Thailand, there are still no such laws.<sup>66</sup> Many westerners believe homosexuality is accepted in Buddhist countries of South and South-east Asia, which AL De Silva has observed is not true. Rather, the loathing, fear and hatred western homosexuals have often had to endure is absent, and largely this is due to Buddhism's humane and tolerant influence.<sup>67</sup> Peter Jackson has also described the popular western perception of a general tolerance of homosexuality in Thailand as inaccurate.<sup>68</sup> In western contexts, homophobia operates in clearly defined ways that contrast with the diffuse cultural sanctions that stigmatise homosexuals in Thailand, where beliefs about the origins of homosexuality determine attitudes.<sup>69</sup> Accepting attitudes are underpinned by the belief that homosexuality originated in past misdeeds and is outside conscious control.<sup>70</sup> Negative attitudes are underpinned by the belief that homosexuality is a wilful violation of ethical and 'natural' principles, and support calls for the exclusion of gays from ordination.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Hacker, 4.7.03, 'Buddhism Grapples With Homosexuality', at [www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm](http://www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm), on 14.6.2005.

<sup>65</sup> Dalai Lama, 1996, *Beyond Dogma*, trans. Alison Anderson, (London, Souvenir Press), p.46—47.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality and Transgenderism in the Thai Buddhist Tradition', pp.55—89, in Winston Leyland, ed., *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists* (San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press), p.56; AL De Silva, (no date), 'Homosexuality and Theravada Buddhism' at <http://www.buddhanet.net/homosexu.htm>, on 12.8.2006.

<sup>67</sup> AL De Silva (no date), 'Homosexuality and Theravada Buddhism', on 12.8.2006, at <http://www.buddhanet.net/homosexu.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', pp.55—56.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', pp. 56, 78—79.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', p.79.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', p.79.

In 2003, a dispute arose in Thailand about the prevalence of gay Buddhist monks.<sup>72</sup> One of Thailand's most famous monks, Phra Pisarn Thammapatee, claimed homosexual monks 'caused trouble' in the temples and he wanted them ousted. He estimated there were a thousand gays among the country's three hundred thousand monks, and argued for candidates being 'more thoroughly screened' to prevent the ordination of those with 'sexual deviation'.<sup>73</sup> The head of Thailand's Supreme Council on Buddhism, Phra Khru Pimornsorakhu, said it would be difficult to exclude gays because homosexuality is not explicitly mentioned in any of the Buddha's discourses, and there are no rules to prevent gays from becoming monks. Male sex is the only qualification required for ordination, and while gay monks commit no offence requiring expulsion they should be allowed to remain.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, the translation of traditional rules may not always be straightforward.

The Thai word '*kathoey*' has been equated with '*pandaka*', and contemporary translations of 'gay' into '*kathoey*' enhances the case for gays' exclusion. Both *kathoey* and *pandaka* are understood to include hermaphrodites and passive, so-called 'feminised', male homosexuals.<sup>75</sup> Arguments to exclude both *pandakas* and *kathoey* from the *sangha* regard them as disruptive 'feminine' elements. The Thai Sangha Council/*Mahatherasamakhom* maintain the *Vinaya* rules that exclude *pandakas* from ordination.<sup>76</sup> The Thai word '*kathoey*' refers to traits in men that are similar to those referenced by '*pandaka*', and the pre-ordination question, 'You are a man, are you not?' has included such culturally defined notions.<sup>77</sup> Thus, for those with negative attitudes towards homosexuality and who belong to traditions that adhere to these *Vinaya* rules, the inclusion of gays in the category *kathoey*, and *kathoey's* translation as *pandaka*, justifies excluding gays from ordination.

## **ii. Sexual Misconduct in Tibet**

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Hacker, 4.7.03, 'Buddhism Grapples With Homosexuality', at [www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm](http://www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm), on 14.6.2005.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Hacker, 4.7.03, 'Buddhism Grapples With Homosexuality', at [www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm](http://www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm), on 14.6.2005.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Hacker, 4.7.03, 'Buddhism Grapples With Homosexuality', at [www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm](http://www.365gay.com/newscontent/070403thaipriests.htm), on 14.6.2005.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', p.79.

<sup>76</sup> Khamhuno 1989, 'Gays Appear in *Sangha* Circles' in 'Religion and Society' column of *Siam Rath Sutsapds/Siam Rath Weekly*, Vol. 36, No.22, 18 November 2532/1989, pp.37—38, cited by Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', pp.63, 77.

<sup>77</sup> Khamhuno, 1989, 'Gays Appear in *Sangha* Circles', cited by Peter Jackson, 1998, 'Male Homosexuality', p.77.

*Out* magazine, in February/March 1994, quoted the Dalai Lama saying that if two males or two females without vows to uphold and without any implication of harming others, agree voluntarily to have mutual satisfaction, then it is okay.<sup>78</sup> He appeared to contradict this two years later when he wrote, 'A sexual act is deemed proper when the couple uses the organs created for sexual intercourse and nothing else', which renders the sexual acts of lesbians and gays 'sexual misconduct'.<sup>79</sup> The Dalai Lama explained,

Homosexuality, whether it is between men or between women, is not improper in itself. What is improper is the use of organs . . . defined as inappropriate for sexual contact.<sup>80</sup>

Concern about these contradictory statements came to a head during the Dalai Lama's visit to San Francisco, in 1997, and the possibility of an organized protest by lesbians and gays was defused by holding a meeting between the Dalai Lama and community leaders.<sup>81</sup> During the meeting, the Dalai Lama explained that Buddhist principles support the struggle of all people for equal treatment and full human rights and he described two perspectives.<sup>82</sup> First, a Buddhist's view of homosexuality as an abstract social and human rights issue sees no harm in mutually agreeable sexual acts, and it is wrong to look down on lesbian and gay people and to discriminate based on sexual orientation. A more complex second explanation gave a traditional view of Buddhists who perform homosexual acts.

The ultimate aim of Buddhist practice is *nirvana*, achieved through the reduction of attachment and desire, and sexual desire is to be decreased by all Buddhists.<sup>83</sup> In the Dalai Lama's tradition, assessments of sexual misconduct are made in relation to four areas: partner, organ, timing, and place.

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<sup>78</sup> Dalai Lama, 1994, *Out*, February/March, cited by Steve Peskind, "'According to Buddhist Tradition": Gays, Lesbians and the Definition of Sexual Misconduct', on 16.12.07, at [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1977&Itemid=0](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1977&Itemid=0).

<sup>79</sup> Dalai Lama, 1996, *Beyond Dogma*, pp.46—47.

<sup>80</sup> Dalai Lama, 1996, *Beyond Dogma*, p.47.

<sup>81</sup> Dennis Conkin, 1997, 'Dalai Lama urges respect, compassion, and full human rights for all including gays', *Bay Area Reporter*, 19 June, at <http://www.quietmountain.org/links/teachings/gayrites.htm>, on 12.12.04

<sup>82</sup> 'Minutes of Meeting between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Gay and Lesbian Leaders', on 11.6.1997, in San Francisco, reported at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>, on 13.12.04

<sup>83</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.



1. The partner should not have taken vows of celibacy, be sick, be under age, or be one's mother or father.
2. The organ involved should exclude use of the mouth, anus, hand, thigh, and calves, and anything other than the vagina and penis.
3. The timing should not be during menstruation, late pregnancy, or while nursing.
4. The place should not be rough ground or a temple.<sup>84</sup>

These traditional proscriptions apply to both heterosexuals and homosexuals; however, while they ensure heterosexual intercourse is legitimate, all homosexual acts are rendered 'sexual misconduct'.

The Dalai Lama further distinguished between two levels of Buddhist prohibitions: those that are naturally unethical (for example, killing any sentient being), which are more offensive than those that are unnaturally unethical (for example, a monk's prohibitions from eating solid food in the evening). Sexual misconduct prohibitions fall into the second, least offensive category. In addition, if suppressing an activity would have consequences that are more negative than its execution—for example, if it would cause aggression or violence due to frustration—then it is better to engage in the proscribed activity.<sup>85</sup> Sexual misconduct is only one of ten negative activities a Buddhist should strive to avoid, and the significance attached to them depends upon motivation and context.<sup>86</sup> If homosexuality is socially acceptable, then it might be acceptable in the Buddhism of that time and place. In Buddhist traditions where homosexuality is not accepted, any change in traditional assessments would have to respect traditional procedures,

. . . no single person or teacher can redefine precepts. I do not have the authority to redefine these precepts since no one can make a unilateral decision or issue a decree. Such a redefinition can only come out of *sangha* discussions within the various Buddhist traditions. It is not unprecedented in the history of Buddhism to redefine issues, but it has to be done on the collective level.<sup>87</sup>

During the meeting, Jose Ignacio Cabezon suggested that if the purpose of the rules is to decrease sexual activity, then a sexual ethic should be developed to that effect, rather than maintaining a system that

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<sup>84</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.

discriminates between types of sexual contact.<sup>88</sup> The Dalai Lama conceded Cabezon's point, and reiterated the goal for all practitioners should be to reduce desire.<sup>89</sup> When the proscriptions were introduced, reproduction was the sole rationale for sexual activity, and contextualisation provides the most comprehensive approach to traditional understandings.<sup>90</sup> The Dalai Lama encouraged lesbian and gay Buddhists to lobby for changes to traditional understandings and for increased awareness of the influence of culture.<sup>91</sup> He urged building a consensus to change understandings so that contemporary western expectations may be accommodated.

After the meeting, some lesbians and gays were dissatisfied with the Dalai Lama's failure to reflect upon the harm caused by traditional proscriptions.<sup>92</sup> Steve Peskind, a former Buddhist monk, observed,

Clearly, some of the traditional Buddhist teachings are virulent to the truth and lives of Buddhist sexual minorities. It is questionable whether the Dalai Lama really understood the impact of Buddhist tradition labelling the way we make love as 'sexual misconduct'. . . . The Buddha did not say it at all, according to the evidence.<sup>93</sup>

Peskind elaborated, saying the Buddha cautioned against misconduct driven by sensual desire, and warned of harmful intentions and actions arising from wrong perceptions and dualistic fixations on self and other; however, the Buddha did not mention sex acts or inappropriate organs or partners, which have appeared in subsequent exegesis.<sup>94</sup> The political status of sexual identity in modern western contexts requires that traditional understandings are made known, and, if necessary, steps may be instigated to adjust them to suit western contexts and sensibilities.

### **C. Academic Attitudes**

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<sup>88</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.

<sup>89</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>; and, Steve Peskind, 1998, "According to Buddhist Tradition": Gays, Lesbians and the Definition of Sexual Misconduct', *Shambhala Sun*, March, at [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1977&Itemid=0](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1977&Itemid=0), on 16.12.07.

<sup>90</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>

<sup>91</sup> 'Minutes', 11.6.97, at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/4886/gay.htm>.

<sup>92</sup> *Gay Today*, 1997, 'Dalai Lama meets with Lesbian and Gay Buddhists', in *Badpuppy*, 16 June 1997, on 13.12.04 at <http://www.gaytoday.badpuppy.com/garchive/events/061697ev.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> Steve Peskind, 1998, 'According to Buddhist Tradition', on 14/6/05 at [www.shambhalasun.com/archives/features/1998/Mar1998/peskind.htm](http://www.shambhalasun.com/archives/features/1998/Mar1998/peskind.htm).

<sup>94</sup> Steve Peskind, 1998, 'According to Buddhist Tradition', on 14/6/05 at [www.shambhalasun.com/archives/features/1998/Mar1998/peskind.htm](http://www.shambhalasun.com/archives/features/1998/Mar1998/peskind.htm), and on 16.12.07 at [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1977&Itemid=0](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1977&Itemid=0).

Some academic Buddhist Studies have approached questions related to sexuality with attitudes bordering prejudice. The two examples in this section illustrate academic sources trivialising the concerns of lesbian and gay Buddhists. The first example is taken from 'Who is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America', published by Prof. Jan Nattier in 1998, and the second is taken from the Open University (OU) course, *World Religions*, prepared by Gwilym Beckerlegge, in 2000.<sup>95</sup>

When considering the modifications made in Western Buddhist contexts, Prof. Jan Nattier has written,

Similar adjustments can be seen in the late twentieth century, as interpretations of Buddhism have been modified to fit American preferences for egalitarianism, feminism, and even a positive valuation of sexuality (an idea it seems certain the Buddha himself would have found outrageous).<sup>96</sup>

The invocation of an outraged Buddha in reaction to the so-called 'positive evaluation of sexuality' fails to differentiate between a positive valuation of sexuality and people identified by their sexuality. Prof. Nattier, an expert in Buddhist texts, is not likely to have been unaware of this distinction or that her observations trivialise the concerns of lesbian and gay Buddhists. The positive evaluation of sexuality, in the sense of sexual desire, would be wholly at odds with Buddhist teachings. However, it is doubtful that the Buddha would disapprove of the positive evaluation of groups of people identified by their sexual orientation who are struggling to overcome discrimination and stigma. Lesbian and gay politics have not only allowed people to express themselves in ways that maintain their integrity, challenge oppression, and minimise suffering, they have also reduced the accumulation of negative *kamma* by many who would otherwise have propagated negative views.

The second example is taken from Unit Sixteen of the OU course work, 'Religion at the end of the twentieth century', which addresses the issue of 'Buddhists under political oppression'. The course work says,

One factor said to have contributed to the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism in California has been the impression held by many Americans attracted to it, including many gays and lesbians,

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<sup>95</sup> Jan Nattier, 1998, 'Who is a Buddhist? Charting the landscape of Buddhist America', pp.183—95, in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka, eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America*; Open University, 2000, Course A213, *World Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 2000, Unit 16, prepared by Gwilym Beckerlegge, 'Religion at the end of the twentieth century', pp.97—115, section 10: 'Buddhism: turning the wheel of *dharma* in peace and conflict', p.98.

<sup>96</sup> Jan Nattier, 1998, 'Who is a Buddhist?', p.193.

that Buddhism is non-judgmental in matters of sexual conduct. During a visit to California in June 1997, the Dalai Lama caused dismay when he reminded his audiences that gay and lesbian sexual relations, as well as masturbation and oral sex, were regarded as sexual misconduct within Buddhism. The level of preoccupation of many Californian Buddhists with the issue of sexual conduct illustrates the difference between Buddhism practised in Tibet, where it is fighting to survive, and 'Tibetan Buddhism' as practised by some Californians who identify themselves as Buddhists.<sup>97</sup>

This is the only representation of lesbian and gay Buddhists in the OU course work. The introductory phrase, 'One factor said to have contributed to the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism' is not substantiated and other factors contributing to its popularity are ignored. The article does not report the Dalai Lama's previous contradictory statements, and assumes lesbians and gays were being *reminded* that Buddhism is not always non-judgemental about issues of sexual conduct. In truth, few Buddhist traditions have made known their assessments of the ethical status of homosexual relationships of the laity. The phrase 'level of preoccupation' implies the attention given to sexual conduct by 'Californian Buddhists' was excessive, while the focus upon lesbian and gay Californians' sexuality ensures subsequent references to 'Californian Buddhists' infer lesbian and gay Californian Buddhists.

By presenting attitudes towards sexual conduct as the sole reason for lesbian and gay Buddhists attraction to Tibetan Buddhism and juxtapositioning an incomplete description of their circumstances with Buddhism's struggle for survival in Tibet, the course work misrepresented lesbian and gay Buddhists. Both Californian and Tibetan Buddhists are addressing concerns that hinge upon ideas of fairness. In the Tibetan case, international forces exterior to Tibet and to Buddhism are acting with deliberation to suppress Buddhism, Buddhists and Tibetan culture. In the Californian case, traditional Tibetan Buddhist rules and understandings are discriminating inadvertently against modern western lesbian and gay Buddhists. These two examples do not compare like with like, and the course work fails to draw attention to this while trivialising and diminishing lesbian and gay concerns about the soteriological status of their primary relationships.

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<sup>97</sup> Open University, 2000, Course A213, Unit 16, section 10: 'Buddhism: turning the wheel of dharma in peace and conflict', p.98.

As part of a degree course, the paragraph might have considered the political circumstances of lesbians and gays, that violence against them is often motivated by prejudice based in religious teachings, and that homosexuality continues to be a life or death issue in many places. The course work ignores lesbian and gay history, that capital punishment was meted out to them in the Nazi's death camps during World War Two, in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966—1976), and that they continue to be threatened by fundamentalist religious regimes. Seven countries currently retain capital punishment for homosexuality: Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen, while the Ugandan parliament has proposals before it to enact severe penalties, including the death penalty.<sup>98</sup> Lesbians and gays live with the knowledge that prejudice against their sexual orientation may be life threatening and that travelling in some countries may be dangerous.<sup>99</sup>

The freedoms available in western contexts have allowed sexuality to be recognised as a political issue and such freedoms are to be celebrated, rather than dismissed. In many religious contexts, soteriological progress is ostensibly blighted by a homosexual orientation. Religion has particular significance for lesbians and gays because their oppression is often justified by reference to religious teachings, which cannot be challenged by Human Rights legislation.<sup>100</sup> Religious teachings have a socio-political status that may warrant a response similar to that galvanised by the Dalai Lama's revelations (see above, section B.ii., 'Sexual Misconduct in Tibet').

The purpose of the OU course work was to consider Buddhism in peace and conflict, and the cited paragraph misrepresents the facts. The topic would have been addressed more appropriately had the two examples been regarded as equally political, rather than questioning their moral

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<sup>98</sup> Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, (no date), 'Islam and Homosexuality: All Viewpoints', at [http://religioustolerance.org/hom\\_isla.htm](http://religioustolerance.org/hom_isla.htm), on 24.6.10.

<sup>99</sup> Sandra A. Wawrytko, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Chinese and Japanese Religions', pp.199—230, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pa, Trinity Press), p.206.

<sup>100</sup> The Human Rights Convention enshrines the right to respect for private and family life and includes the right not to be treated differently because of your race, religion, sex, political views, or any other status, without objective justification. The Human Rights Act, 1998, says, 'If a court's determination of any question arising under this Act might affect the exercise by a religious organisation (itself or its members collectively) of the Convention right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, it must have particular regard to the importance of that right.' Thus, a sincerely held religious belief may negate individual human rights (Chapter 42, section 13, 'Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion', on 16.08.07, from [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga\\_19980042\\_en\\_1#pb5-11g13](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga_19980042_en_1#pb5-11g13)). Also see 'Introductory Chapter', section A.i., 'Religion: Mainstream Buddhist Studies'.

justification and misrepresenting the facts. Acknowledging the various oppressions faced by Buddhists may offer valuable insights into the ways in which Buddhists engage in political struggles while maintaining Buddhist values. However, trivialising the concerns of minorities may reiterate the kind of academic bias historically cultivated by implication and innuendo, which are contrary to modern understandings of 'academic rigour' (see Chapter Two, section B, 'Lesbians' Invisibility').

### ***Conclusion***

Homophobia and heterosexism are present in Buddhist cultures and may be reflected in Buddhist understandings and practices. The lack of a sexual discourse in Buddhism has resulted in widespread ignorance of traditional Buddhist views. The Buddha's words offer minimal guidance to the laity about 'sexual misconduct', and in western contexts where sexual identity is a contentious political issue, the lack of clarity and debate throughout Buddhism engenders concern about views of homosexuality. This chapter has described a range of attitudes towards same-sex sexuality based largely in examples related to men, and the status of lesbians and their relationships is in urgent need of attention.

## **PART 1: THE PROBLEM**

## Chapter 1

### Sexual Identity and Western Culture

#### *Introduction*

Sexual identities are currently accepted as socially constructed and historically specific; however, same-sex erotic attraction appears trans-historically and trans-culturally. It is consistent within a limited range of behaviours, and each society has a limited range of sexual scripts.<sup>1</sup> People might be only acting their scripts but most appear to make their own identities; however, they are not free to do this just as they please.<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler reminds us that people are never free to choose sex and gender performances at will.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, we can only enact those behaviours that have become familiar and are meaningful to us. This remains so, no matter how much we realise that our self-fashioning has been done through the policed norms of a sexist and heterosexist culture. Because sexuality became associated with identity, and what a person does became who the person is, the meaning and significance of sexual experience became one of the most contested areas of discourse. When considering lesbian identity throughout history, it is important to bear in mind that sexual behaviour is unpredictable, various, and influenced by same-sex and opposite-sex desires. It is therefore necessary to consider the various beliefs and understandings that have been attached to sex and gender before lesbians' different manifestations may be recognised as culturally and historically specific.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter outlines the socio-historical context within which the thesis 'Lesbian Buddhism?' is articulated. None of the information reflects a Buddhist understanding of what a person is, or what a lesbian is. Rather,

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity', pp.432—452 in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, & David M. Halperin, eds., *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (London & NY, Routledge), p.433.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Epstein, 1987, 'Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism', *Socialist Review* No.93/94 (May-August), pp.13—34, cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.434.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (NY & London, Routledge), pp.128-141.

<sup>4</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1991, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Hertford, Harvester), p.85



this chapter explores the history of various understandings of lesbians that are indigenous to western cultures, and with which Buddhist teachings must engage as they are established in the West. The purpose of this chapter is fourfold. Firstly, it places the thesis firmly in western contexts. 'Lesbian' understood as a personal identification is indigenous to the West, and interrogation of the concept of 'Lesbian Buddhism' is appropriate here. Secondly, it demonstrates that the various ways lesbians have been recognised have depended upon both hegemonic heterosexual and marginalised lesbian cultural contexts. Lesbians' cultures are an important aspect of lesbians' existence and have often been hidden from history. A significant basis for the acknowledgement and naming of different approaches to the Buddha's teachings has been cultural difference, and the cultural basis of lesbian identity, and lesbians' own cultural productions, are important aspects of the thesis 'Lesbian Buddhism?'. Thirdly, by illustrating various ways in which 'lesbian' has been understood and recognised, it is possible to explore the complex and variable nature of what the 'lesbian' in 'Lesbian Buddhism?' might represent. Finally, presenting both the culturally hegemonic view of lesbian history and a view of lesbian history produced by lesbian historians reveals the lesbian subject position influencing understandings and outlooks.

The first section of this chapter, 'Who or What is a Lesbian?', introduces the topic of lesbian identity by considering some of the problems encountered when trying to define 'lesbian', which is a particularly intractable problem in lesbian history and a significant theme throughout the thesis. An introduction between academic Buddhist studies and lesbian Buddhists requires an understanding of how 'lesbian' has been fashioned historically in western cultures, and this chapter presents two views of lesbians' history. The widely known conventional view is presented in the second section, 'The Sciences of Sex: "Lesbian" as Personal Identity', which traces how 'lesbian' became a personal identifier and demonstrates this understanding being indigenous to western cultures. The third section, 'Lesbians' History: the View from the Margins', is an account of lesbian history produced by lesbian historians, and provides a brief resume of modern lesbians' heritage by tracing how lesbians have been recognised since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***A. Who or What is a Lesbian?***

There is no single understanding of 'lesbian' that is common to all times and places, and some of the most comprehensive explorations of how lesbians are recognised are found in historical studies. If feminist history is about the sexual dynamics of history, then lesbian history is about its heterosexual dynamics. The lack of alternatives to heterosexuality makes it a compulsory norm maintained by lesbians' invisibility. The techniques developed for uncovering lesbians' histories reflect the efforts made to obscure lesbians' lives. Positive understandings are found in studies of lesbians by lesbians; however, these might be regarded as marginal to mainstream discourse, in which negative understandings of 'lesbian' have become widely known and commonly accepted.

Four models underpin hegemonic understandings of 'lesbian' and exist both in isolation and in combination with each other. Firstly, the 'sexual deviant' model defines women's same-sex sexual attraction as abnormal, and this model includes naming those who experienced this attraction 'inverts', 'an intermediate sex', 'hermaphrodites', or 'Uranians'. Secondly, the Freudian psychoanalytic view understands lesbianism as a state of arrested sexual development that reflects the failure to mature into heterosexuality. Freud understood lesbianism to be a 'phase', an infantile stage of development that naturally gave way to 'normal' heterosexual attachments in adulthood. Thus, lesbianism was pathologised and the psychology of the 'mature' lesbian was regarded as frozen in an immature stage of development. Thirdly, monotheistic religious traditions provide understandings in which lesbian relationships are regarded as sinful, and have a corrupting influence (see Chapter Four, 'The Christian Religious Milieu'). Finally, the liberal model that regards sexuality as a personal preference that should remain private fails to recognise the social, cultural, and political significance of sexual orientation, and ensures they remain hidden.

Some historians have argued that it is wrong to apply 'lesbian' to a woman who would not claim it for herself or who might have experienced her love for women differently from modern lesbians. Such arguments limit the possibilities of identifying lesbians in history by naively assuming a fixed definition based upon current understandings, which isolates lesbians from their particular socio-historical contexts. However, different rules seem to apply when identifying heterosexuals in history. Heterosexuality has always enjoyed social acceptance, even while some heterosexual behaviours might

have been unacceptable; for example, divorce, adultery, and sex outside marriage. Marriage is the most significant cultural institution of heterosexuality, and its frequency, the rituals with which it is associated, and what it signifies about a relationship, have changed over time. Aspects of 'heterosexual culture' include the various means of attracting partners, such as styles of dress and appearance, and the rituals of courtship. At some point in a serious relationship, the heterosexual couple might agree upon a method of contraception, and plan for children. Family culture could favour extended or nuclear arrangements that determine the degree contact with, and involvement of, wider family members with 'family issues', which might include questions of child rearing, childcare, the size and location of housing, and the ability of family members to work outside the home. These things both reflect and determine social status, and may determine 'appropriate' marriage partners, together with questions of dowry, pre-nuptial agreements and inheritance. Thus, a heterosexual preference does not only involve sexual contact, but has wider social and cultural ramifications, and this is also true of lesbians' sexual preference.

The cultural phenomena that attend sexual orientation are mutable and impermanent, and accurate understandings of sexuality must consider this.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while analyses might focus consistently upon sexual preference, accurate studies must reflect how its meanings and manifestations have varied according to time and place. Lesbians' lives, like heterosexual lives, have varied over time, and a fixed description of the meaning and significance of any sexual orientation is inconceivable.<sup>6</sup> There have been few problems associated with acknowledging the sexual preference of heterosexuals in history, even though what 'heterosexual' signifies has changed. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that any reluctance to describe women in history as 'lesbian' is largely a consequence of the social stigma with which it is associated and the prejudice of those who choose not to authorise its use.

Every social group needs access to its own history because knowledge of the past provides cultural roots, the continuity of a heritage, and models of experiences to emulate or avoid. Depriving lesbians of knowledge of their

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<sup>5</sup> Lesbian History Group (LHG), 1993, 'Introduction', pp.1—18, in LHG, eds., *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840—1985* (London, Women's Press), p.14.

<sup>6</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.14

history maintains their invisibility, isolation and powerlessness.<sup>7</sup> As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 'sodomy' between women was 'the sin which cannot be named', even more so than sodomy between men.<sup>8</sup> It had been called 'the silent sin', and in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, it had been called a sin against nature in which 'women have each other by detestable and horrible means which should not be named or written.'<sup>9</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century jurist, Germain Colladon, advised the Genevan authorities that for female sodomites the death sentence should be read publicly, while the description of their crime should be omitted: 'A crime so horrible and against nature is so detestable and because of the horror of it, it cannot be named'.<sup>10</sup> Women were thought to have such weak natures that they were susceptible to suggestion, and so while men guilty of sodomy had their crimes read aloud to deter other men, sexual relations between women remained hidden to deter other women.<sup>11</sup> As recently as 1921, maintaining ignorance of lesbians was used in Parliamentary debates against a Bill that proposed, 'an act of gross indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanour punishable in the same manner as any committed by male persons under section eleven of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885.'<sup>12</sup> MP's suggested it was better to remain silent about 'the subject' than to publicise it by passing a law against it.<sup>13</sup> For centuries, ignorance has been considered more effective than punishment for the prevention of lesbian relationships (see Chapter Two, 'Lesbian Invisibility').

Uncovering women's history is difficult because women have often been ignored or overlooked, and because lesbians are both women and sexual non-conformists, the difficulties are magnified.<sup>14</sup> The social stigma associated with lesbianism has often resulted in lesbians being reluctant to identify themselves as such, and claims that a woman in history was a lesbian invite outright denial, and even feminist historians appear to have

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<sup>7</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Judith C Brown, 1989, 'Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', pp.67—75, in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, & George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past* (NY, New American Library), p.75.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Gerson, (late 15<sup>th</sup> century), *Confessional ou Directoire des confesseurs*, cited by Judith C Brown, 1989, 'Lesbian Sexuality', p.75.

<sup>10</sup> Monter, 'La Sodomie', p.1029 (no further details), cited by Judith C Brown, 1989, 'Lesbian Sexuality', p.75.

<sup>11</sup> Judith C Brown, 1989, 'Lesbian Sexuality', p.75.

<sup>12</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', pp.1—2.

<sup>13</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.2.

<sup>14</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.3.

difficulty acknowledging the lesbianism of some of the women they study.<sup>15</sup> Control of historical knowledge has included rewriting the lives of lesbians into more acceptable scripts and omitting references to known lesbian relationships is just one of many ways to 'normalise' lesbians.<sup>16</sup> A woman's position in society has often been determined by her relationships to men—father, brother, husband, son, mentor, colleague, or sponsor—and these relationships have often been exaggerated. A woman's heterosexuality is confirmed on the flimsiest of evidence; for example, if any man found her attractive, because lesbians are assumed unattractive; or if she was at all 'feminine', because lesbians are assumed masculine; or if she was engaged, or married, or had children, because these are incontrovertible proof of a woman's enduring heterosexuality.<sup>17</sup> Reluctance to admit lesbians' existence has resulted in the demand for certainty before the label 'lesbian' has been allowed and critics often demand proof of sexual activity between women.<sup>18</sup> If proof of genital contact were required before women could be described as 'lesbian', then very few lesbians would exist in history and heterosexuality's much lower standard of proof would determine everyone's sexuality.<sup>19</sup>

A woman who never married, lived with other women, whose friends were mostly women, and moved in lesbian and gay circles, may well have been a lesbian.<sup>20</sup> However, evidence of these things is often regarded as insufficient proof. Further clues to lesbian identity might include: being a member of feminist or other rebellious movements; being employed where women work; living with women; and engaging in social activities that involve association with women.<sup>21</sup> Positive understandings of 'lesbian' recognise that socio-cultural factors are some of the most significant aspects of lesbian existence, which is not to diminish the importance of sexual desire and sexual relationships, but rather contextualises them in a balanced view of human existence.

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<sup>15</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.1.

<sup>16</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.2.

<sup>17</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.5. An example of these manoeuvres working together is found in Octavia Hill's biography, in which her passionate friendship with Sophia Jex-Blake was excluded from mid-20<sup>th</sup> century biographies, while a hasty engagement to a man that lasted one day was elevated to the romance of her life. In fact, Octavia Hill lived for the last thirty-five years of her life with another woman, Harriot Yorke (LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.2).

<sup>18</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.8.

<sup>19</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, 1993, 'Does it Matter If They Did It?', pp.19—28, in LHG, eds., *Not a Passing Phase*, p.22

<sup>20</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.7.

<sup>21</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.7.

There would be fewer problems hypothesising from available evidence that a woman was probably a lesbian if either it ceased to be an insult or it was more accurately understood to refer to a range of feelings and expressions.<sup>22</sup> Even in the current relatively permissive social climate, describing someone as a lesbian is commonly regarded as an insult. There seems to be little or no problem in accepting that sexual attraction plays some part in a range of non-sexual encounters between heterosexual women and men, and it is a measure of the prejudice faced by lesbians that their sexual preference is not similarly understood. Because 'lesbian' is often mistakenly assumed to refer exclusively to sexual activity, the biography that uses the epithet 'lesbian' is assumed to focus upon a narrow, limited, and 'abnormal' aspect of an otherwise 'normal' life.<sup>23</sup>

Among the questions most frequently asked of the epithet 'lesbian' are whether or not it requires proof of same-sex sexual acts, and should definitions be broad enough to include women who simply refuse to organise their lives around men. Some lesbian-feminists recognise heterosexuality as an institution, and identification as 'lesbian' has sometimes been claimed as a political act in a world that subordinates women, often through their relationships with men.<sup>24</sup> Lesbian identification has not always relied upon sexual preference, and women who refuse to be subordinated are often perceived as lesbians, regardless of their sexual preference. Thus, 'lesbian' has also been understood to reflect political as well as sexual deviancy.<sup>25</sup> The 'lesbian continuum' authorises all women's intimate friendships to be designated lesbian, regardless of their sexual status (see Chapter Two, section A, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'). While some lesbian-feminists reject the continuum's existence, most would agree that there are circumstances in which it might be usefully deployed; for example, when there is uncertainty about the sexual preference of a woman in history.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.7.

<sup>23</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', pp.2—6

<sup>24</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.13

<sup>25</sup> Social stigma being associated with the word 'lesbian' enables its use to police 'unfeminine' behaviour, and occasionally 'straight' feminists have worked to reverse this by proudly claiming to be lesbians.

<sup>26</sup> Objections to the notion of a lesbian continuum are expressed succinctly by Sheila Jeffreys, 'Women who simply have 'best friends' share neither lesbian oppression nor lesbian experience, and as long as the definition of lesbian is open enough to include heterosexual women who love their women friends, it will be hard to articulate what is specific about the experience and oppression of lesbians, and

Today, lesbian culture has an imperative to respect the rights of women to identify themselves, which allows a lesbian to be anyone who claims the identity. While sexual preference has marked a personal identity only since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, throughout history, women who love women have been stigmatised if their preference became known. Debates among lesbian historians often focus upon the ethics of applying today's positive understandings to women who might not have regarded themselves or their relationships positively. Historians do not always agree upon how to identify lesbians, and various definitions have been used. However, all agree that women who loved women should be included within the scope of history, regardless of how the relationships were manifested.<sup>27</sup>

### ***B. The Sciences of Sex: 'Lesbian' as Personal Identity***

This section relates how 'homosexual' came to represent a personal identity that was pathologised and stigmatised in sexology and psychoanalysis, two of the scientific discourses that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of this process, Michel Foucault has observed:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his (*sic*) total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth—less than by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of

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almost impossible to fight compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian invisibility.' (1993, 'Does it Matter', p.22).

<sup>27</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p.14.

the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.<sup>28</sup>

In pre-industrial European societies, the regulation of sexual behaviour, like moral behaviour generally, was primarily a religious or spiritual issue.<sup>29</sup> Sacred definitions, understandings, and boundaries, were set in times that pre-date conceptions of sexual identity. Sexual pleasure was routinely connected with metaphors of sin, disease, and self-indulgence, and sexual acts that were not tied to procreative ends within marriage were regarded as sinful.<sup>30</sup> Notions of 'masturbatory self-pollution' and 'unnatural pleasures' were routinely associated with social decay, and sexual acts were understood to be chosen on the basis of a person's morality rather than the consequence of his/her inherent drives. The scientism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to what were considered objective biological studies of sexuality, whereby doctors and scientists took responsibility for instructing the courts and communities about the nature of sexual 'normality' from the clergy.<sup>31</sup> In both Christian and scientific paradigms, the individual does not know best, and the clergy's advocacy of God knowing best was replaced by scientists' advocacy of the primacy of biological imperatives, in which the sexual and the biological became synonymous.<sup>32</sup>

### **i. Sexology**

Sexology achieved the legitimacy reserved for science by isolating and quantifying human sexuality in biological studies. Before Sigmund Freud monopolized discourses of the science of the mind in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840—1902), was a professor of psychiatry at the University of Vienna. In 1886, he published *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Psychopathy of Sex), the founding text of sexology.<sup>33</sup> His elaborate taxonomy aimed to separate 'natural' sexuality, which was directed towards procreative ends, from its 'unnatural' or 'perverse' forms, which were non-reproductive.<sup>34</sup> Krafft-Ebing introduced the words 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' to refer to instances of sex without the chance of reproduction,

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will To Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London, Penguin), p.43.

<sup>29</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', pp.183—238, in Katheryn Woodward (ed.), *Identity and Difference* (Milton Keynes, Open University), p.189.

<sup>30</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.189.

<sup>31</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.189.

<sup>32</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.189.

<sup>33</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, 1886, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Stein & Day), republished in 1998 (NY, Arcade).

<sup>34</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.191.



and categorised both cases perverse.<sup>35</sup> His work was dominated by observations of homosexuality, but also discussed masochism, fetishism, and sadism, and introduced these terms.<sup>36</sup> When Krafft-Ebing began his studies, he believed homosexuals were moral degenerates, inferior specimens of humanity who suffered a mental affliction. He eventually came to realise that most of his homosexual case studies exhibited characteristics of moral, physical, and mental health that were just as robust as those of 'normal' people.<sup>37</sup> Later editions of his book were adjusted accordingly, but too late to influence the widespread view of homosexuality being an aberration.<sup>38</sup>

In England in 1897, Havelock Ellis (1859—1939) published *Sexual Inversion*, the second in a series of six volumes entitled, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*.<sup>39</sup> Its subject matter ignited official condemnation.<sup>40</sup> One bookseller was tried for obscenity, found guilty, and fined, and Ellis's books were unable to be sold openly in England until 1936.<sup>41</sup> A publisher was found in Philadelphia, and so Ellis's views were popularised. For Ellis, all sexual relationships were required to conform to the complementary male and female, heterosexual model, and homosexuality could only be understood as an inversion of this hegemonic norm. Ellis's concept of the congenitally predetermined biological condition of 'inversion' was intended to contrast with the widespread belief that homosexual acts reflected moral degeneracy.

Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis agreed that sexual behaviour was the most powerful force in human society, and it formed the biological core of human character and identity.<sup>42</sup> Their techniques reduced sexual activity to biology, which they presumed was its exclusive dimensions, and sexuality's psychological and social dimensions were ignored. As pioneers of the 'science of sex', sexologists understood that male and female sexuality

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<sup>35</sup> Alex Hunnicutt, 'Krafft-Ebing', at [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html) on 6.2.07

<sup>36</sup> Alex Hunnicutt, 'Krafft-Ebing', at [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html) on 6.2.07.

<sup>37</sup> Alex Hunnicutt, 'Krafft-Ebing', at [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html) on 6.2.07.

<sup>38</sup> Alex Hunnicutt, 'Krafft-Ebing', at [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/html) on 6.2.07.

<sup>39</sup> Havelock Ellis, 1897, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Volume 2 of 6), on 6.2.07, eBook #13611, freely available as an E-text at [www.gutenberg.net](http://www.gutenberg.net).

<sup>40</sup> Ruth M Pettis, 'Ellis, Havelock (1859—1939)', on 6.2.07, at [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/ellis\\_h.html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/ellis_h.html).

<sup>41</sup> Ruth M Pettis, 'Ellis, Havelock', at [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/ellis\\_h.html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/ellis_h.html), on 6.2.07

<sup>42</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.190.

were fundamentally opposed. Their works elaborated three concepts—sex, gender, and sexuality—through a parallel set of binary oppositions—male/female, masculine/feminine, and active/passive.<sup>43</sup> Victorian evolutionary ideals regarded men as more evolved because they were more active in sexual selection, which served efficient gene dispersal. Rigid gender polarities and the essentialist understanding of active masculine and passive female sexualities did not allow women's sexuality to be independent of men's, which resulted in active female desire being gendered male. Founded in such ideas, early studies of sex reinforced notions of gender polarity and the biological necessity of male domination.<sup>44</sup>

Havelock Ellis is often regarded as a sexual and social reformer who upheld the importance of female sexual pleasure and criticised the many doctors who pathologised it. Nevertheless, consistent with the widespread understandings of his time, Ellis saw all women as controlled and weakened by their biology.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while sexologists radically acknowledged that some aspects of sexual pleasure were available to women, they often demonstrated their ignorance of the full complexities of sexual desire and arousal. Sexologists' understandings of the homosexual as the sexual invert eventually produced rigid stereotypes of masculine lesbians, who had short hair, wore mannish suits, were sporty, aggressively assertive, sexually predatory, congenitally miserable and suicide prone.

After the Second World War, social attitudes changed. Marriage became a partnership of equals, and in response to a rise in marriage breakdowns, the key to stability in marriage was thought to require a good sex life for wives as well as for husbands. Studies revealed that one in three men had had at least one homosexual experience, while only one in ten men identified as 'homosexual'.<sup>46</sup> These statistics challenged notions of the congenital invert by demonstrating that diverse people experience same-sex desire and homosexual and heterosexual are not polarised when considering who and what may trigger sexual arousal during a lifetime. It was subsequently argued that sexual satisfaction in whatever forms it manifested should be socially acceptable.<sup>47</sup> Studies at this time theorised the similarity

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<sup>43</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.191.

<sup>44</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.191

<sup>45</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.190.

<sup>46</sup> Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B Pomeroy, Clyde E Martin, 1949, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, cited by Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.207

<sup>47</sup> Alfred C. Kinsey, et al, 1949, *Sexual Behaviour*, p.263, cited by Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.194.

of male and female sexuality in terms of their capacity for sexual arousal and satisfaction. In the 1960's, sexologists Masters and Johnson revealed to a western audience the ability of women to achieve multiple orgasms, which demonstrated their sexual capacity was more varied and greater than men's sexual capacity.<sup>48</sup> Women's bodies had been the exclusive preserve of male discourse for too long, and educating women about their own bodies became an important aspect of early Women's Liberation.<sup>49</sup>

Sexology had advanced from describing and explaining human sexual behaviour in terms of instinctive imperatives, to emphasising the ability to learn and the acquisition of skills. It suggested that there are no inherent difficulties to prevent anyone from experiencing the full joys of sexuality, and that the most inexhaustible pleasures are available to women.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, for a biological science, sexology ignored some fundamental aspects of human existence, and by ignoring social, cultural and political influences, sexologists ignored how patriarchy is licensed by male sexual performance. Its failure to consider sexual attraction reduced human sexuality to simple questions of sexual capacity and biological functions, and disregarded the relationship between attraction and stimulation.<sup>51</sup> The studies failed to recognise the influence of emotions upon sexual object choice, and supported the view that homosexuals are sexually obsessed. Sexologists believed that people who favoured an object of the same sex had a homosexual inner essence or core, which formed the basis of their identity, and their studies effectively created a homosexual minority who were identified solely by this essence. The lack of any positive discourse about homosexuality ensured that lesbians and gays absorbed only negative views of themselves. Defining people on the basis of their sexual preference and the designation of heterosexuals' preference normal and acceptable and homosexuals' preference abnormal and unacceptable, created an ostracised minority who would become politicised. The biological basis of sexological studies reduced sexuality to orgasm and isolated sexual feelings from personal relationships. Arising at about the same time as sexology,

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<sup>48</sup> William H. Masters & Virginia E. Johnson, 1966, *Human Sexual Response* (Toronto & NY, Bantam), & 1970, *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Toronto & NY, Bantam), cited by Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.194.

<sup>49</sup> William H. Masters & Virginia E. Johnson, 1966, *Human Sexual Response*, & 1970, *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, cited by Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.194

<sup>50</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.196.

<sup>51</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.195.

psychoanalysis placed questions of sexual thoughts and attractions at the centre of its studies.

## ii. Psychoanalytical Theory

Early psychoanalytical studies focussed upon the pains of sexuality and concluded that the most intractable of problems are inevitable to women.<sup>52</sup> In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, published in 1905, Sigmund Freud (1856—1939) challenged the contemporary belief that the sex drive was an exclusively biological instinct that emerged after puberty.<sup>53</sup> In psychoanalytical thinking, the sexual drives are present from the beginning, because sexual sensations attach themselves to the infant's attempts to satisfy essential biological needs.<sup>54</sup> Freud suggested any area of the body or activity could become the source of a sexual drive, and disturbances in this process resulted in repression and the formation of the unconscious.<sup>55</sup> Freud's main preoccupation was not to develop a theory of how sex drives originate, but rather to describe their early polymorphous expression, and so gain insight into adult patterns of behaviour.<sup>56</sup> The psychic manifestations of sexual life involve the repetition of past pleasures and their interactions with fear and pain, which may not be conscious processes.<sup>57</sup>

According to Freud's theories, a boy's development towards 'normal' masculinity is more straightforward than a girl's development towards 'normal' femininity.<sup>58</sup> The process involves the boy renouncing his sexual desire for the mother in favour of identification with the position of authority, the father. For the girl, it is the desire to possess a penis—'penis envy'—that causes her to abandon her attachment to her mother.<sup>59</sup> As she cannot be a father, she can have his child—in later life, the child of his substitute—and so the girl takes on the maternal role, and thereby attains 'normal' womanhood.<sup>60</sup> Freud believed the most feminine wish was to have a baby, and he translated this into the wish for a penis.<sup>61</sup> He was the first to suggest that the sex life of the little boy and the little girl follow similar paths; both express active and passive wishes (usually in relation to the

<sup>52</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.196.

<sup>53</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.196.

<sup>54</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.196.

<sup>55</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', pp.196—7.

<sup>56</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.197.

<sup>57</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.197.

<sup>58</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198.

<sup>59</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198.

<sup>60</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198.

<sup>61</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198—9.

mother), both enjoy masturbatory experiences, and both develop a sense of self or ego, via self-love.<sup>62</sup> Freud could find no basis for sexual polarity and it was difficult for him to explain how the bisexual libido of childhood transforms into 'normal' adult patterns of masculinity and femininity.<sup>63</sup> He assumed a fixed polarity of sexual difference and that womanhood is essentially heterosexual and maternal.<sup>64</sup> His account of sexual difference is incoherent because he cannot specify what the feminine is without reference to the masculine.<sup>65</sup> Primacy is given to biological sex, and all social roles revolve around a masculine centre, represented by the penis. In Freud's view, the only 'normal' sexuality was heterosexual, and this rendered all alternatives 'abnormal', and so lesbians' relationships became a pathologised form of heterosexuality. Freud's heterosexism is illustrated by his description of a female patient changing into a man when she described a woman being the object of her desire.<sup>66</sup> Overall, Freud's psychoanalytical theories confirmed sexologists' conclusions that homosexuality is pathological. Both sexological and psychoanalytical understandings of who and what women are were based on masculine, heterosexist expectations of femininity that were damaging for heterosexual women, but damning for lesbians.

In the 1920's, some women psychoanalysts rejected what they saw as Freud's phallocentrism, and insisted that women were women from the start, with a distinct female sexuality that was not dependent upon male sexuality, but this was a minority view.<sup>67</sup> Freud's work has been attacked by feminists on many grounds, but mainly because it categorised women's search for independence a neurosis and labelled it 'penis envy'.<sup>68</sup> Feminists critique the disparity between women's accounts of their own sexuality and the normative prescriptions advanced in Freud's theories.<sup>69</sup> In 1974, Juliet Mitchel, a feminist professor of psychoanalysis, suggested that psychoanalytical theory could be used to explain women's social positioning

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<sup>62</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198.

<sup>63</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198.

<sup>64</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198—9.

<sup>65</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.198.

<sup>66</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.199, citing Freud's 1920 case study (no publication details).

<sup>67</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.199.

<sup>68</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.200.

<sup>69</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.199—200.

under patriarchy, and many feminist psychoanalysts adopted this view.<sup>70</sup> In this move, Anglo-American feminists began to engage with the issues with which French feminists were struggling.

### **iii. The Influence of Jacques Lacan (1901—81)**

Jacques Lacan theorised that the social regulation of individuals operates through their entry into language (logocentrism).<sup>71</sup> Entry into language is entry into culture, and the privileged position given to the male, represented by the phallus, ensures women's secondary cultural status. The phallus takes the central subjective position and forever constitutes women in terms of what they lack and men in terms of their fear of lack, represented by the fear of castration.<sup>72</sup> Thus, there are not two sexes, but only one, the male, defined by its psychological focus, the phallus, and its other, the female, defined as that which is not male.<sup>73</sup> Lacan theorised that subjectivity was constructed in and through language, which was understood as a symbolic order in which the phallus is the privileged signifier, and so discourses of social and cultural theory came to be influenced by psychoanalytical theories.<sup>74</sup>

Lacan reformatted Freud's work, substituting the phallic symbol for the biological penis, and provided a socio-cultural analysis in place of an ontological-biological one.<sup>75</sup> He insisted that gender identity is discursively constructed, and constituted the psychoanalytical subject in grammatical terms rather than biological ones.<sup>76</sup> In his understanding of the subject, Lacan decentred Cartesian concepts of an autonomous, ready-made subject, and made explicit the fact that sexuality plays a role in identity. A prevalent notion that had limited conceptions of human existence was the identification of the subject with the body, and Lacan's work demonstrated that this model was incomplete for social beings. However, Freud's oedipal structure remained a key belief in Lacan's work, which maintains the idea that only the father can interrupt the infant's early fusion with the mother,

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<sup>70</sup> Juliet Mitchell, 1974, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London, Allen Lane), cited by Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.200.

<sup>71</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.200.

<sup>72</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.200—201.

<sup>73</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.201.

<sup>74</sup> Jacques Lacan, 1982, 'The Meaning of the Phallus', in Juliet Mitchell & Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école Freudienne* (London, Macmillan), p.82, cited by Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.200.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1989, *Sexual Subversions: three French Feminists* (Australia; Allen & Unwin), pp.24—5.

<sup>76</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.200.

and thereby rescue the individual from infantile narcissistic omnipotence, and potential lawless thuggery.<sup>77</sup>

Some feminists have critiqued Lacan's work for offering very little hope of overturning logocentrism and phallogocentrism, two major paradigms of patriarchy. Lacan either situates these pre-discursively or embeds them in language, where they are intractable.<sup>78</sup> Lacan's theories underpin much of French feminism's focus upon sexual difference, in contrast to Anglo-American feminism's focus upon sexual equivalence. However, feminists who accept Lacan's framework often find themselves in a paradoxical situation. By accepting the Lacan's semiotic, they must embrace the incoherence of woman representing the unrepresentable, defined as 'other', and subordinated to man, while simultaneously attacking the denigration of the feminine.<sup>79</sup> This has inspired some feminists to question if women are quite as trapped in phallogocentrism as they originally believed.<sup>80</sup> Feminists believe that the lack that both defines and confines women in Lacan's system remains the phallic lack, and the phallogocentrism of his theories reflects the influence of patriarchy in 'a man's world'.

#### **iv. Social Construction: Politicising Sexuality**

Social constructionist accounts presented a new paradigm by which to understand sexual orientation and eroded previous certainties about sexuality. Theories of social construction arose in the 1960's and 1970's, with the claim that sexuality is not simply a matter of individual development but is socially determined. Scientific studies of sexuality had assumed all forms of sexuality were biologically fixed, whereas social constructionists maintained that social pressures influence how sexualities are experienced. Constructionists were able to recognise that social prejudices had influenced notions of 'the degenerate homosexual', and that lesbians and gays might belong to 'subcultures' that resisted heterosexist norms. Thus, social constructionists' accounts acknowledged the continuity between sexual identity and politics. The relationship between social discourse and sexuality was explored by asking questions of how the creation of the homosexual as a stigmatised identity maintained heterosexual norms and institutions. In an academic setting, Michel

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<sup>77</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.203.

<sup>78</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.201. 'Logocentrism' and 'phallogocentrism' are combined in 'phallogocentrism'.

<sup>79</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.202.

<sup>80</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.202.

Foucault (1936—85) explored such questions by tracing the power of social discourse. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (1979), he challenged the 'regulatory fiction' that sexual identity reflects an inner essence.<sup>81</sup> Foucault dated the emergence of homosexuality being understood as a type of inner essence to 1870, from which time 'the homosexual' became a species (see quotation, above).<sup>82</sup>

Prior to Foucault, sexuality represented the core of a person's being, and his analysis demonstrated how this notion effected social control of both 'normal' and 'deviant' sexual identities.<sup>83</sup> He argued sexuality is,

An historical construct, a surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, intensification of pleasures, incitement to discourse, formation of knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistance, are interlinked in accordance with a few strategies of knowledge and power.<sup>84</sup>

For Foucault, each enquiry of sexuality is a discourse and provides a new way of defining, and so regulating, the body and its pleasures. He exposed the relationship between knowledge and power, and claimed it was the key to understanding the place of sexuality in society. In the broadest possible terms, Foucault considered the dialectical swings in discourses,

We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients); nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications, which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process.<sup>85</sup>

His work revealed the often hidden role played by social forces in the construction and maintenance of sexual identities. However, he ignored questions of sexual difference, and avoided individual accounts, and his work lends itself to general observations and androcentrism. Many feminists find these aspects of his work problematic.<sup>86</sup> Their concerns are illustrated by an instance when Foucault described an adult man's sexual encounter with 'a little girl', in which he ignored the possible effects of the man's

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<sup>81</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, trans. Robert Hurley, *The History of Sexuality; Volume One: The Will to Knowledge ('Sexuality')*; 1986, *Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure*; and, 1988, *Volume Three: The Care of the Self* (London, Allen Lane).

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *Sexuality*, p. 43

<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *Sexuality*, p.11, & 95—101.

<sup>84</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *Sexuality*, pp.105—6

<sup>85</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *Sexuality*, p.99.

<sup>86</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, p.xii; & Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.211.



actions upon the girl, which was a glaring omission in a study of power. Foucault's attention was not focussed upon the concerns of individuals; rather, it was upon the wider issues of social control.<sup>87</sup>

Foucault observed that it is only possible to resist discursive power by talking back from within the institutions that assert it. He also warned that oppositional discourses inevitably echo the relations of domination and subjection they are resisting.<sup>88</sup> For example, asserting heterosexuals' rights excludes the interests of non-heterosexuals, whose position is thereby diminished. Similarly, any response by lesbians and gays would not only attack and diminish heterosexuals' position, but might exclude the interests of bisexuals and queers. Whatever the shortcomings of Foucault's work, three aspects ensure his enduring influence: he questioned the existence of a fixed, essential identity; he recognised resistance being a form of power; and, he developed 'genealogy', an historical method of investigating discourses. Foucault's theorising has a political trajectory, but his insights alone lack the ability to dislodge entrenched conceptions of sexual identities. His work increased awareness of the impossibility of stepping outside social pressures in order to define the self, and, much like the self that requires outside forces for definition, Foucault's social theories become effective in combination with other disciplines.

While scientific studies of sexuality focussed exclusively upon biological aspects, social constructionist studies of sexuality focussed exclusively upon socially meaningful aspects, and both approaches may be equally reductionist. Nevertheless, social constructionists' insights have led to complex, multi-disciplinary analyses that may combine biological, psychoanalytical, and social dimensions of sexuality, that are capable of reflecting human experiences more accurately. In constructionists' accounts, what lesbians and gays share is not an inner core, or desire, or

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<sup>87</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *Sexuality*, pp.31—2.

<sup>88</sup> Michel Foucault, 1979, *Sexuality*, pp.92—102. Foucault's work has had many positive effects for lesbians and gays, but his assertion that a challenge to any regulatory regime must collude with it has been used to undermine identity politics. Foucault did not openly claiming a gay identity has distanced him from identity politics. However, his presence at Gay Pride Marches in the years they were essentially political begs questions of the degree of differentiation between his ideological theorising and the everyday realities that underpinned political necessity. There has been much speculation about his reasons for choosing to not 'come out', including whether during the early stages of his career he was intimidated by the threats public knowledge of his sexual orientation would provoke, or did his theoretical understandings reflect a lifetime's self-conscious commitment. For further information on controversial aspects of Foucault's life, see James Miller, 1994, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (London, Flamingo).

personality, but rather the harsh experience of social discrimination. The scientific models did not allow resistance, whereas lesbians and gays' resistance is vindicated by the knowledge that 'the deviant homosexual' was a social construction. The Stonewall riots in San Francisco, in 1969, mark the beginning of lesbian and gay liberation movements. These riots were the response of the lesbian and gay community to routine harassment and police raids, and were the catalyst that created worldwide lesbian and gay affirming political movements from the random homophile organisations of the 1950's and 1960's. Eventually, wider social awareness of the politics of sexuality encouraged self-reflective studies by lesbians, which challenged sexist and heterocentric accounts of lesbians' lives. In the 1980's, Lesbian Studies were recognised by academia, and lesbians formulated and articulated their views in various disciplines.

### ***C. Lesbians' History: the View From the Margins***

Mainstream histories of sexuality frequently focus upon the emergence of the pathologised individual since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and give the impression that lesbian history has only existed for the last one-hundred and fifty years. While the origins of individual and group identities are important, the androcentrism of many mainstream accounts detracts from histories of women who have loved women. Martha Vicinus observes sexology's influence has often been exaggerated in contexts that are ignorant of lesbians' histories.<sup>89</sup> The rise of Lesbian History as a discipline relied upon a small number of individual scholars who were willing and able to pursue half-forgotten, half-destroyed, and half-neglected stories.<sup>90</sup> Knowledge of lesbians' histories has allowed the recognition that socio-historical contexts played definitive roles in the construction of pathological paradigms, and ironically, they have provided the means of liberation from them.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, lesbian desire was categorised under four headings closely linked to the social class of the women concerned: the transvestite, the mannish woman, the free woman, and romantic friendships.<sup>91</sup> Early modern Europeans took transvestite women in their stride and the cross-dressed woman was a common figure.<sup>92</sup> Virtually all the surviving examples of these 'passing women' are of working class or

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<sup>89</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443.

<sup>90</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.433.

<sup>91</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.436.

<sup>92</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.436.

peasant women who sought more job opportunities, better pay, and greater freedom by dressing as men.<sup>93</sup> They are found in stories of female soldiers who often retained their biological identity as women and were simultaneously courageous fighters, gentle helpers, and loyal wives.<sup>94</sup> Cross-dressed actresses appeared on the 18<sup>th</sup> century stage, and were notoriously heterosexual, with the exception of Charlotte Charke, who is known to have delighted in playing on the possibilities of sexual transgression by wearing her breaches in public.<sup>95</sup> Outside these contexts, women who cross-dressed might have done so as the logical consequence of the absence of any social role for lesbians, combined with a tradition of women in men's clothing.<sup>96</sup> It has been argued that at this time women could only conceive of love for another woman in terms of the heterosexual paradigm, which would require lesbians to adopt masculine and feminine roles and dress. This might also explain why some women undertook the risk of marrying each other.<sup>97</sup>

The second heading under which lesbians of this period appeared was the 'mannish woman', the cross-dressed woman in 'male' attire who represented the forerunner of today's 'butch'. Long before the scientific studies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an essentialist identity had been assigned to same-sex sexual behaviour. Some suggested the cause of the 'mannish woman' was her elongated clitoris, while others believed her to be descended from distant peoples or cursed, either by the stars or by witchcraft.<sup>98</sup> More common than the 'mannish woman' is the 'free woman', who is portrayed as consuming both men and women.<sup>99</sup> Her appearance and behaviour could signal an erotic interest in women, but at other times—as prostitute, courtesan, or mistress—she partnered men. Much of the evidence of 'free women' is described as originating in pornography, politics, pamphlets, and

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<sup>93</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.436.

<sup>94</sup> Dianne Dugaw 1989, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650—1850* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), pp.148—158, cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.436—7.

<sup>95</sup> Charlotte Charke, 1755, *A Narrative of the Life of Charlotte Charke*, edited by Leonard RN Ashley, 1969, (Gainesville, Fla., Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints), cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.437.

<sup>96</sup> Rudolph Dekker & Lottie van de Pol, 1988, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (London, Macmillan), pp.54—55, 71, cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.437,

<sup>97</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.437.

<sup>98</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.439; & Elaine Hobby, 1989, 'Seventeenth-Century English Lesbianism: First Steps' (unpublished Conference paper, 'Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality', Amsterdam), cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.437.

<sup>99</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

gossip, which might have reflected and contributed towards images of lesbians of this period.<sup>100</sup> The most famous example is Marie Antoinette (1755—1793) who was repeatedly accused of political intrigue and bisexual 'debauchery'. The 'free woman' was frequently perceived as posing a threat to the normal political hierarchies because of her undue influence upon male leaders.<sup>101</sup>

'Romantic friendships' constitute the fourth most widely recognised category of lesbian desire. They were known during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when women's friendships were tightly controlled by notions of respectability. All families feared emotions that might threaten their position in a society whose foundations were its conventions.<sup>102</sup> However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been described as the heyday of 'romantic friendships'. 'Boston marriages', a New England term used to describe a long-term monogamous relationship between two otherwise unmarried women, were commonplace in literary circles, and there are many examples of women in 'romantic friendships' making inroads into the professions.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, these relationships were more prevalent among moneyed and aristocratic women than among those who needed public acceptance for economic reasons.<sup>104</sup> Many couples were highly respectable, and had one partner who was more active in the public sphere, possibly in a profession, while the other was more retiring. Wealthy women who avoided trespassing upon male prerogatives fared best, and this is exemplified by the 'Ladies of Llangollen', Eleanor Butler (1739) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755—1831), who were women of independent means and chose to live in remote north Wales.<sup>105</sup> During their lives, this couple faced down snide comments by appearing to be intellectual, desexualised, and other-worldly, which enabled their 'eccentricities' to be brushed aside by a circle of admirers.<sup>106</sup>

Romantic friends have often characterised their relationships as having a sense of being different, that they wanted more than other women

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<sup>100</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

<sup>101</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

<sup>102</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

<sup>103</sup> Lillian Faderman, 2000, 'Boston Marriage', pp.126—127, in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia* (London & NY, Garland); and, Lillian Faderman, 1981, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (NY, William Morrow), pp.190—230, cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.442.

<sup>104</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.442.

<sup>105</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.440.

<sup>106</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.439—440.

did, and a love of learning often represented a mutual interest.<sup>107</sup> The discipline of study was supposed to teach women to be rational and so to control their love for each other, but it probably led to desire for greater independence and increased the social stigma associated with women's close friendships.<sup>108</sup> The women concerned in such friendships often describe them as including a combination of emotional and physical feelings, and they emphasise the totality of the relationship rather than any outward appearance or sexual act. The degree of sexual involvement is disputed among scholars.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, women were punished most heavily when they trespassed upon male privilege, especially in religion or politics. The usual punishment for a woman who 'married' another woman was whipping and banishment, but records from 1721 reveal at least one woman being tried for sodomy and executed.<sup>110</sup> Dominant social paradigms were most threatened by the prospect of an active female sexuality, typically found in the sexually liberated woman who had long been the target of public moral outrage (and private sexual fantasies). Women who were not necessarily prostitutes or well connected could—at the price of their respectability—choose to live a sexually free life, and middle-class women began to wear 'masculine', or simply practical, clothing.<sup>111</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, male commentaries on occasional lesbian lovemaking became more commonplace, and public gossip shifted to unconventional women in artistic circles.<sup>112</sup> By the 1820's, the active, mannish, middle-class woman was found throughout Europe and America. Most insisted upon their sexual respectability, together with their right to enter male dominated areas, such as medicine, literature, art and travel.<sup>113</sup> This move entailed a social price, and in the 1830's, Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchatelet, a pioneering

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<sup>107</sup> Lillian Faderman, 1981, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, pp.42—3, cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

<sup>108</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438; also see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 1989 (1<sup>st</sup> published 1985), 'Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870—1936', pp.264—280, in Martin Bauml Duberman, et al, eds., *Hidden From History*.

<sup>109</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

<sup>110</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.439. Legal penalties are discussed by Judith C Brown, who says that lesbian sex was described as sodomy because it was an act against nature, and observes there were conceptual difficulties about lesbian sexuality that are reflected in the lack of an adequate terminology (1989, 'Lesbian Sexuality', p.73).

<sup>111</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.440.

<sup>112</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.440.

<sup>113</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.440.

French medical hygienist, linked the lives of prostitutes with those of cross-dressed lesbians. He supposed that these groups of women posed a threat to men because they embodied independent, active, and uncontrollable aspects of women's sexuality.<sup>114</sup> Parent-Duchatelet claimed that, 'lesbians have fallen to the last degree of vice to which a human creature can attain, and, for that very reason, they require a most particular surveillance on the part of those charged with the surveillance of prostitutes.'<sup>115</sup>

Women's same-sex relationships have been both categorised and limited by men's reactions to them, and discourse of such things has been a marginal aspect of masculine sexual discourse.<sup>116</sup> Women's sexual behaviour has never been isolated from, or independent of, male discourses.<sup>117</sup> Religion, pornography, literature and medicine were exclusively male discourses that defined female sexuality, and the various groups in which lesbians appeared were categorised as suspect long before sexologists' works.<sup>118</sup> Common understandings of lesbianism emphasized the circumstances of individuals, while biological explanations seemed to have been confined to educated, often medical men.<sup>119</sup> Their vocabulary was drawn from the classical world and they focussed upon what were considered the 'unnatural acts' compelled by the congenital defects of their subjects. The most common medical term was 'hermaphrodite' and the Greek word 'tribade' appeared in France and England during the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The word most frequently used in memoirs by the women themselves was 'Sapphic', which did not carry any explicit sexual connotation because dictionaries of the period rarely attached a sexual explanation to it.<sup>120</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, sexologists did not so much define lesbian identity as describe and categorise certain aspects of it.<sup>121</sup> Havelock Ellis's work was based upon his sample of six lesbians, comprised of his bisexual wife and her friends, and the rest of his female examples were drawn from

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<sup>114</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443.

<sup>115</sup> AJB Parent-Duchatelet, 1836, *La prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, Vol.1, p.170, quoted by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', Fn.60, p.451.

<sup>116</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.438.

<sup>117</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', pp.443—4.

<sup>118</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', pp.443—4.

<sup>119</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.436.

<sup>120</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.439.

<sup>121</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 1989 'The New Woman, 1870—1936', pp.268—9; & Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443

literature or history.<sup>122</sup> Like Krafft-Ebbing, Ellis identified lesbians by their masculine behaviour, and in his accounts, they seemed to crave male privilege and power as much as they desired women.<sup>123</sup> These male researchers were simply confirming the long-standing representation of women's 'social transgressions'—that is, women venturing into male preserves—as both the symptom and the cause of their sexual transgression.<sup>124</sup> However, the biologism of earlier generations' understandings ensured these theorists insisted upon the primacy of the body as the basis of appropriate public social behaviour (and private sexual acts), and established hegemonic notions of sex and gender. Rather than being labelled immoral choices, sexologists' long descriptions of 'deviant' sexual activities were now understood as innate and unchanging personal characteristics.<sup>125</sup>

'Romantic friendships' and 'passing women' existed long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the cross-dressed, 'mannish woman' transformed into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century 'butch'.<sup>126</sup> This shift inscribed gender upon the body as a permanent identity, and denied the possibilities of its theatricality. Accordingly, the butch became a deviant 'invert', the masculinised female. The butch's partner, the femme was presumed to be only an occasional lover of women, and readily distracted from her 'aberration' by the right man.<sup>127</sup> The femme was either passing as lesbian or passing as straight, her lesbianism being unseen unless she entered the frame either with a lesbian in male body drag or wearing it herself.<sup>128</sup> The femme retained her feminine characteristics and baffled sexologists, who found it impossible to identify and categorise her sexual preference from her appearance or behaviour.<sup>129</sup> As a female identified woman who desired women, the femme failed to conform to heterosexist assumptions, and by the late 1950's, she was

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<sup>122</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443.

<sup>123</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 1989 'The New Woman, 1870—1936', p.270; & Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443.

<sup>124</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443.

<sup>125</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.443.

<sup>126</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', pp.440—1.

<sup>127</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.441.

<sup>128</sup> Esther Newton, 1989 (1<sup>st</sup> published 1984), 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', pp.281—293, in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, & George Chauncey, Jr., *Hidden From History*, p.291. The variability of some, but not all, lesbians, is characterised in the rhyme, 'Butch in the streets, femme in the sheets', and tales of publicly powerful women sometimes being privately submissive, are rarely reflected in superficial observations. That sexologists failed to recognise this begs questions of the impartiality and scope of their research.

<sup>129</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.441.

identified as a chameleon, the consummate sexual predator that deceived unsuspecting victims.<sup>130</sup>

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries lesbian cultures flourished, and wealthy and intrepid women migrated to Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and other cities, where it was known that women like themselves could live openly and socially. An extraordinary number of lesbian and gay clubs and bars flourished in German cities, but none survived the Nazi takeover of 1933.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, in the US, a lively lesbian and gay nightlife was characteristic of Harlem during the 1920's, where the sexual freedom attracted both black and white women, while literary lesbians were attracted to Paris.<sup>132</sup> Some of the most striking aspects of these lesbian coteries were their efforts to express themselves creatively, which included gestures, costume, behaviour, and 'high culture', such as poetry, literature, art, and music.<sup>133</sup> Even this generation of extraordinary women could not escape the paradox that as women who privilege the body—by preferring women—they participated in the language and debates of sexuality that had already been defined by men. Two descriptors of a woman's body prevail: that it is the source of her greatest pleasure, and that it determines her destiny. Woman-as-body has been a male trope for too long to be overcome by simple rejection, however spirited or tragic.<sup>134</sup>

Ultimately, the complex, experimental, and flamboyant heritage of this first generation of self-identified lesbians, collapsed into the figure of the deprived and depraved '*femme damnee*'.<sup>135</sup> In front of every lesbian yawned the unbridgeable chasm that separated her self-perception from negative, masculinist conceptions of her constitution.<sup>136</sup> Some lesbian authors celebrated the tactile delights of women's bodies, but the lesbian body was primarily perceived as a curse, most famously depicted in Radclyffe Hall's

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<sup>130</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.440.

<sup>131</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.444.

<sup>132</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.444.

<sup>133</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.445.

<sup>134</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.445.

<sup>135</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446.

<sup>136</sup> Elyse Blankley, 1984, 'Return to Mytilene: Renee Vivien and the City of Women', in *Women Writers and the City*, ed. Susan Merrill Squier (Knoxville; University of Tennessee Press), pp.45—67, cited in Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.444.



fictitious character Stephen Gordon, hero of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928).<sup>137</sup> Without public or family acceptance, self-hatred was inevitable for her:

That night she stared at herself in the glass; and even as she did so, she hated her body with its muscular shoulders, its small compact breasts, and its slender flanks of an athlete. All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body . . . She longed to maim it, for it made her feel cruel . . . her eyes filled with tears and her hate turned to pity. She began to grieve over it . . .<sup>138</sup>

*The Well* depicted lesbians being undeniably benighted and full of self-hatred, while advocating that women should ultimately have sexual choice.<sup>139</sup> After a notorious trial in 1928, the book was banned in England. *The Well* was never banned in the US and France, and copies somehow made their way into the UK.<sup>140</sup>

The politically and economically turbulent 1930's narrowed women's sexual options, and little is known of lesbians during this era.<sup>141</sup> Social factors allowed some women to flaunt their sexuality, while others were punished or cowed into silence. Most of the evidence suggests that class and economic status have played important roles in relation to how lesbians have been perceived, and tolerated. Class divisions increased, and research shows that while the aristocratic lesbian popped up at favourite expatriate spas, and the middle class lesbian disappeared into discrete house parties, the working class lesbian was discovered among unemployed hitchhikers.<sup>142</sup> Evidence of the public role of lesbians at this time is found in popular psychology books, in which she was labelled dangerously independent.<sup>143</sup> By the 1950's, the lesbian's assigned role was one of defiance, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. If her sexual preference became known, she might be literally outcast, and lesbians faced the prospect of expulsion from their

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<sup>137</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.445; Radclyffe Hall, 1928, *The Well of Loneliness* (UK, Jonathan Cape).

<sup>138</sup> Radclyffe Hall, 1950 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1928), *The Well of Loneliness* (NY, Pocket Books), p.187, cited by Esther Newton, 1989, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian', p.289.

<sup>139</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.445—6

<sup>140</sup> In 1968, the Falcon Press published an edition in England without legal challenge.

<sup>141</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446.

<sup>142</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446. Vicinus (Fn.79) refers readers to, Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, 1977, 'Lesbianism in the 1920's and 1930's: A Newfound Study', *Signs* 2, pp.895—904; Marion K. Sanders, 1973, *Dorothy Thompson, A Legend in Her Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin); and, Box-Car Bertha, 1975, *Sister of the Road: An Autobiography*, as told to Ben L. Reitman (NY, Harper & Row).

<sup>143</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446.

families, homes, and occupations. The *femme damnee* was not just the product of a fevered literary imagination, and the doomed lesbian is an enduring image. The progressive view was that the lesbian was not damned but mentally ill; in reality, there was little to choose between the two.

During the 1950's and 60's, the vogue was for the mannish or butch lesbian, and her cross-dressing represented romantic excess, forbidden desire, and social marginality.<sup>144</sup> The butch was the product of a tangled history that embodied the outlawry of 'passing', the idealism of romantic friendships, and the theatricality of aristocratic play.<sup>145</sup> What has adhered most strongly to her image has been a sense of being different, and having a body that reflected a specific sexual identity. By the 1980's, the butch's partner, the femme who could pass, had (apparently) disappeared, but continues to have relevance when challenging heterosexist ideologies. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a rise in the numbers of visible lesbians and the flourishing of their cultures. The establishment of Lesbian Studies in academia was an important milestone in the journey of both self-knowledge and self-expression. Lesbians created environments in which they are able to define themselves and voice their experiences. Lesbian-feminist goals include opening discourses to the possibility an active female desire unimpeded by negative heterosexist stereotypical assumptions.<sup>146</sup>

Lesbian history demonstrates the continual jostling of two competing perspectives on the origins of lesbians' sexual feelings: they are either the product of social conditioning or the manifestation of an innate tendency. Lesbians themselves use both explanations. The history of lesbians includes considerations of the teenage crush, romantic friendship, Boston marriage, theatrical cross-dressing, the passing woman, prostitute, dyke, bull-dagger, stone-butch, butch, femme, and other identifications too numerous to mention, whose relationships might or might not have included genital sex.<sup>147</sup> Lesbians' histories do not rely upon essentialist references to overt sexual acts, and must be researched and written in ways that are able to include all the ways in which women's same-sex desire and the cultures that surround them have been presented.<sup>148</sup> Vicinus suggests that recovering lesbian history requires sensitivity to nuance, masks, secrecy, and the

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<sup>144</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446.

<sup>145</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446

<sup>146</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.446.

<sup>147</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.434.

<sup>148</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.432.

unspoken.<sup>149</sup> The polymorphous, even amorphous, sexuality of women is an invitation to multiple interpretive strategies, and lesbian's stories may be complicated, contradictory, and challenging.<sup>150</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Because of the social stigma associated with lesbianism, lesbians have existed primarily in private spheres, and sometimes formed communities that shared common interests and understandings that are now recognised as aspects of lesbian cultures.<sup>151</sup> Questions of when and under what circumstances modern lesbian identity arose are not answered by the usual criteria used by historians to explain social change.<sup>152</sup> Lesbian identity did not result from economic independence, or an ideology of individualism, or the formation of women's communities, although all of these elements have been important for enhancing women's personal choices and have been conducive to increasing lesbians' self-confidence.<sup>153</sup> The various ways in which sexuality has been understood by different disciplines have resulted in the recognition that abstract reasoning and social relations give the body its meanings, and while all feminists argue that patriarchal influences have caused these meanings to be mediated through phallogocentric images and discourses, lesbian-feminists argue for the recognition of the heterosexual lens.<sup>154</sup>

The lack of references to overt genital sexual acts in lesbian history challenges assumptions that lesbian identity is based solely upon sexual acts, and the widespread belief that such acts are the only constancy that defines 'lesbian' is ill conceived. Women's same-sex desire is the shared basis of 'lesbian' as a personal identity; however, in social contexts, overt expressions of women's same-sex desire are hard to find, and the many ways in which lesbians have been recognised throughout history indicate the complex nature of lesbian cultures. No single expression can typify lesbian experience, and like mainstream culture, lesbian cultures are mutable, they are changeable and unfixed, and have various expressions.

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<sup>149</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.434.

<sup>150</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.436.

<sup>151</sup> 'Culture' is defined as, 'The distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlook, etc., of a society or group; the way of life of a society or group' (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002).

<sup>152</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.435.

<sup>153</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.435—6.

<sup>154</sup> Lynne Segal, 1997, 'Sexualities', p.204

The premise of lesbian history is that women's same-sex desire has probably existed at all times and in all places, and women who desire each other probably found ways to recognise this, formed mutual bonds, and possibly did this in a coterie of like-minded women. There is cross-cultural evidence of such women being socially valued and enjoying religious approval.<sup>155</sup> In western contexts, however, lesbians' private lives have been translated into social and cultural phenomena that remain obscured in mainstream discourses, lesbians' lives and cultures have been hidden from history. The hegemonic processes that facilitated this are considered in Chapter Two. Sexuality and sexual identity are intertwined in western contexts, where identity itself is a cultural value.<sup>156</sup>

For centuries, lesbian cultures have existed in the margins of straight cultures. Descriptions of how lesbians have lived in various historical periods demonstrate that such lives are lived not simply in relation to sexual urges, which has been assumed when 'lesbian' has been taken to mark only sexual acts. Lesbian history has seen communities consolidate and dissolve in relation to social and cultural forces. Each lesbian community has had norms and expectations, and lesbians' lives have been affected by historical, social, and cultural influences. Desire remains the common foundation of lesbian sexuality and identity, but the ability to recognise the lesbian as a social being requires the additional recognition that the significance of her desire is socially and culturally formed. The lens of heterosexuality that colours mainstream reports of the world often renders them inappropriate for lesbians. The lesbians' social milieu has a different set of organising principles that require particular understandings and priorities that are the foundations of lesbian cultures. Lesbians' lives have much broader significance than sexual acts may represent. The meanings and structures built upon the basis of lesbian desire by lesbians constitute lesbians' cultures, which contain significant aspects of lesbians' social existence.

Mainstream studies have two major shortcomings: they fail to recognise that sexual identification also applies to heterosexuals, who are privileged by not having to claim it, and that lesbians' relationships and the

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<sup>155</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, 1993, 'Lesbians in American Indian Cultures', pp.106—117, in Martin Bauml Duberman, et al, eds., *Hidden From History*; and, Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror: The Construction of Lesbianism and the Anthropological Discourse on Homosexuality', pp.1—18 in Evelyn Blackwood, ed., *The Many Faces of Homosexuality: Anthropological approaches to Homosexual Behaviour* (NY, Hawthorn).

<sup>156</sup> Estelle B. Freedman, et al, 1984, "Editorial", 'The Lesbian Issue', *Signs*, 9/4 (Summer 1984), p.554, cited by Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.432.

women who engaged in them had been stigmatised long before 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific studies. Mainstream studies, especially of religion and society, often reiterate widely held negative understandings of lesbians' lives, while failing to consider lesbians' views and self-perceptions. Lesbian's own histories come from the cultural margins, and by looking to the margins, ruptures, and breaks, it is possible to piece together a history of women speaking to each other.<sup>157</sup> Lesbian history is one of discontinuities: it is rarely known what women in the past did with each other, in bed or out, and historians are unable to reconstruct detailed accounts of how and under what circumstances lesbian communities evolved.<sup>158</sup> Today, many lesbians are able to be open about the significance of their relationships. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that lesbians are 'out' in every sphere of their lives, and questions persist of the whereabouts of women who pass. In mainstream social spaces, lesbians lives include varying degrees of being 'closeted' and being 'out', and indeterminacy is a key aspect of existence for many lesbians.

The moves that have made it particularly difficult to recover lesbians' histories include both social and academic machinations that have rendered lesbians invisible. Knowledge of the widespread and insidious repressive processes faced by lesbians facilitates an understanding of the significance of representation to lesbians and allows some insight into the strategies used to resist hegemonic forces. While reports of lesbians' histories considered some of the social forces that repress lesbians, the following chapter allows some insight into the significance of lesbian Buddhists' invisibility by offering a more detailed consideration of the moves that repress lesbians' representations.

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<sup>157</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.434.

<sup>158</sup> Martha Vicinus, 1993, 'They Wonder', p.434.

## Chapter 2

### Lesbian Invisibility

#### ***Introduction***

Unless there are clear indications to the contrary, it is courteous to assume all people are heterosexual. This convention ensures that to maintain their integrity, lesbians must mark their sexual orientation or 'come out'. The coming out process involves lesbians being prepared to confront social stigma, ostracism, and threats of violence, while being aware that coming out strategies, rather than being recognised as acts of personal integrity, are often taken to mark sexual obsession. The polite assumption of heterosexuality, the dangers of 'coming out', and the stigma associated with homosexuality, together indicate heterosexuality being a compulsory norm. The gap between this compulsory norm and the reality of lesbians' lives represents 'the closet', where sexual identity remains concealed and lesbians must either pass or come out.

This chapter offers a brief introduction to how the forces maintaining lesbians' invisibility operate. The relatively high profile of lesbians in the media in recent years has resulted in the concept of lesbian invisibility being less obvious. Nevertheless, lesbians are under represented in many social, cultural, and academic areas, and are not represented at all in others.<sup>1</sup> In the same way that women's invisibility assists the maintenance of patriarchy, lesbians' invisibility assists the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality.<sup>2</sup> Conventions that render lesbians both mute and invisible have impeded the recognition of lesbians' lives and cultures, limited all women's sexual choices, and curtailed lesbians' knowledge of their heritage, so that successive generations have had to construct their own meanings.

Lesbians' invisibility is examined here in four sections. Section one, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', explores the concept of compulsory heterosexuality in a brief summary of Adrienne Rich's seminal

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space, Time, and Perversions*, (London & NY, Routledge), p.219.

<sup>2</sup> Lesbian History Group (LHG), 1993, 'Introduction', pp.1—18, in LHG, eds., *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840—1985* (London, Women's Press), p.16.

article of the same name.<sup>3</sup> By reviewing the practices and assumptions made by social anthropologists, section two, 'Lesbians' invisibility', considers how academic studies have maintained lesbians' invisibility.<sup>4</sup> If Social Anthropology, the discipline that can most easily justify studies of lesbians' lives, has maintained lesbians' invisibility, then how much more likely is this to be the case in other disciplines. Section three, 'Lesbians' disappearance', explains how articles that focus upon 'women' or 'homosexuals' are often wrongly assumed to include, and therefore to represent, lesbians' interests. On some occasions, lesbians' interests do coincide with those of heterosexual women or gay men, but on most occasions, lesbians' interests are best represented by lesbians, and this is rarely acknowledged outside Lesbian Studies. The final section, 'Queer', offers a lesbian-feminist view of how queer's analysis of identity renders lesbians indistinguishable from gay men and heterosexual perverts.

#### **A. Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence<sup>5</sup>**

In 1980, Adrienne Rich wrote 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' to encourage all feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution that disempowers women. It was the first article to compile evidence of heterosexuality being a compulsory norm. At that time, the feminist movement was questioning psychoanalytical and biological explanations of sexuality, and Rich reasons that if the search for love and tenderness in both sexes originally leads towards women as mothers, then why would women ever re-direct that search on to men.<sup>6</sup> The article questions widely held assumptions that species survival and impregnation are coterminous with emotional and erotic relationships, and argues that all women's relationships exist in a 'lesbian continuum'.

Rich presents the arguments in four stages. In the first stage, feminists' works that assume a woman's innate trajectory is heterosexuality and motherhood are critiqued for failing to consider the constraints and

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<sup>3</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, (first published 1980), 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', pp.227—254 in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, & David M. Halperin (eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (Routledge, London & NY).

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows: Challenging the Silence in the Study of Sexuality', pp.452—473, in Darlene M. Juschka, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London & NY, Continuum).

<sup>5</sup> This title was originally used by Adrienne Rich in 1980. References made here are to its 1993 publication, in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, & David M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (Routledge, London & NY), pp.209—32.

<sup>6</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.232.

sanctions that compel women towards heterosexual relationships.<sup>7</sup> Because they fail to consider these things, feminist writings collude with the forces that compel women towards heterosexuality. The second stage questions why violent strictures have been necessary to enforce women's loyalty and subservience to men, and details some of the social forces that have redirected women's energies away from themselves and other women.<sup>8</sup> These forces are categorised under eight headings, which elaborate how under patriarchy men have the power to,

1. Deny women an independent sexuality.
2. Force male sexuality upon women.
3. Command or exploit women's labour to control women's produce.
4. Control or deny women access to their children.
5. Confine women physically and prevent their movement.
6. Use women as objects in male transactions.
7. Cramp women's creativeness.
8. Withhold from women large areas of society's knowledges and cultural attainments . . .<sup>9</sup>

Many of the circumstances Rich describes have been recognised as legitimate areas of concern by human rights organisations and politicians. However, Rich's purpose was to illustrate how clusters of forces have functioned to convince women that heterosexual coupling and marriage are inevitable components of their lives, even though many women might have experienced them as unsatisfactory or oppressive. Masculine interests have engendered cultural hegemonies that ensure women are governed by masculine norms and expectations, often despite their own inner knowledges and drives.<sup>10</sup>

In the third stage of her argument, Rich proposes the 'lesbian continuum' as a solution to the compulsory nature of heterosexuality.<sup>11</sup> Women have been taught that heterosexual family life is their natural destiny, and few women have been willing to abandon this in favour of life as a lesbian, which is unknown and alien to such expectations.<sup>12</sup> Both sexual and non-sexual alternatives to heterosexual relationships have been regarded as pathological, deviant, and emotionally and sensually deprived.

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<sup>7</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.228—32.

<sup>8</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.232—9

<sup>9</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.233

<sup>10</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.234

<sup>11</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.239—244

<sup>12</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.242. Many lesbians claim their identity after fulfilling heterosexist expectations by being married or having children.



Against this, the 'lesbian continuum' makes visible the many positive truths and possibilities of relationships between women, and challenges the assumption that they should be set aside from the erotic.<sup>13</sup> Citing Audrey Lorde, Rich describes a female erotic that is an assertion of the life force of women and unconfined to single parts of the body. The female erotic is present in the sharing of joy—whether physical, emotional, or psychic—and in sharing work; it is an empowering joy that makes women less willing to accept powerlessness, resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression and self-denial.<sup>14</sup> Rich fashions these mutual positive aspects of women's friendships into the 'lesbian continuum', under which all relationships between women are categorised 'lesbian' regardless of whether the women identify as such.

By naming all women's relationships 'lesbian', Rich deployed a strategy that was intended to bridge their interests. In contrast to the 'female eroticism' that she describes as an aspect of all relationships between women, Rich describes 'lesbian existence' in exclusively political terms: as the breaking of a taboo, the rejection of a compulsory way of life, and an attack on the assumption that males have the right to access all women.<sup>15</sup> When surrounded by hegemonic heterosexuality, there is a nascent feminist political intent in the act of a woman choosing a woman lover, and this underpins the article's understanding of 'lesbian existence'.<sup>16</sup> Rich argues this understanding might be liberating for all women because it challenges widespread assumptions of what a woman is. When lesbian existence is recognised, it demands a conscious restructuring of feminist analysis and criticism, and not just the token references found in many feminist works.<sup>17</sup> Rich equates lesbian existence to motherhood because it is a profoundly female experience that has particular expressions, meanings and potentials that cannot be recognised while it is understood only as a sexually stigmatised existence. One of the many lies of compulsory heterosexuality is that women turn to women for their primary relationships because they hate men. Existence as a lesbian is often presented as a refuge from men rather than an eclectic and empowering charge between women, of which many are ignorant.

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<sup>13</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.240

<sup>14</sup> Audre Lorde, 1984 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1978), 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power', pp.53—9, in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA, Crossing Press), pp.55—58.

<sup>15</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.239—40

<sup>16</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.245

<sup>17</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.248

Rich opens the fourth section saying,

Woman identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, curtailed and contained under the institution of heterosexuality. The denial of reality and visibility to women's passion for women, women's choice of women allies, life companions, and community, the forcing of such relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure have meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other*. The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today afflicts not just feminist scholarship, but every profession, every reference work, every curriculum, every organizing attempt, every relationship or conversation over which it hovers.<sup>18</sup>

Enforcing heterosexuality has kept countless numbers of women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality, into a prescribed script. The history of female resistance to patriarchal control has never been fully understood because the records of lesbians' lives have been fragmented and erased, and the denial of women's passion for women has successfully reduced the power of women to challenge and alter the relationship between the sexes.<sup>19</sup>

Many lesbian-feminists critique Rich's article on the basis that it fractures and desexualises the meaning of 'lesbian'. In the continuum, 'lesbian' becomes an ambiguous term and lesbian sexuality is indistinguishable from women's heterosexuality.<sup>20</sup> Lesbian-feminists have sometimes emphasized their resistance to traditional heterosexual relationships and their emotional commitment to women by offering de-sexualised political understandings of 'lesbian' that attempt to redress understanding 'lesbian' solely in terms of sexual activities. Similarly, Rich's real lesbian, signified by 'lesbian existence', is defined solely in terms of political resistance, and her sexual dimension has been translated into the sensual experiences present in all women's friendships. The lesbian continuum facilitates the sensuous connections between women being recognised and represented without having to face the threats that attend existence as a lesbian.<sup>21</sup> The phrase 'lesbian continuum' embraces the greatest variety of positive female relationships and a different kind of respect is paid to existence as a lesbian.

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<sup>18</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.244. Original italics.

<sup>19</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.244—46

<sup>20</sup> 'Lesbian Continuum', in Maggie Humm, 1995 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (NY & London, Prentice Hall) p.148.

<sup>21</sup> Adrienne Rich, 1993, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', pp.248—9.

The relevance of Rich's article is maintained by its groundbreaking critique of heterosexuality as an institution and its introduction of the concepts 'compulsory heterosexuality', 'lesbian continuum', and 'lesbian existence'. In 1990, Judith Butler referred to 'compulsory heterosexuality', and described heterosexual coherence as a regulatory fiction, which is consistent with Rich's claims.<sup>22</sup> Also in 1990, Mary Rose D'Angelo relied upon Rich's concept of the 'lesbian continuum' to justify describing as 'lesbian' the commitments between women of the New Testament.<sup>23</sup> In 1993, by referring to both definitions of 'lesbian', the Lesbian History Group enabled lesbians in history to be identified without proof of genital sexual activity.<sup>24</sup> Not all academics favour such a wide-ranging definition of 'lesbian', and Sheila Jeffreys has objected to one that includes heterosexual women who love their women friends because it renders the specifics of lesbian experience and oppression difficult to articulate.<sup>25</sup> In 1995, Alison Webster observed that if heterosexuality is unquestioned in secular disciplines and in feminist critiques of such disciplines, then it is hardly surprising that it remains unquestioned in Christian theologies.<sup>26</sup> By 2001, Rich's article had become an established text of lesbian-feminist theorising, and Blackwood and Wieringa cite it when arguing that lesbian experience is not a mirror image of either heterosexual or male homosexual experience.<sup>27</sup> They accept that many societies are characterised by a system of compulsory heterosexuality, but critique Rich's assumption that it functioned in the same way in all cultures.<sup>28</sup> However, Rich would not have had access to the observation that homosexuality did not mean the same thing cross-culturally, which implies that heterosexuality did not mean the same thing, because it had not been published at the time Rich was writing. Nevertheless, such critiques demonstrate Rich's arguments have continuing relevance.<sup>29</sup> Rich's observations have been fundamental for theorising

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<sup>22</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (NY & London, Routledge), p. x, & 136.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Rose D'Angelo, 1990, 'Women Partners in the New Testament', pp.441—455, in Gary David Comstock & Susan E Henking, eds., *Queering Religion: A Critical Anthology* (NY, Continuum), p.444, & 455.

<sup>24</sup> LHG, 1993, 'Introduction', p. 3, & 13.

<sup>25</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, 1993, 'Does it matter if they do it?', pp.19—28, in LHG, eds., *Not a Passing Phase*, p.22.

<sup>26</sup> Alison R Webster, 1995, *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality* (London & NY, Cassell), p.50 & 66.

<sup>27</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.460 & 465.

<sup>28</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.467.

<sup>29</sup> Blackwood and Wieringa credit Joseph Carrier with being the first anthropologist to observe homosexuality not meaning the same thing in all cultures (1980,

lesbian existence and the compulsory nature of heterosexuality. The article focuses attention upon 'lesbian' being variously defined, while ongoing compulsory heterosexuality and lesbians' invisibility maintain its relevance.

### ***B. Lesbians' Invisibility***

Lesbians' invisibility is key to understanding their oppression and is obvious when they simply do not appear; however, it is not so obvious when they are excluded from academic reports that claim to represent them. Of all the academic disciplines, Social Anthropology is most able to justify researching 'homosexuals', and if lesbians have not been represented in its studies or have been represented inaccurately, then how much more likely is this to be true in other academic disciplines. The moves that have ensured lesbians' invisibility in anthropological studies are clarified here in a brief report of Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa's article, 'Sapphic Shadows: Challenging the Silence in the Study of Sexuality'.<sup>30</sup> When gathering reliable data about women's same-sex sexual relationships, the attitudes of scholars and academic institutions have caused many problems that have added to the difficulties researchers faced in the field. The following account considers the problems in three periods: before and after the World War II, and since the 1980's.<sup>31</sup> It is important to bear in mind that, prior to 1980, it was often mistakenly assumed that homosexuality had the same significance in all cultures and for both genders.

The lack of evidence of lesbian relationships has been justified in all periods by the self-fulfilling claim that there was little evidence of them. The scarce nature and poor quality of information has been the consequence of various problems encountered in the collection and interpretation of data, and the reluctance of western scholars to address questions of sexuality. These circumstances have been further complicated by inadequate reporting, which is typified by reports of male same-sex sexual activity being accompanied by the observation, 'the same can be said of women'. The intent behind such comments might have been inclusivity, but they often indicated the most unlikely behaviours being enacted by women, while creating and reinforcing stereotypical myths of lesbians' masculine and predatory behaviours.

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'Homosexual Behaviour in Cross-cultural Perspective', pp.100—122, in Judd Marmor, ed., *Homosexual Behaviour: A Modern Reappraisal* [NY, Basic Books], cited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.458).

<sup>30</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows'.

<sup>31</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.452.

Before the Second World War, only a handful of western anthropologists gathered and published material on women's same-sex sexual practices, the invisibility of which can be directly related to the circumstances and limitations of observers.<sup>32</sup> Researchers into homosexuality faced negative personal and professional repercussions, regardless of their own sexual orientation. Self-censorship was a defensive strategy that continues to be necessary in some academic institutions.<sup>33</sup> Before 1939, western taboos against homosexuality were a tangible force, and some anthropological researchers published their findings only after retirement. Between 1967 and 1986, three famous anthropologists, Malinowski, Evans Prichard, and van Lier, published studies of same-sex sexuality that were based on their fieldworks completed an average of forty-two years earlier.<sup>34</sup> These delays represent deliberate self-censorship by men who were at the top of their field, and demonstrate that the stigma associated with research on homosexuality restricted knowledge by curtailing both research and its publication. Publication was eventually facilitated by the researchers' retirements, which released them from the constraints of academic institutions, while the intervening years witnessed increasing tolerance of lesbian and gay issues.

Obstacles continued to be placed in the way of women's attempts to conduct studies of sexuality. Before the 1990's, and the rise of Lesbian Studies, women's careers failed to flourish if they studied sexuality. Saskia Wieringa details some of the prejudice she faced when conducting anthropological research on women's same-sex sexual relationships. Her fieldwork proposal, in 1983, was met with disapproval and suggestions that, 'such women could not be found in the third world'. Later, in 1993, Wieringa published accounts of her initial encounters with lesbians under a

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<sup>32</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror: The construction of Lesbianism and the Anthropological Discourse on Homosexuality', pp.1—17, in her *The Many Faces of Homosexuality: Anthropological Approaches to Homosexual Behaviour* (NY, Harrington Park Press), p.9; & Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.453—7.

<sup>33</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.453—7; and, Gayle S Rubin, 1993 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1984), 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', pp.3—44 in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M Halperin, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (NY & London, Routledge), p.16.

<sup>34</sup> The three researchers are: Branislaw Malinowski, 1967, who published diaries of his 1920's fieldwork with the Trobrianders; Evans-Prichard, 1970, whose 'Sexual Inversion Among the Azande', was based in his fieldwork of the 1930's; and, van Lier, 1986, whose 'Tropical Tribades', was based in his fieldwork of 1947 (Blackwood & Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp. 453—456).

pseudonym because she feared that publicity about her sexual orientation might jeopardize the research project she was co-ordinating.<sup>35</sup>

Information of female same-sex sexual relationships exists from before World War II, but is scarce, of questionable reliability, and must be read with awareness that the racism and misogyny of authors, informants, and interpreters might have been influential.<sup>36</sup>

The 'colonial gaze' of these observers tended to portray the 'natives' they came in contact with as 'primitive' and 'pagan'. Their emphasis on sexual customs served as proof of how 'close to nature' these groups were. The exotization of colonized peoples was achieved by the eroticization of their lives.<sup>37</sup> Apart from the biases of early observers, informants may have had their own motives in telling tales of certain sexual customs. Hypersexualizing others was not only done by travellers and missionaries but may also have been a way for instance, in which informants expressed interethnic tensions.<sup>38</sup>

Researchers were often ignorant of sexual diversity, and unable to obtain answers about women's sexual practices because of their reluctance or inability to ask questions of women.<sup>39</sup> Women's homosexuality was believed to be a result of living in sex-segregated conditions that occurred in polygynous relationships, and all-female living arrangements that denied them access to men.<sup>40</sup> Women's same-sex practices were assumed not to exist where men were plentiful and the possibility of married women engaging in non-heterosexual practices was unthinkable.<sup>41</sup> Early ethnographers witnessed some customs and supplemented this with information from missionaries and other travellers. However, even the most open and well-meaning enquirers have been excluded by local customs, and cultural prejudices.<sup>42</sup> In some places, informants' prejudices have been instigated by colonial and postcolonial interventions, and indigenous groups

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<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Blackwood & Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.453, citing Saskia Wieringa, 1993, 'Feminist Anthropology since the Mid-Seventies: From Monocausality to Diversity, A Personal View', in M Krueger, ed., *Was Heisst Hier Eigentlich Feministisch?* (Bremen, Donat).

<sup>36</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p. 456.

<sup>37</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.456. At this point, the authors include a footnote reference to the infamous example of the tour through Europe of a south African woman, the so-called 'Hottentot Venus', to demonstrate aspects of her anatomy and genitalia that were deemed different from European women's (p.468).

<sup>38</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.456.

<sup>39</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.454—455.

<sup>40</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.454—455.

<sup>41</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp. 454—455.

<sup>42</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p. 456.

have frequently suppressed or rewritten accounts of same-sex eroticism to conform to colonisers' expectations.<sup>43</sup>

After the Second World War, the constraints upon researching sexual practices were gradually relaxed. However, most studies focused upon 'structurally analogous sexual practice', that is, sex with a member of one's own sex, which was assumed to mean the same for women as it did for men.<sup>44</sup> Many researchers assumed lesbianism to be the mirror image of male homosexuality, so that behaviours witnessed among homosexual men, together with any theories built upon them, could be applied to women.<sup>45</sup> This assumption confirmed masculinist theories of female homosexuality. Investigators often claimed that their attention was necessarily focussed upon men because of the paucity of data on lesbians, and the systems that supported women's homosexual relationships were less well developed, less common, and less visible.<sup>46</sup> Occasionally, women were consulted, but the final reports did not give women's relationships and men's relationships the same degree of attention and level of analysis.<sup>47</sup> Most frequently, research excluded women's relationships, while theories about them were included in conclusions.<sup>48</sup> Misleading, inaccurate, and prejudiced reporting of women's same-sex sexual relationships ensured them being misconceived and misunderstood, and the realities were virtually unknown before the 1980's. Standard phrases, such as 'females were known to' or 'no examples of females are known', continued to obfuscate the circumstances of

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<sup>43</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p. 456; who cite, among other examples, the Amazons of Dahomey, a troop of warrior women of the King of the Fon, which was disbanded by the French in 1894. Karsch-Haack has written of the women not being allowed to marry or have children, and of their female attendants or courtesans who served them sexually. Since their disbandment, knowledge of the group has almost disappeared because of the colonisers' preference not to discuss sexual questions. (Ferdinand Karsch-Haack, 1911, *Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvolker* [Munich, Reinhardt], p. 480, in Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p. 456).

<sup>44</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.457—460.

<sup>45</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror', p.6.

<sup>46</sup> Blackwood & Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.457, cite two examples of such justifications: Ford, Clellan S, and Frank Beach, 1951, *Patterns of Sexual Behaviour* (NY: Harper), and Paul Gebhard, 1971, 'Human Sexual Behaviour: A Summary Statement', pp.206—17, in Donald S Marshall and Robert C Suggs, eds., *Human Sexual Behaviour: Variations in the Ethnographic Spectrum* (NY, Basic Books).

<sup>47</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.459—460.

<sup>48</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.459—460, citing examples from David Greenberg (1988, *The Construction of Homosexuality* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press], pp.19, 74, 75, & 183), and Barry Adam (1986, 'Age, Structure, and Sexuality: Reflections on the Anthropological Evidence on Homosexual Relations', pp.19—33, in Evelyn Blackwood, ed., *The Many Faces of Homosexuality: Anthropological approaches to Homosexual Behaviour*, [NY: Hawthorn]).

consultations with women, and raised questions of whether or not researchers' conclusions could be applied to women. In the 1930's, Balinese boys on bicycles were reported as having pursued European men in order to solicit them, and the footnote of one report, published as recently as 1992, implied that Balinese girls similarly solicited older European ladies, which is unlikely to have been profitable.<sup>49</sup>

In the late 1980's, Lesbian and Gay Studies contributed new materials and methods to anthropological analyses. In an important attempt to theorise homosexuality cross-culturally, Joseph Carrier concluded that homosexuality does not always have the same meaning in all cultures.<sup>50</sup> He also observed that male homosexual behaviour appeared to be more regulated than female homosexual behaviour, and speculated this might be because of men's higher status in most societies and their role as protectors of women and children. Gayle Rubin has argued that where men have control over women, lesbians would be subject to more suppression than gay men, and lesbians' invisibility is associated with male dominated societies.<sup>51</sup> Blackwood has suggested that it is precisely within societies stratified by class and gender that the visibility of women's same-sex sexual relationships is lacking or limited to clandestine relations and marginalised groups.<sup>52</sup> Carrier did not consider that men's higher status in patriarchal societies might be sufficient reason for their increased regulation, and his lack of attention to female sexuality raises questions of the usefulness of his study to women.<sup>53</sup>

Many studies produced typologies that were applied to men and women's practices, although analyses rarely included data on female sexuality. Conclusions were often based on men's same-sex sexual practices

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<sup>49</sup> Gosse Kerkhof, 1992, 'Het Indiesche Zendenschandaal: een koloniaal incident', pp.92—111, in Raymond Feddema, ed. *Wat Beweegt de Bamboe? Geschiedenissen uit Zuidoost Azie* (Amsterdam, Het Spinhios), p.203, cited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.455.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Carrier, 1980, 'Homosexual Behaviour in Cross-cultural Perspective', pp.100—122, in Judd Marmor, ed., *Homosexual Behaviour: A Modern Reappraisal* (NY: Basic Books), cited in Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.458.

<sup>51</sup> Gayle Rubin, 1975, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', pp.157—210, in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, (NY: Monthly Review Press), cited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.463.

<sup>52</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror', cited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.463.

<sup>53</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.458.



and might be described 'masculinist'.<sup>54</sup> Typologies are often relied upon when defining 'homosexuals', and one example in Buddhist Studies is Peter Harvey's, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, which uses Gilbert Herdt's typology of homosexual relationships (age-structured, gender-reversed, and role-specialised).<sup>55</sup> The criteria referred to do not conform with what lesbians themselves believe are important aspects of their relationships, and typologies often entrench masculinist ideals when authors fail to pay sufficient attention to lesbians. In 1986, Evelyn Blackwood published a typology of women's same-sex sexual relationships that has only two definitions, 'informal' and 'formal', determined by the degree of integration of the relationship with the women's social networks.<sup>56</sup>

Feminists' studies highlight the diversity of women's sexuality, and indicate that previous anthropological studies had often assumed family and kinship to conform to the European Christian heterosexual model.<sup>57</sup> Studies in the past often emphasized women's reproductive and maternal roles, whereas recent studies demonstrate women's lives include a range of social relations not defined by domestic caretaking. The revelation that some women choose to create families with women highlights the need to distinguish between female and male homosexual practices and experiences, and challenges assumptions that male and female domestic coupling is 'natural' and inevitable.<sup>58</sup> Heterosexual marriage might be the norm in all societies, but sexuality does not equal marriage, nor does marriage deny women's creation of, and participation in, other sexual practices.<sup>59</sup> Western notions of sexuality are embedded in gender ideologies that impose different constraints on women and men, whose gender roles are structured

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<sup>54</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.458. Their examples of masculinist typologies include five kinds of relationships: transgendered or gender differentiated relations, where partners occupy different gender roles; transgenerational, or age differentiated relations, where partners belong to different generations; egalitarian relations, where partners occupy the same status category; Greenberg added a class differentiated type, where partners belong to different classes; and, Herdt added a role specialised category, that facilitates the inclusion of shamans and others with a role to fulfil that sanctions homosexual acts (Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', pp.458—9, citing David F. Greenberg, 1988, *The Construction of Homosexuality* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press]; & Gilbert Herdt, 1988, 'Cross-Cultural Forms of Homosexuality and the Concept "Gay"', *Psychiatric Annals*, 18 [1], pp.37—9).

<sup>55</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.411; Gilbert Herdt, 1987, 'Homosexuality', pp.445—53, in M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religions* (NY & London, Macmillan), p.446.

<sup>56</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror', p.10.

<sup>57</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.464.

<sup>58</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.465.

<sup>59</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.466.

differently in all cultures. Sex-roles, behaviours, meanings, and desires, vary according to biological sex, and the structures of male and female homosexuality cannot be the same, or even similar.<sup>60</sup> Studies by women pay attention to how gender ideologies have controlled and limited the expression of women's sexuality. They also draw attention to significant factors influencing women's same-sex sexual practices, which are not the same as, or even similar to, the factors that influence men's. Furthermore, these significant factors are not always mutually applicable. For example, the oppressive conditions within marriage for women in China that gave rise to marriage resistance sisterhoods had no parallel among Chinese men, who were entitled to control their wives and family property.<sup>61</sup>

Anthropological studies conducted during the 1980's made the extent of female same-sex sexual practices visible for the first time and called into question previous assertions of the scarcity of lesbians' relationships. In 1951, women's same-sex sexual relationships were known to exist in only seventeen societies, whereas by 1984 they were known in ninety-five societies: an observation that is intended to reflect the shoddy nature of previous scholarship, rather than the proliferation of lesbians.<sup>62</sup> Cross-cultural evidence speaks of the plurality of women's sexual practices, and recent studies reveal women's same-sex sexual relationships being embedded in wider social relations of kinship and exchange, and they co-exist with married, heterosexual relationships in many societies.<sup>63</sup> Studies have also demonstrated women's same-sex sexual relationships being socially legitimated, contrary to western assumptions.<sup>64</sup> These insights indicate how the invisibility of lesbians has been maintained in academic works, primarily because male dominated gender ideologies have controlled and limited reports of women's sexuality. While the circumstances in different academic disciplines have varied, the prevalent attitudes and assumptions demonstrated in Social Anthropology represent conventions that were applied consistently throughout academia.

### ***C. Lesbians' Disappearance***

<sup>60</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror', p.6; & Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.460.

<sup>61</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.463.

<sup>62</sup> Ford and Beach, 1951, *Patterns of Sexual Behaviour* (NY, Harper); & Evelyn Blackwood, 1984, MA thesis, *Cross-cultural Dimensions of Lesbian Relations* (San Francisco, State University), cited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.461. These figures are not definitive.

<sup>63</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, 1986, 'Breaking the Mirror', and Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.464.

<sup>64</sup> Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E Wieringa, 2001, 'Sapphic Shadows', p.467.

In the heterosexual mainstream, 'women' is translated into 'heterosexual women', and lesbians disappear, while in the homosexual margins, 'homosexual' is translated into 'gay men', and lesbians disappear. The dominating influences of heterosexual women and gay men ensure the status of lesbians as women who live in cultures that are focussed upon women's interests disappears. Dominant social groups generate models that impede the free expression of alternatives, and the ways in which sex, gender, and sexual orientation interact often render lesbians mute and invisible.

Lesbians' absences might be anticipated in traditional discourse, but not in feminist discourse.<sup>65</sup> Even while feminists no longer make the essentialising assumptions that 'woman' signifies a set of universal values, assumptions continue to be made that 'feminism' represents all women's interests. A feminist position that insists on being equally inclusive of all women would be a feminism of bland generality that includes all but speaks to no one in particular.<sup>66</sup> To understand lesbians' absence in feminist works it is necessary to question if all feminist interests necessarily include those of lesbians, and if the frameworks used for feminist theory may be presumed adequate for theorising lesbians.<sup>67</sup>

Some feminist works acknowledge lesbians simply by a linguistic nod in occasional references to 'lesbian', 'sexual-orientation', or 'sexualities', but fail to appreciate lesbians' differences.<sup>68</sup> When lesbians have made an appearance, they have sometimes been portrayed as asexual beings whose sexual desire has been replaced by an attenuated 'women loving', where the presumed heterosexual continuity between biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality, remains unchallenged.<sup>69</sup> Lesbians' differences are most apparent in their own writing, in anthropologies and autobiographies, where coming out stories challenge assumptions that heterosexual marriage and motherhood constitute the 'normal' trajectory of women's lives.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Tamsin Wilton, 1997 'Healing the Invisible Body: Lesbian Health Studies', pp.212—27 in Gabriele Griffin and Sonya Andermahr, eds., *Straight Studies Modified: Lesbian interventions in the Academy* (London & Washington, Cassell), p.217

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space*, p.157.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space*, p.157.

<sup>68</sup> Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'The Gender Closet: lesbian disappearance under the sign "women"', pp. 209—32, in Martha Vicinus, ed. *Lesbian Subjects: a feminist studies reader* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press), p.210.

<sup>69</sup> Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'Gender Closet', p.210

<sup>70</sup> Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'Gender Closet', p.211

In some works, feminist values and goals have worked against the representation of lesbians' differences, and the invocation of difference itself may cause lesbian differences to disappear.<sup>71</sup> Differences between race and class often distract from theorising lesbians' differences. Because lesbians are present in all races and all classes, sexual orientation does not represent an obvious feature of these differences and it rarely enters into their presentation or analyses. The invisibility of black lesbians is not analogous to racial discrimination but is rather an effect of heterosexism. Writing about lesbians and race, Bidy Martin has described the totalising effects of discourses of identity,

(For those) who identify themselves as lesbians, lesbianism clearly does not figure as the exclusive ground of either identity or politics; however, it is neither divisible from nor subordinate to other identities. . . . Even as attention to racism interrupts any conception of lesbianism as the exclusive ground of identity and politics, lesbianism interrupts other potentially totalizing self-identifications.<sup>72</sup>

Feminist methodologies have often required women to abandon the true complexities of their histories, communities, and locations, in the name of a unity that has rarely marked its white, middle-class, heterosexual basis.<sup>73</sup> When invoking 'working class, women of colour', feminists have often failed to recognise that heterosexism cuts across race and class structures. Heterosexism is the barrier between women that does not appear, while race and class are not as frequently excluded.<sup>74</sup> The invocation of 'working-class-women-of-colour' causes lesbians to disappear because it does not include the lesbian position, and so it implies the differences feminism foregrounds are those experienced by heterosexual women.<sup>75</sup>

Historically, women have been denied access to sexual discourse, and many representations of lesbians have been based upon how men imagined them to be. Patriarchy and androcentrism have functioned to ensure that lesbians have had few authentic representations, and lesbian invisibility has resulted in not only misunderstandings and misrepresentations of lesbians, but also ignorance of the effects of gender upon sexual behaviour. Lesbian invisibility runs through much of the history of western culture, in contrast

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<sup>71</sup> Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'Gender Closet', p.215

<sup>72</sup> Bidy Martin, 1993, 'Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference', pp.274—93 in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, & David M. Halperin (eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (London & NY, Routledge), p.284.

<sup>73</sup> Bidy Martin, 1993, 'Lesbian Identity', p.283.

<sup>74</sup> Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'Gender Closet', pp.213—215.

<sup>75</sup> Cheshire Calhoun, 1996, 'Gender Closet', p.213

to the visibility of gay men. In ancient Athens and Rome, men's same-sex sexual relations were sometimes accepted and privileged above heterosexual relationships.<sup>76</sup> Historical texts and artefacts depicting men's same-sex sexual relationships have been valued and maintained in the public domain.<sup>77</sup> Occasionally, translators of texts altered an odd word to transform original sets of male lovers into heterosexuals. Nevertheless, the circumstances of gay men in history contrasts with the circumstances of lesbians in history.

Possibly the most famous of all lesbians is Sappho, who lived on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea in approximately 600 BCE.<sup>78</sup> She was renowned throughout the ancient world for her poetry, which addressed love between women, and she is said to have established a school for girls with whom she developed erotic friendships. She is also reputed to have been infatuated with a young ferryman, on whose account she committed suicide. During the early Christian era, her works were lost, and only two complete poems survive, transmitted to Renaissance Europe in the works of others. The fragmentary remains of a further 200 poems were recovered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Western cultures have a long history of eradicating the records of lesbians' existence. Sappho is the most prominent exemplar of erotic behaviours between women, and she has been used repeatedly to illustrate the existence of women's same-sex eroticism. Sappho's literary reputation was well established in early modern Europe, and she is the sole ancient model to whom early-modern women writers might compare themselves. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this led to her being established as a 'lesbian foremother'.<sup>79</sup> English language currently has two meanings for 'Sapphic', 'of or pertaining to Sappho, an allegedly homosexual poet of Lesbos', and, 'a metre associated with Sappho'.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, 'lesbian' has two meanings, 'of or pertaining to the island of Lesbos', and 'pertaining

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<sup>76</sup> John Boswell, 1980, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press), pp.16—21.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Lambert, 2000, 'Athens', 'Greece, Ancient', 'Rome, Ancient', in George E Haggerty, ed., *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* (NY & London, Garland Publishing), pp.79—80, 417—419, 750—751.

<sup>78</sup> 'Sapphic Tradition', Harriette Andreadis, 2000, pp.666—668; and, 'Sappho', Jane McIntosh Snyder, 2000, pp.668—669; both in, Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia* [London & NY, Garland].

<sup>79</sup> 'Sapphic Tradition', Harriette Andreadis, 2000, pp.666—668; and, 'Sappho', Jane McIntosh Snyder, 2000, pp.668—669; both in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia*.

<sup>80</sup> 'Sapphic', *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, CD-ROM, v.2.0 [Oxford University Press].

to, or characterised by female homosexuality'.<sup>81</sup> While little is known for certain of Sappho, her legend has been paradigmatic for cultural adaptations made by some lesbians during the modern era.

Historical evidence of lesbians' existence has not been valued and maintained, and in recent years, dedicated efforts have been needed to identify lesbians in history. Positive understandings of lesbianism became widely available only with the establishment of Lesbian Studies, during the 1980's and 90's. Throughout history, both lesbians and gay men have suffered the effects of heterosexism and homophobia; however, gay men retained their male privilege and the knowledge that their relationships are capable of being valued, while lesbians suffered disparagement and subordination as women, endorsed by ignorance of lesbian possibilities.

Ignorance and misunderstandings of lesbians are maintained by the assumption that their interests are included in genderless categories, such as 'homosexual', 'gay', and 'queer'. Such categories conflate the interests of lesbians and gay men, and sexism and androcentrism ensure masculine norms dominate their perception. In patriarchal societies, men may be said to be acting in direct contradiction to the interests of women, while gay men as a group seek to protect their practice of masculinity, which contradicts lesbians' interests. Lesbians' invisibility has resulted in ignorance of their specificities and assumptions that they share the high profile culture of gay men. In addition to denying lesbians an authentic culture, this assumption endorses notions of lesbians' behaving in masculine ways and denies the active female sexuality at the heart of lesbians' difference.<sup>82</sup>

It is impossible to separate the interests of lesbians from the interests of women as a group; however, heterosexual women have priorities and perspectives that are distinct from those of lesbians. While heterosexual feminists and lesbian-feminists both strive for women's autonomy, their relationships with men are different, and this influences their social positioning, perspectives, and politics. Women as a group have often been rendered invisible by sexism and androcentrism, but lesbians have suffered the additional oppressions of heterosexism and homophobia that remain unchallenged while lesbians remain invisible. Sexism and androcentrism privilege men's interests over women's, and these privileges are maintained on occasions when lesbians and gays are presumed to co-exist. The

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<sup>81</sup> 'Lesbian', *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, CD-ROM, v.2.0 [Oxford University Press].

<sup>82</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, 2003, *Unpacking Queer Politics*, (Cambridge, Polity), pp.6—7

discourse that attends gay men's sexual orientation may be muted in the heterosexist mainstream, but in the 'homosexual' margins, gay men retain their masculine privileges. Representing homosexuality as a unitary phenomenon dissipates gendered differences between lesbians and gays, and sexism and androcentrism underpin assumptions that lesbians share gay men's culture, lifestyle, and values. In mainstream discourses, attempts to be inclusive are often dominated by the interests of heterosexual women that challenge sexism and those of gay men that challenge heterosexism, while the interests of lesbians that combine challenges to sexism and heterosexism are represented adequately only when lesbians are addressed directly.

#### **D. Queer<sup>83</sup>**

'Queer' represents the postmodern challenge to identity categories and this section considers its relationship to lesbian invisibility. During the 1990's, debates of multiple and unstable sexual identities resulted in queer's emergence as a serious category of theoretical analysis.<sup>84</sup> Lesbians and gays often embrace multiple sexual identities by being out in some areas of their lives, and being closeted and assumed heterosexual in others. Queer theory is rooted in strategies of disruptive resistance to the regulation that identity categories impose. It offers an array of theoretical works about sex and gender diversity, the purpose of which is to subvert the normalising categories that tie gender to sexuality. It also challenges the mutual reliance of sex, gender, and sexual orientation, and reconceptualises the problem of perverse sexuality into the problem of identity. Queer theory indicates the inconsistencies of sex and gender categories; nevertheless, 'queer' appears to represent lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transsexuals, together with non-normative heterosexuals, such as, paedophiles and voyeurs.<sup>85</sup> By challenging the processes of categorisation, queer became a sign that embraces non-specific sexual minorities.

The works of Jonathan Dollimore, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler, represent the founding texts of queer theory. In 1991, Jonathan

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<sup>83</sup> 'Queer Theory' was a term coined by Teresa de Lauretis in the 'Introduction', pp.iii—xviii, in the special edition, of *differences*, 'Queer theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', 3 (Summer 1991) (Robyn Wiegman, 1994, 'Introduction', pp.1—19, in Laura Doan, ed., *The Lesbian Postmodern*, [NY, Columbia University Press], p.17).

<sup>84</sup> The position taken by this thesis in relation to queer is detailed in Chapter Four, section D, 'Lesbian, Gay and Queer', and Buddhist teachings are explained in Chapter Five, 'Buddhist Doctrine'.

<sup>85</sup> 'Trannie' according to the OED refers solely to a transvestite; nevertheless, it is the preferred name used by transgendered people, and includes those previously referred to as transvestites and transexuals ('Trannie' in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on CD-ROM*, v.2.0, 2002, [Oxford, Oxford University Press]).

Dollimore argued that the category of 'the homosexual' had failed to disintegrate under centuries of pressure, not because of its importance to homosexuals, but rather because it is indispensable to heterosexuals, who define themselves in contrast to it. The negation of homosexuality by heterosexist cultures has been in direct proportion to its centrality, and its cultural marginality is in direct proportions to its cultural significance.<sup>86</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued that male desire has been central to the foundations of western culture, and the homo/hetero sexual duality is as important to the organisation of western society as are gender, class, and race.<sup>87</sup> Both Dollimore and Sedgwick present their arguments about sexual identity from the position of gay men, and might be inappropriate in a study that focuses upon lesbians; however, Buddhist understandings of the illusory nature of the self/*atman* are echoed in Judith Butler's works on gender and the body.<sup>88</sup>

According to Butler, compulsory heterosexuality has a specific view of gender coherence whereby what a person feels, how a person acts, and how a person expresses herself sexually, are the articulation and consummation of gender.<sup>89</sup> Butler demonstrates the 'performativity' of gender, and asks,

Is 'the body' or 'the sexed body' the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is 'the body' itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex?<sup>90</sup>

The body's significance changes over time, which indicates its meanings being socially constructed and vulnerable to politics. However, the assumed continuity of the sexed and gendered body is challenged,

The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender—indeed, where none of

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<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, 1991, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p.25.

<sup>87</sup> Eve Sedgwick, 1990, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London, Penguin), p.11.

<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, 1991, *Sexual Dissidence*; Eve Sedgwick, 1990, *Epistemology of the Closet*; Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (NY & London, Routledge), & 1993, *Bodies that Matter* (NY & London, Routledge). Buddhist understandings are detailed in Chapter Five, 'Buddhist Doctrine'.

<sup>89</sup> Judith Butler, quoted by Peter Osborne & Lynne Segal, 1994, 'Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler', pp.32-39, *Radical Philosophy*, 67, Summer, p.37

<sup>90</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, p.129



these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another.<sup>91</sup>

Butler explains how words, acts, gestures, and desire, produce the effect of an internal core or substance—Buddhists might identify this as *atman*—but the effect is only produced on the surface of the body, and so is performative. The essence of identity is a fabrication—Buddhists might say 'illusory'—manufactured and sustained through bodily signs and discourse. The 'permanence' of identity is a discursive effect, and rendering identity substantial becomes a function of discourse.

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity.<sup>92</sup>

Butler's emphasis upon performativity allows a disruption of the essential continuity between sex and gender. To this end, she offers examples from dissident groups that appear to undermine binary restrictions.<sup>93</sup> For example, lesbians that rely upon butch and femme roles parody heterosexual sex and gender categories and demonstrate their incoherence. Butler observes,

In this sense, heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into heterosexuality as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative gay/lesbian perspective.<sup>94</sup>

By highlighting parody, Butler alludes to camp theatricality. Her arguments have been critiqued because they rely upon the problematic of parodying effects, which under different circumstances might endorse heterosexual norms. Butler acknowledges the need for identity politics in societies that can be violently homophobic; however, her preference is for 'lesbian' to be

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<sup>91</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, p.135

<sup>92</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, p.136

<sup>93</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, p.121.

<sup>94</sup> Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble*, p.122

known as a provisional category whose meaning remains permanently unclear.<sup>95</sup>

Sex and gender are often assumed to influence only biological and social areas of existence, but their residue has been recognised in realms that are more abstract. Luce Irigaray's early works argue that all knowledges are produced from particular positions, which are left as traces in what is produced.<sup>96</sup> She demonstrates a number of commitments within science that privilege masculinity and reflect patriarchal values, which are congruent with the values accorded to men in western cultures. The ideals men attribute to themselves are projected into truths and knowledges that have been advanced as gender neutral. Thus, Irigaray revealed the isomorphism of the body of man in philosophy, which implicitly privileges the masculine form in western constructs of logic, language, and metaphysics.<sup>97</sup> Irigaray gendered western knowledges, and by describing the post-enlightenment search for a singular truth as 'phallogocentric', identified the projection of man's biological being into the abstract world of ideas. Because gender coherence is unrecognisable under a queer regime, these insights would be neither facilitated nor valued, and queer may be problematic for feminists' analyses.

Any political movement that has its roots in sex and gender difference might find the current prevalence of queer problematic, and lesbian-feminists have noted five areas of concern.<sup>98</sup> Firstly, queer theory is insufficiently engaged with the issues that face lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and trans, in a world where they continue to be stigmatized.<sup>99</sup> Queer theory lacks the ability to assert anything positively, and rather than challenging prejudice, it denies identity labels and ignores the stigma associated with the behaviours they represent. Sexist and heterosexist

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<sup>95</sup> Judith Butler, 1991, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', pp.13—31, in Diana Fuss, ed., 1991, *Inside/Outside: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* [London & NY, Routledge], p.14, Fn. 42. Judith Butler says, 'I am not at ease with 'lesbian theories, gay theories', for ... identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes. ... That is not to say that I will not appear under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies.'

<sup>96</sup> EA Grosz, 1988, 'The in(ter)vention of feminist knowledges', pp.92—104 in Barbara Caine, EA Grosz, & Marie de Lepervanche, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Feminism and the Critique of Knowledge* (Australia, Allen & Unwin), p.96—97.

<sup>97</sup> Moira Gatens, 1988, 'Towards a Feminist Philosophy of the Body', pp.59—70, in Barbara Caine, EA Grosz, & Marie de Lepervanche, eds., *Crossing Boundaries*, p.63, citing Luce Irigaray, 1977, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un (This sex which is not one)* (Paris Minuit).

<sup>98</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04. The concerns Guest notes are re-ordered here.

<sup>99</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04.

pressures to conform ensure the queer option of refusing an identity has significant appeal. However, relinquishing identity does little to challenge prejudice and to facilitate the recognition and understanding of human difference.<sup>100</sup>

Queer seems to make differences disappear by advocating the transcendence of sex and gender categories. Lesbian history testifies that invisibility is not an effective way to ensure a minority's rights, and queer is another means by which the specifics of lesbian existence may be rendered invisible. Louise Allen has written of how queer detracts from lesbian-feminist politics,

In my view, the lack of distinction between lesbian and queer theories has hampered a proper understanding and discussion of the drastic changes in lesbian culture that have occurred over the past ten years. Importantly, queer theories which exclude lesbianism have *oppressed* lesbian-specific theories (it has been difficult for specifically lesbian theories to develop), but also have *radically informed* such theories (when lesbian theories do develop, central tenets of queer theory often structure them). This is a significant problem, because queer theory, in one sense, actively pre-empts a theoretical approach to lesbianism. This divisive move in the academy thus suppresses an examination of the various means by which lesbians are oppressed, not only through heterosexuality but also through the gay theoretical practice of Dollimore and the 'gay affirmative' theoretical practice of Sedgwick.<sup>101</sup>

Because of queer's influence, lesbians and lesbian specific analyses have disappeared, and knowledge of lesbians has been reduced. It is difficult to assess if queer represents a significant backlash against lesbians' visibility, but queer does represent another means whereby lesbians are rendered invisible. All women, and lesbians in particular, have a history of oppression marked by their absence, and strategies that ignore both lesbians and women's differences repeat their histories of neglect. For many lesbian-feminists, queer is another tricky aspect of patriarchy that must be resisted.

Lesbian-feminists' second area of concern is queer's arguments that they relinquish their specific identities in favour of queer's lack of specificity. Lesbian-feminists have only recently re-fashioned 'lesbian' into a symbol of pride, and relinquishing this hard-won identity is unacceptable, especially while its consequences are uncertain.<sup>102</sup> The third area of concern is queer theory's accessibility, and the obscurant tendencies found in some queer

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<sup>100</sup> Arguments for the co-existence of the distinct positions of queer and lesbian are advanced in Chapter Four, section D, 'Lesbian, Gay and Queer'.

<sup>101</sup> Louise Allen, 1997, *Lesbian Idol*, p.12

<sup>102</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04.

works are not consistent with traditional feminist methods. Queer theory is often an elitist discourse, and feminism has a time-honoured commitment to present ideas in accessible ways.<sup>103</sup>

The fourth area of concern is the potential of queer theory to be dominated by male scholars and masculine concerns.<sup>104</sup> Queer reduces the profile of differences between men and women, which lesbian-feminists regard as dangerous because they have never received equal recognition.<sup>105</sup> Relinquishing sex and gender as central categories of analyses risks the construction of another universal subject with inherently masculine qualities. Lesbian-feminists' fifth area of concern is whether the queer position is able to embrace the gendered analyses that already exist in feminist discourse or if it encourages historical amnesia.<sup>106</sup>

In practice, the obstacles to queer theory's ultimate goal of relinquishing sex and gender categories may be insurmountable. Society at large, which has little or no interest in queer theory, connects sex and gender categories inextricably with sexual activities. Reproductive imperatives provide a logic that differentiates male and female bodies, and Elizabeth Grosz argues for their maintenance,

This field of queerness, it seems to me, can only ignore the specificities of sexed bodies at its own peril. Even if we are all composed of a myriad of sexual possibilities, and fluid and changeable forms of sexuality and sexual orientation, nevertheless these still conform to the configurations of the two sexes. A male sadomasochist does not function in the same way or to the same effect as a female sadomasochist. It does make a difference which kind of sexed body enacts the various modes of performance of sexual roles and positions.<sup>107</sup>

Sex and gender maintain their significance because of their social currency, which is not to say that this should not be challenged.

The arguments of queer often disregard positive aspects of identity categories, whose recognition is important. Identity categories can be adopted and relinquished at will; they enable social and political groupings; a sense of cohesion; a sense of belonging; and, possibly, even a sense of stability. Identity categories are capable of challenging isolationist forces that weaken self-confidence and personal resolve. The works of Sedgwick,

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<sup>103</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04; & Dale Spender, 1990 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (1980), *Man Made Language* (Pandora, London), pp.120—137.

<sup>104</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04.

<sup>105</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04.

<sup>106</sup> Deryn Guest, [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1/04.

<sup>107</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space*, pp.249—50, Fn.1.

Dollimore, and Butler, have popularised 'queer', which has been reified into the latest fashionable identity category. 'Queer' no longer refers simply to homosexual perverts, and at its most basic, it now signifies a coalition of sex and gender perverts, many of whom are oblivious to its theoretical underpinning. It is ironic that many who prefer the epithet 'queer' claim it as an identity and gain some of the advantages mentioned above. Nevertheless, 'queer' signals the impermanence of sexual identities, and queer theory's logic destabilises identity categories but does not require them to be wholly discarded. 'Lesbian', and 'gay' and 'queer' co-exist because they represent distinct constituencies.<sup>108</sup>

Queer bases itself in social constructionist ideas that maintain sexual orientation being culturally dependent and historically conditioned. Queer acknowledges distinct social contexts, and understands that people who have engaged in same-sex sexual activity throughout history are not marked as a particular type of person.<sup>109</sup> Arguments that favour differences being shared across time and place are often accused of essentialism as a way to dismiss them. Essentialists might disagree among themselves about the causes of a homosexual orientation, but they would probably agree that sexual orientation is an objective and transcultural fact.<sup>110</sup> Many feminists ascribe to the incontrovertible authority of experience, and the experience of same-sex sexual relationships might transcend time and place, while the social significance of such relationships would not. Appeals to strategic essentialism have become a political strategy, and Gayatri Spivak suggests that if essentialism is practised by the dispossessed themselves, it can be powerfully disruptive.<sup>111</sup> Strategic essentialism differs from other kinds of essentialism in two ways.<sup>112</sup> Firstly, the 'essential attributes' are defined by the groups deploying the strategy, not by outsiders who are trying to oppress the group. Secondly, the 'essential attributes' are acknowledged as constructions and are not held as intrinsically essential; rather, they are invoked when it is politically expedient to do so. Strategic essentialism is a powerful political tool used in defensive manoeuvres, and is particularly

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<sup>108</sup> See Chapter Four, section D, 'Lesbian, Gay and Queer', for arguments of the co-existence of lesbian, gay and queer.

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.8.

<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.8.

<sup>111</sup> Gayatri Spivak, 1987, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press), cited by Maggie Humm, 1995 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), 'Essentialism', pp.80—81, in *Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (London & NY, Harvester), p.81.

<sup>112</sup> Laura Arnold, Prof., (no date), 'American Indian Literature and Culture', at <http://academic.reed.edu/english/courses/English558/Week2.html>, on 12.8.07.

necessary in contexts dominated by social constructionist ideas.<sup>113</sup> While challenging the relevance of identity categories, 'queer' represents a coalition of minority interests and may render lesbians' interests invisible.

### ***Conclusion***

The complex forces that maintain lesbians' invisibility are deeply embedded in western cultures. This chapter has demonstrated how not only the mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality maintain lesbians' invisibility, but also how queer may threaten lesbians' interests. The extent of lesbians' oppression has been known for some years, but it is still necessary to iterate how social conventions and cultural hegemonies render lesbians invisible. The political efforts necessary to resist such oppressive forces are currently most active and visible in religious contexts.

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<sup>113</sup> Laura Arnold, (no date), 'American Indian Literature and Culture'.

## Chapter 3

### Lesbians in Buddhist Studies

#### **Introduction**

Outside the *Vinaya* rules, Indian Buddhist texts are silent about relationships between women.<sup>1</sup> An explanation of why women's homosexuality has hardly been considered is suggested by Bernard Faure,

What we would call lesbianism, but for which the Buddhists have no name, was at best perceived as a poor imitation of heterosexual relations—or a preparation for them—and as such condemned. As John Winkler points out in the Greek context, only men count as significant, whereas women do not signify: they are, properly speaking, insignificant. Sexual relations between women are equally insignificant and can be formulated only through male language.<sup>2</sup>

The low value placed upon women in many Buddhist traditions helps to explain the lack of references to women's relationships in general, and to lesbians' relationships in particular.<sup>3</sup> Feminist critiques of ancient textual understandings might be construed as historically and culturally inappropriate, and this chapter focuses upon the modern methods and assumptions often found in Buddhist studies that maintain patriarchal and heterocentric influences. The absence of references to women's same-sex sexual relationships in modern Buddhist studies consolidates the invisibility of lesbian Buddhists.

While the 'Prequel' presented a report of attitudes towards homosexuality in Buddhist cultures, this chapter explores references to women's same-sex sexuality in modern Buddhist sources. References to women's same-sex sexuality may be included in articles that reference 'homosexual' or 'lesbian', and the first half of this analysis considers the former, while the second half considers the latter. 'Lesbian Buddhists as

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), p.421—422; & Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.203—214, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon (ed.), *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, (Albany, SUNY), p.207;

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), pp.81—82, citing John J Winkler 1990, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (NY & London, Routledge), p.8

<sup>3</sup> Women's status in Buddhism is explored in Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women'.

Homosexuals', has three sections. The first, 'Philology', considers the problems encountered when looking for equivalences between the conceptual foundations of sexuality in Buddhist texts and those in the modern West, and pays particular attention to the term '*pandaka*'. The second subsection, 'Gender Confusion', compares how 'homosexuals' have been regarded by modern Buddhist scholars, and demonstrates the confusions lesbians may encounter in articles about 'homosexuals'. These two sub-sections contain evidence of lesbians being rendered invisible in western Buddhist studies, while the third subsection, 'Re-reading *Jataka* Tales', demonstrates the influence sexual orientation upon 'readings', in particular the readings of gay men that demonstrate non-traditional understandings of Buddhist texts. The second half of this chapter, 'Lesbian Buddhists', has two sections that consider references to women's same-sex sexuality outside and inside Western Buddhism, respectively.

#### **A. Lesbian Buddhists as Homosexuals**

*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'homosexual' as adjective and noun,

A. *adjective*. Sexually attracted to people of one's own sex; of, pertaining to, or characterized by sexual attraction between people of the same sex.

B. *noun*. A person who is sexually attracted (often exclusively) to people of his or her own sex.<sup>4</sup>

Used correctly, 'homosexual' is ungendered and references to male or female homosexuals require additional specification; for example, male homosexual or homosexual woman, who are more commonly referred to as gay and lesbian. In the *Encyclopedia of Religions*, published in 1987, Gilbert Herdt confined his use of the term 'homosexuality' to gay men, excluding lesbians based on 'practice',

Because the word homosexuality derives from the Greek *homos*, meaning 'same', and not from the Latin *homo*, meaning 'man', the term refers both to sex between males, and sex between females, though in practice lesbianism is used to refer to sexual relations between females.<sup>5</sup>

This explanation implies a dichotomy, and because 'lesbian' refers to relations between females, 'homosexual' refers to relations between men.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Homosexual' in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Fifth Edition), 2002, on CD-ROM V.2.0.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Herdt, 1987, 'Homosexuality', p.445—453, in Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religions* (NY, Macmillan), p.445.



Herdt fails to elucidate whose practice he is referring to and to cite criteria that justifies changing the more customary meanings of 'homosexual'. In 2000, this understanding was repeated uncritically in Peter Harvey's book on Buddhist ethics.<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, the word 'homosexual' refers to both lesbians and gays, 'lesbians' are called 'lesbians', and 'lesbianism' is called 'lesbianism', unless it may include lesbians outside modern western contexts when the phrase 'women's same-sex sexuality' may be used. Patriarchy lends itself to habitually colonizing the ungendered with masculine significance, which often remains unchallenged in gay scholarship. The lack of attention paid to lesbians in mainstream studies, combined with the androcentric focus of articles about 'homosexuality', has imbued 'homosexual' with an almost wholly male significance, resulting in confusion about its gender significance. In this study, 'homosexual' signifies the combined interests of lesbians and gays, and in quotes signifies the term itself or its use by another source.

### **i. Philology**

In cross-cultural studies of sexual orientation, finding equivalence between key terms may be problematic. Correct understandings must take into account changes in meanings that occur over time and place to reflect different social and moral contexts. In English, a complete understanding of the concept 'homosexual' might need to contextualise it historically, socially, morally, politically, philosophically and theologically. The concepts used in other languages and cultures may require similar processes, so that finding equivalence between modern western and historical Buddhist concepts is a complex process that demands compromise and approximation.

In western understandings, there are two biological sexes, each of which is associated with a socially normative behaviour or gender. This theoretical model allows the body to be separated from social conditioning, and facilitates a variety of sex/gender constructs. The lack of a similar ability in understandings found in Buddhist sources is a major obstacle to constructing equivalences.<sup>7</sup> In ancient India, where Buddhism has its roots, sex, sexuality, and gender were generally conflated.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, grammatical gender was derived from the sex a person appeared to be,

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.411.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Zwilling and Michael J. Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs in ancient India: a study in ambiguity', pp.99—132, in Julia Leslie & Mary McGee (eds.), *Invented identities: The interplay of gender, religion, and politics in India* (Oxford & NY, Oxford University Press), p.99.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.99.

rather than his/her 'natural sex'.<sup>9</sup> Men and women were essentially heterosexual, and those who did not fit into heteronormative roles were assigned to either 'third sex' or 'no sex' categories. Third-sex persons were usually regarded as 'defective males' despite concurrent claims of androgyny or sexual ambiguity, and third-sex references have rarely been addressed as female.<sup>10</sup> English translations adapted to the western two-sexed system have maintained masculine references, so that the search for lesbian signification is problematic. Here, the search for lesbians in Buddhist studies focuses upon debates of the third-sex category of '*pandaka*', who are excluded from ordination and Leonard Zwilling has equated with 'homosexual'.<sup>11</sup>

Buddhaghosa describes five types of *pandaka*,

1. the 'sprayed (*asitta*)-*pandaka*': one who quenches his lust by fellating another man to ejaculation;
2. the 'jealous (*usuya*)-*pandaka*': one who, through the arising of jealousy, quenches his lust through watching others have intercourse': a voyeur;
3. the 'by-a-means (*opakkamika*)-*pandaka*': one for whom 'semen is expelled using some special means';
4. the 'fortnight (*pakkha*)-*pandaka*': one who, because of past karma, is a *pandaka* only for half the lunar month; the other half, he can quench his lust;
5. the 'non-male (*napunsaka*)-*pandaka*': one who, from the time of conception, is lacking.<sup>12</sup>

Absent from this list is the female-*pandaka* or the *itthipandaka*, referred to in the *Vinaya* when she is excluded from ordination, and nothing more is said of her in Buddhist literature.<sup>13</sup> Zwilling has equated '*pandaka*' with homosexual men, and claims the *itthipandaka*, by analogy, is simply the

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<sup>9</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.109, Fn.28.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.100.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.204—205.

<sup>12</sup> Buddhaghosa, at *Vin.A.* v.1015—16, commenting on the *Vin.* 1.85—6 (Bapat & Hirakawa, 1970), cited by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.414; & Buddhaghosa, *Samantapasadika* III, pp.1068—1069, cited by Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality', p.204.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1998, 'Avoidance and Exclusion: Same-sex Sexuality in Indian Buddhism', pp.45—54, in Winston Leyland, ed., *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists* (San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press), p.52. Peter Harvey (2000, *Ethics*, p.415, citing *Vin.* III, V.129, 144, I B Horner, trans. *Book of the Discipline*, Vols. I, II, & III, [PTS]) says the female *pandaka* is mentioned twice in the *Vinaya*, when it is said that she *cannot* be a sexual partner for a man, which has little connection with modern understandings of 'lesbian'.

female of the species, a homosexual woman.<sup>14</sup> While consideration of lesbians is welcome, a simplistic analogy of masculine and feminine sexuality is unacceptable, and the equation of *itthipandaka* with lesbian is questionable. *Pandaka* is a third-sex construct, which implies having or lacking both male and female sex, and therefore requires the consideration of both. Nevertheless, modern sources—including Zwilling—discuss the definition of '*pandaka*' in relation to men's sexuality alone.<sup>15</sup>

It is known that female *pandakas* were excluded from ordination, and Harvey provides a list of those who cannot be ordained as nuns,

. . . (Those) without sexual characteristics, and who were defective in sex, and bloodless, and with stagnant blood, and who always wore a menstrual cloth and were dripping and deformed, and female-*pandakas*, and man-like women (*vepurisika*), and those (whose anus and vagina) were run-together, and those who were hermaphrodites.<sup>16</sup>

The reasons for exclusion appear to be physical abnormalities that bear little resemblance to current understandings of 'lesbian'. The five kinds of *pandakas* are known in the Brahmanic and Jain traditions and while they are accepted in both Pali and Sanskrit Buddhisms, they appear to be a later scholastic accretion.<sup>17</sup> Buddhism has scriptural authority for a two-sex system, although evidence of *pandakas* might appear to indicate a tacit acceptance of a three-sex model.<sup>18</sup> Sanskrit Buddhism indicates the dyad of *sanda* and *pandaka*, both of which were third-sex types who were denied ordination.<sup>19</sup> *Sanda* is an impotent man, whereas *pandaka* refers to a number of possibilities, from impotent man to 'a long haired dancing transvestite'.<sup>20</sup> Pali Buddhism knows only the fifth sex-gender variant of *pandaka*. Nevertheless, both Pali and Sanskrit Buddhism associate *pandaka* with 'transvestism and homosexual practices'.<sup>21</sup> The practices referred to are exclusively masculine, while it is unclear if references to

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<sup>14</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.208.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.115.

<sup>16</sup> *Vin. II. 271*(*Book of the Discipline, Vols. IV and V*, trans. IB Horner, [PTS]), cited by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.415.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.117.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.117—119.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.109.

<sup>20</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.109.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Zwilling & Michael Sweet, 2000, 'Evolution of third-sex constructs', p.109.

transvestism refer to men in female dress or women in male dress.

According to Peter Jackson, the Theravada *Vinaya* has four sex/gender types that conform to male, female, *ubhatobyanjanaka*, which is both male and female, and *pandaka*, which is neither male nor female.<sup>22</sup> The last two are non-normative, and refer to different things in different sections of the Pali Canon.<sup>23</sup> The derivation of *ubhatobyanjanaka* indicates a two-fold sign, which includes both physical and psychological characteristics, and implies what is understood in the modern West as a hermaphrodite.<sup>24</sup> The meaning of *pandaka* is less clear, but appears to mean a deficiency in male sexual or reproductive capacity, which includes non-normative male sexuality.<sup>25</sup> Consideration of the female is lacking in Jackson's article. Both *ubhatobyanjanaka* and *pandaka* include behaviour that today is labelled 'homosexual'. The modern western classification of masculine homosexuality unifies aspects of sexual behaviour that in some historic periods have been distinct. For example, men who engaged in receptive anal sex were sometimes regarded as feminised hermaphrodites, whereas men who took the active part in oral sex were engaging in a sexual practice that did not threaten their masculine status.<sup>26</sup> Some ancient Indian meanings are clear while others remain shrouded, and modern western scholars are working to establish their equivalence with modern understandings of male homosexuality. Few, if any, modern studies have considered the relationship between third sex categories and women, and while this may reflect the attitude of traditional texts, it fails to address modern western concerns.

Leonard Zwilling translated '*pandaka*' using the derivatives *apa* + *anda* + *ka*, 'without testicles'.<sup>27</sup> He suggested *pandaka* is the nearest equivalent to modern western understandings of 'homosexual' if it is interpreted metaphorically, 'as we do in English when it is said of a weak or

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<sup>22</sup> Peter A Jackson, 1996, 'Non-normative Sex/Gender Categories in the Theravada Buddhist Scriptures', *Australian Humanities Review*, March 1996, accessed at [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html), on 14.7.05; & Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.414.

<sup>23</sup> Peter A. Jackson, 1996, 'Non-normative', at [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html) on 14.7.05.

<sup>24</sup> Peter A. Jackson, 1996, 'Non-normative', at [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html) on 14.7.05.

<sup>25</sup> Peter A. Jackson, 1996, 'Non-normative', at [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html) on 14.7.05.

<sup>26</sup> Peter A. Jackson, 1996, 'Non-normative', at [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jacksonref.html) on 14.7.05.

<sup>27</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.204.

pusillanimous person that he (or even she) has no balls.'<sup>28</sup> In this bracketed reference, Zwilling attempted to include women in his understanding. Because the article's title refers to 'homosexuality', and no further details are provided of what might constitute a female-*pandaka*, Zwilling implies that in the Buddhist literature a female-*pandaka* would equate with a lesbian. Zwilling also equates *pandaka* with 'passive homosexuals', which are a recognisable type of gay man, but are unrecognisable as a type of lesbian. A female equivalence for balls/testicles might be found in the ovaries, and the lack of ovaries would correlate with infertility; however, many lesbians are mothers, and there are no clear connections between a woman's fertility, her sexual abilities, and her sexual orientation/preference. Zwilling's article confuses how the 'sexual dysfunctions' named in the texts might relate to lesbians, and assumes impotence and sexuality function in the same ways for men and women.

Harvey claims that to be classified as a *pandaka*, a woman must have been identified as having some organic abnormality whereby she cannot be a sexual partner for a man.<sup>29</sup> This contrasts with modern western understandings of 'lesbian' that have focused upon sexual desire, and include women who might or might not have had relationships with men or women, or who might be celibate. In Buddhist texts, women's physical qualities and reproductive abilities underpin what might be perceived as 'sexual dysfunctions', whereas in the West, none of these things has been reliably associated with women's sexual orientation. The physical dysfunctions of the five types of *pandaka* ensure that their equation with modern western understandings of women's sexuality is problematic. The lack of analysis from a female perspective renders the equation of '*pandaka*' and 'lesbian' unsafe. Female-*pandakas* might include women who had same-sex sexual relationships, but it is questionable if these would be sufficient grounds for her classification as *pandaka*. If having a lesbian relationship warranted this classification, then consistency would require the *Vinaya* rules to exclude women who performed lesbian sexual acts, and this is not the case. Any group of women might include lesbians, and the claim that *pandakas* would be more likely than any other group to include lesbians requires substantiation, preferably by research focussed upon women's same-sex sexuality.

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<sup>28</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.204—5.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.415—7.

'Homosexual' in the title of an article is often taken to indicate the inclusion of male and female interests, which is often misleading. It is difficult to assess if the absence of women in modern Buddhist studies reflects their absence in Buddhist texts or the androcentrism of modern Buddhist scholars, or both. '*Pandaka*' does not present 'a perfect fit' with modern understandings of 'lesbian'; however, there should be no expectation that western constructs of homosexuality will be a perfect fit with constructs from other cultures.<sup>30</sup> One of the more interesting aspects of comparative and cross-cultural analyses might be the exploration of differences in the semantics of key terms.<sup>31</sup> Differences in cross-cultural and trans-historic understandings require questioning the relevance of ancient Buddhist texts for today's lesbians and gays; however, while some studies are considering their relevance for gays, little consideration is given to their relevance for lesbians. The widespread oppression of lesbians in western culture—and in western religious culture, in particular—ensures the importance of Buddhist attitudes towards sexuality. A thorough understanding of Buddhist attitudes towards sexuality requires texts to be interrogated from both male and female perspectives.

## **ii. Gender Confusion**

Sexual acts cannot be the same for men and women, nor do they have the same significance, but this is rarely acknowledged in 'homosexual' articles. Read from a gay man's perspective, many 'homosexual' articles are deft, and their male bias and gender confusion become apparent only when read from a lesbian perspective. This is illustrated by an excerpt from Leonard Zwilling's article, 'Homosexuality in the Indian Buddhist Tradition', which considers the *Vinaya* and its commentaries.<sup>32</sup> The celibate monastic life is the Buddhist ideal, undertaken by the minority and governed by the *Vinaya* rules. Looking to these rules for guidance of 'normative' attitudes towards sexuality would be misleading. Buddhist society is comprised of four groups, monks, nuns, lay men, and lay women, and guidance for the laity is found in the Five Precepts/*panca sila*. The laity's only explicit guidance in sexual matters is encapsulated in the third precept, 'to avoid misconduct in

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<sup>30</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.81—101, in Arlene Swidler, *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pa., Trinity Press), p.86

<sup>31</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.86.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts'.

sensual matters'.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to note that while the *Vinaya* is divided into the *Bhikkhuniivinaya* for nuns and the *Bhikkhuvinaya* for monks, Zwilling uses the gender blind 'homosexual' in his title, and barely mentions the *Bhikkhuniivinaya*. There are many areas of possible gender confusion, some of which are underlined in the following extract,

Buddhist tradition essentially conceives of sexual misconduct in terms of sexual relations with various types of prohibited women (*agamyā*) and the performance of non-procreative sexual acts. Among the commentators, only Buddhaghosa and the anonymous author of the commentary to the *Abhidharmasamucaya* include men among forbidden sexual objects. The *Vinaya* punishes all intentional sexual conduct by monks or nuns, providing a hierarchy of penalties depending upon the nature of the offence. Penetration with emission results in expulsion from the order, regardless of the gender or species of the partner or the orifice penetrated. Other types of sexual contact, such as masturbation of one monk by another, although still a serious offence, does not require expulsion, and non-orgasmic contact such as touching another's genitals is a relatively minor offence. As a rule, offences committed with a pandaka require less severe punishment than those involving a woman, although more so than if they were committed with a socially normative man.<sup>34</sup>

In some religious cultures, ejaculation is regarded as the dispersal of a man's life force, which is regarded as squandered outside heterosexual intercourse. Women's sexuality has no similar connotation, and references to 'emissions' and 'masturbation' have different implications for men and women.<sup>35</sup> 'Offences committed with a *pandaka* require less severe punishment than those involving a woman', raises questions of the *pandaka*'s status as male, female, no-sex, or third-sex. The offence with a *pandaka* could be equally applicable to men or women, but the inclusion of 'requiring less severe punishment than those involving a woman', raises doubts of just what is being said of whom. The concluding reference, to offences committed with a socially normative man, is clearly not addressing a lesbian act. The last sentence lists a hierarchy of punishments, wherein offences with a woman are most severely punished, those with a *pandaka*

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<sup>33</sup> 'Panca-sila' (S), Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p.210. For further information about the precepts, see Chapter Five, section C, 'Eightfold Path and Precepts'.

<sup>34</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', p.207. Underlining added.

<sup>35</sup> For an example of religious influences upon understandings of masculine sexuality, see Sandra Wawrytko's (1993) account of Taoism and Neo-Taoism, in 'Chinese and Japanese', pp.207—210.

are less so, and those with a socially normative man incur least punishment. It is unclear if the person committing the offence is a man or woman, or if this list should be reversed for male and female subjects. Assuming the article is androcentric and the offender is male, questions of the punishments for female offenders remain unanswered.

Zwilling's comparison of attitudes towards heterosexual and homosexual relationships appears straightforward when read from a gay man's perspective, and the ambiguities and uncertainties become apparent only when looking for information relevant to lesbians. From this perspective, the article's lack of clarity damages its credibility. Nevertheless, its ambiguities are no worse than may be found in other 'homosexual' sources. 'Homosexual' is an inclusive reference to same-sex sexuality, but the androcentrism of many who use it has resulted in topics of equal importance to lesbians being considered only from a masculine perspective in terms that are confusing when read by lesbians. The lack of research into attitudes towards women's same-sex sexuality ensures that observations of male homosexuality may have salience for lesbians, and the attitude being fostered is that some acknowledgement of homosexuality is better than none.

The *Vinaya* are the rules for renunciants who have undertaken the vow of celibacy/*brahmacariya*, and their principal concern is ethical conduct, in contrast to concern about the rights or wrongs of particular sex acts that dominate monotheistic and western cultural contexts.<sup>36</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon suggests that, 'as a whole, Buddhism has been for the most part neutral', and 'the principal question for Buddhism has not been one of heterosexuality versus homosexuality but one of sexuality versus celibacy'.<sup>37</sup> Harvey takes exception to generalisations of Buddhist attitudes towards homosexuality, and maintains that a comparison of punishments for 'penetration' appears superfluous because the *Parajika* section in both *Vinayas* require expulsion for all penetrative acts.<sup>38</sup> Of course, not all sexual acts are penetrative, and assessments of punishments being less severe for homosexual acts are confirmed by Bernard Faure, who claims most sexual offences considered in the *Vinaya* require only penance, and not exclusion,

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<sup>36</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.82.

<sup>37</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.82.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.417, 420—421; Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1994, trans. '*Bhikkhu Patimokkha: The Bhikkhus' Code of Discipline*', '*Parajika: Rules entailing expulsion from the Sangha (Defeat)*' Rule No.1, on 28.5.07, at, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhu-pati.html#pr>.



On the whole, however, the *Vinaya* pays little attention to (homosexual) deeds and does not punish offenders severely—particularly when one compares its relative tolerance in that matter with the rigor with which heterosexual acts are condemned and the wealth of detail with which they are described.<sup>39</sup>

Harvey and Cabezon conduct brief surveys of attitudes towards homosexuality in Buddhist contexts and observe social and cultural attitudes towards homosexuality influencing Buddhist traditions in formative ways.<sup>40</sup> After his survey, Cabezon concludes that, because Buddhism has an essentially neutral attitude towards same-sex sexual relationships, it has been able to adapt to particular socio-cultural norms. This has ensured that, throughout its history, and throughout its geographical spread, Buddhist opinions range from condemnation (never to the point of active persecution) to active praise.<sup>41</sup> After his survey, Harvey offers the following, more nuanced summary,

While close friendships have been accepted in monasteries, homosexual activity has not been, except in Japan and, in a moderated form, among irregular monks in Tibet. In the case of the type of sexually dysfunctional passive homosexual known as a *pandaka*, ordination has been barred, and the spiritual potential in the present life of such people seen as limited. In Japan, which has had some influence on American Buddhism, resistance to the ideal of monastic celibacy, which culminated in the development of a married priesthood, led to a toleration and even advocacy of homosexual activity in the monasteries.<sup>42</sup>

Such observations are significant, but it is important to bear in mind that they reflect observations of male homosexuality, while the invisibility of and silence about female homosexuality must be considered before it is possible to forge any definitive conclusions.

### **iii. Re-reading Jataka Tales**

Minority readings of established texts may reveal new or previously excluded understandings, and re-visiting texts from lesbian and gay perspectives may contribute to Buddhist traditions being more inclusive. John G Jones's book, *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, first published in 1979, illustrates how sexual orientation might be the basis for alternative readings of

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread* (NJ, Princeton University Press), p.81. Bracketed reference added.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, pp.423—433; Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.87—94.

<sup>41</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.82.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, pp.433—434.

Buddhist texts.<sup>43</sup> Reading some of the *Jatakas* from a gay standpoint challenges established heterosexist readings and sets a precedent for minority readings. Jones's analysis contrasts attitudes in the *Four Nikayas* of the *Sutta Pitaka* that record the Buddha's life and teachings after enlightenment, and the *Jataka Tales* that illustrate his previous lives. Historically, the laity relied upon the *Jatakas* for knowledge of Buddhism, and the ethical and doctrinal issues considered in Jones's argument include the acceptance of male homosexual behaviour among the laity.<sup>44</sup>

The *Jatakas* divide all relationships into two kinds: those of 'sex-and-marriage' that are encouraged, and those of 'love-and-friendship' that are highly prized.<sup>45</sup> However, the *Nikayas* discourage the kind of love that involves personal attachment, regardless of whether it is friendship or marriage. A personal attachment ultimately leads to pain on separation, and is classified 'a fetter' because it impedes spiritual progress.<sup>46</sup> In the *Nikayas*, the best said of marriage is that it provides an opportunity to employ sexuality in a way that is 'dutiful and decent'.<sup>47</sup> The rules on celibacy explicitly forbid monks from having penetrative sex, and to fail in this is a *parajika* or defect warranting exclusion from the order.<sup>48</sup> The *Nikayas'* repeated strictures against heterosexual activities contrasts with their lack of discouragement for homosexual activities, which were more accessible to monks and presented less danger of exposure.<sup>49</sup>

The *Nikaya's* record the Buddha's words, and his silence about homosexual relationships allows monks to believe that homosexual love would neither prevent ordination nor warrant exclusion from the order.<sup>50</sup> Attachments formed between men within the order stood a better chance of remaining hidden than did heterosexual attachments because of the strict segregation between monks and nuns and the added risk of pregnancy. A sexual relationship between monks would not tempt them away from the order, would never issue in children or domestic ties, need never be known to the laity, and both parties might work to ensure their feelings never

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<sup>43</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (1<sup>st</sup> published 1979), *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha: The Jataka Stories in Relation to the Pali Canon* (Christchurch, NZ, Cybereditions.com).

<sup>44</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.10.

<sup>45</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, pp.71—72, & 96—98

<sup>46</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.71.

<sup>47</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.71.

<sup>48</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.69.

<sup>49</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.72.

<sup>50</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.71, & 72.

became a 'fetter' that would hinder their ultimate goal.<sup>51</sup> Jones acknowledges these are perilous arguments from the *Nikaya's* silence, but they are supported by evidence from the *Jatakas*.

The *Jatakas* have themes of sex, marriage, love and friendship and depict marriage in a more favourable light than the *Nikayas*.<sup>52</sup> A great deal of 'homosexual emotion' is operating in what is said about friendship, although an Indian might be reluctant to describe it in such a way.<sup>53</sup> Indian men and youths will hold hands, embrace each other, and quite openly display physical affection without any embarrassment, whereas western taboos have often made physical contact between members of the same sex the cause of anxiety and neurosis.<sup>54</sup> As far as Jones could ascertain, homosexual emotion presented none of the problems with which it is commonly associated in the West. The Indian tradition has never seen loving feelings between men as anything but good, and in Buddhist contexts, a mutual regard for the Five Precepts is the ethical touchstone for evaluating relationships.<sup>55</sup>

Jones invites homoerotic readings of extracts from the *Jataka* tales that depict increasingly devoted friendships between men. He includes one in which the Buddha requests Ananda to be his sole attendant and cements their relationship in a contract of eight conditions.<sup>56</sup> Jones concludes,

Even if sex does enter into friendship between males, it is likely to be much less harmful than when it occurs between a man and a woman. The corrupting influence of evil women is one of the dominant themes in the *Jataka*; the possibility of a friend's becoming a corrupting influence is regarded as so remote that it is scarcely ever mentioned. This differs from the canonical position. Sex and marriage, love and friendship are there equally dangerous because both foster attachments, which nourish desire and eventually bring pain. The only love or friendship consistently condoned in the canon is that which is detached and general: 'a boundless friendly mind for all creatures'.<sup>57</sup>

The *Jatakas* view relationships in terms of a sex-and-marriage/love-and-friendship dichotomy, while simultaneously they are full of misogyny, and depict women as essentially corrupting influences.<sup>58</sup> Misogynistic attitudes

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<sup>51</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.72.

<sup>52</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.72.

<sup>53</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.96.

<sup>54</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.96.

<sup>55</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.96.

<sup>56</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.90—94.

<sup>57</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.97—8

<sup>58</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.76—78.

are common to both the *Jatakas* and the *Nikayas*, and Jones observes,

Nevertheless, even the *Jataka* reflects the canonical aversion to marriage. But this hostility is based on a sustained misogyny rather than a high doctrine of detachment. The *Jataka* also exploits the marked silence we noted in the *Nikayas* regarding homosexual attachments, filling the canonical vacuum with a warm ideal of male friendship which, if canonically unsupportable, is humanly attractive.<sup>59</sup>

Jones's observations have sparked various reactions. Cabezon is supportive, and observes,

...in the Indian texts there are many 'eloquent silences', to use a term of Jones, and in the *Jatakas* even instances of eloquent prose that suggests an acceptance, and occasionally even a eulogy, of homoerotic feelings and, if Jones is right, even of homosexual acts.<sup>60</sup>

Cabezon confirms that, 'the *Jataka* texts depict a variety of past-life scenarios that are touching and at times homoerotically suggestive'.<sup>61</sup> Harvey, on the other hand, suggests the homoerotic instances Jones describes are simply instances of friendly or brotherly affection, and accuses Jones of 'making assumptions'.<sup>62</sup> In championing traditional heterosexist understandings, Harvey fails to consider the hermeneutic circle in which all readings take place. His observations fail to acknowledge that the dreams and experiences of sexual minorities, like those of sexual majorities, are brought to their readings. The study of homosexuals and their relationships necessarily includes the examination of a range of homoerotic, brotherly and sisterly feelings and attractions that are not always consummated in sexual acts.<sup>63</sup>

The names given to various Buddhist traditions—for example, Northern, Southern, Tibetan, Japanese—acknowledge the influence of various cultures, contexts, and values upon Buddhist understandings. Nevertheless, one primary influence that remains unnamed is heterosexuality, and all authoritative Buddhist readings have assumed heterosexual perspectives. The readings of sexual minorities have rarely been valued, much less preserved, and it is impossible to know every way in which the *Jatakas* have been understood. *Tales and Teachings of the*

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<sup>59</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*, p.98.

<sup>60</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.89, citing John G. Jones, 1979 (1st edn.), *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, (London, Allen & Unwin), p.113—5

<sup>61</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.89.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.422–3.

<sup>63</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', p.86.

*Buddha* presents an alternative approach, and by illustrating how texts might be interrogated from a gay man's standpoint, Jones reveals a new perspective on traditional sources. Jones's work acknowledges that gay men may bring different values and expectations to their understandings of Buddhism, and sets a precedent for other minority readings. Jones takes into account that homosexuality is not only about sexual contact and involves a range of attractions and expressions. His book does not openly declare itself to favour reading the *Jatakas* from a homosexual standpoint, but such readings are validated because of Jones's work.<sup>64</sup>

### **B. Lesbian Buddhists**

In addition to illustrating lesbians' absence and the androcentrism in 'homosexual' contexts, the first half of this chapter indicated a small but visible body of scholarly work accommodating the perspectives of gay Buddhists, which might be identified as the embryo of a new discipline, 'Gay Buddhist Theology'. The following account of Anglo-American sources reveals no similar body of work accommodating lesbian Buddhists, and confirms their invisibility.

#### **i. Outside Western Buddhism**

##### *a. The Ming Plays*

Harvey explains that the literature of the Ming dynasty 'not infrequently expresses suspicion that some Buddhist nuns were lesbians', and thereafter cites selectively from articles by Sandra Wawrytko and Jose Ignacio Cabezon.<sup>65</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon reports one play, 'Pitying the Fragrant Companion' (*Lian Xiangban*), by Li Yu (1611–1680), in which a married woman meets and falls in love with a younger woman in a Buddhist convent, and they take lovers' vows before the Buddha image.<sup>66</sup> The play ends with the married woman convincing her husband to take her lover as his second wife. Cabezon and Harvey cite Sandra A. Wawrytko's article, 'Homosexuality and Chinese and Japanese Religions', and fail to contextualise the plays and to include her understandings of these lesbian Buddhist depictions.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> John G. Jones, 2001, *Tales*. NB - References cited by other works are to the 1979 edition.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.425, citing Sandra A. Wawrytko, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Chinese and Japanese Religions', pp.199–230, in Arlene Swidler, (ed.), *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pa., Trinity Press), and Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality in Buddhism', p.84.

<sup>66</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality in Buddhism', p.84

<sup>67</sup> Sandra A Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.203–6. Wawrytko's article is primarily concerned with Confucianism and Taoism, and appears to relinquish

Sandra Wawrytko suggests the two heroines in the lesbian classic, *Love for the Perfumed Companion (Lien-Hsiang-pan)* by Li Yu, vow to seek rebirth as husband and wife, and invoke the Buddha as witness to their 'marriage'.<sup>68</sup> She reports two other plays by different authors in which heterosexual men are situated as voyeur or participant within lesbian scenarios.<sup>69</sup> Such positionings might suggest the plays' use for heterosexual titillation, and it is important to consider the plays' intended audience and purpose.<sup>70</sup> In China, accusations of lesbianism were used to question the commitment of Buddhist nuns to celibacy, and depicting Buddhist nuns as lesbians insulted Buddhism.<sup>71</sup> The Buddhist focus upon renunciation and celibacy disrupted the family bonds that were highly valued by Confucians, and the plays were intended to critique Buddhism.<sup>72</sup> The idea that women abandoned their sacred duty of propagating the family to live in self-contained communities where they were not subject to the control of male relatives was abhorrent to Confucians.<sup>73</sup>

*b. Marriage Resistance*

Accounts of women in the marriage resistance movement in China provide further evidence of lesbian relationships in Buddhist contexts. Marjorie Topley's research presents one of the earliest and most authoritative accounts of the Vegetarian Halls that existed in the rural hills of the Canton delta between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>74</sup> Topley observes these were residential establishments for lay Buddhist women and lay and clerical members of several semi-secret sects.<sup>75</sup> Her informants explained that sometimes a woman is born with a 'blind' or 'nonmarrying' fate because her predestined partner is not of a suitable age or an appropriate sex or is not alive at the same time, under which circumstances a woman should remain unwed.<sup>76</sup> Topley says,

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concern for Buddhism to Cabezon's article, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism' in the same volume.

<sup>68</sup> Sandra Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.203

<sup>69</sup> Sandra Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.203.

<sup>70</sup> Sandra Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.204—207.

<sup>71</sup> Sandra Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.206

<sup>72</sup> R H Van Gulik, 1974, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* [AD Leiden, EJ Brill], p.267, cited by Sandra Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.206; & p.224 (Fn.22).

<sup>73</sup> R H Van Gulik, 1974, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, p.267, cited by Sandra Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.224 (Fn.22).

<sup>74</sup> Marjorie Topley, 1975, 'Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung', pp.67—88, in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (eds.), *Women in Chinese Society*, (Stanford University Press), p.76.

<sup>75</sup> Marjorie Topley, 1975, 'Marriage Resistance', p.74

<sup>76</sup> Marjorie Topley, 1975, 'Marriage Resistance', p.75

Several sources refer to lesbian practices in connection with sisterhoods in Shun-te and P'an-yu. My own informants agreed that they sometimes occurred. One woman gave me a religious explanation. As we saw, a woman may be predestined to marry a certain man over and over again in different incarnations; even if her predestined husband should in one incarnation be born a female, she is nonetheless attracted to her predestined partner.<sup>77</sup>

The women's understandings of lesbian relationships included 'a religious explanation'; nevertheless, such explanations have been excluded from many accounts of the marriage resisters.

Nancy Schuster Barnes's article about women and Buddhism says that Buddhist nuns were an important model of alternative lifestyles to heterosexual marriages for the women silk workers who refused to marry and lived as laywomen in communal groups.<sup>78</sup> Of the women silk workers, Barnes observes,

These women were able to choose such a way of life because they were economically independent due to their work, and that was not owed to Buddhism; but the patterns of their lives in the community were. The nuns' *sangha* has always provided an important alternative life-style for women in China and wherever else the order was strong; these modern Chinese women simply adapted the institution further to fit their own preferences.<sup>79</sup>

Barnes omits references to lesbian influences, motivations and relationships.

In her article, Barbara Reed says Kuan-yin, the *bodhisattva* of compassion, facilitated marriage resistance.<sup>80</sup> Kuan-yin was a model and patron goddess for the residents of Vegetarian Halls, which had a room dedicated to her. Kuan-yin's presence was always visible and served to affirm the resident's own lives and choices.<sup>81</sup> The system represented by the Halls offered women an alternative to marriage that did not involve the *Vinaya* restrictions undertaken by nuns. Reed explains the financially independent women banded together to resist marriage in order to avoid three things: loneliness and oppression; lack of financial independence; and, the pain and punishment of childbirth. The possibilities of women finding sexual relationships with men distasteful or having a preference for

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<sup>77</sup> Marjorie Topley, 1975, 'Marriage Resistance', p.76

<sup>78</sup> Nancy Schuster Barnes, 1987, 'Buddhism', pp.105—134, in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women in World Religions* (Albany, SUNY).

<sup>79</sup> Nancy Schuster Barnes, 1987, 'Buddhism', p.132

<sup>80</sup> Barbara Reed, 1992, 'The Gender Symbolism of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva', pp.159—180, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon (ed.), *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, (Albany, NY, SUNY), p.169

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Reed, 1992, 'Gender Symbolism', p.169

relationships with women are not considered by Reed. Topley's article reports 'a religious explanation' for lesbian relationships and several informants expressing distaste for heterosexual relationships, and although the articles by Barnes and Reed cite Topley, they fail to include such references.<sup>82</sup> Arguably, the marriage resistance movement is where lesbian Buddhists are historically most visible, and the failure to mention them in women's accounts of the movement is disturbing.

The articles about homosexuality and Buddhism by Cabezon and Harvey make brief references to lesbian relationships among the marriage resisters.<sup>83</sup> Cabezon tells of the practice of lesbian marriages in a woman's organization known as the 'Golden Orchid Association' that flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thereafter cites Barnes' article (see above). Harvey provides two partial accounts of the marriage resisting sisterhoods in separate chapters of his book.<sup>84</sup> The chapter devoted to issues of 'Sexual Equality', explains the marriage resistance movement in a brief paragraph,

In nineteenth-century China, there was a movement among financially independent women of rural Canton who wished to improve the lot of women, their patron being the *Bodhisattva* Kuan-yin. They either refused to marry, living in nun-like groups, or postponed the consummation indefinitely, through staying in their own family's home. Their aim was to avoid loneliness or oppression in marriage, lack of financial independence, or the pain of childbirth.<sup>85</sup>

Harvey does not cross-reference the following chapter, 'Homosexuality and Other Forms of Queerness', for information about lesbian relationships in the movement. In this chapter, he reports that, 'In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Buddhist-influenced movement of financially independent silk-weaver women, known as the "Golden Orchid Association", sometimes included lesbian marriages', and readers are referred to the chapter on sexual equality for the few lines quoted above.<sup>86</sup> Harvey's failure to include the few words 'sometimes included lesbian marriages' from the chapter on sexual equality, and his separation of issues of sexual equality from homosexuality allows lesbians' struggles with issues of sexual equality to disappear.

Harvey acknowledges the importance of homosexual and queer issues

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<sup>82</sup> Marjorie Topley, 1975, 'Marriage Resistance', p.75, & 79.

<sup>83</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality'; & Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, 'Homosexuality and Other Forms of 'Queerness"', pp.411—433.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, 'Sexual Equality', pp.353—410, & 'Homosexuality and Other Forms of 'Queerness"', pp.411—433.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, 'Sexual Equality', pp.353—410, in *Ethics*, p.406.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, 'Homosexuality and Other Forms of 'Queerness"', pp.411—433, p.425.



by devoting a whole chapter to them; however, his lack of attention to the many dimensions of lesbians' oppression is remiss. The division of information about marriage resisters into chapters on 'sexual equality' and 'homosexuality and queerness' implies that heterosexual women had many reasons to resist marriage, while lesbians resisted marriage only to marry each other. The chapter about 'sexual equality' ignores lesbians, while the 'homosexual and queer' chapter ignores lesbians' issues of sexual equality, and that lesbians experience the same pressures to marry, possibly finding them more onerous. Within 'homosexual and queer' contexts, lesbians must overcome issues of sexism and androcentrism and struggle for equality. Separating the topic of sexual equality from sexual orientation works for men, but fails to recognise the patriarchal influences upon how women's same-sex sexuality has been regarded, and that lesbians face the combined issues of sexual equality and sexual orientation.

Additional information about the marriage resistance movement is found in Chilla Bulbeck's, *Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World*, and Fang Fu Ruan and Vern L Bullough's, 'Lesbianism in China', which are not specifically Buddhist works.<sup>87</sup> It is inconsistent that women who joined an association to resist marriage would later claim to be married to each other. By indicating similarities between wedding ceremonies and the marriage resisters' initiation ceremonies, Chilla Bulbeck explains references to 'lesbian marriages',

These women were called 'self-combers' or *sou hei* because they combed their own hair after the fashion in which married women's hair was combed at the wedding ceremony. Self-combers had their own marriage ceremonies in which a woman vowed to remain chaste, saying that she would govern her emotions, as a king his people.<sup>88</sup>

References to 'lesbian marriage' may misrepresent the ceremonies that marked admission to the sisterhoods, which included vows of celibacy and took the place of marriage.

Fang Fu Ruan and Vern L Bullough refer to the 'Golden Orchid Association' as a lesbian organisation.<sup>89</sup> They report many members living

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<sup>87</sup> Chilla Bulbeck, 1998, *Re-orienting Western Feminisms: women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World*, (Cambridge University Press), p.127; Fang Fu Ruan, MD, & Vern L Bullough, PhD, 1992, 'Lesbianism in China', taken from *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, Vol. 21, No 3, accessed at [www.bbclesbian.co.uk](http://www.bbclesbian.co.uk), on 14.12.2006, citing TY Chen, 1928, *Zhongguo Funu Shenghuoshi (The Story of Chinese Women)* (Shanghai, Commercial Press).

<sup>88</sup> Chilla Bulbeck, 1998, *Re-orienting Western Feminisms*, p.127.

<sup>89</sup> Fang Fu Ruan, MD, & Vern L Bullough, PhD, 1992, 'Lesbianism'.

together as couples after completing a marriage ceremony in which they were designated husband and wife, which is described as a legal requirement for the women to live together.<sup>90</sup> The article refers to two other 'organised lesbian groups'. The 'Ten Sisters' was founded by a Buddhist nun and 'existed several hundred years earlier' in Guandong/Canton. This organisation was an antecedent of the 'Rubbing Mirror Party', of Shanghai, which was recorded having twenty members in 1925.<sup>91</sup> It is difficult to assess the veracity of these claims, and it is interesting to note that the authors relied upon police records and interviews with prisoners for accounts of lesbianism in China.<sup>92</sup> It seems unlikely that so many women in the same geo-political area who shared the same occupation would choose relationships that modern westerners would understand as lesbian.

It has been suggested that depictions of lesbian Buddhists in the Ming plays were intended to tarnish Buddhism, and like the plays, the Vegetarian Halls had Buddhist connections that encouraged women away from marriage and familial roles. Thus, it is possible that reports of lesbianism in the marriage resistance movement have been exaggerated to tarnish the reputation of the movement. Information about the marriage resistance organisations is contradictory and confusing. In the thought reform prison camps that operated in China at the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966—1976), homosexuals were summarily executed.<sup>93</sup> As recently as 1993, Sandra A. Wawrytko reported that homosexuals 'still pursue their proclivities at the risk of their lives, although discretion is more likely to be rewarded by official blindness.'<sup>94</sup> In China, it has only recently become possible to talk of lesbianism, and ignorance and naivety are widespread.<sup>95</sup> Lesbians in modern China are fearful of being identified, and the freedom required to clarify historical circumstances has been lacking.

Some western feminists describe the marriage resistance associations as furnishing a form of escapism rather than being a significant force for change, whereas others classify them as the precursors of a Chinese

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<sup>90</sup> Fang Fu Ruan & Vern L Bullough, 1992, 'Lesbianism'.

<sup>91</sup> Fang Fu Ruan & Vern L Bullough, 1992, 'Lesbianism', citing Zhonghua Tushu Jicheng Bianjisuo (Chinese Book Collection Institute), eds., 1925, *Shinghai funu neijingtai (The Mirror of Sins of Women in Shanghai)* (Shanghai, Zhonghua Tushu Jicheng).

<sup>92</sup> Fang Fu Ruan & Vern L Bullough, 1992, 'Lesbianism'.

<sup>93</sup> Sandra A. Wawrytko, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Chinese and Japanese Religions', pp.199—230, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pa, Trinity Press), p.206.

<sup>94</sup> Sandra A. Wawrytko, 1993, 'Chinese and Japanese', p.206.

<sup>95</sup> Fang Fu Ruan & Vern L Bullough, 1992, 'Lesbianism'.

women's movement.<sup>96</sup> Regardless of their classification, it is known that for over a hundred years, thousands of women silk-workers vowed to never marry in rituals preceded by a hairdressing ceremony, which resembled the one preceding marriage ceremonies.<sup>97</sup> They swore friendship to each other, and lived in Vegetarian Halls that were often devoted to Kuan Yin. They abhorred the loneliness of marriage and its lack of economic independence, and some expressed distaste for heterosexual relationships.<sup>98</sup> Marriage resisters were encouraged by economic independence, together with a local culture that encouraged chastity, and some formed lesbian relationships.<sup>99</sup>

Descriptions of marriage resisters by Barnes, Reed, Cabezon, and Harvey, rely upon Topley's original research and had access to her accounts of lesbian relationships. It is disturbing to note that the articles written by women excluded such references, while articles written by men were not as censorious. The exclusion of lesbians from articles might represent prejudice against lesbianism or self-censorship by authors who feared professional reprisals. No reason is sufficient to justify lesbians' deliberate exclusion; however, feminists studying religions have faced institutional prejudice and discrimination, and the academy has historically been more perilous for women whose studies referred to sexuality.<sup>100</sup>

## **ii. Inside Western Buddhism**

Because lesbian authors might be closeted, it is impossible to be certain of identifying all their Buddhist publications. Only three publications are known to include articles written by lesbian Buddhists: Sandy Boucher's, *Turning the Wheel*, first published 1988, Marianne Dresser's, *Buddhist Women on the Edge*, published in 1996, and Kalyanavaca's, *The Moon and*

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<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth Croll, 1978, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London, Routledge), p.44, cited by Janice Raymond, 1986, *A Passion for Friends: towards a philosophy of female affection* (London, Women's Press), pp.140; and, Janet Saltzman Chafetz & Anthony Gary Dworkin, 1986, *Female Revolt, women's movements in world and historical perspective* (Totowa, Rowman and Allanheld), p.137, cited by Saskia Wieringa, ed., 1995a, 'Introduction', pp.1-22, in *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance* (London & New Jersey, Zed Books), p.8.

<sup>97</sup> Saskia Wieringa, 1995, 'Introduction', p.9.

<sup>98</sup> Saskia Wieringa, 1995, 'Introduction', p.9, citing Marjorie Topley, 1975, 'Marriage Resistance', pp.86—88.

<sup>99</sup> Saskia Wieringa, 1995, 'Introduction', p.9.

<sup>100</sup> Autobiographical accounts of the discrimination experienced by feminists in religious studies departments have been written by Ursula King (ed., 1995, *Religion and Gender* [Oxford, Blackwell] pp.12—15), and Rita Gross (1998, *Soaring and Settling* [NY, Continuum], p.37—41). Various kinds of repression and censorship found in academic contexts are reported in Chapter Two, 'Lesbians' Invisibility'.

*Flowers: A Woman's Path to Enlightenment*, published in 1997.<sup>101</sup> All three report primarily western Buddhist women's thoughts and experiences and were published some time ago. Articles by or about lesbian Buddhists offer unique insights and their relevance is maintained by the lack of subsequent works.

Doubts are raised of the eligibility here of Varabhadri's article, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', in *The Moon and Flowers*, when she says she tends to not call herself a lesbian; however, she maintains her sexual orientation is lesbian and so the article is included.<sup>102</sup> Varabhadri's description of her journey to becoming a Buddhist gives the impression that she swapped an unsatisfactory lesbian existence for an idyllic Buddhist existence.<sup>103</sup> In the article, Varabhadri's personal experiences are isolated from their wider social and political contexts, and she appears to not take responsibility for her actions. Prior to becoming a Buddhist, in 1978, Varabhadri observes her sexual relationships determined even the smallest issues in her life and were the cause of 'undercurrents' in feminist meetings, among her friends, and in her housing co-op.<sup>104</sup> This is set in contrast to Buddhist contexts, in which she found herself among women who did not share her 'lifestyle', were not possessive or controlling, and for whom sexual relationships did not appear to have the same priority.<sup>105</sup> None of the Buddhist women was openly lesbian or knew about the political movements to liberate women or lesbians, and Varabhadri observes, 'The lack of common background, together with the new values, ideals, and lifestyles I was learning about, resulted in my putting my sexual persona to one side, as it were, for quite a while.' Explaining the continuing renunciation of her lesbian identity, she says,

These days I tend not to call myself a lesbian. My sexuality is

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<sup>101</sup> Sandy Boucher, 1993 (first published 1988), *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (Boston, Beacon); and, Marianne Dresser, ed., 1996, *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier* (Berkeley, North Atlantic); and, Kalyanavaca ed. 1997, *The Moon and Flowers: A Woman's Path to Enlightenment* (Birmingham, Windhorse). A reference is made in Chapter Seven, section B.ii., 'Women's Innovations', to Arinna Weisman's experience of being excluded, reported in an interview with Ruth Frankenberg (2004, *Living Spirit, Living Practice: Poetics, Politics, Epistemology* [Durham, NC, Duke University Press], pp.237—240); however, this book focuses upon spirituality rather than Buddhism

<sup>102</sup> Varabhadri, 1997, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', pp.170—184, in Kalyanavaca, ed., *The Moon and Flowers: A Woman's Path to Enlightenment* (Birmingham, Windhorse), p.170.

<sup>103</sup> Varabhadri, 1997, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', p.175.

<sup>104</sup> Varabhadri, 1997, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', pp.175—176.

<sup>105</sup> Varabhadri, 1997, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', p.176.

important to me, but I no longer need to identify myself in that way. I'm committed to Buddhism and call myself a Buddhist. I'm not committed to being lesbian, even though I think it unlikely that my sexual orientation will change drastically.<sup>106</sup>

In a Buddhist analysis, lesbian identity does not exist ultimately; however, Varabhadri fails to refer to the two levels of mundane and ultimate truths (see Chapter Five, 'Introduction'). Rather than regarding lesbian identity as a mundane label that denotes a person with an oppressed sexual preference, Varabhadri simply assumes lesbian identity demands commitment and that it is possible for her to have only one identity and one commitment. This thesis takes a more eclectic approach and understands the only commitment demanded by lesbian identity is to integrity, to be honest, which is consistent with Buddhist teachings and practice. Only those with the necessary will and resources need actively pursue political goals. A lesbian identity indicates a sexual preference, while a Buddhist identity indicates a religious commitment, and Varabhadri's life embodies both. Adopting a celibate lifestyle or working towards the relinquishment of desire does not require relinquishing sexual identity any more than abandoning meditation would require abandoning a Buddhist identity. The Buddhist and lesbian aspects of Varabhadri's life are not antithetical and appear in need of reconciliation.

Sandy Boucher observes that in a homophobic culture lesbians may be drawn to Buddhist practice because they have learned to take nothing for granted, to question everything, and to create a path for themselves, and each of these qualities is compatible with Buddhist teachings.<sup>107</sup> In *Turning the Wheel*, she reports her conversations with many leading American Buddhist women and introduces herself as a lesbian.<sup>108</sup> Boucher was constrained from publishing some parts of her interviews with lesbians,

Some lesbians talked frankly with me both about their acceptance by Buddhist teachers and groups and about their experience of stereotyped responses and images among their *sangha* peers. However, when these women saw the typescripts of what they had said, several of them refused to let those comments be included, because they felt that would place too much emphasis on their lesbianism. As I worked on this book I was surprised at the level of homophobia in our culture, in our Buddhist centres, and in ourselves. This prevented any but the most brief and oblique discussion in my book of lesbian women's relationship to their Buddhist centres,

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<sup>106</sup> Varabhadri, 1997, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', p.175.

<sup>107</sup> Sandy Boucher, 1993, *Turning*, p.7.

<sup>108</sup> Sandy Boucher, 1993, *Turning*, p.7.

which was a topic I had hoped to address more fully.<sup>109</sup>

In the book, Boucher's interviewees are rarely 'out' and there is no way of knowing which chapters record lesbians' experiences.<sup>110</sup> Some Buddhists may be unaware of compulsory heterosexuality or that refusal to be identified maintains ignorance and encourages others to remain silent. Some interviews indicate that lesbians' sexual identity has caused discomfort in Buddhist centres; however, lesbians' remaining closeted does not resolve all questions of discomfort.

Marianne Dresser, editor of *Buddhist Women on the Edge*, introduces herself as a lesbian, and her book contains a cross section of American women's experience of Buddhism.<sup>111</sup> Each chapter is written by a different author who reports her view of important issues in Buddhism. The whole book must be read in order to identify the four articles by 'out' lesbians. Their accounts report incidents of homophobia and discouragement from speaking out and testify to the lack of acknowledgement given to lesbian Buddhists. One chapter in Dresser's book is particularly apposite. Kate O'Neill's, 'Sounds of Silence', makes constructive suggestions for Western Buddhism.<sup>112</sup>

O'Neill questions if traditional understandings and practices are necessarily relevant to women, and explores the ways gender, sexual orientation, and politics, may be woven together in Buddhist practise.<sup>113</sup> Buddhist teachings are not a 'one size fits all', and their traditional androcentrism ensures the need to translate women's experiences of Buddhist teachings, just as Tibetan is translated into English.<sup>114</sup> The history of patriarchal bias in every type of Buddhism has skewed Buddhist teachings towards men's experiences, so that they are not always explained in the most appropriate ways for women. For example, connectedness is highly valued in Buddhism and is frequently presented as an alternative to practitioners' ego-centeredness; however, men and women often relate to connectedness and egocentredness differently. Women's biology and socialization encourage them to recognise and value their connections, whereas egocentredness is more often a masculine problem. Many Buddhist

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<sup>109</sup> Sandy Boucher, 1993, *Turning*, p.26 & xvii

<sup>110</sup> 'Out' is an abbreviated form of 'out of the closet'.

<sup>111</sup> Marianne Dresser, 1996, 'Introduction', pp.xi—xvii, in ed., *Buddhist Women On The Edge* (Berkeley, Ca, North Atlantic Books), p.xvii.

<sup>112</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Sounds of Silence', pp.19—37, in Marianne Dresser, ed., *On The Edge*.

<sup>113</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.20.

<sup>114</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.25.

teachings focus upon letting go of ego, and O'Neill questions how she could give up ego when as a woman she is struggling to claim one. Men seem to struggle with connectedness, and male teachers are more comfortable talking of patriarchal lineages than about children or more personal relationships, which might be an appropriate way to bridge women's interests and the *dhamma*. Women's connections often have an emotional dimension, and Buddhism has not developed practices that enable working with these.<sup>115</sup>

O'Neill has experienced Buddhist communities where issues of gender and sexual orientation were not overtly discouraged; rather, they were silenced. O'Neill speaks for many lesbians when she says:

We are required by our difference to choose between hiding ourselves and making our identities explicit in relation to family, community, and society at large. Because of fear and misunderstanding, many of us have felt exiled from family, from other people, and from the larger society. I actually think of myself, self-consciously, as a lesbian only a small fraction of the time. It is only a part of who I am. But there is a persistent voice in the back of my mind, necessitated by survival, which says: Don't assume you're safe, don't assume you're understood, don't assume you're included, don't assume you'll be treated the same, one way or the other.<sup>116</sup>

And,

Lesbians and gay men are unlike other oppressed groups in that we have to recreate our communities anew each generation. We crack through the concrete of cultural stereotypes like unwanted weeds, and come through to our true selves only with great determination.<sup>117</sup>

To be inclusive, Buddhism must change, and O'Neill indicates two ways forward.<sup>118</sup> Firstly, it is necessary for lesbian Buddhists to speak out, which would allow the ways in which Buddhist communities and institutions have instigated and maintained lesbians' discomforts to be recognised and addressed. Speaking out requires the use of an appropriate language, and sexist, heterosexist and homophobic uses of language must be curtailed. Secondly, it is necessary to confront the fear that often underpins the reluctance to discuss sexuality. When questioning the relevance of sexuality to Buddhist practise, O'Neill observes that the relative world in which we live is shaped by political and social constructs, just as in the ultimate realm

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<sup>115</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.29

<sup>116</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.32.

<sup>117</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.31—32.

<sup>118</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.29–32.

such distinctions are empty.<sup>119</sup> For lesbian Buddhists, an inclusive tradition would encourage openness and not require important aspects of their lives to be distanced from Buddhist practises.

### **Conclusion**

In addition to demonstrating the androcentrism of many articles focussed upon homosexuality, the first half of this chapter provided evidence of engagements with Buddhist sources that represent a visible body of scholarly work fit for gay men that might be called 'Gay Buddhist Theologies'. Lesbians do not have a similar body of work. In fact, some female scholars were shown to have disregarded information relevant to lesbian Buddhists. Male scholars have addressed issues of sexuality more frequently and more thoroughly; however, they often ignore the specifics of women's gender and sexuality, and what little is known of same-sex sexuality in Buddhist contexts focuses upon men. Identity being a doctrinal issue in Buddhism presents the perfect opportunity for debates of what its teachings might mean for western lesbian Buddhists; however, few debates have been forthcoming. Lesbians' differences are often ignored, and lesbian Buddhists remain invisible.

In a lesbian-feminist analysis, silence is closely associated with the endorsement of, and collusion with, androcentrism and compulsory heterosexuality, together with assumptions of 'homosexual' being masculine. A signal of Buddhism's inclusive intent would require lesbians' acknowledgement. However, Buddhism's silence about homosexuality is often mistaken for tolerance, largely because it has been interrogated from an androcentric perspective. High profile instances of male homosexuality are taken as evidence of Buddhism's tolerance, while gender is given little or no consideration and the circumstances of lesbian Buddhists are ignored.

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, few scholarly works by Buddhist women were regarded as authoritative and preserved, and of the few works that survive, many simply reproduce androcentric observations, having little or no awareness of sexual politics. Throughout Buddhism's history, regardless of their sexuality, men have produced most, if not all, of the authoritative views, and these are the perspectives that dominate today's Buddhist texts, traditions, institutions, and studies. When choosing an area that is able to support a gay intervention, men have the whole of Buddhism available to them. Lesbians looking to make similar interventions find traditional views

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<sup>119</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Silence', p.31—2.



of women, which have been overwhelmingly negative and disparaging (see Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women'). It would be difficult for positive depictions of lesbian Buddhists to have the same credibility as positive depictions of gay Buddhists without first revising traditional views of women.

The absence of a Buddhist discourse of sexuality is one reason for Buddhism's silence about sexual orientation, but the silence of western lesbian Buddhists is more puzzling. In many Buddhist traditions, negative perceptions of women are based upon traditional views of women's bodies. Buddhist teachings make no distinctions between the soteriology of men and women; however, this is not reflected in the low status accorded to Buddhist women. Where 'woman' or 'female' has negative connotations, it is impossible to construct relationships between women in positive terms. Modern Buddhist women have worked hard to revalorise their position in Buddhism (see Chapter Seven, 'Western Women's Buddhism'). Nevertheless, studies of Buddhist women do not have the status and authority of traditional androcentric studies, and the endemic androcentrism of Buddhist texts and studies ensure lesbian Buddhists' need to prioritise positive gender constructs above concern for sexual orientation and identity.

In both Buddhist studies and Buddhist traditions, the subordination of women and nuns to men and monks render lesbian interventions problematic. For women, the transcendence of sex and gender differences might be an attractive alternative to confronting religious institutions. The transcendence of sex and/or gender is often advocated to Buddhist women in circumstances that simultaneously privilege Buddhist men. In these circumstances, 'transcendence' fails to challenge heterosexism, sexism, and homophobia and favours the status quo. Given the discrimination and disadvantages of many women in Buddhism, the transcendence of gender has little ethical justification without it being observed by men, and Buddhist texts, traditions, institutions and studies being reconceived in ways that ignore gender. The circumstances of women in Buddhism are addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women', and Chapter Seven, 'Western Women's Buddhism'.

The discouragements faced by lesbian Buddhists include heterosexist, sexist, and androcentric texts, traditions, and studies. Buddhism has no discourse of sexuality and a celibate ideal, while women have few positive endorsements and are disparaged in many traditions. Before the thesis explores these issues, it is necessary to establish the central role of sexuality in western religious culture and the circumstances of homosexuality in

western religious contexts. Christianity is the most influential religious tradition in the West, and its understandings have supported the homophobia that has historically underpinned western cultural norms and assumptions. The following chapter reports some of these understandings, together with the strategies employed by lesbian and gay Christians to challenge entrenched religious beliefs, institutional homophobia, and lesbian's invisibility.

This chapter has indicated the reluctance of academic women to identify lesbian Buddhists, and the reluctance of lesbian Buddhists to identify themselves. Such reluctance is increasingly rare in western contexts and begs questions of why this is the case in Western Buddhist contexts. Religio-cultural differences underpin distinctions between Buddhist and western approaches to sexuality, which are highlighted by juxtapositioning this chapter's account of the lack of Buddhist references to sexual identity with the following chapter's account of the explicit debates that have taken place in Christian contexts.

## **PART 2: THE CONTEXTS**

## Chapter 4

### The Christian Religious Milieu

#### *Introduction*

The importance of sexual orientation and identity in western religious culture is illustrated here with reference to the circumstances of lesbian and gay Christians. The prevalent understanding in monotheistic religions has been that God prescribed heterosexuality for all, and this view has influenced western norms. In recent years, heterosexist and homophobic Christian attitudes have been most visible in the plethora of newspaper stories that tell of papal denunciations in the Roman Catholic Church and speculation about schisms in the Anglican Church. These stories focus upon single issues and rarely reflect accurately the complex relationships between lesbians and gays and Christian denominations.

The oppression of lesbians and gays has been said to be an injustice that resulted in the dehumanisation of people, and because lesbian and gay oppression has been legitimized by Christian churches, these injustices have often taken place in the name of a gospel of love, mercy, and peace.<sup>1</sup> The cultural stereotype of lesbians and gays, whereby they are assumed to be highly sexed and predatory, continues to dominate some Christian contexts, and in order to survive hostile contexts many lesbians and gays have withdrawn their Christian affiliation.<sup>2</sup> For many, coming out *in* the church has meant coming out *of* the church. Those who remain church members may also remain closeted for various reasons, including personal safety, acceptance by their family and friends, and job security.<sup>3</sup> Circumstances are changing, but in many churches, lesbians and gays continue to be subjected to insults and vilification that contravene their human rights; however, religious traditions are exempt from the enforcement of this legislation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Lebacqz, 1987, *Justice in an Unjust World* (Minneapolis, Augsburg), p.35, cited by Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', pp.149—179, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality in World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Trinity Press), p.149.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.149, 151, 153.

<sup>3</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.149.

<sup>4</sup> *The Human Rights Act 1998*, Chapter 42, Section 13, 'Freedom of thought, conscience and religion', says, 'If a court's determination of any question arising

The strident opposition to homosexuality in many religions ensures some taking 'spiritual homosexual' as an oxymoron and has been particularly damaging for lesbians and gays who have regarded any form of spirituality as beyond them.<sup>5</sup> A sex-affirming ethic goes against the grain of Christian traditions, and it has been necessary for lesbian and gay theologies to challenge prejudices that are often blatant. The political basis of their theologies is claimed openly: politics is their *raison d'être* and their self-conscious political basis is one of their most significant differences from mainstream theologies. Nevertheless, their political nature has been used to cast doubt upon their veracity, whereas the insidious heterosexist agenda found in mainstream theologies is rarely seen to cast doubt upon their veracity.

Debates about the status of lesbians and gays in Christianity are ongoing, and this chapter does not reach tidy conclusions. It opens with an 'Historical Overview' of the circumstances in Christian contexts. Doctrinal concerns are to the fore in the second section, 'Texts of Terror and Christian Attitudes', which analyses the range of Christian attitudes towards homosexuality in three broad categories—liberal, conservative, and ambivalent—determined largely by attitudes towards Biblical texts. The third section, 'Lesbian and Gay Theologies', traces their historical development in four sub-sections: 'Gay is Good'; 'Liberationist'; 'Stalemate'; and, 'Queer'. The fourth section, 'Lesbian, Gay, and Queer', argues that these three categories usefully co-exist. 'Ordination' is a problem area in many traditions, and the various attitudes of mainstream churches are reflected in this brief section. To highlight some circumstances in Western Buddhism, the final section, 'Observations', contrasts some of the circumstances in Christianity and Buddhism.

### **A. Historical Overview**

Christianity has come to dominate various cultural contexts, and while at first homosexual activities were accepted, they gradually came to be vilified

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under this Act might affect the exercise by a religious organisation (itself or its members collectively) of the Convention right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, it must have particular regard to the importance of that right.' (from [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga\\_19980042\\_en\\_1#pb5-11g13](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/ukpga_19980042_en_1#pb5-11g13) on 16.08.07.).

<sup>5</sup> Roger Corless, 1998, 'Coming Out in the Sangha: Queer Community in American Buddhism', pp.253—265, in Charles S Prebish & Kenneth K Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley & London, University of California Press), p.258.

and rejected throughout Christendom.<sup>6</sup> Until the 5<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of the Greek and Roman cultures into which Christianity was born, homosexuality was tolerated as a viable minority option.<sup>7</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274) asserted the 'natural' status of heterosexual acts based upon their procreative function, which were prescribed, while masturbation and homosexual acts were condemned as 'unnatural'.<sup>8</sup> The 'natural law' stance has dominated Roman Catholic moral thought. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant theologies of marriage changed their focus from procreation to personal relationships, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these had a significant influence upon Roman Catholic ethics.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1960's, Roman Catholic moral thought moved from its previous blanket condemnation of homosexuals by distinguishing subjective and objective guilt. Roman Catholic priests were urged to adopt a pastoral understanding of homosexuals, while official Vatican statements offered little comfort to lesbians and gays.<sup>10</sup> The authoritative Roman Catholic view continues to require wholesome sexual acts to have the potential to procreate, which excludes any possibility of homosexual acts being morally acceptable.<sup>11</sup> At its best, the 'natural law' tradition emphasizes homosexuals and heterosexuals being equally pleasing to God, on condition that homosexuals make sincere efforts to control their 'deviant bent will'.<sup>12</sup> Roman Catholic lesbians and gays are required to repent their sexuality and to confess their relationships as a prerequisite for receiving Holy Communion—a central unifying rite in most Christian denominations. This prerequisite obliges lesbians and gays to regret the kinds of relationships they might otherwise find most positive and nurturing, and effectively excommunicates those who do not repent.

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<sup>6</sup> Denise Carmody & John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', pp.135—147, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality in World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Trinity Press), p.136.

<sup>7</sup> Denise Carmody & John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.138—139.

<sup>8</sup> Denise Carmody & John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.142.

<sup>9</sup> Denise Carmody & John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.139.

<sup>10</sup> Denise Carmody & John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.143.

<sup>11</sup> Denise Carmody & John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.142, citing J F Harvey, 1967, 'Homosexuality', in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 7* (NY, McGraw-Hill), p.117.

<sup>12</sup> J F Harvey, 1967, 'Homosexuality' in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (NY, McGraw-Hill), vol. 7, p.119, cited by Denise and John Carmody, 1993,

Since the 1960's, lesbian and gay political consciousness and activism have been highly influential, and lesbian and gay Christians have produced alternative theologies and created at least one new church. The Metropolitan Community Church was created specifically for the affirmation of lesbian and gay Christians and their allies, and currently it has three hundred congregations in twenty-two countries.<sup>13</sup> In the political moves that emerged after the Stonewall riots of June 1969, lesbian and gay Christians who wanted to retain both sexual and religious identities formed campaigning groups and challenged religious authorities in ways that were impossible to ignore.<sup>14</sup> Debates were encouraged, studies and reports produced, and pronouncements made, encouraged by three things: lesbians and gays being more easily identified; recognition of the extent and degree of hostility being directed at lesbians and gays; and, the knowledge that Christianity had a role in these things.<sup>15</sup> At stake in the politics of sexual orientation in Christian denominations are fundamental understandings of what it means to be human and what it means to be Christian. Lesbians and gays remind the Church that Christ's teachings advocate embracing the outsider.<sup>16</sup>

### ***B. Texts of Terror and Christian Attitudes***

The diverse understandings of Christian denominations are made possible by applying various degrees of symbolism and allegory to the Bible's texts. The same texts are regarded in ways that range from their being the literal and inerrant word of God to their being wholly mystical and symbolic, which enables socio-historic circumstances to be taken into account. The abundance of Biblical endorsements of monogamous heterosexual relationships within marriage is taken to demonstrate God's eternal approval. Examples of these include,

- Genesis 1:27—28, God created man and woman in his image, and instructed them to 'be fruitful and multiply';

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'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.142

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Elder Troy Perry, Founder and Moderator of MCC, 'History of MCC', on 27.08.06, at

[www.mcccchurch.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=About\\_Us&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=662](http://www.mcccchurch.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=About_Us&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=662).

<sup>14</sup> Deryn Guest, at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), in 01.04.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.154—155.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Vasey, 1995, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London, Hodder & Stoughton), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.91

- 1 Corinthians 7:1—5, marriage requires a man and wife;
- 1 Corinthians 7:9, it is better to marry than to burn;
- Ephesians 5:25—28, husbands are required to love their wives as Christ loved the church;
- Ephesians 5:31, man and wife are one flesh.<sup>17</sup>

The heterosexist focus in many denominations is endorsed by homophobic readings of the instances of homosexual behaviour found in the Bible. These instances include,

- Genesis 19:1—11, depicts sodomites as rapists;
- Leviticus 18:22, male homosexual acts are an abomination;
- Leviticus 20:13, a man lying with a man is an abomination, for which the punishment should be death;
- Romans 1:26—27, men and women who have 'unnatural passion' for one another are shameless and Godless;
- 1 Corinthians 6:9, male prostitutes and sodomites are barred from heaven;
- 1 Timothy 1:8—11, classifies sodomites with murderers, whoremongers, and liars, and describes them as profane, lawless, disobedient, and ungodly sinners;
- 2 Peter 2:9—10, the unrighteous are kept under punishment until the day of judgment, especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion.<sup>18</sup>

Phyllis Tribe has described these texts as 'Texts of Terror'.<sup>19</sup>

The understanding that Biblical references to homosexual acts necessarily demonstrate God's eternal disapproval of lesbians and gays has been challenged in four ways.<sup>20</sup> Firstly, it is argued that the original historical and cultural contexts of the Texts of Terror render them incomparable with today's understandings. Authorities that condemn lesbian and gay activities today on the basis of these ancient Middle Eastern texts are making inappropriate cross-cultural and trans-historic comparisons. Secondly, many things prescribed in the Bible have been discontinued because they are no longer considered appropriate; examples include upholding kosher food laws, the prohibition of intercourse during

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<sup>17</sup> John Stirling, ed., 1954, *The Bible: Authorized Version* (London, British & Foreign Bible Society).

<sup>18</sup> John Stirling, ed., 1954, *The Bible*.

<sup>19</sup> Phyllis Tribe, 1984, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (UK, SCM Press), cited by Deryn Guest at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest), on 1.04.

<sup>20</sup> Denise and John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.138.



menstruation, priests maintaining celibacy, and the veiling of women.<sup>21</sup> Each Christian denomination chooses which Biblical understandings to maintain and which to relinquish, so that the decision to maintain traditional understandings of homosexuality appears arbitrary and homophobic.<sup>22</sup> Thirdly, western logic allows nothing to be construed of the silence of Jesus about homosexuality; nevertheless, it may be argued that his silence signals homosexuality was not an important item on his agenda, and Christians should approach it bearing in mind his primary concerns were God, faith, and love. Finally, lesbians and gays have argued some Bible stories exemplify God's approval of same-sex love; for example, the stories of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1—5), and Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16). Traditionally, such references are not given the same priority as those that affirm heterosexual or condemn homosexual relationships. Despite these well-founded arguments, some Christian denominations continue to advocate homophobic understandings of the Texts of Terror.

Christian views of 'homosexuality' are not uniform, and here attitudes are gathered into three categories: liberal, ambivalent and conservative. Liberal denominations regard the texts as condemning the specific instances depicted. The texts are read in their historical and cultural contexts, and liberals differentiate between those instances and today's lesbian and gay people and their relationships. For Liberals, the Bible is silent about the relationships of modern lesbians and gays. Each sexual orientation is normal and natural, and liberal congregations are generally welcoming, sometimes using a liturgy that acknowledges the equivalence of heterosexual, lesbian and gay relationships. On the whole, liberal denominations present few problems for lesbians and gays.

Ambivalent attitudes are typified by the cliché, love the sinner, but not the sin, which allows lesbians and gays to remain in religious communities that regard their preferred relationships as sinful. Ambivalent denominations differentiate between homosexual acts and homosexual people, which isolates lesbians and gays from their most significant relationships. This division is as invidious as the separation of Christian identity from Christian practice. Nevertheless, lesbians and gays who have grown up as members of ambivalent denominations are required to

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey John, John, Jeffrey, 2000 (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1993), *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-sex Partnerships* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd), pp.7—19.

<sup>22</sup> Denise and John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', p.138.

transcend their sexual desires and remain celibate or adopt heterosexual relationships. In return, they are allowed to remain members of their community, participate in heterocentric rituals, and imbibe understandings of Christian doctrine that present negative views of lesbians and gays.

Conservative denominations understand the Texts of Terror to signify God's intolerance of any kind of homosexual behaviour. Conservatives generally understand homosexuality in terms of behaviour, and lesbians and gays are perceived as predatory perpetrators of vile sexual acts, rather than participants in loving relationships. Conservative churches may exclude or excommunicate those who maintain same-sex sexual relationships or identify as lesbian or gay. Many conservatives believe sincere Christians can renounce such 'practices' by prayer and will power, and the 1970's saw the foundation of 'ex-gay' or 'transformational' ministries.

A basic aspect of human being is the maintenance of positive self-regard, for which it is necessary to know our affections are welcomed.<sup>23</sup> Lesbians and gays' affections have often been regarded as perverse, judged abhorrent and regarded with derision, which are marks of homophobia. Lesbians and gays who remain members of ambivalent or conservative communities and absorb their attitudes unquestioningly, may suffer internalised homophobia and serious psychological harm. Many conservative and ambivalent denominations believe homosexual orientation may be changed. 'Ex-gay' and 'transformational' missions emerged during the 1970's, advocating heterosexuality and assisting the conversion of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. The techniques used in such ministries have included religious conversion, meditation, individual and group counselling, and 'reparative therapy'. 'Reparative therapy' is a counselling technique that encourages close relationships being formed with people of the opposite sex, which is wrongly assumed to be difficult, if not impossible, for lesbians and gays.<sup>24</sup> The techniques are promoted as both safe and effective, even though they have the potential to cause serious depression and suicide.<sup>25</sup>

In both the UK and the US, the medical classification of

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<sup>23</sup> Nanette Gartrell, 1987, 'The Lesbian as a "Single" Woman', pp.412—420, in Mary Roth Walsh, ed., *The Psychology of Women: Ongoing Debates* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press), p.414.

<sup>24</sup> 'Reparative therapy', at [http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_repar.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_repar.htm), on 15.9.07.

<sup>25</sup> B A Robinson, 'Changing Gays and Lesbians: "Ex-gay" and "Transformational" Ministries', at [www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_evan.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_evan.htm), on 6.06.

homosexuality as a psychological illness was rescinded during the 1970's.<sup>26</sup> Prior to which, therapies used to 'cure' homosexuality included: aversion therapies, which induced sickness or sent electric shocks through patients' genitals; mind-altering therapies, which often involved experimenting with drugs, such as LSD, or hypnosis or electro-convulsive therapy; surgeries were performed, which included lobotomies, breast amputations, and clitoridectomies; and, hormonal therapies sometimes induced the physical characteristics of the opposite sex. Historically, 'curative therapies' coerced lesbians, gays and bisexuals into claiming they were heterosexual, but no method succeeded in changing the orientation of a person's sexual desire.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, some Christian denominations maintain faith in the efficacy of transformative techniques.

Exodus International is the largest ex-gay Christian mission. They claim a seventy percent 'success rate' and believe, 'Freedom from homosexuality is possible through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord'.<sup>28</sup> Exodus has used various definitions to determine sexual identity and currently accepts that converting sexual desire from an exclusively homosexual to a heterosexual orientation is impossible. They have abandoned attempts to change 'sexual orientation' in favour of changing 'sexual identity', which they define solely in relation to sexual behaviour. Accordingly, lesbians and gays who remain celibate, and bisexuals who confine their sexual relationships to members of the opposite sex, are classified 'heterosexual'. The focus upon behaviour ensures a bisexual's classification as 'homosexual' depends upon engaging in same-sex sexual relationships, regardless of any residual desire. Exodus regards a bisexual engaging in only heterosexual relationships as a success; however, more worrying is that lesbians and gays who remain celibate are also regarded as heterosexual and 'cured' of homosexuality.<sup>29</sup> 'Lesbian', 'gay', and 'homosexual' signify the direction of sexual attraction and do not rely

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<sup>26</sup> American Psychiatric Association's web site, at <http://www.healthyminds.org/glbissues.cfm>, on 2.7.07.

<sup>27</sup> American Psychological Association, at <http://www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html>, and Prof. Gregory M Herek, University of California, 'Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation', at [http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts\\_changing.html](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_changing.html), on 15.9.07.

<sup>28</sup> BA Robinson, 1997—2006, 'Changing Gays and Lesbians: "Ex-gay" and "Transformational" Ministries', at [www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_evan.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_evan.htm), on 4.6.06.

<sup>29</sup> B.A. Robinson, 'Changing Gays and Lesbians', at [www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_evan.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_evan.htm) on 4.6.06.

upon sexual acts, while celibacy is the state of abstinence from sexual acts and says nothing of attraction or desire.<sup>30</sup> By assuming that celibacy signifies heterosexuality, Christians in transformational ministries create and maintain unconventional understandings.

### **C. Lesbian and Gay Theologies**

Theological understandings rarely remain static, and in 1998, Wal Anderson described lesbian and gay Christian theologies taking place in four 'waves'.<sup>31</sup> The first wave spoke from a pastoral concern for lesbians and gays, and represented a liberal, 'Christ died for us all' approach.<sup>32</sup> The second wave engaged with identity politics, and spoke from lesbian and gay experiences.<sup>33</sup> The third wave explored lesbian and gay experiences of liberation and engaged in scriptural exegesis from lesbian and gay perspectives.<sup>34</sup> The fourth, most recent postmodern wave builds bridges and embraces diversity, and Anderson associates this wave with ecological concerns and the use and concept of 'nature'.<sup>35</sup> A comparison of the dates of publications in each wave indicates their co-existence, and the four waves represent increasingly complex understandings and analyses of lesbian, gay, and queer, Christian issues.

Mainstream or 'straight' Christian theologies also shifted their focus

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<sup>30</sup> Colleen Lamos, 2000, 'Lesbian' in Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia* (NY & London, Garland), pp.453—454; Scott Spiers, 2000, 'Gay' in George E Haggerty, ed., *Gay Histories and Cultures: an Encyclopedia* (NY & London, Garland), pp.362—363; 'Homosexual' in *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* on CD-ROM, v.2.0 (Oxford University Press).

<sup>31</sup> Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography', at <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~unitingnetwork/anno.html>, on 3.6.06.

<sup>32</sup> Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography', cites four examples of first wave gay theologies, including, Derek S Bailey, 1975, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Hamden, CT, Archon Books), and George R Edwards, 1989, *Gay Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (NY, Pilgrim Press).

<sup>33</sup> Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography', cites nine examples of second wave lesbian and gay theologies, including, Mary Daly, 1978, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, Beacon), and Michael Vasey, 1995, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London, Hodder & Stoughton).

<sup>34</sup> Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography', cites sixteen examples of third wave lesbian and gay theologies, including, Carter Heyward, 1984, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation* (Washington, University of America Press), and Gary D Comstock, 1993, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press).

<sup>35</sup> Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography', cites seven examples of fourth wave lesbian and gay theologies, including, Carter Heyward, 1989, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco, Harper & Row), and Pim Pronk, 1993, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans' Publishing Co.). At the time Anderson was writing, the academic use of queer was not prevalent.

during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Joerg Rieger, the shifts took place in four 'turns': the turn to the self in 'liberal theology'; the turn to the other in neo-orthodoxy; the turn to others in liberation theologies; and, the turn to 'the text' in postmodern theologies.<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Stuart's chronology of lesbian, gay and queer theologies is based upon Rieger's account, but excludes the second turn to neo-orthodoxy because it is based in the works of Karl Barth and his followers, who regarded homosexuality as a perverted sickness.<sup>37</sup> Stuart describes her turns emerging in chronological succession, after the Stonewall riots, of 1969.<sup>38</sup> 'Gay is good' theologies emerged during the 1970's; lesbian and gay liberation theologies emerged during the 1980's; and, queer theologies emerged during the 1990's.<sup>39</sup> Stuart acknowledges that the turns took place in succession but continue to co-exist.<sup>40</sup> One problem with her classification is that all theologies questioning the stability of identity are regarded as queer, which renders it impossible for lesbian and gay theologies to interrogate identity.<sup>41</sup>

Anderson and Stuart's systems place individual lesbian and gay theological works into different categories. For example, Anderson classifies Michael Vasey's *Strangers and Friends* as a second wave theology, one that speaks from lesbian and gay experience and engages with identity politics, while Stuart describes it as turning to the text and being a queer theology.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, both systems reflect lesbian and gay and queer theologies moving towards increasingly sophisticated understandings, which are reported in the following sections, 'Gay is Good', 'Liberationist' and 'Queer'.

### **i. Gay is Good**

Prior to the rise of lesbian and gay political activism, many Christian denominations regarded homosexuality as a dangerous disease. During the late 1950's and early 1960's, some liberal Christians became concerned at

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<sup>36</sup> Joerg Rieger, 2001, *God and the Excluded: Visions and Blindspots in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Hampshire, Ashgate), pp.4—7.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.5.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.6.

<sup>39</sup>Deryn Guest, at

[www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queering%20Theology/lesbian\\_and\\_gay\\_theologies.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queering%20Theology/lesbian_and_gay_theologies.htm), on 3.6.06, based upon Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.6.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.47, & 62.

<sup>42</sup> Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography'; Michael Vasey, 1995, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London, Hodder & Stoughton); &, Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.90.

the widespread animosity and discrimination against lesbians and gays, and pressed for their pastoral care.<sup>43</sup> Such concerns underpinned the earliest theologies, many of which considered the ethical position of the Church in relation to homosexuality.

The first wave of lesbian and gay theologies emerged at the confluence of liberal theologies and lesbian and gay political consciousness. Liberal theologies made an autonomous self the point of contact between the human and the divine, and lesbian and gay politics facilitated the construction of positive, autonomous selves. Liberal gay theologies endorsed lesbians and gays' positive self-esteem, and 'miraculously' transformed what had been an exclusively negative Christian discourse on 'homosexuality'.<sup>44</sup> Traditional theological condemnations of 'homosexuals' had not previously been challenged, and they required a defensive approach. In general, gay theologies were committed to,

- an understanding of sexual orientation being biologically determined;
- affirming the distinctive spiritual gifts of lesbians and gays;
- recognising the importance of coming out as a spiritual milestone;
- using lesbian and gay experiences to challenge traditional teachings;
- affirming that sexual practice was a celebration of spiritual experience.<sup>45</sup>

Essentialist understandings were commonplace, and one example of a theology that relies upon essentialism is John Boswell's, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, research for which was conducted during the 1970's.<sup>46</sup> Boswell reveals the Roman Catholic Church in pre-modern Europe being tolerant of same-sex desire, to the extent of its celebration in liturgical unions.<sup>47</sup> Boswell's arguments, like

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<sup>43</sup> Garry David Comstock, 1996, *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing* (NY, Continuum), p.5.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.19

<sup>45</sup> Based upon Deryn Guest, at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/lesbian\\_and\\_gay\\_theologies.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest/Queerying%20Theology/lesbian_and_gay_theologies.htm), on 3.6.06, citing Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*.

<sup>46</sup> John Boswell, 1980, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press), p.xvii.

<sup>47</sup> John Boswell, 1980, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, cited by Wal Anderson, 1998, 'An Annotated Bibliography', and Elizabeth Stuart, 2003,

those of many lesbian and gay historical analyses, rely upon European experiences of same-sex sexual desire between pre-modern times and the 20<sup>th</sup> century having a 'family likeness'. It is reasonable to assume that the self-conception of these two groups would be different, based upon their socio-historical circumstances; however, a homosexual orientation offers a viable basis for their political alignment. In lesbian and gay works, the assertion of essential similarities across time, place and culture are underpinned by notions of strategic essentialism, which support Boswell's political invocation.

During the late 1960's and 1970's, the basis of sexual ethics shifted from moralistic judgements towards concern for justice and respect.<sup>48</sup> In the same ways that 'the race problem' was recognised as a problem of institutionalised white supremacy, and the 'problem of women' was recognised as a problem of male power and privilege, the 'problem of homosexuality' was eventually recognised as a problem of compulsory heterosexism and institutionalised homophobia.<sup>49</sup> This shift in understanding led to the creation of support groups or 'affirming caucuses' in various congregations, which offered support and co-ordinated educational and political resources.<sup>50</sup>

Not all Christians accept traditional Christian views, and for some, the vision of 'the moral life' was incompatible with the condemnation and persecution of any person or group. The attention of many Christians refocused upon the involvement of their Church in the oppression of lesbians and gays.<sup>51</sup> In many denominations, inconclusive debates took place about human sexuality, homosexuality and sexual ethics. Exclusionary and restrictive practices by some congregations are challenged by others, who call themselves 'More Light Churches' or 'Reconciling Congregations', which signals their commitment to the full participation of lesbians and gays in the life and ministry of the church.<sup>52</sup>

## **ii. Liberationist**

This second group of theologies are rooted in the experiences of positive lesbian and gay people in conflict. Traditional theologies often ignore the

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*Repetitions*, p.8.

<sup>48</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.155.

<sup>49</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.155.

<sup>50</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.152.

<sup>51</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.155.

politics of oppression, which form the foundations of liberation theologies. Rather than salvation being an individual matter, liberationists understand it to require acting in solidarity with others. Liberation theologians are aware of their relationships with others, and are sensitive to possible misuses of power.<sup>53</sup> This facilitates insight into the power dynamics that influence the formation of doctrine, which is no longer limited to formal statements of the Church. Tradition and scripture become resources from which to seek guidance, rather than being authorities from which to seek approval. Liberation theologies emphasize experience, and differences between gay men and lesbians could no longer be disregarded.

Christianity is a patriarchal religion whose values have been replicated throughout Christian societies. Although gay men suffer discrimination based on their sexual orientation, they benefit from the privileges of being men, and sexuality may represent a single focus of their political concern. Lesbians face similar discrimination based on their sexual orientation and are subjected to additional discriminations based on their gender that have often excluded them from the priesthood and restricted their administration of sacred rites. Lesbians have two areas of political concern, gender and sexuality, and this double burden informs the radical nature of Lesbian Theologies.

#### *a. Gay Men's Theologies*

Gay men's liberation theologies include David Comstock's, *Theology Without Apology*, which draws parallels between the exodus story of Moses leading his people from slavery in Egypt and homosexuals' exclusion from the Church.<sup>54</sup> Comstock says, 'instead of trying to copy what is done in the Bible, our confrontation with the Bible becomes a model for confronting the moral dilemmas we face in our lives today.'<sup>55</sup> In *Know My Name*, Richard Cleaver presents a theology that interprets the Stonewall riots in terms of a Red Sea crossing, where the story of Moses is seen as one of 'passing' and 'coming out' that resonate with lesbian and gay experiences.<sup>56</sup> Cleaver believes stories are more useful for gay theologies than are speculations

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<sup>52</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.152.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, pp.33—49.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, pp.41—43, citing David Comstock, 1993, *Gay Theology Without Apology*.

<sup>55</sup> David Comstock, 1993, *Gay Theology Without Apology*, p.57, cited by Deryn Guest, at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest.htm), in 1.04.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Cleaver, 1995, *Know My Name* (Westminster, John Knox Press), cited by



about same-sex relationships in the Bible.<sup>57</sup> Feminist influences are found in Gay Theologies' recognition of the interplay between patriarchy, Christian doctrine and tradition.

*b. Lesbian Theologies*

Lesbian theologies often combine liberationist and feminist theologies, and offer radical solutions to the problems caused by oppressive Christian understandings. A comparison of lesbian and gay theologies reveals gay men content to seek a place at the table many lesbians would overturn.<sup>58</sup> Lesbian-feminist theologians have argued that Christian theology has been rooted in patriarchy and other exclusionary beliefs and practices, such as racism and heterosexism, and before it can be truly inclusive, Christianity must be demolished and rebuilt.<sup>59</sup>

Carter Heyward is one of the most influential lesbian theologians, and many of her concepts have been taken up by other theologians.<sup>60</sup> Her most notable work, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, regards heterosexism as an aspect of the ideological foundations of western culture.<sup>61</sup> Western culture's phallogentric heterosexism and its structures of 'power over' require 'the divine' to be reconceived.<sup>62</sup> Heyward asserts that patriarchal understandings of authority and 'power over' have dominated theological discourse and a theology of 'right relation' requires something different. Although her work is influenced by her experiences as a lesbian, Heyward does not claim epistemological privilege for lesbians; rather, she places the divine in the centre of human relationships without identifying it with them.<sup>63</sup>

In Heyward's theology, there is constant tension between the power of the erotic and the power of alienation. In her search for a common ethic of relationships, she does not separate sexual and asexual relationships, and

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Deryn Guest, at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest.htm), in 1.04.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Cleaver, 1995, *Know My Name*, cited by Deryn Guest, at [www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest.htm](http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/guest.htm), in 1.04.

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 1997, *Religion is a Queer Thing* (London & Washington, Cassell), p.2.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 1997, *Religion*, p.3.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.51. Interestingly, whereas Stuart categorises this as a liberation theology, Wal Anderson categorises it as one that embraces diversity, in his final wave.

<sup>61</sup> Carter Heyward, 1989, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.51—55.

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.52

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.54.

all 'right relationships' have seven qualities: courage, compassion, anger, forgiveness, touching, healing, and faith.<sup>64</sup> Heyward was the first to engage Audrey Lorde's concept of 'the erotic' in her theology. In Lorde's work, the female erotic is the deep body knowledge and self-fulfilment that can be encountered in several areas, including sexual relationships, manual work, writing, poetry, and the explanation of ideas.<sup>65</sup> Heyward extrapolates from this the understanding that women's eroticism is a 'power in relation', which she identifies with the divine. This divine encourages Christians to live in 'right relationship' with others, in mutuality and equality, and avoiding absorption into self or others.<sup>66</sup> Christian influences have constructed sexual desire as shameful and antithetical to the divine; however, this may be changed.

Heyward's God of right relation is described by Stuart,

The God of right relation is a God who takes sides and encourages all to do the same. S/he is a god intimately involved because s/he has the power of right relation, the eros that drives us towards each other in right relation. S/he is the source of transcendence because s/he calls us forth from and 'out' of ourselves towards others. In right relationship we not only experience God as the power of right relation we also 'god'; we bring God forth.<sup>67</sup>

In subsequent theologies, Heyward's construction of God as the erotic has been influential. In *Sensuous Spirituality: Out From Fundamentalism*, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott develops the idea of eros into a spiritual drive.<sup>68</sup> In the 'Song of Songs', Mollenkott finds a celebration of connections between the erotic and the divine in a non-marital relationship. She lists forty configurations of family presented in the Bible that are used to challenge the modern Church's uncritical sanctification of the nuclear family.<sup>69</sup> Mollenkott's later theologies are identified as 'queer'.<sup>70</sup>

In *Just Good Friends: Towards a Theology of Lesbian and Gay Relationships*, Stuart draws critically upon Heyward's work, and converts the

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.53—54.

<sup>65</sup> Audre Lorde, 1984a (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1978), 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power', pp.53—9, in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA, Crossing Press), pp.55—58.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.52

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.52.

<sup>68</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, 1993, *Sensuous Spirituality: Out From Fundamentalism* (New York, Crossroad), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.56.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.56.

<sup>70</sup> In 2001, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott published a work entitled, *Omnigender: a Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press), where the use of 'Omnigender'

concept of the 'power of the erotic' into the 'power of passion'.<sup>71</sup> Stuart maintains Lorde's understanding of the erotic, and argues that 'passion' cannot be reduced to sexual activity because it contains notions of both a strong committed force and sexual love.<sup>72</sup> According to Stuart, passion is at the heart of all loving relationships and is most appropriately articulated in friendship, which she believes must be the ethical basis of all relationships.<sup>73</sup> Her arguments rely upon sociological evidence of lesbians and gays defining their relationships in terms of friendship. Friendships may have an acknowledged erotic dimension that subverts traditional theological assumptions of a distinction between eros and agape.

### **iii. Stalemate**

One of the most visible aspects of Christian debates is the impasse in negotiations between denominations that condemn and exclude homosexuals, and lesbians and gays and their supporters who argue for their acceptability.<sup>74</sup> Tim Koch observes,

What is obscured by this back-and-forth wrangling between, on one hand, the open-minded, clear-thinking, humane scholars versus the flat-earth, hate-mongering closed-minded bigots; or between, on the other hand, the God-fearing, Bible-believing, lovers of truth versus the arrogant, self-absorbed, immoral sinners - what goes largely unchallenged here is the prize that goes to the ultimate winner: namely, the right to decide what behaviours I, as a gay man, may or may not 'rightfully' engage in.<sup>75</sup>

Stuart believes the 'stalemate' testifies to the theological inadequacy of the arguments on both sides. However, the notion of a 'stalemate' implies that all denominations are open to negotiation, willing to subject their theologies to public scrutiny and render them democratically accountable. For Stuart, the repetition of entrenched positions represents the fissures of the demise of lesbian and gay theologies and queer theology emerges from their

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indicates its queer intent.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 1995, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Theology of Lesbian and Gay Relationships* (London, Mowbray), p.89, cited in Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.59.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 1995, *Just Good Friends*, p.89, cited in Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.59.

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 1995, *Just Good Friends*, p.220, cited in Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.59—60.

<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.89

<sup>75</sup> Tim Koch, 2001, 'Cruising as Methodology: Homoeroticism and the Scriptures', in Ken Stone, ed., *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press), pp.171—172.

rubble.<sup>76</sup> While she recognises the co-existence of previous lesbian and gay theologies, Stuart presents queer theologies as a new beginning, born out of the demise of preceding theologies. Her faith is placed in the ability of queer theologies to provoke some movement in the entrenched and stagnant understandings of conservative and ambivalent denominations.<sup>77</sup>

#### **iv. Queer**

Use of the word 'queer' in a positive sense was made possible by its reclamation during the 1990's. While clarity about gender is a central concern in lesbian-feminist analyses, it is wholly inappropriate in a queer analysis, and a theology's categorisation not only reflects but also determines the nature of its interrogation.

In Stuart's classification, one of the earliest queer theologies is Michael Vasey's *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible*, which holds that since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, sodomy has emerged as something frightening and in need of punishment and destruction, as a sin 'beyond ordinary sin'.<sup>78</sup> The sodomite has been constructed as a vile creature whose existence destabilises human and divine orders. Vasey accuses fellow evangelicals of diverting the focus of worship from God to the sexual attraction between men and women, and suggests the role of gays is to recall the focus of the Church to friendship, which was a major theme in Christianity before modernity. Vasey insists the Church should be wary of using biblical texts to condemn homosexuality because it might be condemning a group of people who embody some profound truths of which the Church has lost sight.<sup>79</sup> He maintains that embracing the outsider is the shape of God's grace, and any discernment of scripture must take place in the context of a Church that welcomes gays.<sup>80</sup> Rather than being wholly about sex, Vasey seeks to desexualise views of gay men by claiming they model different types of masculinity and relationships. It is unclear whether Vasey's work is a deliberate 'men's study' or if its androcentrism is accidental.

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<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.89.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.89, & 106.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Vasey, 1995, *Strangers and Friends*, cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.90. Wal Anderson regards this theology as speaking from lesbian and gay experiences, and classifies it in his second 'wave'.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Vasey, 1995, *Strangers and Friends*, p.140, cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.90.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Vasey, 1995, *Strangers and Friends*, cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.90.

In *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality and the Transformation of Christian Ethics*, Kathy Rudy argues that Christian fundamentalism in the U.S. has its origins in resistance to the emergence of the independent 'new woman' in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> The history of middle class women becoming independent of men challenged Christianity's view of gender roles and the cult of domesticity for women.<sup>82</sup> Rudy notes the affinity between queer theorists' desire to question and subvert categories of sexual identity and the Christian calling to identify as a people of God. She argues for the transcendence of gender identity, saying that the primary identity should be Christian, through baptism, and the Christian calling is to reject any other identity category to ensure it can not take precedence. She argues that Christians do not need the categories of lesbian, gay, and straight, and the Church's obsession with sexuality is distracting it from discussions of what constitutes 'moral sex'. Rudy claims the priority should be whether two Christians can embrace outsiders, rather than whether they can bear children. In Rudy's theology, queer theory helps Christians to think radically about gender, and Christianity challenges queer theory not to jettison God and religion.<sup>83</sup>

'Radical Orthodoxy' is a different strand of queer theology, and relies upon a patristic medieval tradition that believed men and women's bodies shared the same sex but had two genders, which made changes between male and female plausible.<sup>84</sup> Such conceptions underpin Graham Ward's theology, 'Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ'.<sup>85</sup> Ward describes a series of assumptions about the body of Jesus that continually refigure a masculine symbolic until the particularities of one sex give way to particularities of both sexes. The instability of Christ's body is represented

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<sup>81</sup> Meanings of 'new woman' are explored in Esther Newton, 1989 (first published in 1984), 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', pp.281—293, in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (NY, New American Library), and Carol Smith-Rosenberg, 1989 (first published 1985), 'Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870—1936', pp.264—280, in Duberman, et al, eds, *Hidden from History*.

<sup>82</sup> Kathy Rudy, 1997, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston, Beacon Press), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, pp.93—95.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.95.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Laqueur, 1990, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press), cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.99 & 109.

<sup>85</sup> Graham Ward, 1999, 'Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ', pp.163—181 in J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, & G. Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*

in several ways; for example, it is transfigured into a second Adam; it manifests as gender-neutral bread in the Eucharist; and, through the resurrection and ascension, Christ's crucified body becomes a floating signifier, which the medieval church represented as a maternal body and his side wound the womb from which he emerged.<sup>86</sup> Roman Catholicism recognises all baptised Christians as members of the body of Christ, and so all Christians are able to participate in these transgressive processes.<sup>87</sup>

For Christians who believe God knows us through our gender in a system that requires genders to oppose and complement each other, one of the most radical aspects of queer theologies is their threat to the ability to have a relationship with God.<sup>88</sup> Queer theologies have three distinctive characteristics: they destabilise identity labels; they argue Christian theology was queer two thousand years before queer theory was invented; and, their arguments are based within the traditions they critique.<sup>89</sup> Lesbian-feminists might question the ability of traditional theologies to represent women because they have been overwhelmingly patriarchal; however, because gendered critiques are outside the remit of 'queer', this observation might be regarded as a failure to appreciate the gender-free nature of queer.

#### ***D. Lesbian, Gay and Queer***

Lesbian, gay, and queer understandings are often presented as antagonistic and their political goals being different but complementary is rarely acknowledged.<sup>90</sup> Queer's arguments for abandoning 'lesbian' and 'gay' labels are based in denial of gender, and the queer position ignores women's political status.

Queer regards identity labels as enabling discrimination and its analyses often fail to acknowledge their positive roles. Stuart damningly suggests that claiming lesbian and gay identities reinforces the sexual identities provided by sexologists and does little to remove those labels despite enabling challenges to their negative understandings.<sup>91</sup> This critique

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(London & NY, Routledge).

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, pp.99—100.

<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.99—100.

<sup>88</sup> Kathy Rudy, 1997, *Sex and the Church*, p.38, cited by Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.93.

<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, p.102

<sup>90</sup> A comprehensive lesbian-feminist analysis of the emergence of queer theory and politics is Sheila Jeffreys, 2003, 'Queer Theory and Lesbian Feminist Critique', pp.32—56, in *Unpacking Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Polity).

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Repetitions*, pp.27—30.

assumes the removal of labels is a desirable objective in itself, and ignores the political advantages gained by using 'lesbian' and 'gay' labels since sexologists' theorising sealed the fate of many homosexuals. It also ignores the preference of the millions around the world who claim lesbian or gay identities in unity with others because of their political significance, wanting the support that belonging to such a group often brings. From a political, lesbian-feminist perspective, the historical processes of naming and reclaiming 'lesbian' as a positive identity can only be regarded as liberating. Although society is increasingly liberal, true equivalence between the status of men and women and heterosexuals and homosexuals has yet to be attained and disbanding the structures of identity politics would be overly optimistic and premature.

Even though queer favours coalitions and argues theoretically against identity categories, it relies upon the ability to distinguish between at least two groups. Whether referring to people or to academic works or to works of art, queer relies upon the ability to differentiate sex and gender conformists and non-conformists, straights and queers. Without the ability to identify a range of sexual identities—for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, heterosexual man, heterosexual woman, sado-masochistic top, sado-masochistic bottom, paedophile, foot-leather-denim-military fetishist—literature and art are just two areas that would be poorer. It is difficult to imagine another politically active group—for example, a Trade Union or a racial minority—arguing against its self-identity and amalgamating its interests into a larger category in which its particularity disappears. While such a move might gain some political advantage by constructing a larger group, the particular interests of each sub-category would be diminished. For a lesbian-feminist, becoming 'queer' requires relinquishing gender and sexual specificity, and for many this price is too high for any advantages queer might offer. In reality, queers and lesbian-feminists currently co-exist and offer distinct possibilities: 'lesbian-feminist' offers a substantial history and tradition of radical political manoeuvres, while 'queer' offers a coalition of sex and gender deviants. Their co-existence, however, facilitates shifting from one identification to the other, at will, and gains both sets of political advantages.

The ability to withstand oppressive forces is increased by the availability of a range of responses. Different political positions in

negotiations about sexual orientation are represented by, on the one hand, claiming an identity category and asserting its importance, and, on the other hand, arguing that identity categories are historically contingent and ultimately unstable. In postmodern contexts, identity is not simply an end in itself; rather it is often a political expediency. To ignore this is to ignore the sophisticated political manoeuvres demanded by postmodernity. Contexts determine the most appropriate response, and in some circumstances, lesbians' differences from gay men and queers are significant, and a lesbian-feminist response would be most appropriate. In other circumstances, wider issues of sexual orientation may favour a queer response. Having a choice between these responses is advantageous, and maintaining them requires acknowledging the distinct political interests of 'lesbian' and 'queer', and resisting pressures to isolate them.

Lesbian, gay and queer theologies co-exist, and represent distinct positions that need not be antagonistic. Historically, lesbian and gay theologies instigated debates and established awareness of the roles of sex and sexual identity in relation to Christian doctrine and practice, and established a positive discourse that has enabled queer's re-assessments. Queer theologies are underpinned and supported by previously established lesbian and gay theologies. Furthermore, queer's assessments enable greater awareness of assumptions about sex and gender, and the politics that surround them. Lesbian and gay on one hand, and queer on the other, offer mutual critiques that aid awareness, and might ultimately strengthen both positions.

### **E. Ordination**

No account of women's gender and sexuality in Christianity would be complete without a report of the issues that attend their ordination. Different denominational attitudes towards gender, celibacy and sexual orientation, ensure questions of the ordination of lesbians and gays are answered in different ways. In 1988, the United Church of Canada followed the example of the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Association and Metropolitan Community Churches, and approved the ordination of lesbians and gays. The decision generated much controversy and threats of congregational secession; nevertheless, it granted lesbians, gays and heterosexuals equal access to ordination in these traditions.<sup>92</sup> In

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<sup>92</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', p.152.



the Anglican Church, the circumstances that attend lesbian's ordination are more complex. All heterosexual women, like all heterosexual men, are allowed to become priests and enjoy married relationships. However, lesbians and gays must undertake to remain celibate before being allowed to become priests, which also requires the celibacy of their partners. Anglican women priests face another area of discrimination because they are currently excluded from the bishopric, which denies their access to high office.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, ordination is unthinkable for lesbians by reason of both their sex and their sexual orientation. In Roman Catholicism, women are excluded from the priesthood, and campaigns for their ordination have made little headway.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, to be accepted into communion with others, Roman Catholic lesbians and gays must repent their sexual orientation. The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards gay men who intend to be ordained was clarified in a statement made by Pope Benedict, in 2005.<sup>94</sup> He reaffirmed the traditional stance that forbade 'active homosexuals' and 'supporters of gay culture' from entering the priesthood. The guidelines refer only to men about to join a seminary, and confirm that at least three years must pass between this 'transitory problem' and ordination. The position of men who realise they are gay after ordination remains unclear, and questions of Roman Catholic priests disrobing are muted. During a meeting with one such priest he said that no official action had been taken and he has voluntarily refrained from carrying out priestly duties after coming out as gay. Such a 'borderland' position is not shared by married heterosexuals who commit adultery or heterosexual priests who break vows of celibacy. Sympathetic priests may occasionally and with great secrecy offer Holy Communion to lesbians and gay Catholics who do not repent their sexual orientation and are otherwise excommunicated.

### ***F. Observations***

Important issues are raised at this juncture by juxtapositioning some of the

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<sup>93</sup> For further information about the ordination of Catholic women, see [www.womenpriests.org/index.asp](http://www.womenpriests.org/index.asp), on 10.08.06.

<sup>94</sup> 'Instructions concerning the Criteria of Vocational Discernment Regarding Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of the Admission to Seminaries and Holy Orders', approved by Pope Benedict on 31 August 2005, and published by the Vatican on 29 November 2005 (accessed via [www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4480588.stm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4480588.stm), on 12.12.05).

circumstances of women in Christianity and Buddhism. Patriarchal interests dominate both religions, although each oppresses women in different ways. In Christian doctrine and western cultures, men are taken as the norm from which women deviate and women have been defined against men. Creationist beliefs endorse that the roles of men and women are complementary and justify women's subordination and control by men. In Christianity, women may be seen as sources of pollution and moral decay; however, they are part of God's creation, and are offered redemption and heavenly rewards in return for faith and devotion. While women are perceived negatively, they are secondary only to men in the hierarchy of creation and are encouraged to engage in Christian worship.

In Buddhism, women are encouraged to engage in rites and rituals to ensure a better rebirth. Women's 'leaky' bodies have sometimes been understood to symbolise that their essential nature lacks integrity, and women have been regarded as both polluted and polluting.<sup>95</sup> In many Buddhist contexts, not only have women been subjugated and controlled by men, their physical and mental characteristics have been understood solely in pejorative terms. Enlightenment requires the cultivation of positive qualities and the aspersions cast upon women are reflected in their soteriological status, and the cycle of disadvantage and oppression is maintained. Three important factors indicate Buddhism having an egalitarian ethic—its soteriology being no different for men and women; the Buddha creating both monks and nuns' orders; and, the *dhamma's* emphasis upon compassion. Nevertheless, Buddhist attitudes towards women have often been brutally prejudiced, although they tend to be disregarded in western contexts, where the focus is upon men and women having the same soteriological potential.

The silence of Jesus echoes the Buddha's silence about homosexuality; however, whereas Christianity has canonical texts offering negative views of homosexual acts, outside the *Vinaya* no such instances are known in Buddhist canons. In Buddhism, debates of sexual misconduct often focus upon *Vinaya* rules that have little relevance for the laity. The

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<sup>95</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma: Problems with Bhikkhuniis in the Pali Vinaya' (revised paper presented to the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference of the IABS in Lausanne, August 1999); on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com), and on 23.7.10 at <http://www.buddhanet.net/budsas/ebud/ebsut066.htm>. Also see, Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women', especially references to Blackstone's thesis in section A.i., 'The *Garudamma*'.

*dhamma* is not hostile towards lesbians and gays. Nevertheless, negative attitudes towards homosexuality exist in many Buddhist contexts.<sup>96</sup> Harmful encultured attitudes have often remained unchallenged in Buddhist traditions.<sup>97</sup> Thus, while the *dhamma* might be described as neutral towards homosexuality, Buddhist cultures and traditions have not always maintained this neutrality. Misogyny and homophobia exist in Buddhist contexts and silence is the only requirement for collusion.

Cabezón has researched contemporary Western Buddhists' understandings of traditional attitudes towards sexuality and found a mixture of ignorance and assumption.<sup>98</sup> For the most part, Western Buddhists were either unaware of what the classical Indian and Tibetan tradition had to say about sexuality or were ready to dismiss it because it did not fit with their preconceptions of Buddhism's essential tolerance. Overall, Cabezón found three problems among Western Buddhists: pervasive misinformation about the content of traditional texts; a tendency to dismiss the textual tradition; and, if traditional views were not dismissed, they were accepted literally, without critical reflection.<sup>99</sup> Understanding the significance of Buddhist texts is complicated by the presence of third-sex constructs whose connections with modern lesbians are difficult to establish.<sup>100</sup> In some Christian denominations, lesbians face condemnation and expulsion, whereas in Buddhist contexts lesbians often face more subtle forces of silence and repression. Introductions to Buddhism for westerners may offer little or no information of traditional attitudes towards homosexuality, and currently there is no accessible way of establishing the levels of acceptance or rejection in Buddhist traditions.

Christian lesbian and gay theologies took place in three moves: the establishment of a positive discourse; the assertion of identity-based understandings; and, questioning the role and significance of identity. This order reflects a progression, and each stage relies upon what has gone

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<sup>96</sup> Reports of negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays in Buddhist contexts are found in the 'Prequel'; Chapter Three, section B.ii., 'Inside Western Buddhism'; and, Chapter Seven, section B.ii., 'Women's Innovations'.

<sup>97</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1998, 'Avoidance and Exclusion: Same-sex Sexuality in Indian Buddhism', pp.45–54, in Winston Leyland, ed., *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists* (San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press), p.48.

<sup>98</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex', pp.60–68, in *Buddhadharma: the Practitioners Quarterly*, Summer, Vol.7, No.4 [Boulder, Shambhala Sun Foundation], pp.62–64.

<sup>99</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex', pp.62–64.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter Three, section A.i., 'Philology'.

before. This process might be relevant for developing Buddhist dialogues. Lesbian and gay Christian caucuses and campaigning groups were important because they raised awareness of the ignorance and harm supported by institutional attitudes and offered support to those who needed it. Buddhist groups might similarly challenge the current levels of ignorance and establish a discourse of sexual orientation and identity that is consistent with western cultural concerns.

### **Conclusion**

Lesbian, gay, and queer Christian theologies have included significant themes; for example, the relationship between God and his human creation; the sanctification of relationships between human beings; the nature of authority; and, the continuum between sex and friendship. Their most important achievements include,

- forging areas of acceptance for Christian lesbians, gays, and queers;
- exposing heterosexist bias and questioning homophobic prejudice;
- deconstructing dominant negative theologies; and,
- bringing previously excluded voices into theological discourse.<sup>101</sup>

In addition to having a strong influence upon Christian perspectives, lesbian, gay and queer theologies have demonstrated the significance of sexual identity when determining and reflecting moral and ethical attitudes. The continuing proliferation of these theologies confirms that sexuality is a major preoccupation in western religious culture.

Christian denominations have excluded lesbians and gays from membership and ordination, largely because of the ways texts depicting homosexual acts have been read and understood. Traditional Buddhist understandings that exclude homosexual *pandakas* from ordination display a similar prejudice. While it has questionable validity for lesbians, the equation of *pandakas* with homosexuals reflects that Buddhist traditions are not always as neutral as has often been assumed.<sup>102</sup> In comparison to Christianity's vociferous lesbians and gays, the silence of lesbian Buddhists is deafening, and signals two possibilities. Firstly, there being no need for lesbian voices in Western Buddhism, which is unlikely because the low

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<sup>101</sup> Based on Elizabeth Stuart, *Repetitions*, 2003, p.76.

moral status of lesbian sexual identity in western religious culture requires an understanding of lesbians' moral status in Buddhism. Indeed, in cultural settings where lesbians are seen and heard in almost every sphere, their invisibility and silence in Buddhism is cause for concern. Secondly, the silence by and about lesbian Buddhists may signal collusion with heterocentric and homophobic hegemonies, despite Buddhist teachings of tolerance and compassion. Important questions are raised by the failure of western Buddhist traditions and studies to assess the moral status of lesbians' relationships and to address questions of non-normative sexuality. The questions include how does Buddhist doctrine engage with western cultural norms; what processes are involved; and, how sensitive are Buddhist traditions to western social and cultural phenomena, in particular as they relate to women.<sup>103</sup>

The cultural significance of sexual orientation and identity in the West asks new questions of Buddhist teachings and requires the willingness of traditions in western contexts to consider afresh such issues. The acknowledgement of sexual identity being a Buddhist issue leads to further questions. For example, what are the most appropriate ways of teaching the *dhamma*, here and now; is it possible for Western Buddhism to uphold the teachings of sex and desire being essentially negative in cultural settings where sex is used to stimulate personal and economic well-being; and, in a community of non-celibate 'serious' practitioners with a variety of sexual norms, what is the basis for assessing moral and ethical relationships. The answers to such questions require knowledge of Buddhist teachings, which are the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>102</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex', pp.62—64.

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women'.

## Chapter 5

### Buddhist Doctrine

#### **Introduction**

This chapter offers an overview of Buddhist teachings most relevant to a lesbian-feminist standpoint. Previous chapters revealed some lesbian Buddhists not wanting to appear overly concerned about sexuality or identity and reluctant to claim a lesbian identity. Knowledge of Buddhist doctrine is essential to withstand arguments that may threaten lesbians' political unity, and the most relevant Buddhist teachings are those that underpin sexual morality or deny identity. Thus, the lesbian-feminist Buddhist concerns that determine the shape of this chapter touch upon issues of ethics and identity. The view of Buddhist teachings presented will be familiar to many Western Buddhists because it follows much of what is presented in well-established English introductions to Buddhism. It is a Theravada oriented account and focuses upon doctrine and ethics, rather than monastic conduct, ritual or pilgrimage. These alternative criteria have an equal claim to represent 'Buddhism', but not an equal relevance to lesbian Buddhists.

Regardless of their different understandings of the Buddha's teachings, all traditions aim to liberate sentient beings from rounds of rebirth/*samsara* by attaining *nibbana* (Pali) or *nirvana* [Sanskrit]. The teachings often rely upon two levels of truth: *sammuti-sacca*, which is the commonly accepted truth of everyday mundane experience, and *paramattha-sacca*, which is the most accurate and philosophically precise, ultimate truth.<sup>1</sup> Teachings distinguish between the appearance of ontological stability and *dhamma*, understood to be atomic-like particles that

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<sup>1</sup> '*Sammuti-sacca*', '*Paramattha-sacca*' (P), Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (Taiwan, Buddha Education Foundation), pp.159, 124. In Pali Buddhism, the two levels of truth appear in that form only in the commentaries, but are implied in distinctions made in the *suttas* use of explicit meaning/*nitattha*, and implicit meaning/*neyyattha* (Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.124). In Sanskrit, '*Satya-dvaya*' refers to the two truths; '*Samvrti-satya*' is relative truth, '*Paramartha-satya*' is absolute truth (Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* [Oxford, Oxford University Press], pp.314, 249, 212).

momentarily arise and pass and whose ultimate status is disputed.<sup>2</sup> *Dhamma* constitute both mental processes and epistemological experiences, and although any object might be treated as a unity for conventional purposes, it is ultimately comprised of momentary *dhamma*.<sup>3</sup> Later Madhyamaka understandings, in which 'ultimate reality' relates solely to the transcendent reality of enlightenment and *nirvana*, undermine earlier understandings of the ontological status of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout its history, Buddhism has developed diverse understandings and practices in many countries throughout the world, not all of which are represented here. The details of Buddhism's early history are largely unknown, although most scholars accept that three major types of Buddhism, Early, Mahayana and Vajrayana, developed between the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. To provide sufficient information to support the thesis while complying with its word constraints, this chapter is limited to primarily Theravada and Mahayana understandings of the Eightfold Path, the precepts, no-self, dependent origination, emptiness and skilful means. Vajrayana or tantric Buddhism was the last to emerge, and its understandings include the use of sexual imagery that signify sexuality having a different role that would require a different analysis.

The first section of this chapter, 'Theravada and Mahayana', offers a brief introduction to these two traditions, and their understandings of how to attain liberation are described in the second section, '*Arahant* and *Bodhisattva*'. The third section focuses upon the Fourth Noble Truth, 'The Eightfold Path', which elaborates the 'right conduct' for liberation. The fourth section, 'No-self and Dependent Origination' report teachings unique to Buddhism that demonstrate the absence of anything permanent and unconditioned. The fifth section, 'Emptiness', focuses upon the understanding of emptiness/*sunyata* in two sources, the *Mulamadhyamaka-karika* and the *Prajnaparamita-sutras*. The sixth section, 'Skilful and Skilful-means', considers how 'skilful/*kusala*' in Theravada understandings relates to ethical practices and in Mahayanan understandings is developed into skilful-means/*upaya-kausalya*. Buddhist teachings require the use of

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<sup>2</sup> '*Dhamma*' (P) or '*dharma*' (S) has no single equivalent in English, and it has three meanings in Buddhist contexts: 1. the natural order that underpins the physical and moral universe; 2. the whole of the Buddha's teachings; and, 3. individual elements that collectively constitute the psychophysical world ('*Dharma*', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.74).

<sup>3</sup> '*Dharma*', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.74.

<sup>4</sup> 'Two truths', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.314.

technical terms that are most accurate in either *Pali* (P) or *Sanskrit* (S), and the most appropriate term is included after an English equivalent.

### **A. Theravada and Mahayana**

Little is known of the historical development of the eighteen schools of Early Buddhism that appeared during the four hundred years following the Buddha's *parinibbana*.<sup>5</sup> Their canons were first comprised of two collections of texts, the Buddha's Discourses/*Sutta Pitaka*, and the Monastic Discipline/*Vinaya Pitaka*. The third collection of Higher Teachings/*Abhidhamma*, comprised of philosophical extrapolations of *sutta* materials, was a later addition. The only three-fold collection/*Tipitaka* to survive intact is referred to as the 'Pali Canon' after the language in which it is written. It is a closed canon that has been preserved assiduously by Theravadins.<sup>6</sup>

'Theravada' signifies 'Doctrine of the Elders', and it is the only remaining school of Early Buddhism. It has two other names: 'Pali Buddhism' after the language of its texts, and 'Southern Buddhism' because it is the dominant tradition throughout Southeast Asia, notably Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>7</sup> Theravadins believe the words in the *Sutta* and *Vinaya* to have come directly from the Buddha, and adhere to them accordingly.<sup>8</sup> Primacy is given to the teachings of the Four Noble Truths/*ariya-sacca*, the Eightfold Path/*atthangika-magga*, no-self/*anatta*, and dependent origination/*paticcasamuppada*.<sup>9</sup> Their ultimate goal is the liberation of sentient beings by the cultivation of meditation/*samadhi*, moral discipline/*sila*, and wisdom/*panna*, the three divisions of the Eightfold Path. The Theravada ideal is embodied in the noble one/*arahant*, who has attained

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<sup>5</sup> '*Nibbana*' (P) literally translated is 'extinction', which is the ultimate Buddhist goal. It is the extinction of greed, hate, and delusion, and clinging to existence; *nibbana* delivers from future rebirths. Full extinction takes place with the end of this life.

'*Parinibbana*' (P) signifies this 'full *nirvana*' (S) or the extinction of the five groups of existence that occur at the death of a Buddha or an *Arahant* ('*Nibbana*', '*Parinibbana*', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.126, & p.105—107).

<sup>6</sup> '*Tipitaka*', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.180; '*Tripitaka*', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.309.

<sup>7</sup> '*Theravada*', (P) Nyanatiloka 1987, *Dictionary*, p.179; '*Theravada*', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.300.

<sup>8</sup> '*Theravada*', Stephan Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, eds., 1994, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Zen* (Boston, Shambhala), p.369.

<sup>9</sup> '*Theravada*', Stephan Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, eds., 1994, *Encyclopedia*, p.369.



enlightenment and liberation by practising the teachings of the Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama (c. 485—405 BCE).<sup>10</sup>

For Theravadins, Buddhas are ordinary human beings who have developed extraordinary insight, and how enlightenment is attained has resulted in a hierarchy of three kinds of Buddhas.<sup>11</sup> The most perfect enlightenment is that of a *samma-sambuddha*, who is enlightened by his/her own efforts and teaches the *dhamma*, like Siddhatta Gotama. *Pacceka-buddha* are enlightened by their own efforts and do not teach, and the lowliest Buddha, a *savaka-bodhi* or noble-one/*arahant*, is enlightened by the teachings of another Buddha.<sup>12</sup> The perfect enlightenment of a *samma-sambuddha* is attained only by one who re-discovers and teaches the *dhamma* at a time when it not known in the world. Thus, becoming a *samma-sambuddha* requires the knowledge that Buddhist teachings have faded from the world.<sup>13</sup> Time is cyclical, rather than linear, and there will be a time in the future when the *dhamma* has disappeared, and another self-enlightened Buddha, named Maitreya, will discover and teach the same *dhamma*. Throughout the aeons that mark world cycles/*kappa*, each time the *dhamma* is discovered it consists of the same teachings. According to tradition, a non-teaching *pacceka-buddha* does not arise while the teachings of a perfect *samma-sambuddha* are known.<sup>14</sup>

New Buddhist understandings appeared and were embodied in *sutras* that became the focus of new schools. Theravada and Mahayana attitudes towards such texts differ,

. . . while the early schools regarded the canon as closed, the Mahayana believed it was still open, and continued to incorporate new literature for over a thousand years after the death of the Buddha. New *sutras*, *sastras*, and tantric compositions were incorporated and given canonical status, with the result that in the Chinese and Tibetan Tripitakas the threefold structure breaks down.<sup>15</sup>

Like Theravadins, Mahayanists claim their texts are Buddha's words, even though textual dating shows most originated after the Buddha's death.

Historical details of the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism remain obscure, and scholars use different criteria to date it; for example, from the

<sup>10</sup> 'Siddhartha Gautama', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.266.

<sup>11</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught* (London, Wisdom), p.1.

<sup>12</sup> 'Bodhi', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.34.

<sup>13</sup> 'Bodhi', 'Samma-sambodhi', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp.34—5, 159.

<sup>14</sup> 'Pacceka-buddha', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.119.

<sup>15</sup> 'Tripitaka', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.309.

appearance of its earliest literature, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, or from its earliest inscriptions, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>16</sup>

Because Buddhism is an orthopraxy, it requires a harmony of behaviour rather than a harmony of belief or opinion, and a schism would require a divergence of monastic rules/*Vinaya* that govern behaviour. The rise of Mahayanist understandings did not denote a schism with Early Buddhism because traditional identities are taken from whichever *Vinaya* is followed. Mahayana ideas cut across the boundaries of different *Vinaya* traditions and did not generate an identifiable further school.<sup>17</sup> Because there is no Mahayana *Vinaya*, there is no such thing as a Mahayana monk; rather, there are monks with Mahayana visions and motivations.<sup>18</sup>

'Mahayana' means 'Great Vehicle', and denotes their claim to embrace a larger vision of the path to liberation.<sup>19</sup> Mahayanists disparaged pre-existing traditions by calling them 'Hinayana' or 'Small Vehicle'. For Mahayanists, Buddhas are cosmic beings who occasionally manifest in human form; they are omniscient/*sarvajna* and possess ten special powers/*dasa-bala*.<sup>20</sup> These super-human Buddhas offer the possibility of an ongoing revelation because they are available to update the *dhamma*.<sup>21</sup> Most Mahayana philosophical teachings are presented in the Perfection of Wisdom Literature/*Prajnaparamita-sutras*.<sup>22</sup> These *sutras* elaborate understandings of the '*bodhisattva* ideal', teachings of 'emptiness/*sunyata*' and 'skilful-means/*upaya-kusala*', and the practice of dedicating one's religious merit/*punya* to others.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Harvey, 2001, 'Introduction', pp.1—28 in Peter Harvey, ed., *Buddhism* (London & NY, Continuum), p.9; & Paul Williams (with Anthony Tribe), 2000, *Buddhist Thought: a complete introduction to the Indian tradition* (London & NY, Routledge), p.104, citing Gregory Schopen, 1979, 'Mahayana in Indian inscriptions', pp. 1—19, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, pp. 98—9, 101, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, pp.99—100; & Damien Keown, 2001, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Hampshire & NY, Palgrave), p.135, who cites N Dutt, 1970, *Buddhist Sects in India* (Calcutta, F.K.L. Mukhopadhyay), p73; and, Dutt, 1930, *Aspects of Mahayana Buddhism and its Relation to Hinayana* (London, Luzac), p.292.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.103.

<sup>20</sup> 'Buddha', (P & S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.42. '*Dasa-bala*', or the ten powers of a Buddha, consist of knowledge relating to: 1. what is and is not possible; 2. the maturation of *karma*; 3. the qualities of beings; 4. the tendencies of beings; 5. the constituents of the world; 6. the paths leading to realms of existence; 7. pure and impure behaviour; 8. the arising of meditative states; 9. the death and rebirth of beings; 10. liberation through the destruction of the outflows/*asravas* (Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.70).

<sup>21</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.103.

<sup>22</sup> '*Prajna-paramita Sutras*', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.218—219.

<sup>23</sup> '*Prajna-paramita Sutras*', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.218—219.

Mahayana understandings represent a paradigm shift in which the values of pre-existing schools were recalibrated.<sup>24</sup> Mahayanists place great emphasis upon the twin qualities of compassion/*karuna* and wisdom/*prajna* that are manifested in *bodhisattva*/enlightenment beings who prioritise the liberation of others over personal liberation.<sup>25</sup> Buddhas also became supernatural beings worthy of devotion. Mahayana Buddhism came to dominate north Asia, notably Northern India, Tibet, Central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Influenced by diverse cultural forces, Mahayana Buddhism has taken many forms; for example, Madhyamaka, Yogacara, Pure Land, Vajrayana and Chan or Zen schools.<sup>26</sup> Mahayanist understandings share at least three characteristics,

- a path of perfection in which practitioners become *bodhisattvas*;
- the co-existence of many Buddhas, who are transcendent beings;
- a technical understanding of emptiness/*sunyata* based upon dependent origination/*paticcasamuppada*.<sup>27</sup>

### **B. Arahant and Bodhisattva**

Theravada and Mahayana paths to liberation are epitomised in the attainments of *arahants* and *bodhisattvas*, respectively, which reflect different conceptions of a Buddha's constitution. According to Theravadins, all Buddhas are human beings who attain enlightenment and liberation from *samsara*, whereas according to Mahayanists, a *bodhisattva* aims to attain enlightenment and Buddhahood and remains available to assist others.

For Theravadins, the *arahant* embodies and models the highest Buddhist attainments, which are closely associated with the monastic ideal. Theravadins rely upon the reciprocal relationship between laity and monastics that conform to the four ideal divisions of Buddhist society—lay and monastic men and women. The laity is assumed to enjoy 'family life' and is relied upon to provide material support for monastics, who in return teach the *dhamma* and model Buddhist practice.<sup>28</sup> The first indications of the cultural divisions between lay and monastic responsibilities are found in

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<sup>24</sup> 'Mahayana', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.167; & Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.130.

<sup>25</sup> 'Mahayana', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.167—168.

<sup>26</sup> 'Mahayana', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.167—168.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), pp.89—90.

stories of the Buddha's birth that foretell his role as a wheel-turning/*cakkavatti* world-renouncer or world-ruler.<sup>29</sup> Theravadins believe 'world renouncers' have a better chance of attaining liberation because their living conditions are more conducive.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, a lay Buddhist might live a 'family life', practise what the Buddha taught, and realize *nibbana*.<sup>31</sup>

The Theravada Buddhist aims to become an *arahant*, who is marked by the arising of *savaka-bodhi*, 'the enlightenment of the disciple'.<sup>32</sup> Enlightenment can be momentary, but it may take several lifetimes to complete the four stages necessary to destroy the Ten Fetters, and so become an *arahant*.<sup>33</sup> Each of the four stages entails entering a supramundane path/*magga* and attaining its fruitions/*phala* (see diagram).<sup>34</sup>

ARAHANT<sup>35</sup>

TEN FETTERS

PATH & ATTAINMENT

1. SELF BELIEF	)	
2. SCEPTICAL DOUBT	)	destroyed ..... 1. STREAM WINNER/ <i>sotapanna</i>
3. RELIANCE ON RULES & RITUALS	)	
4. SENSUOUS CRAVING	)	reduced ..... 2. ONCE-RETURNER/ <i>sakadagami</i>
5. HATRED	)	destroyed ..... 3. NON-RETURNER/ <i>anagami</i>
6. CRAVING MATERIAL/FORM REALM	)	
7. CRAVING FORMLESS REALM	)	
8. CONCEIT	)	<u>destroyed</u> ..... 4. ARAHANT/ <i>ariya-puggala</i>
9. RESTLESSNESS	)	
10. IGNORANCE	)	

At the end of this process, the *arahant* has attained liberation/*nibbana*, and, like the Buddha, upon death attains full extinction of the groups of existence/*khandha-parinibbana*.<sup>36</sup>

In the Pali Canon, the Ten Perfections/*paramita* necessary for perfect enlightenment/*samma-sambodhi* are mentioned only in relation to the

<sup>28</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp.76—89.

<sup>29</sup> 'Cakka', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.38; and, 'Cakravartin', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.48. The wheel symbolises free movement throughout the land, and has been used as an epithet for the Buddha whose teachings spread through many lands ('Cakravartin', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.48).

<sup>30</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp.76—89

<sup>31</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.77.

<sup>32</sup> 'Pacceka-buddha', & 'Savaka-bodhi', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.119, & 168.

<sup>33</sup> 'Ariya-puggala', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp.20—22.

<sup>34</sup> 'Ariya-puggala', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp.20—22.

<sup>35</sup> Based on Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, 'Ariya-puggala', p.21.

<sup>36</sup> 'Ariya-puggala', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp.20—22; and Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.41.

Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama.<sup>37</sup> The designation '*bodhisatta*' is given only to the Buddha before his enlightenment and in his former existences, and the Pali scriptures do not record a follower of the Buddha declaring it as an aspiration.<sup>38</sup> In the Theravada tradition, *bodhisattahood* is not mentioned as an ideal higher than becoming an *arahant*.

*Bodhisatta* is a Pali word that when translated into the Sanskrit preferred by many Mahayanists becomes *bodhisattva*. For Mahayanists, everyone has the potential to become a *bodhisattva*, which requires undertaking the *bodhisattva* vow/*pranidhana*.<sup>39</sup> The *bodhisattva* path takes a long time, said to be as long as 'three incalculable aeons', and motivated by compassion, this undertaking is definitive of the ideal Mahayanan practitioner.<sup>40</sup> Some *sutras* describe a special form of *nirvana*, the unlocalized or *apratistha-nirvana*, where the *bodhisattva* might be in the world, but not of it.<sup>41</sup> A *bodhisattva* is held to be mothered by the perfection of wisdom/*prajnaparamita* and fathered by skilfulness in means/*upaya-kusala*.<sup>42</sup> The presence of both wisdom/*prajna* and means/*upaya* are essential, and the absence of either results in continued rounds of *samsara*.<sup>43</sup> Mahayanists have compared their emphasis upon wisdom/*prajna* and compassion/*karunna* favourably with what they have perceived to be the inward-looking focus of 'Hinayanists'.<sup>44</sup>

The *bodhisattva* treads a graduated path to perfection, but Mahayanan schools do not agree whether the path is completed in six or ten stages/*bhumi*. Details of the *bodhisattva* path differ, but always begin with the mind turning towards compassion for others in a movement called the

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<sup>37</sup> The ways in which the Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, practiced the perfections are recorded in the *Jataka* stories. The perfections are mentioned in two other canonical works, the *Buddhavamsa*, the fourteenth book of the *Khuddaka Nikaya*, and in the concluding Miscellaneous Section/*pakinnakakatha* of the Commentary to *Cariyapitaka* ('Parami', (P) Nyanatiloka, *Dictionary*, p.125; & 'Buddhavamsa', (P) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.45).

<sup>38</sup> '*Bodhisatta*', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.35.

<sup>39</sup> '*Pranidhana*', '*Bodhisattva*', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.220, 38; Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, pp.137, 176.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.176.

<sup>41</sup> '*Bodhisattva*', in Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.38

<sup>42</sup> *Vimalakirtinirdesasutra*, vii.6.1, trans. E. Lamotte (Sara Boin, English trans.), 1976, *The Teachings of Vimalakirti* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul). cited by Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.131. This gendered observation in Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism understands *prajna*/wisdom to be passive and female, and *upaya*/means to be active and masculine.

<sup>43</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.131

<sup>44</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.131

arising of the awakening mind/*bodhicitta*.<sup>45</sup> At the end of the ten stages/*bhumi*, the practitioner is a Buddha, omniscient and everywhere (see diagram).<sup>46</sup>

THE BODHISATTVA PATH<sup>47</sup>

<u>STAGE/BHUMI</u>	<u>PERFECTION/PARAMITA</u>
1. JOYFUL	GENEROSITY/ <i>DANA</i>
2. PURE	MORALITY/ <i>SILA</i>
3. LUMINOUS	PATIENCE/ <i>KSANTI</i>
4. BRILLIANT	COURAGE/ <i>VIRYA</i>
5. HARD TO CONQUER	MEDITATION/ <i>SAMADHI</i>
Personal development completed.	
6. FACING FORWARD	WISDOM/ <i>PRAJNA</i> (INSIGHT)
Bodhisattvas are perfect in ethics and wisdom and enter the threshold of the transcendent	
7. GOING FAR	SKILFUL-MEANS/ <i>UPAYA-KUSALA</i>
8. IMMOVABLE	VOW/ <i>PRANIDHANA</i>
9. THE GOOD	POWER/ <i>BALA</i>
10. DHARMA CLOUDS	KNOWLEDGE/ <i>JNANA</i>
BUDDHAHOOD	

The first five stages/*bhumi* represent a normative development of moral conduct. From stage six, practise continues wholly for the purpose of assisting others and enters the threshold of the transcendent. At stages seven to ten, great *bodhisattvas* represent the fusion of metaphysics and ethics, and the supreme ideals of wisdom/*prajna* and compassion/*karuna*.<sup>48</sup> At the highest levels, *bodhisattvas* are perfect supernatural beings with supernatural powers, and finally attain Buddhahood.<sup>49</sup>

Mahayana and Theravada traditions adhere to two different visions of Buddhist ethics, neither of which is wholly absent in the other. In Theravada understandings, only exceptionally do lay Buddhists become enlightened, and monasticism is held in great esteem. Monastics model wholly human endeavours to become *arahants*, who are liberated from *samsara* after death. In Mahayana understandings, undertaking the *bodhisattva* vow represents an advanced soteriological resolve motivated by compassionate concern for the liberation of all beings that postpones *nirvana* until all beings have attained enlightenment. From the Theravada perspective, the Mahayanan *bodhisattva* vow represents a well-intentioned but misguided clinging to *samsara* for the benefit of liberating others who

<sup>45</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.176.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.181.

<sup>47</sup> 'Bhumi', 'Bodhisattva', 'Paramita', 'Sad-paramita', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.34, 38, 212, 242.

<sup>48</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.158.

<sup>49</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.159—60

can only free themselves. From the Mahayana perspective, the attainment of *nibbana* by the *arahant* represents a self-absorbed disregard of suffering.

### **C. Eightfold Path and Precepts**

The Buddha's teachings relate the performance of 'right' or moral conduct to the attainment of a supramundane/*lokuttara* state.<sup>50</sup> All traditions accept that the Four Noble Truths/*Ariya-sacca* are at the heart of the Buddha's teachings, and they are, briefly, suffering/*dukkha*, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Eightfold Path that leads to the cessation of suffering.<sup>51</sup> It is said that the first truth is to be fully understood; the second to be abandoned; the third to be realised; and the fourth to be cultivated.<sup>52</sup> The cornerstone of Buddhism's strategy for liberation is the Fourth Truth, the Eightfold Path/*atthangika-magga*, which describes the path to enlightenment and *nibbana* and has been succinctly described as a tripartite soteriological structure of morality, concentration, and wisdom, based in virtuous action.<sup>53</sup> Its eight factors are grouped into three sections: wisdom/*panna*, which contains right view and thought; morality/*sila*, which contains right speech, action, and livelihood; and meditation/*samadhi*, which contains right effort, mindfulness and concentration (see diagram).<sup>54</sup>

#### THE EIGHTFOLD PATH/ATTHANGIKA-MAGGA<sup>55</sup>

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>UNDERSTOOD AS:</u>
iii. <i>Wisdom/Panna</i>	
1. Right view	based in the Buddha's teachings.
2. Right thought	free from lust, ill will and cruelty.
i. <i>Morality/Sila</i>	
3. Right speech	using it productively.
4. Right action	maintaining morality/ <i>sila</i> .
5. Right livelihood	avoiding harm.
ii. <i>Meditation/Samadhi</i>	
6. Right effort	fostering wholesome things.

<sup>50</sup> Hammalawa Sadhatissa, 1987, *Buddhist Ethics: the Path to Nirvana* (London, Wisdom), pp.12—13.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Gombrich, 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London & NY, Routledge), p.62. Gombrich observes that '*dukkha*' has no precise English equivalent, and represents the opposite of well-being, and is more general than suffering (Gombrich, 2006, p.63).

<sup>52</sup> '*Sacca*', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.153, citing the *Dhammacakkappavattana-Sutta*.

<sup>53</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, pp.110 & 121.

<sup>54</sup> '*Sacca*', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp.151—153. For further analysis of the threefold classification of the Eightfold Path, see Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, pp.35—44.

<sup>55</sup> '*Sacca*', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.152—153; '*Eightfold Path*', Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.84.

7. Right mindfulness      being fully aware.
8. Right concentration    cultivating wholesome consciousness.

The order of the three sections reflects that morality facilitates the intellectual discipline necessary for meditation, which is necessary for wisdom.<sup>56</sup> However, a degree of wisdom underpins the ability to recognise and accept the Path, and progress along it is not linear, passing from one factor to another; rather, factors are developed cumulatively.<sup>57</sup>

There is only one Path to which ethical and moral behaviours are integral, so that the pursuit of moral goals within contexts of the Buddhist path are not always simply mundane activities, although they are practised in mundane contexts.<sup>58</sup> Ethical behaviour has three understandings. Outside Buddhism, random ethical activities will not end rebirth and *samsara*. Within Buddhism, ethical activities take on soteriological significance, and the Eightfold Path has two understandings: conventional and ultimate. The conventional understanding recognises and accepts the Eightfold Path as the path to liberation, whereas an advanced practitioner who has internalised the *dhamma* has an ultimate, supramundane perspective.<sup>59</sup>

The Eightfold Path is not a list of precepts to be followed; rather, it is the Buddha's formulation of the qualities necessary for liberation/*nibbana*. To encourage the development of these qualities, monastics undertake hundreds of precepts set out in the *Vinaya Pitaka*. The laity undertakes a more manageable set of five precepts/*panca-sila*, which are to abstain from,

1. killing or harming living beings;
2. taking what is not given;
3. sexual misconduct;
4. false speech; and,
5. the use of intoxicants.<sup>60</sup>

On specific days, such as full and new moon days, and on the first and last quarter of the moon, the number of precepts is sometimes increased to ten/*dasa-sila*, and include abstaining from,

6. eating after midday;
7. dancing, singing, music, and shows;
8. the use of garlands, scent, cosmetics and adornments;

<sup>56</sup> Richard F Gombrich, 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Theravada Buddhism*, p.63

<sup>57</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.112, based on *Anguttara-Nikaya* V.2.

<sup>58</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.108—9

<sup>59</sup> *Majjhima-Nikaya*, iii.74, cited/trans. by Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.109, 242 Fn.4.

<sup>60</sup> 'Patimokkha', 'Sikkhapada', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp. 136, 170.



9. the use of high seats or beds; and,
10. accepting gold and silver.<sup>61</sup>

Eight precepts/*attha-sila* are sometimes undertaken, in which case precepts seven and eight are fused, precept nine becomes precept eight, and precept ten is excluded.<sup>62</sup> Some Mahayanists recognise a different set of similar precepts, the Ten Good Paths of Action/*dasa-kusala-karmapatha*, which are not to kill, steal, indulge in sexual misconduct, lie, slander, indulge in harsh speech, in idle talk, and to cultivate non-greed, non-hatred, and right views.<sup>63</sup> For all Buddhists, precepts are regarded as voluntarily undertaken training principles and are not enforced. The Eightfold Path to liberation/*nibbana* is built upon ethical behaviour whose translation into soteriological advancement is explained in intricate and profound philosophies.

#### ***D. No-self and Dependent Origination***

The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* presents the teachings in the *Suttas* systematically and it contains exhaustive lists of what is occurring in all psychophysical circumstances.<sup>64</sup> The Buddha described the flow of mental and physical processes that are the experiential aspects of *dhammas*. *Dhammas* have been described as evanescent events linked by an impersonal causal law, and it is sometimes observed, 'That is how it truly is.'<sup>65</sup> In Theravada Buddhism, 'ultimate truth', 'how it is', and 'ultimate reality', indicate that *dhammas* are the final result of analyses and the starting points of synthesis. The Early schools did not agree about the degree to which *dhammas* exist beyond appearance and whether or not they have own-existence/*svabha*.<sup>66</sup> The Theravada's *Abhidhamma* names eighty two *dhammas*, eighty one of which are conditioned, and the eighty second, *nibbana*, is uniquely unconditioned.<sup>67</sup> As a *dhamma*, *nibbana* is regarded as an experiential event that cannot be further reduced.<sup>68</sup> However, some Mahayanists argue that *nibbana* is conditioned by *samsara*, and draw the

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<sup>61</sup> 'Sikkhapada', (P) Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.170; and, 'Astanga-sila', 'Panca-sila', and 'Dasa-sila', (S) Damien Keown 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.22, 70, & 210.

<sup>62</sup> 'Sikkhapada', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.170.

<sup>63</sup> 'Dasa-kusala-karmapatha', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.70

<sup>64</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.83; Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, pp. 83, 87—8.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.92.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.89, 93.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.90.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.90.

conclusion that the nature of 'ultimate reality' is inexpressible, indicated by the term 'emptiness/*sunyata*' and 'thusness/*tathata*'.

### **i. Anatta**

Buddhist understandings of a human being's constitution are unique and have their origins in ancient Indian religious philosophies in which self/*atta* or *atman* was that immutable part of a person that was reincarnated and that ultimately gained liberation/*moksha* through unity with *Brahman*.<sup>69</sup> The nature of the relationship between *brahman* and *atman* was described in the Chandogya Upanisad, which dates from before the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as '*tat tvam asi*/that thou art', and the *atman*/soul or self was understood as having the same constitution as *brahman* and to be unconditioned, unchanging and eternal.<sup>70</sup>

Buddhist analyses reveal nothing that is unconditioned, unchanging and permanent that might constitute a self/*atta* or *atman*. Buddhism teaches that while a being appears to exist as a stable unity, in truth it is comprised of five aggregates/*khandha*—form/*rupa*; feeling/*vedana*; perception/*sanna*; volitions/*sankhara*; and consciousness/*vinnana*—which function in ways that give the illusion of ontological stability. The aging process—from birth to old age and death—indicates their impermanence. In the Pali Canon, the lack of substance in these aggregates is described in the *Phena/Foam-sutta*,

Form is like a glob of foam; feeling, a bubble; perception, a mirage; fabrications, a banana tree; consciousness, a magic trick. . . . However you observe them, appropriately examine them, they are empty, void to whoever sees them appropriately.<sup>71</sup>

All Buddhists accept this analysis and the teachings of no-self/*anatta*.

The First Noble Truth describes being as subject to suffering/*dukkha* and unsatisfactory.<sup>72</sup> The Buddha observed an inextricable link between

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<sup>69</sup> 'Atman', 'Moksha', (S) Stephan Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, eds., 1994, *Encyclopedia*, p.22, & 229.

<sup>70</sup> 'Chandogya Upanisad', 8.14.1, Patrick Olivelle 1996, *Upanisads: translated from the Original Sanskrit* (Oxford & NY, Oxford University Press), p.176; '*Tat Tvam Asi*', 'Atman', 'Moksha', (S), Stephan Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, eds., 1994, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 365, 22, 229.

<sup>71</sup> 'Phena/Foam-sutta', *Samyutta Nikaya*, 22.95, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1999, from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.095.than.html>, on 23.11.07; '*Khandha*', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, pp.82—86, p.84, citing *Samyutta Nikaya*, XXII, 95, the 'Phena Sutta/Foam'.

<sup>72</sup> 'Sacca', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.151.

embodiment and *samsara* and the importance of human existence for liberation,

Within this fathom-long sentient body itself, I postulate the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world.<sup>73</sup>

Human embodiment facilitates the relationship between ethical action and liberation, or moral goodness/*sila* and enlightenment/*bodhi*.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, almost paradoxically, in all Buddhist traditions,

The idea of a self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore,

The doctrine of Anatta or No-Soul is the natural result of, or the corollary to, the analysis of the Five Aggregates and the teaching of Conditioned Genesis (*paticcasamuppada*).<sup>76</sup>

## **ii. Paticcasamuppada**

In *paticcasamuppada*/dependent origination, the Buddha taught how the world is, that everything is produced by conditions, is impermanent and without self/*anatta*, and that the experiential realisation of this is a characteristic of enlightenment. Dependent origination/*paticcasamuppada* refines the analysis of the five aggregates/*khandha*, and the Buddha demonstrates how basic phenomenon/*dhammas* condition each other and form causal links between rounds of rebirth/*samsara*. The relationships described conform to the formula: when this is, that is; this arising, that arises; when this is not, that is not; this ceasing, that ceases.<sup>77</sup> This is more clearly expressed,

When this is present, that comes to be;

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<sup>73</sup> *Anguttara-nikaya* II, Fours, 45, *Rohitassa Sutta*, cited by Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.42. Rahula notes that the formula is the same as that of the Four Noble Truths, but the word *loka*/world replaces the word *dukkha*. This quotation maintains that all the Truths are found within ourselves and there is no external power that produces the arising and cessation of *dukkha*.

<sup>74</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.115

<sup>75</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.51.

<sup>76</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.52.

<sup>77</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.53, FN.1, citing *Majjhima-nikaya III* (PTS edition), p.63, and *Samyutta-nikaya II* (PTS edition), pp. 28, 95.

from the arising of this, that arises.  
When this is absent, that does not come to be;  
on the cessation of this, that ceases.<sup>78</sup>

*Paticcasamuppada* demonstrates how the whole of *samsara* is conditioned and that nothing originates independently.

Each of the *paticcasamuppada*'s twelve links/*nidana* presents the condition necessary for results to arise. The first link, ignorance, conditions the arising of *karma* formations, which condition consciousness, which condition mind and body, and so on (see diagram).

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION/PATICCASAMUPPADA<sup>79</sup>

<u>CONDITION/NIDANA</u>	<u>ARISING</u>
1. Ignorance/ <i>avijja</i> is.	
2. Conditioned by ignorance/ <i>avijja</i>	karma formations/ <i>sankhara</i> .
3. Conditioned by karma formations	consciousness/ <i>vinna</i> .
4. Conditioned by consciousness	name and form/ <i>namarupa</i> .
5. Conditioned by mind and body	six sense media/ <i>ayatana</i> .
6. Conditioned by the six senses	sense contact/ <i>phassa</i> .
7. Conditioned by sense contact	feeling/ <i>vedana</i> .
8. Conditioned by feeling	craving/ <i>tanha</i> .
9. Conditioned by craving	clinging/ <i>upadana</i> .
10. Conditioned by clinging	becoming/ <i>bhava</i> .
11. Conditioned by becoming	birth/ <i>jati</i> .
12. Conditioned by birth	aging and death/ <i>jara-marana</i> .

*Nidana* do not give birth to anything, but are conditioned by something and present the conditions for something else. Each *nidana* arises, subsists, and passes away, and its presence is the condition necessary for the subsequent *nidana* to arise. *Nidana* are relative and interdependent and together function as a complex nexus in which creation has no place. The apparently fixed world is replaced by a world that is, 'a dynamism of experiences based on the centrality of causal conditioning'.<sup>80</sup>

The twelve links may be taken to represent an individual.<sup>81</sup> Ignorance, the initial link/*nidana*, is often taken to be ignorance of the Buddha's teachings, but questions of a first cause are set aside as speculative (see below, section F.i., 'Kusala'). Because it has no absolute beginning, the *paticcasamuppada* is sometimes represented by a circle in

<sup>78</sup> David J Kalupahana, 1975, *Causality: the Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (Honolulu, University Press), p.144.

<sup>79</sup> *Samyutta Nikaya* II, XII.2. trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, at [www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.html](http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.html), on 7.8.07; & 'Paticcasamuppada', Nyanatiloka, 1987, Dictionary, p.128—136.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, pp.62—4.

<sup>81</sup> Edward J Thomas, 1935, *Early Buddhist Scriptures* (London, Kegan Paul), p.122

which the twelve *nidana* are depicted as the 'Wheel of Life'. When they are depicted in this way, the twelve links represent the causal links between past, present and future lifetimes. Elements one and two are identified with volitional activities of a previous existence; elements three to ten relate to this lifetime's volitional activities; and elements eleven and twelve relate to a future life.<sup>82</sup>

The Four Noble Truths rely implicitly upon *paticcasamuppada* and the two are almost interchangeable.<sup>83</sup> By demonstrating the nature of existence, how it comes about and how it is maintained, *paticcasamuppada* illuminates the Four Noble Truths. The Truths state the unsatisfactoriness of existence, while the *paticcasamuppada* elaborates why and how this is so. The first Noble Truth, of *dukkha* being inherent to existence, is indicated by the group of twelve *nidana*. The second Noble Truth, of the origin of *dukkha*, is indicated by reading the Wheel from the first to the twelfth *nidana*, which demonstrates impermanence. The third Noble Truth, of the cessation of *dukkha*, is indicated by reading the *nidana* in reverse order, from the twelfth to the first. The fourth Noble Truth, of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, requires the cultivation of 'right view', which includes knowledge of cause and effect as expounded in the *paticcasamuppada*.

*Patichsamuppada* clarifies and endorses the whole of the Buddha's teachings. It describes the conditions whereby all sentient beings are tied to *samsaric* existence, and explains how psycho-physical phenomena are maintained through repeated cycles of *samsara* without recourse to a soul. It reveals how the past conditions the present, and how the present conditions the future. The Buddha saw and experienced the processes of *patichsamuppada*, and so it is not speculative. Knowledge of the processes facilitates suffering being regarded as an impersonal law-like response to causes, which may be removed.<sup>84</sup> Knowledge of *patichsamuppada* is what the Buddha is said to have re-discovered, by which he is enlightened and its

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<sup>82</sup> David J Kalupahana, 1975, *Causality*, p.143; & Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.54; '*Pratitya-samutpada*', (S), Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.221; '*Pratitya-samutpada*', (S), Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.221.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Williams, 2000, *Buddhist Thought*, p.66; Etienne Lamotte, 1980, 'Conditioned Co-production and Supreme Enlightenment', pp.118—132 in Balasooriya, Somaratna, Andre Barfeau, Richard Gombrich, Siri Gunasingha, Udaye Mallawarachchi, and Edmund Perry, eds., 1980, *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula* (London, Gordon Frazer), pp.118—119.

<sup>84</sup> David J. Kalupahana, 1975, *Causality*, p.144.

understanding is essential for realizing his teachings.<sup>85</sup> The Buddha placed dependent origination at the centre of his teachings by saying, 'He who sees dependent origination sees the *dhamma*; he who sees *dhamma*, sees dependent origination'.<sup>86</sup>

### ***E. Emptiness***

The Buddha's first sermon expounded a 'middle path' between extreme asceticism and extreme sensualism, which implies ethical considerations.<sup>87</sup> The path of the Middle School/*Madhyamaka* is set between eternalism and nihilism, and says little of ethics. This middle way is based in the concept of emptiness/*sunyata*, extrapolated from the teachings of dependent origination/*paticcasamuppada*.<sup>88</sup> The Madhyamaka School has its basis in Nagarjuna's text, *Mulamadhyamaka-karika/Fundamentals of the Middle Way* (MMK), which argues that a proper understanding of early texts leads to everything being regarded as empty of self/*anatta*.<sup>89</sup> Teachings of emptiness/*sunyata* are also associated with the *Perfection of Wisdom literature/Prajnaparamita-sutras* (PJP).<sup>90</sup> The wisdom repeatedly praised is knowledge of emptiness/*sunyata* required by *bodhisattvas*.<sup>91</sup> Both the MMK and PJP reject speculative views and emphasize that the ultimate goal requires 'letting go', which facilitates the transcendence of sensory and mental objects.<sup>92</sup>

Teachings of no-self/*anatta* and dependent origination/*paticcasamuppada* demonstrate nothing is eternal or unconditioned. However, there is something in experience that can be described in terms of *dharmas*, and it is wrong to say that *samsaric* experience does or does not exist, thereby adopting an eternalistic or nihilistic view.<sup>93</sup> The MMK demonstrates the Buddha's teachings being subverted by the belief that

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<sup>85</sup> Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.31, citing *Majjhima-nikaya*, III (PTS edn.), p.280; *Samyutta-nikkaya* (PTS edn.) IV, p.47, 107.

<sup>86</sup> *Mahahatthipadopama Sutta* or *The Great Elephant Footprint Simile*, MN 28, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, at [www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.html), on 11.7.06.

<sup>87</sup> Rina Sircar, 1999, *Psycho-Ethical Aspects of Abhidhamma* (Maryland & Oxford, University Press of America), p.100.

<sup>88</sup> Rina Sircar, 1999, *Psycho-Ethical Aspects*, p.100.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.95—96.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.95; Donald S Lopez Jr, ed., 2004, *Buddhist Scriptures* (London & NY, Penguin Classics), p.450.

<sup>91</sup> Donald S Lopez Jr, ed. 2004, *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.450.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.97.

<sup>93</sup> *Mulamadhyamaka-karika*, Ch.15.v.10, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07.

*dharmas* are permanent and argues against the understanding that they constitute the ultimate reality.<sup>94</sup> It observes *nirvana* being conditioned by *samsara*, and so accords *nirvana* the same provisional status given to all other *dharmas*.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the constitution of 'ultimate reality' becomes unknown and inexpressible, which is indicated by the term 'emptiness/*sunyata*'.

A self/*atta* or *atman* is unchanging and eternal; it remains static and its constitution renders change impossible.<sup>96</sup> In a being, the absence of a self/*atta*, which is sometimes also described as 'emptiness', facilitates change, which is required for spiritual development.<sup>97</sup> Chapter twenty-four of the MMK implies the emptiness of the Four Noble Truths, saying that if the suffering/*dukkha* proclaimed in the first Noble Truth was causeless and eternal and was not empty, then it could never be ended.<sup>98</sup> The same may be said of the second and third Noble Truths, of the arising and cessation of suffering/*dukkha*, respectively. Finally, if the fourth Noble Truth of the Eightfold Path is to be developed gradually, then it cannot be causeless and eternal.<sup>99</sup>

In Mahayana traditions, emptiness is applied in every sphere; however, it is not just a monistic ultimate substance of which the world is comprised.<sup>100</sup> It is an adjectival quality of *dharmas*, rather than a substance from which they are comprised. It is neither a thing nor is it nothingness; rather it refers to the inability to define conceptually the nature of reality.<sup>101</sup> 'Emptiness' is known because the world is a web of changing,

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<sup>94</sup> MMK, Ch.24.v.40, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.100.

<sup>95</sup> MMK, Ch.25.v.19; & Ch.7.v.33, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.98–99.

<sup>96</sup> MMK, Ch.24.v.38, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.100.

<sup>97</sup> MMK, Ch.24.v.39, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.100.

<sup>98</sup> MMK, Ch.24.v.23, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.100.

<sup>99</sup> MMK, Ch.24.v.24, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.100.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.99.

<sup>101</sup> MMK, Ch.24.v.18, Frederick J Streng, trans. 1967, at [www.orientalia.org/article492.html](http://www.orientalia.org/article492.html), on 15.10.07; Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.99.

interdependent, baseless, *dharmas*, which the *paticcasamuppada* describes as dependently originated.<sup>102</sup>

In the Pali Canon's *Phela/Foam-sutta*, quoted above, in section D.i. 'Anatta', emptiness did not have the technical import developed in the MMK and PJP. In the PJP, *dharmas* are as real as dreams or magical illusions, and the section of the Heart Sutra that emphasises the emptiness of the five aggregates echoes sentiments previously expressed in the Pali text.

Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness is no other than form, form is no other than emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness.<sup>103</sup>

The PJP maintains ultimate truth transcends all logic, words and concepts, and avoids presenting a view by not asserting anything positively (arguably, this presents a view).<sup>104</sup> At the ultimate level, even talk of emptiness is to be relinquished because the things that are said to be empty do not ultimately exist, and so it cannot be said that 'they' are 'empty'.<sup>105</sup> For Theravadins, 'ultimate reality' requires the fires of greed, hatred and delusion to be blown out and the experiential realisation that everything is dependently originated.<sup>106</sup> For Mahayanists, 'ultimate reality' is inconceivable and inexpressible, and the PJP contains a series of subtle allusions to 'that-which-is-beyond-words', for which is used the notion of thusness/*tathata*, and all *dharmas* have the same quality of 'thusness' or 'emptiness'.<sup>107</sup>

In the MMK, Nagarjuna's refusal to state any opinion echoes the Buddha's refusal to answer speculative questions (see below, section F.i. 'Kusala'). 'Emptiness' is intended as an antidote to ideologies, views and theories. Nagarjuna negates opponents' views by means of four-cornered negation/*catuskoti*, which refute all possible alternatives.<sup>108</sup> The ethical

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.99.

<sup>103</sup> 'The "Heart of Perfect Wisdom" in 25 Lines', pp.140—141, Edward Conze, trans. 1973, *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts* (Totnes, Devon, Buddhist Publishing Group), p.140.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.102.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.102.

<sup>106</sup> Richard F Gombrich, 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Theravada Buddhism*, p.64.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, pp.102—103.

<sup>108</sup> *MMK*, Ch.21.v.13, is one instance where Nagarjuna echoes the four-cornered argumentation that is used in relation to *acinteyya*/that which cannot be thought or *avyakrta-vastu*/questions that have not been determined (Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.27, 210; Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.27). For further information, see below, section F.i., 'Kusala'.



implications of the doctrine of emptiness become apparent in the concept of 'skilful-means/*upaya-kusala*'.

### **F. Skilful and Skilful-means<sup>109</sup>**

Differences in Theravada and Mahayana approaches to ethics are embodied in their respective understandings of skilful/*kusala* and skilful-means/*upaya-kusala*.<sup>110</sup> In all traditions, realising the truth of the *dhamma* involves a progression of good mental states that are described as skilful/*kusala*, and the words 'skilful/*kusala*' and 'unskilful/*akusala*' were used by the Buddha where we might say 'moral' and 'immoral'.<sup>111</sup> In the Pali Canon, 'skilful/*kusala*' describes a method, means or device that is *kammically* wholesome or morally good.<sup>112</sup> Mahayanists expanded this understanding into skilful-means/*upaya-kusala*, and *bodhisattvas* are said to be mothered by the perfection of wisdom, and fathered by skilfulness in means.<sup>113</sup> There is no record in the Pali Canon of the Buddha using the expression 'skilful-means/*upaya-kusala*', and it is not known if the Buddha intended the Mahayanan understandings or if they were the result of later explication and schematisation.<sup>114</sup> In all traditions, *nibbanically* oriented qualities are described as 'skilful'. However, while practising the *dhamma* gives rise to qualities that are maintained even as the *dhamma* is left behind, skilful/*kusala* qualities are not jettisoned prior to enlightenment; rather, in *nibbana* they reach their full perfection.<sup>115</sup>

#### **i. Kusala**

The Buddha hesitated before teaching the *dhamma* because he knew it was difficult to communicate.<sup>116</sup> He was persuaded to teach by recognising the different abilities of people, which he compared to a pond of lotus,

Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses—born and growing in the water—might flourish while immersed in the water, without rising up from the water; some

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<sup>109</sup> 'Skill' is rendered '*kusala*' in both Pali and Sanskrit (Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.88), while '*upaya*' in Sanskrit is understood as skill in means or skilful method (Stephan Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, eds., 1994, *Encyclopedia*, p.393).

<sup>110</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means in Pre-Mahayana Buddhism', pp.117—136 in (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) *Skilful-means: a concept in Mahayana Buddhism* (NY, Routledge).

<sup>111</sup> Richard Gombrich, 1988, *Theravada Buddhism*, p.62.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.119; & 'Kusala', Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary*, p.88.

<sup>113</sup> *Vimalakirtinirdesasutra*, VII.6.1, cited by Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.131.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.117.

<sup>115</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.118.

<sup>116</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.120.

might stand at an even level with the water; while some might rise up from the water and stand without being smeared by the water—so too, surveying the world with the eye of an Awakened One, the Blessed One saw beings with little dust in their eyes and those with much, those with keen faculties and those with dull, those with good attributes and those with bad, those easy to teach and those hard, some of them seeing disgrace and danger in the other world.<sup>117</sup>

The Buddha formulated his teachings in a variety of ways tailored to the hearer.<sup>118</sup> A consistent teaching in different forms stems directly from him and reflects his skill in teaching.<sup>119</sup>

Theravada is the Buddhist tradition most noted for its conservatism; nevertheless, it is tolerant of beliefs and practices that might be inconsistent with strict understandings of its doctrines.<sup>120</sup> During the spread of Buddhism, many non-Buddhist cultural and religious phenomena were regarded as preliminaries for the Buddha's teachings, and presenting them in ways that are relevant to listeners is consistent with a 'philosophy of assimilation'.<sup>121</sup> The techniques recorded in the Pali Canon demonstrate the Buddha considering practitioners' needs and circumstances, which is integral to an ethic of inclusivity.<sup>122</sup>

The Buddha's skill is also manifest in his refusal to divert attention from liberation into futile speculations. In the simile of the arrow, the Buddha describes a man pierced by a poisoned arrow demanding to know all things of the arrow prior to its removal.<sup>123</sup> The Buddha equated this demand

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<sup>117</sup> *Samyutta Nikaya VI.1, Ayacana Sutta*, 'The Request', trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/index-author.html#i>, on 17.10.07.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.121.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.123.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.125, citing the works of M. Spiro, 1967, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Allen & Unwin, pl.), SJ Tambiah, 1970, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand* (Cambridge, pub.), and RF Gombrich, 1971, *Precepts and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford, Clarendon).

<sup>121</sup> Alicia Matsunaga, 1969, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation: The Historical Development of Honhi Suijaku Theory* (Tokyo, Sophia University; Rutland Vermont, Tuttle Co.), cited by Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', pp.123—124.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.124.

<sup>123</sup> *The Cula-Malunkya Sutta* (MN 63), 'The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya', Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1998, trans., at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html>, on 17.10.07, and Nyanaponika Thera, 1974, trans. *Alagaddupama Sutta*, 'The Discourse on the Snake Simile', MN 22, on 27.10.07, at [www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel048.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel048.html).

with a person refusing to practise the *dhamma* without answers to the imponderables/*acinteyya*.<sup>124</sup> The questions are,

1. whether the world is eternal, or not, or both, or neither;
2. whether the world is infinite in space, or not, or both, or neither;
3. whether the Buddha exists after death, or not, or both, or neither;
4. whether the soul/*atta* is identical with the body or different from it.<sup>125</sup>

The manner in which they are expressed covers every eventuality and is known as a four-cornered negation/*catuskoti*. Walpola Rahula illustrates the *catuskoti* by presenting them in an algebraic formula: a is b; a is not-b; a is both b and not-b; a is neither b nor not-b.<sup>126</sup> The simile of the arrow illustrates the Buddha not taking a view and not answering speculative questions. A similar attitude is reflected in the MMK and PJP's four-cornered negation/*catuskoti* of alternative views and opinions. The Buddha focussed only upon those things he knew would benefit others, and by prioritising concern for suffering over philosophical speculations, he set the tone for Buddhism's pragmatism.

Passages in the Pali Canon represent a matrix of Theravada understandings of skill from which Mahayanan understandings might have developed.<sup>127</sup> In one example, a wise man, understood as one who knows the *dhamma* and uses it to help others gain liberation from *samsara*, is compared to the skilful boatman who has the means and ability to ferry others across a dangerous river.<sup>128</sup>

But if (the man at the river) knows the method and is skilled and wise, by boarding a strong boat equipped with oars and a rudder, he can, with its help, set others across. Even so, he who is experienced and has a well-trained mind, who is learned

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<sup>124</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.127—128. The name applied to these questions varies between Sanskrit and Pali sources. In Sanskrit, *avyakṛta-vastu* is rendered as 'questions that have not been determined (by the Buddha)' (Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.27). In Pali, Nyanatiloka uses the term '*acinteyya*', described as 'that which cannot or should not be thought, the Unthinkable, Incomprehensible, Impenetrable, that which transcends the limits of thinking and over which, therefore, one should not ponder' (*Dictionary*, 1987, p.27 & 210).

<sup>125</sup> *Cula-Malunkyaovada Sutta, The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya*, MN 63, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1998, at

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html>, on 17.10.07.

<sup>126</sup> MMK.Ch.13.v.8, & Ch.27.v.30, acknowledge the Buddha first taught this; Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.53, Fn.1.

<sup>127</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.117 & 119.

<sup>128</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.118, citing D Andersen & H Smith, eds., 1913, 1965, *Sutta-nipata* (London, Luzac & Co, for Pali Text Society) p.56.

and dependable, clearly knowing, he can help others to understand who are willing to listen and ready to receive.<sup>129</sup>

This is complemented by the skill in means described in the 'Simile of the Raft', whose understanding is closest to 'skilful-means/*upaya-kausalya*' in Mahayanan sources.<sup>130</sup> The 'Simile of the Raft' tells of a man who having crossed a river by means of a raft then considers what to do with the raft.<sup>131</sup> The Buddha explains the best action would be to leave the raft behind, saying that like the boat the *dhamma* is 'for crossing over, not for retaining'.<sup>132</sup> To the monks, the Buddha said,

In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to. You, O monks, who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones!<sup>133</sup>

Thus, the Buddha teaches that the *dhamma* is a means, not an end. When a level of expertise in the *dhamma* has been realised, skilful qualities become intuitive and adherence to the *dhamma* may be decreased and eventually abandoned. Other instances in the Pali Canon demonstrate that perceptions of 'right meaning' depend upon spiritual attainment and critical awareness, and the degree to which the *dhamma* has been internalised.<sup>134</sup>

This section has shown that the *dhamma* was formulated in ways that demonstrated skill being essential for teaching; that the *dhamma* is most easily understood when it is made relevant to people; that speculative questions are a distraction; and that ultimately, the *dhamma* is a means that may be discarded.

## ii. *Upaya-kusala*

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<sup>129</sup> *Sutta Nipata* II.8, '*Nava Sutta*', 'The Simile of the Boat', trans. John D. Ireland, 1983, *The Discourse Collection: Selected Texts from the Sutta Nipata*, at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.08.irel.html>, on 14.1107.

<sup>130</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.131.

<sup>131</sup> 'Simile of the Raft', in 'The Water-Snake Simile' (MN 22), *Alagaddupama Sutta*, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2004, at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.022.than.html#raft>.

<sup>132</sup> *Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake/Alagaddupama Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, (PTS: M.i.130), cited by Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.132.

<sup>133</sup> *Alagaddupama Sutta* (MN 22), 'The Discourse on the Snake Simile', trans. Nyanaponika Thera, 1974, *The Wheel*, No.48, from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel048.html>, on 27.10.07.

<sup>134</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.127.

The doctrine of 'skilful-means/*upaya-kusala*' represents a reassessment of Early Buddhism's moral priorities that has been described as 'transmoral'.<sup>135</sup> In Mahayanan traditions, skilful-means combine the teachings of skill/*kusala* and emptiness/*sunyata* to remove the normative ethics that present obstacles to compassionate acts by *bodhisattvas*. Prioritising compassionate concern for the welfare of others above the *Vinaya* rules and mundane morality requires a different kind of judgement.<sup>136</sup> Regarded from the ultimate vantage of emptiness/*sunyata*, some schools maintain there are no rules, no perfections, no precepts, no beings, and no *karma*, and only from a relative standpoint do the interests of others need to be furthered.<sup>137</sup>

The Buddha authorised modifications of the *Vinaya*'s minor rules, and Mahayanists separated the monastic discipline into major and minor offences.<sup>138</sup> However, there is no agreement among Mahayana schools about which rules constitute what kind of offence and not all Mahayana traditions adopted new priorities. For example, Tibetans maintained the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya* and the *Brahmajalasastra* was popular among the Chinese, and both of these sources insist upon strict compliance with traditional disciplinary norms.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, distinguishing between major and minor offences frees *bodhisattvas* from the constraints of the *Vinaya* on condition that the offence is in the interests of sentient beings. Under these circumstances, the *bodhisattva* might employ skilful-means and perform any act.

*Bodhisattva* perfect themselves before radiating perfection towards others, and based upon the stages of perfection attained, there are two levels of skilful-means.<sup>140</sup> Initially, there is an equivalence between ethics and the first five perfections—generosity, morality, patience, courage, and meditation—where skilful-means relate to normative ethics.<sup>141</sup> From the sixth perfection, moral conduct has been perfected and practise continues solely to instruct other beings.<sup>142</sup> Perfections seven to ten represent the threshold of the transcendent, where great *bodhisattvas*—for example, Manjusri and Avalokitesvara—symbolise the highest ideals of wisdom/*prajna*

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<sup>135</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, pp. 146—149, 129.

<sup>136</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.152

<sup>137</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.154, & 162.

<sup>138</sup> *Digha-Nikaya*, ii.154, cited by Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.151.

<sup>139</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.156.

<sup>140</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.157—160.

<sup>141</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.157; & 'Paramita', (S), Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.212.

and compassion/*karuna*, and represent the fusion of ethics and metaphysics.<sup>143</sup> At this highest level, *bodhisattvas* have reached the upper limits of perfectibility, having perfected both ethics and wisdom and attained supernatural powers.<sup>144</sup> Such advanced *bodhisattva* realise that all phenomena lacks substance and there is nothing to impede compassion/*karunna*.<sup>145</sup> Advanced *bodhisattvas* may perform acts of deception and in extreme cases when motivated by compassion they may commit any of the Ten Bad Paths of Action/*dasa-akusala-karmapatta*.<sup>146</sup>

For some Buddhists, 'skilful-means' is a symbolic concept communicated by stories of ingenuity that affirm compassion and whose true domain is myth, rather than history.<sup>147</sup> The acts of Buddhas and great *bodhisattvas* have been said to be largely myth and symbol that require interpretation and stories of them are a 'means' of engaging the imagination.<sup>148</sup> Teachings of skilful-means encourage a compassionate ethic and prioritise the welfare of others over the means employed, which is consistent with the transcendent seventh stage of the *bodhisattva* path.<sup>149</sup>

There is little historical evidence of the higher level of skilful-means being adopted as an ethical principle in Mahayana countries, and most Mahayanan monastics rigorously observe traditional rules.<sup>150</sup> Dispensations for breaking precepts have not been incorporated into the disciplinary codes, and although the textual influences of skilful-means are not denied, older and more rigorous monastic attitudes and practices have prevailed.<sup>151</sup> Skilful-means recognise that the Buddha's teachings are provisional devices, and when they are combined with teachings of emptiness, the normative

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<sup>142</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.158

<sup>143</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.158.

<sup>144</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.159—60

<sup>145</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.160

<sup>146</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.150. The Ten Bad Paths of Action/*dasa-akusala-karmapatta* are the reverse of the Ten Good Deeds/*dasa-kusala-karmapatta*, which are not to: kill, steal, indulge in sexual misconduct, lie, slander, indulge in harsh speech, in idle talk, and to cultivate non-greed, non-hatred, and right views ('*Dasa-kusala-karmapatha*', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p.70).

<sup>147</sup> Peggy Morgan, 1998, 'Ethics and the Lotus Sutra', at [www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/morgan981.htm#theme](http://www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/morgan981.htm#theme), on 8.9.2005.

<sup>148</sup> Peggy Morgan, 1998, 'Ethics and the Lotus Sutra', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.5, at [www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/morgan981.htm#theme](http://www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/morgan981.htm#theme), on 8.9.2005; Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.162.

<sup>149</sup> Peggy Morgan, 1998, 'Ethics and the Lotus Sutra', at [www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/morgan981.htm#theme](http://www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/morgan981.htm#theme), on 8.9.2005.

<sup>150</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.162.

<sup>151</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.162—3

impact of precepts and perfections evaporate, leaving the higher purposes of compassion and wisdom to determine what is right.

. . . the concept of 'skilful-means', . . . is developed to mean that *all* Buddhist teachings . . . should be regarded as provisional devices. The teachings, especially on Conditioned Arising, are simply to induce people into a skilful frame of mind: one in which there can be insight into inexpressible ultimate truth, transcending all such teachings.<sup>152</sup>

### **Conclusion**

There is a 'profound consistency' in the style and intention of the Buddha's teachings throughout Buddhism.<sup>153</sup> Despite significant differences between Theravada and Mahayana understandings, they share a concern for discerning the true meaning of doctrine and practice, which is necessary for the development of Buddhist practitioners. Even within their differences there is profound consistency, recognised by Pye,

The Theravada text distinguished between good and bad mental objects/*dhammas*, while the Mahayana text has shifted the ground to *dharmas* as existent and as *dharmas* non-existent; that is, not only should one not seize on *dharmas* as existent but above all one should not seize on them as non-existent. . . . In both texts, however, the main point is the same, namely that Buddhist analysis is not to be pedantically maintained, but used and discarded. The central premise was already present in the Theravada text, namely the Buddhist *Dhamma* itself, in general and as a whole, is to be treated as a raft.<sup>154</sup>

Differences between Theravada and Mahayana understandings are reflected in the movement from prioritising a personal *nibbanic* goal to prioritising outward concern for the welfare of others. The movement is from liberation by one's own efforts to *bodhisattvas* being available to call upon and who might use skilful-means to assist whenever necessary. Both Theravadins and Mahayanists recognise the provisional nature of the Buddha's teachings, and once the path has been cultivated, the teachings are redundant.<sup>155</sup> Like a boat, the purpose of the *dhamma* is 'for crossing over, not retaining'.<sup>156</sup> Buddhism represents the various ways in which the

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<sup>152</sup> Peter Harvey, 1990, *Introduction to Buddhism*, p.100.

<sup>153</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.133 & 131.

<sup>154</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.132.

<sup>155</sup> '*Upaya-kusala*', (S), Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, p. 318.

<sup>156</sup> *Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake/Alagaddupama Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikaya*, cited by Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.132.

Buddha's teachings have been related to an ultimate goal, and although the *dhamma* is indispensable to all traditions, it is eventually disposable.<sup>157</sup>

This chapter has demonstrated how ethical actions and soteriological goals are encapsulated by the *Arahant* and *Bodhisattva* ideals, and how the status of the mundane world in which the ideals are practised varies between Buddhist traditions. Clinging to identity is taught to be a primary cause of suffering/*dukkha*, and ultimately the permanence of lesbians' identities, together with every other identity, is negated. Few Buddhists would deny this ultimate truth. However, some Buddhists base themselves in ultimate truths and deny the significance of conventional reality. Among such schools are those that believe in 'mind only'; for example, the sophisticated philosophy of the Yogacara School denies the reality of the exterior world in favour of the reality of the mind.<sup>158</sup> Western Buddhists may base themselves in such ideas and dismiss issues of sexual identity as illusory, despite their mundane political significance in western cultures. For other Buddhists, teachings of no-self/*anatta* and emptiness/*sunyata* counter the recognition of identity, even in political contexts. Before such attitudes can be regarded as reflecting a recognisably Buddhist outlook, Buddhist institutions must find them acceptable. This gatekeeping role is rarely commented upon; nevertheless, it reflects Buddhist schools having political influence. The recognition that Buddhist traditions have political influence goes hand in hand with the recognition that political responses are not only warranted but are essential in Buddhism. Buddhist politics function in the mundane realm and have little impact upon soteriological goals; rather, their impact is upon who has access to them.

In Buddhism, the status of personal identity is a complex issue most frequently discussed in relation to the notion of a permanent essence, *atta* or *atman*, which despite being likened to self or soul, has no equivalent in western thought. Buddhist and western philosophies construct identity quite differently and comparisons of the two cannot compare like with like because of the roles played by the concepts of real and permanence. In Buddhism, teachings of no-self/*anatta* and dependent origination/*paticcasamuppada* deny anything permanent exists in the world and result in questions of what is real and what is not. In western paradigms, the denial of anything permanent in the world, including the soul, has little

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<sup>157</sup> Michael Pye, 2003, 'Skilful-means', p.133.

<sup>158</sup> 'Yogacara', (S), Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.341—342.



impact upon notions of reality. Knowledge of beings and their relationships with the world is based in scientific observations of their impermanent and composite nature, which casts no doubt upon their reality.

Mainstream discussions of Buddhist morality and ethics have rarely recognised how the politics of identity function in the West, and have failed to consider significant socio-political issues, such as class, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Some debates of Buddhist morals question how ethics can exist at all when the teachings of no-self/*anatta* imply the absence of a moral subject, while others question how anything can impede the outpouring of moral concern in view of universal emptiness.<sup>159</sup>

Describing the nature of Buddhist ethics, Damien Keown has written that the negation of identity may confuse ethics and metaphysics,

Buddhism provides sufficient criteria for personal identity to allow the identification of subjects within the moral nexus. The discipline of ethics requires only that one individual can be distinguished from another: to pursue the issue of the ultimate ontological constitution of individual natures in this context is to confuse ethics with metaphysics, and does not make for a fruitful line of enquiry. While responses to today's ethical problems might be deduced from canonical sources, Buddhist traditions have not refined the tools that would assist in formulating responses.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, Buddhist traditions may lack the tools necessary for debates of sexual ethics in western contexts. In Buddhism, there appears to be an expectation that ethical problems will be resolved or dissolved in the pursuit of the religious life.<sup>161</sup> Buddhist ethics rely upon the cultivation of personal virtue, and as spiritual capacity expands towards enlightenment, it is expected that ethical choices will become clear and unproblematic.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, many less advanced western Buddhists may be uncertain of lesbians' moral status and might welcome explicit guidance and debate.

Realism and idealism in Buddhist and western contexts are fundamentally different, and Buddhist commitments might require Western Buddhists to accept that such differences may be reconciled at some future date.<sup>163</sup> Cultural and philosophical differences do not allow Buddhism to be a perfect fit in western contexts, where Buddhist teachings are often isolated from everyday experience and distanced from western understandings. In

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<sup>159</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.161

<sup>160</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.19

<sup>161</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.2.

<sup>162</sup> Damien Keown, 2001, *Ethics*, p.2.

the West, religion is assumed to engage faith and to require the suspension of rational doubt, which, combined with Buddhism's status as an exotic religion, often places Buddhist differences beyond critique.

If western norms are to be brought into the ambit of Buddhism, as the name 'Western Buddhism' implies, then Buddhists who would prioritise the social and ethical concerns of sexuality and sexual identity need to consider how to legitimise engaging with moral and political issues. The less contentious issue of gender is being addressed by Buddhist women throughout the world, and under this guise lesbians may be working to accommodate their needs (see Chapter Seven, 'Western Women's Buddhism'). Buddhist teachers are validated in seeking knowledge of lesbian Buddhists by the Buddha's example of taking into account the circumstances of his pupils. This thesis has so far presented Buddhism in ways that replicate widely accepted academic norms, albeit it has been set within a lesbian agenda. The following chapter reports widespread prejudice against women in Buddhist traditions and demonstrates the need for Buddhist political analyses and engagements.

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<sup>163</sup> Rina Sircar, 1999, *Psycho-Ethical Aspects*, p.114.

## Chapter 6

### Buddhism and Women

#### **Introduction**

The lack of lesbian Buddhists openly claiming this identity ensures that their experiences of Buddhism may be appreciated best by considering the experiences of women in Buddhism. Most lesbians would agree they are women first and lesbians second; therefore, how women are regarded in Buddhist contexts is crucial to assessments of lesbian Buddhists' religious potential and self-regard.

When Ananda asked the Buddha if women were capable of the same achievements as men, the Buddha affirmed, 'They are capable, Ananda.'<sup>1</sup> However, this has not translated into Buddhist men and women accomplishing the same things or being given the same status.<sup>2</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo has observed,

Many Buddhists invoke the rhetoric of human beings equal potential for enlightenment and assume that traditional structures are adequate to support women's practice, but they are not. The rhetoric of equality often masks the truth of women's subordination and lack of opportunities for education, training, and ordination. Without adequate structures to support women's practice, the ideal of spiritual equality remains an empty claim. . . . The gender imbalance in Buddhist societies, gendered interpretations of Buddhist tenets, and inequitable authority structures in traditional Buddhist institutions all demand our attention.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhist deprecations of women are often ascribed to cultural factors; nevertheless, non-egalitarian beliefs from outside the original teachings have been accepted as worthy of association with the *dharmma* and incorporated into traditional beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Sexist and misogynistic assumptions have accumulated and influenced how the *dharmma* has been understood,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Kullavagga', X.3, trans. TW Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, 1885, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol.20, Part III, 'On the Duties of Bhikkhunis', pp.322, on 28.4.08, at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe20/sbe20092.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.205—234 in Peter Harvey, ed., *Buddhism* (London & NY, Continuum), p.205.

<sup>3</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2000, 'Introduction', pp.xvii—xxviii, in Tsomo, ed., *Innovative Buddhist Women* (Richmond, Curzon), p.xvii—xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1<sup>st</sup> published 1979), *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley, University of California Press), pp.xxiii.

taught, and practiced.<sup>5</sup> Historically, Buddhism has accommodated androcentrism and misogyny more than it has stood against them, and many cultures in which Buddhism has taken root have maintained negative attitudes towards women.<sup>6</sup> It has been observed that,

From time immemorial, (woman) has been pictured as an unholy mantrap of sexuality: succubus, witch, hag, or dark Kali with her girdle of severed heads. It was the daughter of Mara who tempted Sakyamuni under his bodhi tree. . . . Even when sex is used as a vehicle for self-transcendence, as in esoteric Taoism, Tantrism, and some Sufis sects, woman is means, an alien object, without possibility of mutuality or real communication.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, Buddhist attitudes towards women have been described as, 'a web of threads woven into a fabric of male stereotypes of the amorphous female.'<sup>8</sup>

Textual attitudes towards women are not consistent or univocal and Diana Paul identified themes in which women are regarded as saints or sinners.<sup>9</sup> As saints women are creative, gentle, wise, compassionate, maternal and chaste, and as sinners they are highly sexual, destructive, wilful and elusive.<sup>10</sup> In the saint/sinner dichotomy, women's sexuality has been regarded as a threatening snare that must be converted into an asexual spiritual potency in renunciation or controlled and subdued in marriage.<sup>11</sup> Knowledge of the extent of gender discriminations affords insight into the need for women's innovations and the importance of alternative practices. This chapter traces prejudice against women from the earliest Theravada texts, to Mahayana and Vajrayana understandings, and into modern practices. It illustrates the kinds of traditional views that must be challenged if Buddhist teachings and practices are to be consistent.

Word constraints forbid an analysis of all of the discriminations against women in Buddhism, and the need for change is illustrated by

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<sup>5</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction', pp.1-14, in Findly, ed., *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal* (Boston, Wisdom), p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.205.

<sup>7</sup> Kendra Smith, 1986 'Sex, Dependency, and Religion—Reflections from a Buddhist Perspective', pp.219—231, in Ursula King, ed., *Women in World Religions* (NY, Paragon), p.219.

<sup>8</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.xxvi.

<sup>9</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, pp.xxiv—xxvii; Alan Sponberg, 1992, 'Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism', pp.3—36, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany, SUNY), pp.3—4.

<sup>10</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.xxv—xxiv.

<sup>11</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.xxvi.

examples taken from a representative array of Buddhist contexts.<sup>12</sup> The first section, 'Women in Early and Theravada Buddhism' has two subsections that report the imposition of the 'The *Garu-dhamma*' and the circumstances of 'Women's Ordination', which are often the focus of concerns about Buddhist women. The second section, 'Gender in Mahayana Buddhism', considers three issues. The first subsection considers the circumstances in Taiwan where nuns' flourishing has often distracted from their gender oppression. The second subsection, '*Sutras*', reports how sex changes in *sutras* signify the requirement of a male body for soteriological advancement and the impermanence of sex. The third subsection, 'Essentialist Motifs', explains the ways in which women have been regarded in Japanese Buddhism. A western woman's account of secret sexual activities constitutes the third section, 'Tibetan Buddhism's *Songyum*'. Women's circumstances continue to spur Buddhist women to effect change.

#### **A. Women in Early and Theravada Buddhism**

Egalitarian attitudes in the Pali Canon were summarised by Isalene Blew Horner,

Summing them up: it is said that the seer won enlightenment for both almsmen and almswomen, laymen and laywomen, and taught the *dhamma* equally to all four branches of the congregation; that the virtuous or bad behaviour of the members of these four branches would have an analogous effect on the persistence or disappearance of the *dhamma*, and would affect the Community for good or ill; that women may have the same spiritual limitations or the same mystic powers as men; that almswomen may grow and become as much as almsmen may; that Gotama would not die until he had gained wise and disciplined almsmen and almswomen, laymen and laywomen as his disciples; that women may conform to the same type as men in their relation to the (Buddha); and that they may all be guarded and protected by a safety-rune.<sup>13</sup>

If teachings and practices conformed solely to these observations, then Buddhism would be a remarkable model of egalitarianism. However, Horner also observed inequalities, and commented, 'Indeed, in actual treatment and practice the almswomen were not so much honoured as the almsmen'.<sup>14</sup> Buddhism's egalitarian impetus has been tempered by five things: the

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<sup>12</sup> For information about reforms considered by Buddhist women around the world, see Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., 1999, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (Albany, NY, SUNY); and, Ellison Banks Findly, ed., 2000, *Women's Buddhism*.

<sup>13</sup> I B Horner, 1930 (reprint of 1<sup>st</sup> edition), *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass), pp.287—288. Horner referred to the 'Superman', and this has been translated here as the 'Buddha'.

imposition of eight additional 'weighty rules/*garu-dhamma*' upon nuns; the *Vinaya's* accumulation of more rules for nuns than monks; women being held responsible for men's diversions from the spiritual path; biased and wholly negative views of women's bodies; and, the disappearance of the *bhikkhuni* lineage.<sup>15</sup>

There is little consensus about the origins of negative views of women.<sup>16</sup> Textual contradictions were first explained from a woman's perspective when Horner observed that the Pali texts had been edited by men with little historical sense and less sympathy with the doings of women.<sup>17</sup> Horner created a hypothetical chronological scheme by suggesting early texts were egalitarian and monks later amended them to constrain women.<sup>18</sup> Scholars in sympathy with Theravada and early traditions generally accept Horner's scheme, and Mahayana sympathisers suggest attitudes towards women in early Buddhism were always negative and any egalitarianism was the result of *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* influences.<sup>19</sup>

The understanding that birth as a human being is fortunate because it affords access to the teachings/*dhamma* and liberation/*nibbana* reflects a positive assessment of women's humanity. However, within the human realm, female birth is often regarded as less fortunate because women must 'suffer' menstruation and childbirth, which are taken as defining features of womanhood. While understandings of menstruation and childbirth may now be recognised as socially constructed, in many Buddhist traditions they have historically been regarded as self-evident disadvantages inherent to womanhood. Modern concerns about women in Early and Theravada Buddhism are dominated by two issues: the Buddha's acceptance of the *bhikkhuni* order conditional upon the *Garudhamma*, and the order's chequered history.

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<sup>14</sup> I B Horner, 1930, *Women*, p.289.

<sup>15</sup> Sue Hamilton, 1996a 'Buddhism: The Doctrinal Case for Feminism', pp.91—104 in *Feminist Theology*, No.12, May, p.97—98; '*Garu-dhamma*' (P), in Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p.99.

<sup>16</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 1999a, 'Mahaprajapati's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement', pp.1—44, in Tsomo, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (Albany, SUNY), pp.6—9.

<sup>17</sup> I B Horner, 1930, *Women*, pp.xx, 288—292, 311.

<sup>18</sup> I B Horner, 1930, *Women*, p.291—292.

<sup>19</sup> Those who accept Horner's scheme include Nancy Schuster Barnes, 1987, 'Buddhism', pp.105—133 in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Women in Religion* (Albany, SUNY), pp.107—108, and Tessa Bartholomeusz, 1994, *Women Under the Bo Tree* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press], pp.55—61. The alternative scheme is supported by Diana Paul, 1985 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Women in Buddhism*, and Anne Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.81—104 in Ursula King, *Women in World Religions*

### i. The Garu-dhamma

The male *sangha* existed for five years before the nun's/*bhikkhuni* order was established, conditional upon their undertaking eight additional 'weighty rules/*garu-dhamma*'.<sup>20</sup> The *garu-dhamma* decree that,

1. A bhikkhuni, even if of a hundred years standing, shall make salutation to, shall rise up in the presence of, shall bow down before, and shall perform all proper duties towards a bhikkhu, if only just initiated. . . .
2. A bhikkhuni is not to spend the rainy season in a district in which there is no bhikkhu. . . .
3. Every half month a bhikkhuni is to await from the bhikkhu-sangha two things, the asking as to the date of the Uposatha ceremony, and the time when the bhikkhu will come to give the Exhortation. . . .
4. After keeping the rainy season, the bhikkhuni is to appear before the assemblies of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to enquire whether any fault can be laid to her charge with respect to three matters, namely, what has been seen, and what has been heard, and what has been suspected. . . .
5. A bhikkhuni who has been guilty of a serious offence is to undergo the Manatta discipline before both assemblies of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. . . .
6. When a bhikkhuni has been trained for two years she is to ask leave for the Upasampada initiation from both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. . . .
7. A bhikkhuni is on no pretext to revile or abuse a Bhikkhu. . . .
8. Admonition by bhikkhunis of bhikkhus is forbidden, whereas the official admonition of bhikkhunis by bhikkhus is not forbidden. . . .<sup>21</sup>

In Theravada monastic communities, protocol operates according to seniority, and the *garu-dhamma* render the most senior nun subordinate to the most junior monk.<sup>22</sup> In the *Sigalovada Sutta*, the duties and obligations of husbands and wives are reciprocal, and the *garu-dhamma* exclude gender

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(New York, Paragon). The complexity of the issue was acknowledged by Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (Albany: SUNY), pp.57 & 114.

<sup>20</sup> 'Garu-dhamma' (P), in Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, p.99; Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2004, 'Is the Bhiksuni *Vinaya* Sexist?' pp.45—72 in Tsomo, ed. *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements* (New York, SUNY), p.58.

<sup>21</sup> 'Kullavagga', X.4, trans. TW Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, 1885, 'On the Duties of Bhikkhunis', pp.323—324, on 6.3.08, at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe20/sbe20092.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Vishvapani, 2002, 'Bold Steps for Nuns', in *Dharmalife*, Issue 19, Winter, on 28.4.06, at [www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbhikkhunis.htm](http://www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbhikkhunis.htm). Tsomo observes the establishment of the monks order five years prior to the nuns' order has been used to justify the seniority of all monks (2004a, 'Is the Bhiksuni *Vinaya* Sexist?', pp.58—59).

reciprocity from monastic life.<sup>23</sup> None of *garu-dhamma* obligations is reciprocal and collectively they ensure *bhikkhunis'* institutional dependence and subordination to *bhikkhus*.

The *garu-dhamma* are the earliest and most visible discriminations against women in Buddhism, and gender inequalities are endorsed throughout the *Vinaya*.<sup>24</sup> Ordination procedures are more arduous for women, and once ordained, the *Patimokkha* code in the *Vinaya* contains more rules for *bhikkhunis* than for *bhikkhus*.<sup>25</sup> In the Theravada *Vinaya*, there are 311 rules for nuns and 227 for monks; in the Chinese Dharmagupta *Vinaya*, there are 348 rules for nuns and 250 for monks, and in the Tibetan Mulasarvastivada *Vinaya*, there are 364 rules for nuns and 253 for monks.<sup>26</sup> The *Vinaya* of these schools are most relevant because the Dharmagupta is adhered to by today's Chinese *bhikkhuni* lineage, and they are considered necessary for the re-establishment and establishment, respectively, of Theravada and Mulasarvastivada *bhikkhuni* traditions.<sup>27</sup>

Generations of Buddhist women appear to have accepted unquestioningly the need for their additional restriction. Modern studies have demonstrated that where there is no alternative to the 'male gaze', androcentric and misogynistic views are internalised by women (see Chapter Seven, section A.i., 'Awareness of the Need to Adapt', and section C.i., 'Feminist Naming').<sup>28</sup> In response to accusations that the additional rules

<sup>23</sup> *Sigalovada Sutta*/The Discourse to Sigala (The Layperson's Code of Discipline), DN 31, trans. Narada Thera, 1985 (Buddhist Publication Society), on 1.7.07 at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2004a, 'Is the Bhiksuni *Vinaya* Sexist?' pp.45—72.

<sup>25</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2004a, 'Is the Bhiksuni *Vinaya* Sexist?'

<sup>26</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2004a, 'Is the Bhiksuni *Vinaya* Sexist?', pp.58—59; Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, 'Translator's Introduction', *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha/Code of Discipline* (Access to Insight), on 25.3.08, at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org); Peter Harvey, 2000, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), p.391; 'Bhiksuni', 'Pratimoksa', in Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, pp.33, 220.

<sup>27</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2004a, 'Is the Bhiksuni *Vinaya* Sexist?', p.58.

<sup>28</sup> 'Male gaze' references the cultural dominance of masculine objectifications of womanhood, which have often been internalised by women. The phrase originated in the feminist film theories of Laura Mulvey (1975, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', pp.6—18, in *Screen*, No.16, on 1.4.08, at <http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/womenstudies/flc436/mulvey.html>). Liz Wilson describes a similar process of Buddhist women internalising culturally dominant masculine views of womanhood (1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I": the self scrutiny and self-disclosure of nuns in post-Asokan Buddhist hagiographic literature', pp.41—80, in Emilie M Townes & Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, eds., *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Spring, Vol.II., reproduced as Chapter Five, pp.141—179, in Wilson, 1996, *Charming Cadavers: horrific figurations of the feminine in Indian Buddhist hagiographic literature*, [University of Chicago Press, Chicago]). Bernard Faure observes many women seeming to have uncritically



restrain nuns unfairly, Thanissaro Bhikkhu observes three things about the Theravada *Bhikkhuni* rules: two (*Pacittiyas* 6 and 44) prevent *bhikkhunis* from putting themselves in servitude; all but three (*Pacittiyas* 59, 94, and 95) were formulated after *bhikkhunis* complained of another *bhikkhunis*' behaviour; and, more than one third of the rules protect *bhikkhunis* from the abuse of other *bhikkhunis*.<sup>29</sup> It is not unusual for the extra rules of the *Vinaya* to be justified by the observation that they have been invited or created by nuns and serve to protect them. However, such observations fail to consider the effects of the *Vinaya*'s design upon *bhikkhunis*' self-perceptions. While the rules instigated by monks were effective for both monks and nuns, nuns were forbidden from criticising monks, and any rules they instigated could be effective only for them. Therefore, any rules instigated by nuns rendered their rules more numerous than those for monks.

Nuns have sometimes been referred to as 'daughters of the Buddha' and subordinated to the male authority of the Buddha as father and the monks as the Buddha's heirs. Thus, the pseudo-familial structure of the *sangha* has limited the autonomy of *bhikkhuni*.<sup>30</sup> The punishments prescribed for violations of the rules are sometimes more harsh for nuns, and some rules that prescribe suspension for monks prescribe exclusion for nuns.<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to justify a system that requires nuns to maintain higher standards while they enjoy lower status.<sup>32</sup>

Shortly after allowing women's ordination, the Buddha observed that the era of the true *dhamma* would last only five hundred years, rather than a thousand.<sup>33</sup>

If, Ananda, women had not received permission to go out from the household life and enter the homeless state, under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata, then

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accepted and interiorised gender discriminations (2003, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* [New Jersey, Princeton University Press], p.64).

<sup>29</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2003, 'Translator's Introduction', on 25.3.08, at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).

<sup>30</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.48; Karen Andrews, no date, *Women in Theravada Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA, Institute of Buddhist Studies), on 9.3.06, at [www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenauthors.html](http://www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenauthors.html).

<sup>31</sup> 'Bhikshuni', in Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber, et al, eds., 1990, *Shambhala Dictionary*, p.21.

<sup>32</sup> 'Bhikshuni', in Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, and Michael S. Diener, eds., trans. Michael H. Kohn, 1990, *Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston, Shambhala), p.21.

<sup>33</sup> 'Kullavagga', X.4—6, trans. TW Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, 1885, 'On the Duties of Bhikkhunis', p.325, on 9.2.08, at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe20/sbe20092.htm>.

would the pure religion, Ananda, have lasted long, the good law would have stood fast for a thousand years. But since, Ananda, women have now received that permission, the pure religion, Ananda, will not now last so long, the good law will now stand fast for only five hundred years.<sup>34</sup>

The reason women posed such a threat is not clarified. The *garu-dhamma* are referred to as a dam to stem the tide of *samsaric* influences, which implies the *bhikkhunis* being regarded as a tide of *samsaric* influence.<sup>35</sup> Modern commentators might agree that the social norms of that time and place required women's subordination to men, and nuns' subordination to monks. However, *bhikkhuni*'s were subject to the same *Vinaya* rules as *bhikkhus*, which implies they would be equally 'pure' or moral. Why and how *bhikkhunis* posed a threat to the *dhamma* has rarely been explained adequately, although Kate Blackstone describes a paradigm in which these things become coherent.<sup>36</sup> The *garu-dhamma* have influenced many subsequent traditions and Blackstone's paradigm deserves further consideration.

Blackstone suggests the *Vinaya* articulates a model by which the male *sangha* has a self-identity and contains the rules by which that identity is expressed.<sup>37</sup> Correspondences between the Buddha, the *sangha* and individual *bhikkhus* clarify the role of the *garu-dhamma* by illuminating the *Vinaya*'s authorisation of a male *sangha* and its relationship with the supporting community.<sup>38</sup> The sphere of enlightenment/*bodhi* transcends space and time, and the characteristics of enlightenment may be embodied

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<sup>34</sup> 'Kullavagga', X.4, trans. TW Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, 1885, 'On the Duties of Bhikkhunis', pp.325—326, on 6.3.08, at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe20/sbe20092.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma: Problems with Bhikkhuniis in the Pali Vinaya', (revised paper presented to the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference of the IABS in Lausanne, August 1999), Footnote 2, on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>36</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>37</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com); Liz Wilson, 1996, *Charming Cadavers*, pp.25—26.

<sup>38</sup> 'Sangha' literally translated is 'congregation', and has various constituencies. In Theravada texts, '*sangha*' refers to the community of Buddhist monks; as the third of the Three Jewels, '*sangha*' refers to the *ariya-sangha*, 'community of the saints', or those who have entered the path: stream winners, once returners, non-returners, and *arahats* (Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms* [Taiwan, Buddha Educational Foundation], p.162, 20).

by a pure community as well as a pure individual.<sup>39</sup> Blackstone describes the Buddha as,

. . . characterised by purity of body, speech, and mind, by a physical and ontological separation from the conditions of ordinary or supernatural beings, and by a concomitant superiority derived from his purity and separateness.<sup>40</sup>

She draws parallels between the characteristics of the Buddha and the qualities of the *sangha*, and argues the *Patimokkha* code ensures the conditions of the *sangha* are adequate to receive the authority of the Buddha. This transference is recorded in the Buddha's commission to the *sangha* to teach in his place, when he explicitly compared the *sangha* with himself, 'I am delivered . . . from all fetters, human and divine. You . . . are also delivered from all fetters, human and divine.'<sup>41</sup> If the authority transferred to the *sangha* was inherently masculine, then women could neither embody its ideal nor be treated as full members of the *sangha*. This offers a rationale for maintaining women's secondary status and affords insight into monastic attitudes towards *bhikkhunis*.<sup>42</sup>

The rules of the *Vinaya* maintain the *sangha's* integrity by excluding men who lack physical, moral, and personal integrity.<sup>43</sup> The requirement of a quorum of ten *bhikkhus* at ordination ceremonies signifies institutional acceptance and emphasises cohesion. The wholeness of the individual *bhikkhu* corresponds with the wholeness of the *sangha*, which corresponds with the wholeness of the Buddha.<sup>44</sup> The physical boundaries of individual

<sup>39</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>40</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>41</sup> *Mahavaga/Major section of the Vinaya*, I.11.1, 'First *Khandhaka*', trans. TW Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, 1881, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XIII, (Oxford, Clarendon Press), p.112, on 27.3.08, at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe13/sbe1312.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com). Thanissaro Bhikkhu also observes gender being an issue in the Buddha's design of the *sangha*, which required a predominantly male community, and ensured the rules governing the communities favoured *bhikkhus* over *bhikkhunis* (2007, *Buddhist Monastic Code II*, Chapter 23, '*Bhikkhunis*', on 27.3.08, at <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/bmc2/bmc2.ch23.html>).

<sup>43</sup> *Mahavaga*, I.39—71 (no publication details), cited by Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>44</sup> Institutional purity and wholeness is most obviously signalled in the *uposatha* rite, for which all *bhikkhus* within the *sima* boundaries are gathered together for the *patimokkha's* recitation. The *uposatha* rite binds the community together, and affirms the *sangha* as a united body. The entire assembly of *bhikkhus* is required to be present while the rules are recited to examine the truthfulness of their

*bhikkhus* have a correspondence with the *sima*, the boundary of the meeting venue of the *sangha*.<sup>45</sup> *Sangha* meetings are physically bounded, socially isolated and emotionally detached, and emphasize the hierarchy that establishes and expresses the purity and separation of enlightened beings. Physical containment, social detachment, and psychological control, are vital components of a Theravada monk's purity. Purity is vulnerable to pollution, and the impurity of an individual would intrude upon the purity of the community.<sup>46</sup> The *sangha* is vulnerable to rupture and defilement and the *Vinaya* maintains the *sangha's* boundaries.<sup>47</sup>

The male *sangha* assumes identity with the male Buddha by adhering to the *Vinaya*, whose processes necessarily exclude women. The *Khandhakas*, that part of the *Vinaya* dealing with the operation of the *sangha*, systematically exclude *bhikkhunis*.<sup>48</sup> Like all non-renunciants, transgressors, and novices, *bhikkhunis* must be outside the boundaries/*sima* during the monks' recitation of the *Patimokkha*, even though their rules are included.<sup>49</sup>

They [*bhikkhunis*] cannot be counted to make up the quorum required of any of the formal acts of the *sangha*, from ordination of *bhikkhus*, to disciplinary proceedings, to the major ritual events, nor can they split a *sangha*, even if they side with schismatics [*Mahavagga* VII 5.1]; they cannot even protest statements uttered during official proceedings, nor can they critique *bhikkhus'* behaviour.<sup>50</sup>

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declarations of purity. Thus, the *uposatha* rite scrutinises the purity of body, speech, and mind (Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com)).

<sup>45</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>46</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>47</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com). The cyclical nature of time enables foreknowledge of the decline in purity and the collapse of the boundaries that maintain it. The threat of this decline is said to have prompted Mahakassapa to convene the First Council, which established the *Sutra* and *Vinaya Pitakas*.

<sup>48</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>49</sup> *Mahavagga* II 36.1-2 (no publication details), cited by Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>50</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

In the logic of the *Vinaya*, female monastics have no place, and if women and men were ordained in the same way and accessed the same privileges the masculine model of enlightenment would be overturned.<sup>51</sup>

Mahaprajapati functioned as the women's leader during the campaign for women's admission to the order. Her role paralleled the Buddha's leadership of the *bhikkhus*, and some argue that she represented the female assumption of his authority.<sup>52</sup> The Buddha initially rejected Mahaprajapati's request for ordination, and in defiance of this, she and her followers shaved their heads, donned yellow robes, and followed the Buddha.<sup>53</sup>

Mahaprajapati challenged the Buddha's authority, and by assuming the guise of *bhikkhus*, the female would-be renunciants undermined the monastic rules by obliterating distinctions between monastic and non-monastic, men and women.<sup>54</sup> The women challenged the monks' status and integrity, and threatened to rupture the *sangha's* boundaries.<sup>55</sup> In this paradigm, the *garu-dhamma* established the *bhikkhus* authority over *bhikkhunis*, and separated the male *sangha* from the flood of *samsaric* contamination the women represented. This model implies the belief that women embody a type or degree of pollution not neutralised by adherence to the same rules as men, and appears to regard women as a different order of humanity. A similar view is presented by Liz Wilson, who suggests that because women's bodies are 'chronically open and perpetually leaky', they are unsuitable vehicles for attaining a state of perfect integrity.<sup>56</sup>

Blackstone offers a coherent conceptual paradigm that implies the androcentrism in early Buddhism might have religious as well as cultural significance. Some aspects of Buddhism might be hopelessly androcentric and any removal of gender distinctions might attack the foundation of some Buddhists' beliefs. In times and places dominated by patriarchal mores,

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<sup>51</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Walters argued that Gotami (Mahaprajapati) is the female counterpart to Gotama (the Buddha) (1994, 'A Voice from the Silence: the Buddha's Mother's Story', pp.358-379, *History of Religions*, 33/4, pp.374-378, cited by Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', Fn.40, on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com); & cited by Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', pp.43-51, who also presents counter-arguments, pp.44-47.

<sup>53</sup> 'Kullavagga', X.2-3, trans. TW Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, 1885, 'On the Duties of Bhikkhunis', pp.323-324, on 6.3.08, at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe20/sbe20092.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>55</sup> Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

male supremacy and androcentrism have been inherent aspects of human existence, and alternatives to them beyond conception. This might have been the case during the *Vinaya's* construction, so that gendered differences would have automatically translated into women's disadvantages. In traditions that maintain such a paradigm, moves to equalise the status and practices of monks and nuns would threaten their very foundations.

Buddhist men and women share the same soteriological goal; however, *Vinaya* rules maintain different practices for *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. Had women's differences not been translated into disadvantages, some feminists might have applauded such a separation. Men and women sharing both an ultimate goal and the ability to renounce is sometimes taken to signify Buddhism having an egalitarian ethic.<sup>57</sup> However, patriarchal influences are evident in most Buddhist traditions, and egalitarian impulses have often been obscured by androcentric understandings and practices that have reduced women's status and opportunities.<sup>58</sup> Nuns have been constrained by additional rules that compel them to rely upon monks, while simultaneously they must compete for material resources, and the history of female renunciation includes many instances of deprivation.<sup>59</sup>

An egalitarian Buddhist system would require men and women's practices to be either reciprocal or independent of each other. The conservative nature of Theravada Buddhism and its androcentric foundations ensure the first of these options being unlikely. However, androcentric traditions may have little control over modern women, many of whom are creating new ways of being Buddhists.

## ii. Women's Ordination

*Bhikkhuni* ordination was first established in India in approximately the 5<sup>th</sup> century, BCE. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, BCE, *bhikkhunis* from India established a lineage in Sri Lanka, and this lineage was taken to China in the 5<sup>th</sup> century,

<sup>56</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.79.

<sup>57</sup> Liz Wilson suggests this was especially the case for women scholars writing before second wave feminism, such as CAF Rhys Davids (nee Caroline Foley), Mabel Bode, and IB Horner (Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.43).

<sup>58</sup> 'Patriarchy' in Maggie Humm, 1995 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (New York, Prentice Hall), pp.200—202.

<sup>59</sup> Karen Andrews, no date, 'Women in Theravada Buddhism', on 9.3.06, at [www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenAuthors.html](http://www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenAuthors.html); &, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 1988a, 'Introduction', pp.17—37, in Tsomo, ed., *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Ithaca, New York, Snow Lion), pp.21—22; &, Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen, 1988, 'The Significance of the Conference', pp.47—52, in Tsomo, ed., *Sakyadhita*, p.50; &, Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction', pp.3—4.

CE, where it persists in the Dharmagupta lineage. The *bhikkhuni* lineage had died out by the 7<sup>th</sup> century in India, and it lapsed during the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Sri Lanka.<sup>60</sup> The separation of householder and renunciant lifestyles is particularly important to Theravadins, and between the 11<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Theravada women had to be content with life as householders whose primary religious focus was to support monks.<sup>61</sup>

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Theravada women with the desire to renounce have become 'precept nuns' and maintained the ten precepts/*dasa-sila*. In Thailand, precept-nuns are called *sikkhamat*/training mothers or '*mai chees*', in Burma they are '*thilashin*', and in Sri Lanka they are *dasasil-mata*/ten precept mothers.<sup>62</sup> In some cultures, the laity's support for renunciants is understood to be an exchange for 'merit', and many regard women's lack of full ordination to signal they are less worthy of support. Some precept nuns regard their low status with ambivalence, as the cause of their lack of material support and their freedom from hundreds of *Vinaya* rules.<sup>63</sup> Others undertake all the *Vinaya* rules voluntarily and regard being humbled as part of their practice.<sup>64</sup>

One of the most vexed issues in Women's Buddhism is the lack of *bhikkhuni* ordination in many traditions and modern Buddhist women are working to make it more widely available. The orthodox ritual prescribed in the *Vinaya* and followed by Theravada and some Mahayana schools, requires the presence of fully ordained *bhikkhunis*. In other Mahayana schools, ordination is carried out by monks alone, and this model of *bhikkhuni* ordination is available in China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.<sup>65</sup> Chinese *Dharmagupta* traditions trace their *bhikkhuni* lineage back to 5<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka, while other traditions, such as those in Tibet and Thailand, never established *bhikkhuni* ordination.<sup>66</sup> It is impossible to summarise concisely the conditions and circumstances that attend

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<sup>60</sup> Anne Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', p.93.

<sup>61</sup> Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.209; and, Karen Andrews, no date, 'Women in Theravada Buddhism', on 9.3.06, at [www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenAuthors.html](http://www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenAuthors.html).

<sup>62</sup> '*Sikkhamat*', '*Thilashin*', and '*Dasa-silmata*', in Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, pp.267, 301, & 71; and, Anne Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', p.95.

<sup>63</sup> Tessa Bartholomeusz, 1994, *Women Under the Bo Tree*, pp.135—9.

<sup>64</sup> Karen Andrews, no date, 'Women in Theravada Buddhism', on 9.3.06, at [www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenAuthors.html](http://www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/womenAuthors.html).

<sup>65</sup> Anne Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', p.94; and, His Lai, (no date), 'A New Dawn for Women's Rights', on 28.4.06, at [www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebudha220.htm](http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebudha220.htm).

*bhikkhuni* ordination. It is sufficient to say that the focus of modern Buddhist women's concern is the continuing absence of ordination due to conservative attitudes towards the *Vinaya* ritual that requires the presence of ordained *bhikkhunis*.

In Sri Lanka, conservative Theravadins maintain that the *bhikkhuni* ordination ceremony cannot be conducted without the presence of fully ordained *bhikkhunis* who follow their *Vinaya*, and the re-establishment of the *bhikkhuni* order is impossible before the arrival of the next Buddha, Maitreya.<sup>67</sup> Liberals present two counter arguments. Firstly, *bhikkhuni* ordination might be re-established with the help of Chinese *bhikkhunis* whose lineage originated in 5<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka. Conservatives respond by questioning the purity of this lineage, determined by the type of *Vinaya* followed, the number of rules undertaken and the strictness of their application. Secondly, it is argued that Mahaprajapati's ordination is a precedent for a modern ceremony without the presence of *bhikkhunis*; however, conservatives maintain the Buddha's presence rendered those circumstances exceptional.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, liberal Buddhists of various traditions and nationalities have made efforts to establish or re-establish *bhikkhuni* lineages, especially in Sri Lanka, which has a substantial Buddhist heritage.<sup>68</sup> In October 1988, five Sri Lankan precept nuns/*dasasil-matas* received *bhikkhuni* ordination in California, and received little or no public recognition in Sri Lanka.<sup>69</sup> In December 1996, ten Sri Lankan *dasasil-matas* received *bhikkhuni* ordination in Sarnath, India, in a ceremony arranged by Mapalagama Vipulasara Mahathera, President of the Mahabodhi Society.<sup>70</sup> Finally, in February 1998, in Bodhgaya, India, an ordination ceremony was conducted according to the Theravada *Vinaya* by high-ranking *bhikkhus* from various traditions, including Theravadins, together with fifteen *bhikkhunis* of the Taiwanese Dharmagupta lineage.<sup>71</sup> At this event, *bhikkhuni* ordination was received by one hundred and thirty two women of

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<sup>66</sup> His Lai, (no date), 'A New Dawn for Women's Rights', on 28.4.06, at [www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebudha220.htm](http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebudha220.htm).

<sup>67</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', pp.119—135 in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Buddhist Women and Social Justice*, p.127.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Gombrich, 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Theravada Buddhism: A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo* (London & NY, Routledge), p.209.

<sup>69</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.126; & Vishvapani, 2002, 'Bold Step for Nuns', on 28.4.06, at [www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm](http://www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm).

<sup>70</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.126.

<sup>71</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.128; & Vishvapani, 2002, 'Bold Step for Nuns', on 28.4.06, at [www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm](http://www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm).



various Buddhist traditions from twenty-three countries—including Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, the Congo, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Canada and the USA.<sup>72</sup> It was an historic occasion and brought together diverse traditions.<sup>73</sup> Twenty-one *bhikkhunis* were Theravadins from Sri Lanka, where their return was greeted with celebrations and their ordination confirmed by a quorum of the *bhikkhu sangha*.<sup>74</sup> Shortly afterwards, in the first *bhikkhuni* ordination ceremony conducted in Sri Lanka for approximately a thousand years, twenty-two *dasasil-matas* became *bhikkhunis*.<sup>75</sup> Seven ceremonies took place in Sri Lanka between 1998 and 2001, and more than 350 *bhikkhunis* received ordination; nevertheless, some Theravada traditionalists do not recognise them as *bhikkhunis*.<sup>76</sup>

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, BCE, the establishment of a *bhikkhuni* order was a progressive move. Nevertheless, Pali texts have scattered references to the disruptive powers of women, and in one in particular, the Buddha warned monks to be alert only to women's subversive influences,

Ananda: How are we to conduct ourselves, Lord, with regard to womankind?

Buddha: As not seeing them, Ananda.

Ananda: But if we should see them, what are we to do?

Buddha: Not talking, Ananda.

Ananda: But if they should speak to us, Lord, what are we to do?

Buddha: Keep wide-awake, Ananda.<sup>77</sup>

The egalitarian principles found in early and Theravada Buddhism have been countered by essentialist ideas and moves to suppress women, which

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<sup>72</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.128; & Vishvapani, 2002, 'Bold Step for Nuns', on 28.4.06, at [www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm](http://www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm); & His Lai, (no date), 'A New Dawn for Women's Rights', on 28.4.06, at [www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebudha220.htm](http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebudha220.htm).

<sup>73</sup> Vishvapani, 2002, 'Bold Step for Nuns', on 28.4.06, at [www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm](http://www.dharmalife.com/issue19/asianbikkhunis.htm).

<sup>74</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.129.

<sup>75</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.129.

<sup>76</sup> Ranjani De Silva, 2004, 'Reclaiming the Robe', p.132—134.

<sup>77</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.48. *Mahāparinibbana-suttanta*, trans. TW & CAF Rhys Davids, 1966, *Dialogues of the Buddha* (London, Luzac), II, 154, cited by Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, pp.7—8; also cited as *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, V.23, by Damien Keown, 2004, 'Women', in *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p.335; and, by Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.379.

reflect the ambivalence that Horner claims is apparent in all Buddhist lands, in all ages and all epochs.<sup>78</sup>

### **B. Women in Mahayana Buddhism**

Direct comparisons of the circumstances in Theravada and Mahayana traditions would compare a single tradition with many traditions, and be unbalanced; however, comparison is not the purpose of this juxtapositioning. Women in Mahayana traditions might have experienced the equality found in some modern Zen traditions or lived in contexts where women's ordination has flourished, such as Taiwan. However, these positive circumstances are not typical reflections of the regard given to women in Mahayana traditions. The aim of this chapter is to consider the circumstances that encourage women's adaptations of Buddhism, and therefore it considers their least favourable circumstances. The following section interrogates how exceptional are the circumstances of Taiwanese nuns, the significance of sex changes in some *sutras*, and essentialist notions of women in Japanese Buddhism.

#### **i. The Taiwanese Exception?**

Every historical and geo-political context is unique; nevertheless, the flourishing of Taiwanese nuns may raise doubts about the extent of gender discriminations in Buddhism generally, and it is important to recognise the gender discriminations prevalent in Taiwan. Various geo-political and religio-cultural circumstances have led to the numerical dominance and fortunate circumstances of nuns in Taiwan. In the post-war period, the eradication of heterodox practices included the promotion of women's high ordination and nuns' adherence to the *Vinaya* rules, so that these things are not necessarily signs of women being politically effective.<sup>79</sup>

Taiwan is unique in having both single-sexed convents and mixed-sex institutions, where monks and nuns live in the same premises and enjoy the same access to training and high ordination. Nevertheless, it is usual for monks to occupy the senior position in mixed institutions.<sup>80</sup> Despite the numerical dominance of nuns, social conditions deter female leadership, and Confucian values discourage men from becoming monks and endorse male

<sup>78</sup> I B Horner, 1985 (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1979), 'Foreword', pp.xv—xvi, in Diana Y Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, p.xv.

<sup>79</sup> Wei-yi Cheng, 2004, *Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka: a critique of the feminist perspective* (PhD thesis, SOAS, London University), p.83.

<sup>80</sup> Wei-yi Cheng, 2004, *Buddhist Nuns*, p.290.

leadership.<sup>81</sup> Confucian influences underpin the expectation that eldest sons have a good education, are successful in their career, should marry and raise sons.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, a son being sent to the monks, even if he wants to go, implies his parents are unable to support him adequately, and shames them.<sup>83</sup> Such expectations ensure few men become monks, and those who do have higher status simply because they are men.

The flourishing of Taiwanese nuns is exemplary for Buddhist women around the world, and the gender discriminations to which they are subject are often overlooked. Sometimes Taiwanese attitudes towards women include a belief in their polluting nature and inferior *karma*, which reduce their status. Some Buddhist traditions restrict the rituals nuns may perform, and they may be prohibited from conducting 'ghost rituals', for example, '*shui ch'an*/water penance' and '*fang yen-k'ou*/release of the burning mouths' (see below, section B.iii, 'Essentialist Motifs').<sup>84</sup>

The equality of monks and nuns may be assessed in relation to income, status, and self-determination, and nuns may be limited in each of these areas.<sup>85</sup> When they are prevented from conducting rituals, nuns' receive fewer donations, and their status is undermined when it is believed women have inferior *karma*. Nuns who have undergone high ordination are restricted by *Vinaya* rules, including the *Garu-dhamma* that subordinate the most senior nun to the most junior monk. The disproportionate number of male heads of mixed-sex *sanghas* reflect gender prejudices being enshrined in nuns' diminished status and power. Thus, even though Taiwanese nuns have access to high ordination, are well educated and maintained, and are numerically superior, they are subjected to social and cultural values that maintain women's secondary status.

## ii. Sutras

*Sutras* enshrine three perceptions of women's soteriological capacity: they may deny women's ability to gain high attainments, or require that women first transform into men, or they may regard gender as illusory.<sup>86</sup> The most forbidding type of *sutra* denies women the ability to become *bodhisattvas*.

<sup>81</sup> Wei-yi Cheng, 2004, *Buddhist Nuns*, p.290—296.

<sup>82</sup> Bhiksuni Shih Yung Kai, 1988, 'Nuns in China: Part II—Taiwan', pp.119—123 in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Sakyadhita: daughters of the Buddha* (NY, Snow Lion), p.121.

<sup>83</sup> Bhiksuni Shih Yung Kai, 1988, 'Nuns in China', p.121.

<sup>84</sup> Wei-yi Cheng, 2004, *Buddhist Nuns*, p.164.

<sup>85</sup> Wei-yi Cheng, 2004, *Buddhist Nuns*, p.352.

<sup>86</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.169.

For example, the *Pure Land Sutra* allows women to progress only so far and further progress is impossible in a woman's body and requires rebirth as a man.<sup>87</sup> The second type of *sutra* accepts women have the ability to become lower stage *bodhisattvas*, and the transformation of female into male bodies in this life allows their further advancement. Examples are found in the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses* and the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>88</sup> In western understandings, the requirement of a man's body negates this being a way for women to progress and this sexual transformation signifies a female to male tranny.

The third kind of *sutra* takes an ultimate view in which attachments to sex and gender have been removed, and gender is regarded as illusory. Women are accepted as advanced *bodhisattvas* and Buddhas, and spontaneous sex changes, such as those depicted in the *Vimalakirtinirdesa* and *The Sutra of Queen Srimala Who Had the Lion's Roar*, indicate sex being conditioned and empty/*sunyata*.<sup>89</sup> This type of *sutra* allows positive attainments and sacred images to be female. Nevertheless, rather than women's gender being regarded in positive terms, women's access to high attainments is associated with gender's insignificance. Thus, all three types of *sutra* regard gender as problematic, only one type regards the gender of both men and women as negligible, and this is rarely put into practice in Buddhist institutions.

The restrictions placed upon women, together with the ability of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* to choose to incarnate as male or female, have resulted in occasional sexual ambiguities. The qualities of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* that are linguistically gendered female (for example, wisdom/*panna*) have sometimes been required to assume a male form, and in some instances, *bodhisattvas* who have chosen to manifest in female forms have continued to be regarded as male.<sup>90</sup> The most famous example is the white clad female figure of Kuan-yin that is often referred to as 'he'. The figure represents the embodied compassion/*karuna* of either Amitabha, the

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<sup>87</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.169—70. There is one exception to women's exclusion from Pure Lands, in Aksobhya's land of *Abhirati*, where women are beautiful and freed from menstruation, conception, and childbirth; a woman becomes pregnant by a mere glance. In the Tibetan version, there is no physical sexuality, and when carnal thoughts arise, they are replaced by a meditative absorption (Paul Williams, 1989, *Mahayana Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations* [London & NY, Routledge], pp.243—7).

<sup>88</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.170—71.

<sup>89</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism* p.217 & 283. Paul quotes examples of these *sutras* in both Chapter 6, 'The Bodhisattvas without Sexual Transformation', pp.217—43, and Chapter 8, 'A Female Buddha?', pp.281—302.

male Buddha of the Pure Land, or Avalokitesvara, the male *bodhisattva*.<sup>91</sup> In the *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin*, Amitabha is presented as a compassionate mother, which inspired his association with the female folk hero, Kuan-yin.<sup>92</sup> In China, the caves at Yun-kang and Lung-men house numerous apparently female images of Kuan-yin, which are regarded as *bodhisattva* and therefore male, and some have moustaches.<sup>93</sup> In the tantric pantheon, White Tara is a female closely associated with Avalokitesvara, a male helper of Amitabha.<sup>94</sup> The image of White Tara together with Avalokitesvara has been superimposed onto and fused with the figure of Kuan-yin, and the fusion persists throughout China and Japan.<sup>95</sup> The fusions that are the foundations of gender ambiguities have been necessary because of women's inability to access high attainments, which the ambiguities may also signify.

In Indian literature, sex change is sometimes used as a metaphorical device whose significance is different in Hindu and Buddhist sources. In Hindu literature, transformations symbolize transitions between sexuality and asceticism, which assume feminine and masculine forms, respectively.<sup>96</sup> In Buddhist literature, similar transitions are made between sensuality and meditation, which are represented by feminine and masculine forms, respectively. When considering the significance of gender transformations in Buddhism, Diana Paul observed,

Since the feminine represented the deceptive and destructive temptress or 'daughter of evil', the feminine body represented imperfection, weakness, ugliness, and impurity. Transformation of sex represented a transition from the imperfection and immorality of human beings (the female body) to the mental perfection of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas (the male body). Maleness was an image for the perfection of the mind. The transformation symbolized a mental change in attitude from a sensual state of attachment to a desireless state of enlightenment.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.250.

<sup>91</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.248—251.

<sup>92</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.265—6.

<sup>93</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.251.

<sup>94</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.249.

<sup>95</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, pp.249—251. Pages 251—278 have further information about textual and iconographic representations of Kuan-yin, and for information about Kuan-yin's appearance in India, Tibet, and China, see John Blofeld, 1978, *Bodhisattva of Compassion: the Mystical Tradition of Kuan Yin* (Bolder, Shambhala).

<sup>96</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.175.

<sup>97</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.175.

Hindu and Buddhist tantric understandings of female gender are significantly different. The female consort in Hindu tantrism symbolises active energy/*sakti*, which is the creative force that maintains the universe and makes all life possible: it is the primal sexual energy that unites male and female and brings forth new life.<sup>98</sup> In Buddhist tantrism, the female consort symbolises wisdom/*prajna*, which is utterly passive and dependant upon an active masculine aspect for vibrancy: the female aspect is quiescent.<sup>99</sup> In tantra, the dynamic principle has the redeeming function, which in Hinduism is the female, and in Buddhism is the male. While androgyny in Buddhist tantra embraces and possibly revalues an ideal of femininity, its female symbolism cannot be active in the world independent of masculine influence.<sup>100</sup>

### **iii. Essentialist Motifs**

Under patriarchy, fatalistic and essentialist notions of womanhood have enabled men to relinquish responsibility for women's social and religious circumstances. Patriarchal conceptions of womanhood often underpin the constraints to which women are subjected; for example, in places where male birth is regarded as fortunate, this assessment is often reversed for women and female birth is regarded as unfortunate. Rather than offering insights into the difficulties faced by women, many Japanese texts enshrine men's views of women, and take masculinity as the non-gendered norm that represents positive *karmic* results, while femininity is taken as the singularly gendered pole that represents negative *karmic* results.<sup>101</sup> In an exclusively male discourse, women are often presented as the embodiment of negative *karmic* forces, which underpin their exclusion from religious discourse and attainments.<sup>102</sup> Cultural norms and *dharmic* expectations have combined in Japan to justify women's social, cultural, and religious subjugation, and many Buddhist traditions regard women as dangerous and characterise them as polluted and polluting.<sup>103</sup> Negative views have been formalised with

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<sup>98</sup> 'Shakti', Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner (eds.), 1994, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston, Shambhala), p.313

<sup>99</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.124—125; and, June Campbell, 2002 (1996 1<sup>st</sup> edn.), *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity and Tibetan Buddhism* (London & NY, Continuum), p.146.

<sup>100</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.124.

<sup>101</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*, (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press), p.14. .

<sup>102</sup> Bernard Faure, 1998, *The Red Thread*, p.14.

<sup>103</sup> Dharmachari Jnanavira, no date, 'Introduction', to 'A Mirror for Women? Reflections of the Feminine in Japanese Buddhism', *Western Buddhist Review*, Vol.

the aid of essentialist motifs, four of which are described in the following sections, 'Menstrual Taboos', 'The Three Dependencies', 'The Five Hindrances', and 'The Seven Vices'. Each motif appears in various Buddhist contexts and all four are found in Japanese Buddhism.

*a. Menstruation Taboos*

Ritual purity has a high priority in indigenous Japanese religions and has influenced Buddhism in Japan. Menstruation is taken to signify women's inherent pollution and this belief was perpetuated in the Blood Bowl/*Ketsubongyo Sutra*, which came to Japan from China in the medieval period (1100—1600).<sup>104</sup> According to this *sutra*, garments stained by menstrual blood were washed in the river and polluted the water used for offerings. The women responsible were said to accumulate *karma* that resulted in their rebirth in the 'Bloodpond Hell'.<sup>105</sup> Similar themes are found in popular literature, and the Bloodpond Hell forms a structural opposition to a Pure Land.<sup>106</sup> The notion that menstruation polluted women led some traditions—such as Tendai and Shingon—to prohibit women from entering the most revered parts of monasteries and temples in a prohibition called '*nyonin kinsei*'.<sup>107</sup>

*b. The Three Dependencies*

The Three Dependencies in Japan are equivalent to the *Laws of Manu* in India, and the Confucian *Yili* and Daoist *Xuebu jing* in China. They enshrine the belief that women must be controlled by men in all stages of their lives: by fathers during childhood, husbands during their prime and sons during widowhood.<sup>108</sup> The Dependencies perpetuate the idea that women are incapable of controlling themselves and need the guidance and control of men at all times. In Japan, the three dependencies were a social

4, on 16.9.05 at

[http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror\\_for\\_women.html](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror_for_women.html).

<sup>104</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.76.

<sup>105</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, pp.73—4. In China, the *sutra* included the blood of childbirth, which was said to pollute the earth when it touched the ground and caused the earth god to be angry (Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.73).

<sup>106</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.74. The term 'Pure Land' is a Chinese invention that refers to an established concept of the land where Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* live and remain available to help others; because they are pure, the land in which they reside must also be pure ('Pure Land' in Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, pp.224—225)

<sup>107</sup> Dharmacari Jnanavira, (no date), 'A Mirror for Women?', Fn.1, on 16.9.05 at [http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror\\_for\\_women.html](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror_for_women.html).

<sup>108</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.73—4.

requirement that became associated with the soteriological elements of the Five Hindrances.<sup>109</sup>

*c. The Five Hindrances*

The Five Hindrances claim women are incapable of rebirth as the five highest forms of existence: a Brahma god; the god Sakra; the tempter Mara; a Wheel-turning king; or a Buddha. Sometimes referred to as the Five Obstacles, they have encouraged the subjugation of women in many Buddhist contexts and are recorded in the Pali Canon.<sup>110</sup> In Japan, they underpin women's exclusion from sacred places/*nyonin kinsei*.<sup>111</sup> The goal in early and Theravada Buddhism is *nibbana*, and, while the hindrances affected women's status, they had minimal soteriological significance.<sup>112</sup> In Mahayana Buddhism, the goal is to attain Buddhahood, and the Five Hindrances truncate women's soteriological progression. References forbidding women from becoming seventh stage *bodhisattvas* first appeared in Japan in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, CE, and by the 9<sup>th</sup> century, technical understandings and juridical restrictions had evolved and the Five Hindrances referred to women's moral and ontological inferiority.<sup>113</sup>

*d. The Seven Vices*

The Seven Vices formalise essentialist criticisms by saying that women: 1. arouse desire in men; 2. are jealous; 3. lack empathy; 4. are only concerned with their appearance; 5. are deceitful; 6. are without shame; and, 7. have bodies that are forever unclean with menstrual discharges, pregnancy, and childbirth, which render them both defiled and defiling.<sup>114</sup> In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, CE, the Chinese monk, Dosen, was the first to record 'The Seven Vices of Women', and in 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan, they were repeated by Muju Ichien, a Rinzai Zen monk, in the *Mirror for Women/Tsuma kagami*.<sup>115</sup> The Seven Vices repeat the familiar pattern of men's prejudices being used to justify women's subordination.

<sup>109</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.63.

<sup>110</sup> *Majjhima Nikaya*, Ch.III, v.65—66, cited by IB Horner, 1930, *Women*, p.291; &, Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.62.

<sup>111</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.63.

<sup>112</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.62

<sup>113</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.63.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Morrell, 1980, *Mirror for Women: Muju Ichien's Tsuma Kagama* (Monumenta Nipponica), p.68, cited by Dharmachari Jnanavira, (no date), 'A Mirror for Women?' on 16.9.05, at [http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror\\_for\\_women.html](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror_for_women.html).

<sup>115</sup> Robert Morrell, 1980, *Mirror for Women*, p.68, cited by Dharmachari Jnanavira, (no date), 'A Mirror for Women?'; and, Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.55.



In Japanese Buddhism, essentialist motifs have produced a coherent discourse that excludes women from sacred places, justifies their institutional subordination and limits their ultimate potential.<sup>116</sup> Few notable scholars have critiqued women's circumstances; however, Master Dogen (1200—1253), founder of the Soto Zen school, said,

What is more worthy about a male? Emptiness is emptiness; the four elements are the four elements: the five skandhas are the five skandhas. It is the same with the female; and actualising the Dharma is actualising the Dharma in either case. Simply you should revere and honour the one who actualises the Dharma and do not consider the matter of being male or female.<sup>117</sup>

Although essentialist ideas of womanhood are vulnerable to the teachings of no-self/*anatta* and emptiness/*sunyata*, no systematic criticism has taken place.<sup>118</sup>

Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, women's cadavers were featured in Japanese poetry, narrative literature, prints and paintings.<sup>119</sup> Many of the images were designed for contemplative meditation and have no parallel in depictions of male cadavers.<sup>120</sup> Women's cadavers also featured in post-Asokan *Pali* and *Sanskrit* sources, and women's physical decay has been associated with the *dharmā* in many traditions.<sup>121</sup> It is sometimes claimed that the depictions have had little impact upon women because their purpose was to enhance meditative abilities. However, Liz Wilson found the same methods being used to teach female students, who were taught to regard themselves through the 'male gaze'.<sup>122</sup> Wilson also found stories of self-harm committed by women to demonstrate to men the transitory nature of beauty.<sup>123</sup> She argues that in post-Asokan Buddhist contexts, nuns were most useful to the life of the *sangha* when they catalogued the undesirable

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<sup>116</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.62.

<sup>117</sup> Master Dogen, cited without reference by Anne Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', p.99.

<sup>118</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.55—90; & Dharmachari Jnanavira, no date, 'Homosexuality in the Japanese Buddhist Tradition', on 14.06.05, at [www.westernbuddhistreview.com](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com).

<sup>119</sup> Dharmachari Jnanavira, date, 'A Mirror for Women?', on 16.9.05 at [http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror\\_for\\_women.html](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/mirror_for_women.html).

<sup>120</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', pp.57—58; & Gail Chin, 1998, 'The Gender of Buddhist Truth: the Female Corpse in a Group of Japanese Paintings', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 25/3—4, cited by Dharmachari Jnanavira, (no date), 'A Mirror for Women?', on 16.9.05, at [www.westernbuddhistreview.com](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com).

<sup>121</sup> Liz Wilson, 1996, *Charming Cadavers*, pp.8—10.

<sup>122</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', pp.42, 58—61. See 'male gaze' in Glossary.

<sup>123</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.69—73, 79.

qualities of their bodies and actively disfigured them. Thus, the nuns gendered themselves and deconstructed their feminine charms for the *sangha's* edification.<sup>124</sup> Assessments of the benefits and deficiencies of such techniques must consider the absence of men's cadavers and of depictions of men harming themselves for women's edification.<sup>125</sup> This lack of balance might be taken to indicate the flesh of men and women being inequivalent, which would be consistent with Blackstone's paradigm, reported above, in section A.i., 'The *Garu-dhamma*'.<sup>126</sup>

Negative depictions of women are said to have benefited monks, and connections are rarely made between monks' beliefs, what women were taught, and women's beliefs. The use of women's rotting corpses to aid meditative concentration reflects and reinforces notions of women being inherently polluted, and encourages men and women to regard female embodiment negatively. Men's gender has rarely been interrogated and the positive status given to male embodiment has been, and continues to be, used to justify men's privileges. Essentialist notions of gender have functioned to distance men from responsibility for women's disadvantaged social and religious circumstances.

As sole beneficiaries of patriarchy, and sole guardians of the *dhamma*, Buddhist men have been responsible for female birth being regarded as unfortunate and 'female *kamma*' being understood only in negative terms. The lack of a systematic critique of gender in Japanese Buddhism has avoided questions of *kamma* itself being gendered, and maintained negative understandings of menstruation and childbirth. In 1993, Junko Minamoto, a Japanese feminist, observed that Buddhism in Japan was hindering the development of women's rights because it embraced a reactionary philosophy chained to outmoded and discredited androcentric views of women.<sup>127</sup> She claimed Buddhism's denial of sexuality resulted in both the fear of eros and contempt for women.<sup>128</sup> In Japanese Buddhist discourse, women's bodies, suffering, and *karma*, have been bound inextricably, and,

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<sup>124</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', pp.80.

<sup>125</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.58.

<sup>126</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', pp.57—58; Kate Blackstone, 1999, 'Damming the Dhamma', on 20.3.06, at [www.buddhistinformation.com/damming\\_the\\_dhamma.com](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/damming_the_dhamma.com).

<sup>127</sup> Junko Minamoto, 1993, 'Buddhism and the Historical Construction of Sexuality in Japan', in the *US-Japanese Women's Journal, English Supplement*, No.5, p113, cited by Dharmachari Jnanavira, (no date), 'A Mirror for Women?', on 16.9.05, at [www.westernbuddhistreview.com](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com).

perhaps most surprising in a religious tradition that emphasises mental culture, women's minds have often been ignored.

### **C. Tibetan Buddhism's *Songyum***

Overcoming dualistic thinking is one of Tibetan Buddhism's primary goals, and gender polarity is a common metaphor for dualistic thinking. The polarities of *nirvana* and *samsara* are associated with male and female, respectively, and masculinity is associated with refinement and transcendence, while femininity is associated with nature and defilement.<sup>129</sup> Tantric practices include representations of (hetero)sexual intercourse, which are used to signify the union of polarities.<sup>130</sup> Both men and women are able to attain high levels of realisation in Tibetan Buddhism, although there are fewer accounts of women's attainments.<sup>131</sup> A female lineage might have created positive representations of female subjectivity and protected information of benefit to women.<sup>132</sup> However, Tibetan Buddhism did not establish a female lineage, and nuns may be called 'A-ni/Aunt', 'Chola/Buddhist practitioner', or 'Tsun-ma/Reverend lady', adhere to ten precepts and twenty-six other rules, and have the status of a novice.<sup>133</sup>

Secrecy has played a large part in Tibetan Buddhism, and certain rituals require initiation for admission, while other rituals take place of which initiates remain ignorant.<sup>134</sup> The autobiography of June Campbell, a modern western woman, reveals how secrecy has enabled women's sexual exploitation. Campbell worked as an interpreter for Kalu Rinpoche, a *tulku-lama* of the Kagyu order, and she witnessed publicly celibate lamas being secretly sexually active.<sup>135</sup> A '*songyum*' is generally understood to be an imaginary visualised female consort of a male deity, and may be conjured by

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<sup>128</sup> Junko Minamoto, 1993 'Buddhism and the Historical Construction of Sexuality in Japan', p113, cited by Dharmachari Jnanavira, no date, 'Homosexuality in Japanese Buddhist Tradition', on 14.6.05, at [www.westernbuddhistreview.com](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com).

<sup>129</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.193. Bernard Faure also believes Tibetan Buddhism's emphasis upon the gendering of wisdom/*prajna* and means/*upaya* should not be taken for egalitarianism (2003, *Denial*, pp.122—125).

<sup>130</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.187.

<sup>131</sup> Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.219—220.

<sup>132</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.116.

<sup>133</sup> Linda LaMacchia, 2006, abstract of 'Ani': Aunts, Nieces, and Himalayan Nuns' Traditional Education in North Indian Vajrayana Buddhism' (American University, Washington, DC), on 21.5.09 at <http://www.geocities.com/mar-aaar/abstracts3.html>; Anne Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', p.97; Peter Harvey, 2000, *Ethics*, p.399. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Dalai Lama has encouraged the movement towards women's full ordination.

<sup>134</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.99.

<sup>135</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.2, 98—99.

a lama to realise insights symbolised by the union of male and female.<sup>136</sup> Literally translated, the Tibetan word '*songyum*' is 'secret mother'. In most lamas' biographies, references to female partners are either given metaphorical status or omitted. However, many lamas have acquired the services of real women to engage in secret sexual activities, and these women are also referred to as '*songyum*'.<sup>137</sup>

Campbell describes some of the collusions necessary to maintain the apparently celibate monastic system.<sup>138</sup> Monks have conspired to sustain the structures of Tibetan Buddhism, to progress soteriologically, and to protect one another.<sup>139</sup> Sexual activities have been supported by powerful men at the heart of a theocratic system, and acquiescence of the women concerned was underpinned by the women's faith in the lama as a Buddha. The women believed taking part in intimate activities with a religiously significant man implied they, too, were religiously significant and the events *karmically* predisposed. Despite the lack of public acknowledgement for their role, some women felt it bestowed prestige, and taking part facilitated access to religious knowledge and contexts ordinarily unavailable to them as women.<sup>140</sup> Some women regarded participation as a test of faith. At best, lamas were motivated by the soteriological attainments the rituals facilitated. However, lamas' anxieties about the women's trustworthiness resulted in attempts to control them, and public knowledge of the sexual relationship being associated with 'trouble' for the woman, which inferred her madness, illness, or even death.<sup>141</sup>

Campbell believes the secrecy that shrouds women tantric 'masters' has been purposefully maintained to ensure women could not gain prominence in a theocratic political system. She argues that during the last five hundred years, knowledge of the female presence in *tantra* has been suppressed, and the accumulated knowledges and powers of women have been lost.<sup>142</sup> An alternative view is offered by Miranda Shaw, who regards the women in her study as 'revelling in the freedom of emptiness', while knowledge of them has been hidden.<sup>143</sup> Shaw regards their hidden status as

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<sup>136</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.98.

<sup>137</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.98—99.

<sup>138</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, pp.2, 98—99.

<sup>139</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.102.

<sup>140</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.103.

<sup>141</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.104, 109.

<sup>142</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.100—102, citing Miranda Shaw, 1994, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press), p.15.

<sup>143</sup> Miranda Shaw, 1994, *Passionate Enlightenment*, p.19.

part of the process necessary for the subjugation of women's egos.<sup>144</sup> This assumes a fundamental difference between men and women's egos that allows men to be publicly lauded. Shaw fails to acknowledge that the invisibility of women of high status has detrimental effects, including the lack of role models and of opportunities for dialogues between women.<sup>145</sup>

During the 1980's and 1990's, secret sexual encounters between teachers/*gurus* and pupils in western Buddhist groups were made public, and many were regarded as abuses of power. In some cases, the public scandal and outrage resulted in traditional guidelines being supplemented with new codes of conduct.<sup>146</sup> In western contexts, the need for secrecy in Tibetan Buddhism has been widely questioned, and information about 'secret' practices is becoming more widely available.

### **Conclusion**

Women who recognise the negative Buddhist constructions of womanhood and still choose to identify as Buddhists may recognise a more powerful truth in the teachings/*dharmma*. Buddhist history is redolent with patriarchal norms and expectations that ensure most traditions maintain a male lineage while women's lineages have either not been established or, if established, have often been allowed to languish. Despite Buddhist men and women following the same paths and attaining the same ultimate goal, women's progress has often been curtailed by institutional prejudice.<sup>147</sup> Canonical texts, the bastions of institutional authority, have been influenced by patriarchal hegemonies, and were edited by monks who probably had 'little sympathy with the doings of women'.<sup>148</sup> Monks are not excused from the responsibility for promoting misogynistic assumptions of women's inherent nature and for making women responsible for their libidos simply because they might have been struggling to maintain their celibacy and their authority.

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<sup>144</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.101.

<sup>145</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.106.

<sup>146</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller*, p.110; & Gabriele Kustermann, 2000, 'Sexual Conduct and Misconduct: Buddhist Ethics in the West', pp.285—93 in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Innovative Buddhist Women*, p.291. Accounts of abusive relationships between Buddhist teachers and western women include various authors under the heading of 'Conspiracy of Silence: the problem of the male teacher', pp.210—258, in Sandy Boucher, 1993, *Turning the Wheel* (Boston, Beacon); and, Rita Gross, 1998, 'Helping the Iron Bird Fly: Western Buddhists and Issues of Authority', pp.60—74, in Gross, *Soaring and Settling* (NY, Continuum).

<sup>147</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, pp.8—9.

<sup>148</sup> I B Horner, 1930, *Women*, p.308.

*Bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* relinquish many gendered characteristics at ordination, but rarely have traditions regarded them equally.<sup>149</sup> Negative understandings and restrictions of *bhikkhunis* contrast starkly with the positive understandings and the privileged status of *bhikkhus*. In general, men's relationships with each other are the central focus of institutional attention, and spiritual relationships between women rarely feature as models of ethics and morality. As religious figures, Buddhist women are usually required to denigrate womanhood or are portrayed in some relationship to men and function as counterparts to them.<sup>150</sup> For example, Mahaprajapati represents the ideal female renunciant; she has some equivalence with the Buddha, but is subordinate to, and supplicant upon, both him and the male *sangha* in a pattern of female subservience idealised in Brahmanical culture.<sup>151</sup> Women's relationships with other women have been disregarded as legitimate sources of spiritual inspiration.<sup>152</sup> The catalogue of attitudes that have disparaged women and the conversion of their differences into disadvantages, raises the spectre of women being regarded as a different order of human being.

The alternative practices created by modern women are underpinned by their positive esteem, established through the efforts of second-wave feminists. Without positive esteem, Buddhist women would be in danger of absorbing long-established misogynistic views and practices, and of eventually regarding themselves as subservient and secondary to Buddhist men. This must not be allowed to happen. By challenging negative understandings and effecting change, modern Buddhist women are establishing equal access to soteriological attainments, constructing the Buddhist path in more recognisably feminine ways.

Modern egalitarian expectations require men and women to have equal access to Buddhist practices and for these to have equal significance. This is not to say that men and women's practices must be the same. While having a minimal impact upon men's Buddhism, the adjustments to ensure gender equality in Buddhism would have a dramatic effect upon women's Buddhism. Adaptations to Buddhist practices are reducing historic disparities between Buddhist theory and practice, while affirming Buddhist women's positive esteem and establishing 'Women's Buddhism'.

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<sup>149</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.48, 51—57.

<sup>150</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.xxv.

<sup>151</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I"', p.46.

<sup>152</sup> Diana Y Paul, 1985, *Women in Buddhism*, p.xxv.

## **PART 3: A POLITICAL SOLUTION**

## Chapter 7

### Buddhism and Women

#### **Introduction**

Religions whose central focus is a male god or leader have often developed an ethic in which women are encouraged to become dependent upon male authority.<sup>1</sup> A primary concern of feminist theology is to encourage women's flourishing in religious contexts that support their autonomy and positive esteem. Most feminists would consider legitimate any adaptations that circumvent the detrimental circumstances often faced by Buddhist women. Integrity requires consistency between personal and religious values, and although Buddhist teachings reflect an ethic of compassion and tolerance conducive to modern egalitarian values, its practices do not. Buddhists all over the world are transforming Buddhism to ensure its practices are consistent with modern egalitarian values. In particular, Buddhist women are tailoring Buddhism to their needs and their adaptations have been referred to as 'Women's Buddhism'.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter has three primary sections. The first considers two aspects of 'Women and Authority'. The subsection 'Awareness of the Need to Adapt', explains the problems some women have recognising oppression. Once oppressive circumstances are recognised, ethical considerations require them to be changed, and the subsection 'Authorising Adaptations', reports how change may be authorised. The section, 'Women's Middle Way', reports changes made by women. Its subsection 'Challenging the Lay/Monastic Dichotomy', describes how circumstances in the West have encouraged women in particular to challenge this traditional dichotomy and become 'serious lay practitioners'. Positive roles for Buddhist women are being implemented in practices described in the second sub-section,

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Murcot, 1983, 'The Feminine in Zen', pp.22—27, in *Kahawai: Journal of Women and Zen* 5, No.4, Fall, pp.23 & 24 f, cited by Ann Bancroft, 1987, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.81—104 in Ursula King, *Women in World Religions* (New York, Paragon), p.100.

<sup>2</sup> The first reference to 'Women's Buddhism' was made by Ellison Banks Findly in the title of her book *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal* [2000, [Somerville, Ms, Wisdom Publications]], and Judith Simmer-Brown refers to 'women's Dharma' (2002, 'The Roar of the Lioness', pp. 309—323 in Charles S Prebish & Martin Baumann, eds., *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia* [Berkeley, University of California Press], p.309).



'Women's Innovations'. To this point, the chapter describes some of the complex circumstances experienced by western Buddhist women in the UK and US, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Evidence from these two areas appears contradictory, and it is important to bear in mind that one addresses the difficulties generated by gender discrimination, while the other considers possible solutions, and similar patterns may be present in both areas.

The third and largest section of this chapter, 'Naming', considers the significance of naming in feminist and Buddhist contexts, respectively. 'Feminist Naming' considers how naming is understood among feminists, and provides two examples of its strategic deployment by 'Womanists' in the 1980's, and by '*Mujerista*' in the early 1990's. These two examples illustrate how self-claimed names have enabled the recognition and promotion of previously under-represented groups of women by raising their profiles and allowing their theologies to be recognised. The final section, 'Naming Buddhism', argues that the current conventions for naming Buddhisms, together with 'Women's Buddhism' already being named, support the naming of 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

## **A. Women and Authority**

### **i. Awareness of the Need to Adapt**

Helen Waterhouse's study of *Buddhism in Bath* assessed the attitudes towards women's gender in all of the Buddhist groups in one UK city, and revealed that some women failed to recognise sexist practices.<sup>4</sup> The women generally disregarded the politics of gender and their expectations of Buddhist men and of men in other areas of their lives were the same. Few women in the study were aware of or in sympathy with debates of women's status in Buddhism conducted elsewhere, and most did not regard themselves as disadvantaged.<sup>5</sup> Many women failed to recognise discriminatory practices, despite having participated in them, and some even denied the existence of discrimination in Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> One nun voiced

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath: Adaptation and Authority* (Leeds, University of Leeds, Community Religions Project); Silvia Wetzels, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun: Western Buddhists as Full-Time Practitioners', pp.275—284 in Charles S Prebish & Martin Baumann, eds., *Westward Dharma*, pp.281—282, and Judith Simmer-Brown, 2002, 'The Roar'

<sup>4</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.232.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.84—5, 124, 176, 230. Bernard Faure has observed that Buddhist women seemed to uncritically accept and internalise gender discriminations (2003, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* [New Jersey, Princeton University Press], p.64).

concern that high ordination was unavailable for nuns, and then hesitated, saying this observation contradicted her faith in her teacher.<sup>7</sup> Theravada practitioners were concerned about the secondary status of ten precept nuns/*dasasil-matas*, but regarded it an improper concern for the laity—which begs the question of it ever being a proper concern for women in a tradition that has historically lacked female ordination.<sup>8</sup> The New Kadampa Tradition relies solely on the teachings and translations of their founder, Geshe Kelsang, who discourages members from referring to alternative sources and teaches that politics and Buddhism should not be mixed.<sup>9</sup> This view fails to recognise the presence of politics in every stance, via the hermeneutic circle.<sup>10</sup> Some women chose consciously not to fight battles against sexism in Buddhist contexts when their efforts to claim equality had been confused with 'ego-grasping'.<sup>11</sup> Overall, women tended to prioritise Buddhist teachings and any concerns about institutional organisations were secondary. Women's inability to recognise sexism and their disregard of discrimination against women requires an explanation.

In different ways, feminism and Buddhism are concerned with overcoming the limitations of social conditioning and restricted views of the self, and instead of attempting to change the external world, Buddhists may focus upon changing personal awareness. Where women's subordination is a daily occurrence, women's inability to recognise it signals their 'false-consciousness', a Marxist concept developed by Engels to describe the inability to recognise the instruments of one's oppression or exploitation. Mary Daly described how a singular masculine viewpoint being universalised by patriarchy had a similar effect upon women. She called the process 'a cosmic false naming' because only men's views and experiences had been universally validated and recorded (see below, section C.i.'Feminist Naming').<sup>12</sup>

The views of men and women often diverge, and in patriarchal contexts, women's views have often been invalidated and subsequently

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<sup>7</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.176.

<sup>8</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.232

<sup>9</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.155.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.176.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.232.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Daly, 1986 (1<sup>st</sup> Published 1973), *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Womens Liberation* (London, Women's Press), p.47; Sally Ryan, 2000, *Marx and Engels Correspondence* (International Publishers, 1968), first published as *Gestamstausgabe*, (no date) trans. Donna Torr, transcribed by Sally Ryan, available on 10.12.08, at [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93\\_07\\_14.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm).

relinquished.<sup>13</sup> Women dominated by patriarchy are often, 'at one and the same time themselves and an abstract male oppressor, whose consciousness they have internalised'.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon is reminiscent of the 'Stockholm Syndrome', in which captives absorb the view of their captors; however, the captivity of women's minds by patriarchy is rarely recognised outside feminist contexts.<sup>15</sup> Dominated women may be caught in a web of self-defeating behaviour that defers to patriarchal norms that take precedence in their psyches. Such women have not always acted in their own best interests or in the best interests of women as a group. Instead of living the dynamics of an authentic existence, dominated women often act vicariously through men or with men at the centre of their concerns, and have submerged themselves in the roles they have accepted are socially pleasing.<sup>16</sup>

Those who are unfamiliar with feminist theologies may remain unaware of the threats to women's autonomy posed by some male dominated religious traditions. The sacred texts of patriarchal religions often reproduce a 'male gaze' that intensifies the processes of socialisation and enculturation by which patriarchal values are internalised.<sup>17</sup> Independent thought is difficult for such women who assume it is natural to focus upon male priorities and do not credit women's priorities with the same regard.<sup>18</sup> Thus, many women fail to recognise gender discriminations and the psychological processes of domination facilitate a false-transcendence.<sup>19</sup> Two processes are necessary to rectify these circumstances: a change in consciousness that enables independent thought, and a commitment to changing discriminatory values and practices. Without these commitments, old patterns of thought are perennial, and may choke the new, more realistic view of discrimination. The complex and often painful processes of personal change aim to liberate women's minds to enable them to think for themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Some Buddhist women have set aside the reform of Buddhist

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.48.

<sup>14</sup> Paulo Freire, 1970, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (NY, Herder & Herder), p.32, cited by Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.48, & Fn.6 p.205.

<sup>15</sup> 'Stockholm syndrome', in 2002, *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* on CD-ROM, v.2.0 (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

<sup>16</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.48.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.48—49. 'Male gaze' is defined in the Glossary.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.49.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.49—50.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.50.

institutions in favour of furthering their personal practise.<sup>21</sup> They appear to transcend Buddhism's sexism, and are either unaware of gender discriminations or unwilling to challenge them. This raises two questions: to what extent does the Buddhist emphasis upon mental cultivation enhance women's awareness of their current social and political circumstances; and, how widespread are the democratic and egalitarian ideals that are often considered integral to Western Buddhism.<sup>22</sup>

The unwillingness or inability to recognise sexist discriminations in Buddhism are insufficient reason to defer implementing the changes that would ensure gender equality. Only when Buddhist women and men have similar levels of respect will it be possible to say truthfully that relationships between all people are equally worthy.

## ii. Authorising Adaptations

Buddhist traditions demonstrate a range of attitudes towards adaptations, from allowing them only when they are essential for survival, to allowing them whenever they are considered necessary, and this range is reflected in a spectrum of adaptations.<sup>23</sup> All of the traditions in Waterhouse's study of Bath acknowledged the need to adapt Buddhist practices in new cultural setting, and those most receptive to change found their cross-cultural transmission easiest.<sup>24</sup> Some adaptations were similar for all traditions; for example, the use of English language for study or liturgy, and a reduced reliance upon rituals.<sup>25</sup> Individual Buddhists may negotiate two types of

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar'; & Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.227—8.

<sup>22</sup> Democratising Western Buddhism is referred to by several scholars. Rita Gross (2001, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.205—234, in Peter Harvey, ed., *Buddhism* (London & NY, Continuum), pp.230—232), believes lay women are effecting democratisation, while Kenneth K Tanaka (1998, 'Epilogue: The Colors and Contours of American Buddhism', pp.287—298, in Charles S Prebish & Kenneth K Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America* [Berkeley, University of California Press], pp.289—290), believes democratisation is a general phenomenon. The online *Journal of Global Buddhism* ('Issues of the Development of Buddhist Traditions', at <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/dig.html>, on 21.8.08) includes democratisation among the topics invited for publication. According to Judith Simmer-Brown (2002, 'The Roar', p.313), Sangye Khandro, 'laments the democratisation of Buddhism'.

<sup>23</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 20—27; 240. Waterhouse cites Deirdre Green being the first to use the notion of a spectrum of adaptations in 'Buddhism in Britain: Skilful Means or Selling Out?' (1989, in Paul Badham ed. *Religion, State, and Society in Modern Britain* [Lampeter, Edwin Mellen]). The spectrum is also referred to by Peter Harvey (1990, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press] p.316), and, Stephen Batchelor (1994, *The Awakening of the West* [Berkeley, Ca, Parallax], pp.337—8).

<sup>24</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.228.

<sup>25</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.228.

authority: the personal authority that comes from practising Buddhism and the traditional authority of a Buddhist group. Texts, traditions, teachers, and personal experiences, are sources of authority that are regarded differently by Buddhist traditions.<sup>26</sup>

Very little has been published on the subject of authority in Buddhism, although some feminist academics have considered how women's adaptations may be authorised.<sup>27</sup> Sue Hamilton and Rita Gross have considered the authorisation of women's adaptations in Theravada and Vajrayana traditions, respectively.<sup>28</sup> Sue Hamilton focuses upon texts, and uses the Pali Canon, in particular the *Kalama Sutta*, to support her argument that women may take the *dhamma* into their own hands and reformulate it in ways that are consistent with Buddhist and feminist imperatives.<sup>29</sup> In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha advocated free enquiry, and enjoined the Kalamas to rely upon themselves. The ability to recognise that which leads to a beneficial outcome was placed above all other authorities,

Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them.<sup>30</sup>

Gross argues that women's gender must be revalorised throughout Buddhism, and gender constructs must be consistent with a two-sexed model of androgyny, which she believes provides a post-patriarchal egalitarian model (see also Chapter Eight, section C.i., 'Androgyny is a Heterocentric Illusion').<sup>31</sup> Like many Buddhists in the US, Gross assumes a

<sup>26</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.237—239.

<sup>27</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.34; Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'Buddhism: The Doctrinal Case for Feminism', pp.91—104 in *Feminist Theology*, May, No.12; Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.31; and, Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.231—2.

<sup>28</sup> Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'The Doctrinal Case for Feminism'; Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, SUNY).

<sup>29</sup> Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'Buddhism: The Doctrinal Case for Feminism'.

<sup>30</sup> *Anguttara Nikaya*. I.189, v.10, trans. Soma Thera, 1981, *The Wheel* No. 8; (Sri Lanka, Buddhist Publication Soc.).

<sup>31</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, pp.293—298.

democratic ideal is essential to Western Buddhism.<sup>32</sup> Both Hamilton and Gross recognise that traditional Buddhist attitudes towards women and the feminine must change; however, their arguments draw upon different sources and demonstrate distinct attitudes towards authority. Hamilton, a Theravadin, looks to canonical sources, while Gross, a Tibetan Buddhist from the US, implies all Western Buddhists have the ability to consult widely and make binding decisions. Nevertheless, both conclude that Buddhist women have the authority to adapt Buddhist practices in ways that are consistent with Buddhist values, even though individual traditions may be to differ.<sup>33</sup>

Traditional sources of authority might be relied upon outside traditional contexts and support some women's self-sufficiency. In particular, lesbian Buddhists may be practicing Buddhism with the conviction that their understandings are validated by the Buddha's injunction to 'Be lamps for yourselves; use the *dhamma* (teachings) as a lamp; do not turn for a lamp to others'.<sup>34</sup> Waterhouse's interviewees preferred women's adaptations to be authorised by traditional sources,

Like all the adaptations being made to Buddhist practice, any new roles for women in Buddhism have to be legitimated or authenticated through structures which already operate. It would be difficult for women to go ahead and do what they want to do in disregard of male dominated structures.<sup>35</sup>

While it might be preferable that adaptations to traditions are authorised by traditional sources, it is important to bear in mind that some women are willing to defy male dominated structures and that not all Buddhist women belong to traditional groups.

Buddhist men and women have never shared the same status, nor have they received the same levels of support. Historically, men's circumstances have been the centre of concerns, and traditional Buddhist views of women have been based in men's assumptions. The absence of women's voices from decision-making processes has resulted in Buddhist contexts being ignorant of women's priorities and concerns, and the lack of equal opportunities. Nevertheless, personal experience, tradition, texts and

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneth K Tanaka, 1998, 'Epilogue: The Colors and Contours of American Buddhism', pp.289—290.

<sup>33</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, & Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.230—232.

<sup>34</sup> *Kalama Sutta*, DN.II.100, trans. Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'The Doctrinal Case for Feminism', p.96.

<sup>35</sup> Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.29.

teachers are currently authorising women's adaptations and allowing women to engage more fully with Buddhism.

### **B. Women's Middle Way**

Historically, Buddhist women's practices have been obstructed in four ways: advanced practices, such as high ordination and conducting rituals, have been withheld or made more difficult; their autonomy has been restricted; titles and status have been withheld; and women have received less material support.<sup>36</sup> All four obstructions have been absorbed into Buddhist traditions from social and cultural contexts and now, 'belong to the powerful Buddhist heritage bequeathed to women'.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Gross predicted that laywomen would find ways of teaching and leading communities, which are traditionally masculine roles.<sup>38</sup> Most of the examples in this section refer to circumstances in the USA, where women's assertiveness is often encouraged and Buddhism has a particular history.

#### **i. Challenging the Lay/Monastic Dichotomy**

Buddhist teachings are traditionally offered in temples by monks who have titles and wear special robes, which represent displays of masculine authority, status, and power.<sup>39</sup> Some Buddhists believe that Buddhism is established in an area only when indigenous men have become monks, and in this way, the lay/monastic dichotomy signals a Buddhist society. Rarely do modern western women find monasticism attractive, and they are less concerned than are men with status, temples, robes, titles, schools and tradition. The innovations of many western Buddhist women are consistent with the concept of a dedicated and serious lay practice. The Buddhist emphasis upon detachment is closely associated with renouncing family and social life, which might encourage isolation and alienation.<sup>40</sup> If one of the purposes of monasticism is to cultivate detachment, this mental

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<sup>36</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction', pp.1—14 in Findly, ed., *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal* (Somerville, Ma, Wisdom Publications), pp.3—5.

<sup>37</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction', pp.4—5.

<sup>38</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p.228, and 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.230.

<sup>39</sup> Silvia Wetzell, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun: Western Buddhists as Full-Time Practitioners', pp.275—284 in Charles S Prebish & Martin Baumann, eds., *Westward Dharma*, p.275.

<sup>40</sup> Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', pp.231—232.

transformation may be achieved by other means by serious lay Buddhists.<sup>41</sup> Human well-being requires a sense of belonging and participation, and balance requires attachment and alienation to be developed in equal measure. Such a balance supports values associated with both genders and validates the need for human connections, communities and communications.<sup>42</sup>

Five conditions in the West encourage erosion of the lay/monastic dichotomy: secularization; individualised lifestyles; widespread affluence; an increased awareness of gender; and, women's higher status.<sup>43</sup> Secular values inform the view of monasticism being feudal and anachronistic.<sup>44</sup> Western cultures value autonomy and emphasize personal goals, which, together with their increased affluence and leisure time, have ensured monasticism not being the only way to develop a dedicated Buddhist practice.<sup>45</sup> High levels of leisure time, disposable income and education allow some Western Buddhists to set aside economic and domestic commitments in favour of intensive study and practice, and facilitate the combination of monastic and householder commitments. A dedicated Buddhist practice no longer requires the traditional choice between family life and renunciation.

In western contexts, lay women face few obstacles to making serious commitments to Buddhism and retain the freedom to incorporate wider interests, concerns and priorities into their practices.<sup>46</sup> Women who are not renunciants and do not belong to religious structures are dedicating themselves to Buddhism as serious lay practitioners, and may be fully dedicated to practising, studying and teaching the *dhamma*.<sup>47</sup> Historically, mendicant monastic communities were referred to as a 'middle way' between the lifestyles of householders and wanderers, and serious lay practitioners are creating a different kind of 'middle way', one that is particularly relevant to women.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rita Gross, 1996, 'Community, Work, Relationship, and Family', pp.133—150 in Marianne Dresser, ed, *Buddhist Women on the Edge* (Berkeley, North Atlantic Books), pp.136—137.

<sup>42</sup> Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.232.

<sup>43</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', pp.281—282.

<sup>44</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.281.

<sup>45</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.281.

<sup>46</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', pp.278—279.

<sup>47</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.282.

<sup>48</sup> Sue Hamilton, 1996a, 'Buddhism: The Doctrinal Case for Feminism', p.96.



Women's serious lay practices may incorporate feminine values and embrace nurturing, connectivity, feelings and emotions.<sup>49</sup> Many women have set aside the reform of Buddhist institutions in favour of reforming personal practices that prioritise connection, community and communication.<sup>50</sup> Women's teaching methods often place less emphasis upon a hierarchical relationship between teacher and pupil, and women teachers may live in secular settings, with or without partners, and with or without children, and no longer have to renounce committed relationships and undertake hundreds of rules.<sup>51</sup> Writing of her role as a woman teacher, Silvia Wetzel says,

As a laywoman and teacher, I am a natural-born heretic in the traditional Buddhist world of ordained male teachers. But being a lay disciple and being a woman may well be advantageous in our times, for these attributes seem to endow a Buddhist teacher with sharp eyes, much humour, an adventurous and playful mind, methodical skills, and great patience ... all qualities needed to bring the *Buddhadharma* into a new culture successfully.<sup>52</sup>

Conservative Buddhists might lament the teacher being regarded as an ordinary person and believe gender awareness and feminist influences counter important aspects of Buddhist traditions.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, educated and dedicated women are challenging many traditional assumptions and making adaptations to accommodate women.

## **ii. Women's Innovations**

Although Buddhist women throughout the world are taking responsibility and adapting Buddhist practices to suit their needs, this report is limited to innovations made in Western Buddhist contexts.<sup>54</sup> Teaching requires self-

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<sup>49</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.281.

<sup>50</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar'; & Rita Gross, 2001, 'Women in Buddhism', p.227—228.

<sup>51</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.277—282.

<sup>52</sup> Silvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.275.

<sup>53</sup> Sangye Khandro, a translator of Tibetan texts and founder of the 'Light of Berotsana' (at <http://www.berotsana.org/index.html> on 28.1.09 and <http://www.berotsana.org/about.html> on 28.7.10), was quoted by Judith Simmer-Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.313. Geshe Kelsang, the founder of the New Kadampa Tradition, teaches that politics and religion should not be mixed (Helen Waterhouse, 1997, *Buddhism in Bath*, p.155).

<sup>54</sup> See Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., 1988, *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (New York, Snow Lion); ed., 1995, *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes* (New York, Snow Lion); ed., 1999, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (New York, SUNY); ed., 2000, *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream* (Richmond, Curzon); and, ed., 2004, *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements* (Albany, NY, SUNY); and, Ellison Banks Findly, ed., 2000, *Women's Buddhism*.

expression and its methods are most susceptible to change. Examples of innovative women teachers in western contexts include the Rinzai Zen teacher, Prabhasa Dharma Roshi, who has taken her students hiking; Ruth Denison, who has taught mindfulness during swimming; and, Sylvia Kolk and Sylvia Wetzel, who have role-played excerpts from the *sutras*.<sup>55</sup>

The ways in which women have approached the body have been most innovative. Leonore Friedman and Susan Moon edited a series of essays about embodiment and published them in *Being Bodies: Buddhist Women on the Paradox of Embodiment*.<sup>56</sup> Concerns about embodiment often focus upon issues of gender and race, and teachers who have focussed upon gender include Rita Gross and Karma Lekshe Tsomo, while gender and race have been most ably addressed by black feminists, such as, Alice Walker, Lori Pearce, and Jan Willis. Women teachers of Zen have offered a softer approach to the body than has traditionally been the norm and they have placed less emphasis upon martial qualities. At Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, women faculty members conduct posture workshops and teach that meditation and movement may be combined in body awareness.<sup>57</sup>

Meditation teachings often refer to an abstract conceptual realm, and Joko Beck has brought meditation into the centre of daily life by directing attention to emotions, physical sensations and personal relationships.<sup>58</sup> Innovative meditation teachers include Pema Chodron and Ruth Denison. Pema Chodron, the abbess of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, has introduced slogans to illustrate the transformation of negative personal experiences into compassion and awakening. Ruth Denison, a Vipassana meditation teacher, has integrated movement, sensory work and rhythm into her instructions.<sup>59</sup> Ruth Dennison has taught *Vipassana* retreats for many years, and founded 'Dhamma Dena' in the Mojave Desert, California. Women who have worked

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<sup>55</sup> Sylvia Wetzel, 2002, 'Neither Monk nor Nun', p.279, & footnote 6, p.284.

<sup>56</sup> Leonore Friedman & Susan Moon, eds., 1997, *Being Bodies: Buddhist Women on the Paradox of Embodiment*, (Boston, Shambhala).

<sup>57</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.317.

<sup>57</sup> Charlotte Joko Beck, 1989, *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* (San Francisco, HarperCollins), and 1993, *Nothing Special: Living Zen* (San Francisco, HarperCollins).

<sup>57</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.315, & 319. The Peaceful Dwelling Project promotes the use of meditation for spiritual, emotional and physical healing by offering retreats for persons with life-challenging illness and their caregivers, and trains healthcare professionals and clergy from different traditions to use meditation as a complementary healing practice (on 7.1.06, at <http://members.tripod.com/~Lhamo/2zen.htm>).

<sup>58</sup> Charlotte Joko Beck, 1989, *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* (San Francisco, HarperCollins), and 1993, *Nothing Special: Living Zen* (San Francisco, HarperCollins).

to establish and maintain Buddhist centres include Toni Packer, who founded the 'Springwater Centre' in New York State, where the Rev. Madeline Ko-i Bastis founded the 'Peaceful Dwelling Project'.<sup>60</sup> Martine Batchelor, a former Zen nun, is a founder-teacher at 'Gaia House', a non-sectarian Buddhist centre in Devon. 'Taraloka', in Shropshire, was established for the exclusive use of women by women of the Friends of Western Buddhist Order. Not all communities founded by women are exclusively female, and 'Tara Mandala', in South Colorado, is a mixed community founded by Tsultrim Allione, whose aims include integrating the feminine into Western Buddhist practice.

Women in many traditions are challenging the ease with which family issues may be ignored. Tsultrim Allione's 'Tara Mandala' community promotes family practice with special programs for children; the Venerable Diane Van Parijs has prioritised enabling families to practice together within larger communities; and schools for children have been created by women in Shambhala communities in Colorado and Nova Scotia.<sup>61</sup> At the other end of life, women who have focussed upon making provisions for death and the dying include Joan Halifax Roshi in New Mexico, and Judith Lief in New York.<sup>62</sup>

As scholars, Buddhist women have restored female icons and revisited texts. Tsultrim Allione has collected hagiographies of little known Tibetan yoginis; Janice Willis has recovered women's stories and traditions from Tibetan sources; and, Judith Simmer Brown has retrieved the symbol of the *dakini*.<sup>63</sup> Women scholars have studied translations of texts and discovered occasions when androcentric bias has resulted in gender ambiguities of original texts being lost.<sup>64</sup> Susan Murcott and Anne Waldman have each translated the *Therigatha*, the book in the Pali Canon that records the

<sup>59</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.317.

<sup>60</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.315, & 319. The Springwater Centre is a centre that holds meditation retreats, and the Peaceful Dwelling Project promotes the use of meditation for spiritual, emotional, and physical healing (on 7.1.06, at <http://members.tripod.com/~Lhamo/2zen.htm>, & on 28.7.10, at <http://omega.org/omega/faculty/viewProfile/f63e6abc72fc58187ecc91c865d23c6d/>).

<sup>61</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.319.

<sup>62</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.319.

<sup>63</sup> Tsultrim Allione, 1986, *Women of Wisdom* (London, Arkana, Penguin); Janice Willis, ed., 1987, *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet* (New York, Ithaca); Judith Simmer-Brown, 2001, *Dakini's Warm Breath: the Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston, Shambhala).

<sup>64</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.316.

sayings of enlightened nuns.<sup>65</sup> Women's monographs are often inspirational, and include the teachings and biographies of remarkable modern Buddhist women, such as Ayya Khema and Tenzin Palmo.<sup>66</sup> Edited volumes present diverse perspectives; for example, Karma Lekshe Tsomo's volumes offer an array of views from women around the world, while Marianne Dresser's volume presents the voices of marginalised American Buddhist women.<sup>67</sup> In addition to gender discrimination, women from minorities may be subjected to discrimination because of how their minority is regarded, and appeals for inclusivity are often underpinned by experiences of prejudice. For example, Janice Dean Willis calls upon her experiences as a black woman when she speaks of the need to address issues of race, and Arinna Weisman's experiences of being a lesbian Buddhist are incorporated into her teachings and retreats.<sup>68</sup>

Teachers may be assumed to be beyond the experience of discrimination, and Arinna Weisman's experiences are most telling.<sup>69</sup> She is the only openly lesbian teacher of Vipassana meditation in the US, and her Buddhism is informed by her experiences of being a lesbian and a feminist in American culture together with the silence of other lesbian Buddhists. Weisman organises retreats for lesbians, gays, bi's, and transnians, and believes that sexual identity is a gateway to shared experiences.<sup>70</sup> She enthuses about their sense of community and her classes and retreats assume the *dhamma* and lesbian existence enrich each other.<sup>71</sup>

Weisman remembered Thich Nhat Hahn, the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, saying that God is also a lesbian, and she assumed his

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<sup>65</sup> Judith Simmer Brown, 2002, 'The Roar', p.320, citing Susan Murcott, 1991, *The First Buddhist Women* (Berkeley, Parallax); Andrew Schelling & Anne Waldman 1996, *Songs of the Sons and Daughters of the Buddha* (Boston, Shambhala).

<sup>66</sup> Ayya Khema, 1991, *When the Iron Eagle Flies: Buddhism for the West* (London, Arkana). The biography of Tenzin Palmo was written by Vicki Mackenzie, 1999, *Cave in the Snow: A Western Woman's Quest for Enlightenment* (London, Bloomsbury).

<sup>67</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., 1988, *Sakyadhita*; 1995, *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes*; 1999, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures*; and, 2004, *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*. Marianne Dresser, ed, 1996, *Buddhist Women On The Edge*, p.xvi.

<sup>68</sup> Jan Willis, 1996, 'Buddhism and Race: An African American Baptist-Buddhist Perspective', pp.81—92 in Marianne Dresser, ed., *Buddhist Women on the Edge*; &, Arinna Weisman, in an interview with Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit, Living Practice: Poetics, Politics, Epistemology* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press), pp.237—240.

<sup>69</sup> Arinna Weisman interviewed by Ruth Frankenberg, reported in Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, pp.237—240. Examples of prejudice against lesbians and gays in Buddhist contexts are found in the 'Prequel' and Chapter Three, section B.ii., 'Inside Western Buddhism'.

<sup>70</sup> Arinna Weisman quoted in Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, pp.237.

movement would reflect this attitude.<sup>72</sup> After a six-week retreat at Plum Village, the community created by Thich Nhat Hahn, Weisman and her partner applied to take up residency. In response, a head teacher implied they would be unable to control their sexual behaviour and advised them to reapply separately and not infer any sexuality because, 'the Vietnamese did not understand this kind of stuff'.<sup>73</sup> Although she had been there for six weeks and it was known that she had been working with the precepts for sixteen years, Weisman was asked if she understood the precepts and was reminded that they were operative.<sup>74</sup> Weisman observes that nowhere can lesbian Buddhists be certain of acceptance. In general, Buddhists discourage openness about sexual identity, and lesbian Buddhists may feel coerced into concealing their true selves.<sup>75</sup>

Buddhist women's innovations have included: adapting teaching methods to accommodate various sensibilities; setting up centres outside established traditions; revisiting women's traditions, lineages, texts, and icons; recording women's experiences and perspectives; and, addressing specific topics, such as the inclusion of the family, issues related to death and the dying, and the importance of diversity. Women have related the *dharmma* to their particular concerns and priorities, and have created ways of being Buddhists that have been identified as 'Women's Buddhism'. Nevertheless, few have embraced or endorsed the description 'lesbian Buddhist', and Buddhist women are being innovative in every area except sexuality.

### **C. Naming**

#### **i. Feminist Naming**

Mary Daly was the first feminist to consider the politics of naming, which she defined as the, 'original summoning of words for the self, the world, and ultimate reality'. In 1973, Daly wrote that to be able to have their experiences acknowledged and thereby gain self-esteem, women must have the ability to name.<sup>76</sup> Daly presented women's 'naming' as the liberation of

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<sup>71</sup> Arinna Weisman, quoted in Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, p.238.

<sup>72</sup> Arinna Weisman, quoted in Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, p.239, referring to Alan Senauke, 1998, 'Interview with Thich Nhat Hahn', pp.33—34 in *Turning Wheel: Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship*, Winter.

<sup>73</sup> Arinna Weisman quoted in Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, p.239.

<sup>74</sup> Arinna Weisman quoted in Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, p.239.

<sup>75</sup> Arinna Weisman, quoted in Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit*, p. 238—240.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.8. Significantly, Daly was writing in 1973, before most feminist critiques of language had been forged. For a feminist analysis of

words from confinement in the sentences of the fathers, the exorcism of patriarchal labels and the invocation of another reality.<sup>77</sup> Many values in western cultures are underpinned by Christian beliefs, and Daly observed,

In order to understand this process it is necessary to grasp the fundamental fact that women have had the power of naming stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or god. The old naming was not a product of dialogue – a fact inadvertently admitted in the *Genesis* story of Adam's naming the animals and woman. Women are now realising that the universal imposing of names by men has been false because partial. That is, inadequate words have been taken as adequate.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the centuries, many women have been maintained in a diminished state, and it was not recognised that to achieve their full potential, women must be able to talk about their experiences and their perspectives must be validated and named.<sup>79</sup>

Daly's phrase, 'the power of naming', acknowledged that naming is a political act. A name has the power to signify a shared and possibly cohesive experience, for which it may facilitate recognition and convey legitimacy. A name may affirm a world-view, and while groups of women remain under-represented, naming is a feminist strategy whose relevance is maintained.<sup>80</sup> Dale Spender explored the androcentric nature of language and observed the difficulties women may experience expressing and encoding their understandings, so that women's accounts sometimes challenged linguistic and conceptual boundaries.<sup>81</sup> Rather than requiring the creation of a new language, women's perspectives often require linguistic revisions that reflect the ability to name their experiences.<sup>82</sup> For example, before 'sexism' and 'sexual harassment' were named and became recognisable concepts, women had been deprived of a perspective.<sup>83</sup> The power to name first described in Christian contexts has been developed into strategies that have formalised women's understandings. The two examples that follow demonstrate how

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language, see Dale Spender, 1990 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1980), *Man Made Language* (London, Pandora Press).

<sup>77</sup> Mary Daly, 1994 (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1987), *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (NY, HarperSanFrancisco), p.83. Original capitals.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.8.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.8; & 'Self-actualisation', in Andrew M Colman, 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p.679.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Daly, 1986, *Beyond*, p.7.

<sup>81</sup> Dale Spender, 1990, *Man Made Language*, pp.165—171; 183—184.

<sup>82</sup> Dale Spender, 1990, *Man Made Language*, pp.184—186.

<sup>83</sup> Dale Spender, 1990, *Man Made Language*, pp.184—186.

naming their experiences has enabled women from religious minorities to formalise their theological understandings and gain positive esteem.

*a. Womanist*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the understanding of 'womanism' was akin to today's understanding of 'feminism', and only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century did 'womanism' come to specify black and African American women's feminism.<sup>84</sup> This understanding originated in the black folk expression between women and girls, 'You acting womanish', which usually referred to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or *wilful* behaviour.<sup>85</sup> In 1983, Alice Walker named her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose*, in which 'womanist' signalled the book's focus upon black and African-American women's experiences.<sup>86</sup> Subsequently, many women—including filmmakers, quilt makers, painters, theorists, historians, and theologians—adopted 'womanist' as a self-description.<sup>87</sup>

In her opening pages, Walker describes a 'womanist' as,

A black feminist or feminist of colour. ... Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance to laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist ... Traditionally capable ... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 'Womanism' in Maggy Humm, 1995 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall), p. 304—305. In 1993, 'womanist' was defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as, 'exhibiting a feminism that is inclusive, especially of black American cultures,' and, 'having expression or belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class.' (Gloria Steinem, 'What is Womanism', at [www.feminist.com](http://www.feminist.com) on 22.10.06, citing *The American Heritage Dictionary*, no publication details). The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* currently defines 'womanism' as, 'the advocacy of or enthusiasm for the rights, achievements, etc., of women', and adds 'chiefly *Black English* ("Womanism" and 'Womanist' in *Shorter Oxford*, 2002, on CD-ROM, V.2).

<sup>85</sup> Alice Walker, 2005 (1<sup>st</sup> Published 1983), *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London, Phoenix), p.xi, original emphasis.

<sup>86</sup> Alice Walker, 2005, *Our Mothers Gardens*.

<sup>87</sup> Gloria Steinem, 'What is Womanism', at [www.feminist.com](http://www.feminist.com) on 22.10.06.

<sup>88</sup> Alice Walker, 2005, *Our Mothers Gardens*, pp.xi—xii, original capitals and emphases.

Walker based her understanding in non-bourgeois black folk culture, which she believes is more egalitarian because it has less rigid sex roles and respects female intelligence and ingenuity.<sup>89</sup> Womanist qualities include:

Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown-up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression, 'You trying to be grown'. Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.<sup>90</sup>

'Womanism' refers to words, beliefs and behaviour that must be deciphered before meaningful cross-cultural communication can take place.<sup>91</sup> It reflects female centred cultural codes, and refers to conditions, events, meanings, and values associated with women's traditions in African-American communities.<sup>92</sup>

'Womanism' prioritises both race and gender, and signifies links with histories that include African cultural heritage, enslavement and women's cultures.<sup>93</sup> 'Womanist' and 'womanism' appear in descriptions of African-American and black women's struggles for self-determination, and they have been incorporated into gender and race studies. Womanist analyses are often characterised by the complex overlaying of race, gender, and class, and are distinct from black analyses, whose defining characteristic is race, and from feminist analyses, whose defining characteristic is gender. Movements led by European American feminists or male civil rights leaders have often marginalised the experiences of African-American women, black women, and women of colour, and 'womanism' draws them back into focus.<sup>94</sup> 'Womanist' marks areas in which scholars are free to explore black women's histories and cultures without being restricted to issues of gender and race that have already been identified.<sup>95</sup>

Womanist theologies have an ethnographic ethic and their sources include personal narratives, traditional church doctrines, and African

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<sup>89</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices', pp.77—88 in Ursula King, ed. *Feminist Theology From the Third World: a Reader* (London, SPCK/Orbis), p.79.

<sup>90</sup> Alice Walker, 2005, *Mothers Gardens*, p.xi, original emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.78.

<sup>92</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.78.

<sup>93</sup> In the US, the phrase 'women of colour' usually refers to Hispanic, Native American, Asian-American, Puerto Rican, and other 'minority' feminists (Maggy Humm, 1995, *Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, p.305).

<sup>94</sup> Gloria Steinem, 'What is Womanism', at [www.feminist.com](http://www.feminist.com), on 22.10.06.

<sup>95</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.81.



American poetry and fiction.<sup>96</sup> They have validated the life stories of enslaved women and womanist theologians have used their foremothers' rituals and survival tools to create something new.<sup>97</sup> Past, present, and future experiences of women have been fused in a dynamic multi-vocal tapestry of intergenerational experiences.<sup>98</sup> Attention being focussed upon women taking the lead has enabled information to be gathered about the strategies they deployed to gain freedom from slavery.<sup>99</sup> Womanist studies make connections between the experiences of African American women and women of colour throughout the world, who are understood to represent an African diaspora.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to presenting positive views of the lives and experiences of black women, the inclusive ethic of Womanism has brought together fragmented pieces of information and allowed the meanings and significance of its theologies to grow.<sup>101</sup> It has been observed that,

Womanist theologians retrieve sources, sort and evaluate materials, and thereby construct new epistemologies that effect change in the space and time occupied by black women. Although it is centred on African American women's realities and stories, it also embraces and stands in solidarity with all suppressed subjects. Womanist theology is a theory and practice of inclusivity, accenting gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and ecology. Because of its inclusive methodology and conceptual framework, womanist theology exemplifies reconstructed knowledge beyond the monovocal concerns of black (male) and (white) feminist theologies.<sup>102</sup>

Womanist theologies engage in dialogues with diverse social, political, and religious communities; they support justice for women, and acknowledge the productive qualities of 'poor folks' lives'.<sup>103</sup> Their holistic approach is capable of addressing issues of the survival and liberation of all oppressed groups,

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<sup>96</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm', in *Cross Currents*, Summer, Vol. 48, Issue 4, accessed at [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06, copyright held by Association for Religion and Intellectual Life; and, Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.79.

<sup>97</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology', [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06.

<sup>98</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology', [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06.

<sup>99</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.80.

<sup>100</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology', [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06.

<sup>101</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.86.

<sup>102</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology', [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06.

<sup>103</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology', [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06.

and of analysing how these experiences might relate to local and global economies and environments.<sup>104</sup> Womanist theologies challenge the status quo in many contexts, especially where narrow or dogmatic attitudes persist, accompanied by pressures to conform. Womanist theologies facilitate the recognition and promotion of positive qualities of women who had previously been marginalised, and they enable new or previously excluded understandings to enter the interpretive circle of theology.<sup>105</sup>

*b. Mujerista*

In the USA, during the late 1980's, many Hispanic women suffered low self-esteem because the Roman Catholic Church sought their involvement and rarely considered their circumstances.<sup>106</sup> Hispanic women were not taught self-reflection, without which they had no critical awareness, and no possibility of self-definition (see above, section A.i., 'Awareness of the Need to Adapt').<sup>107</sup> Hispanic women were rarely included in their Churches' decision-making processes, even when they constituted the majority in the congregation: '. . . we do the praying, but our understanding of the God to whom we pray is ignored.'<sup>108</sup>

Connections with Hispanic communities are marked by descriptions such as 'Cubanas/Cubans', 'Chicanas/Mexicans', or 'Puertorriqueñas/Puerto Ricans', and women who acknowledged their struggles against sexism were called 'Feministas Hispanas/Hispanic Feminists'. This name originated outside the women concerned and required long explanations.<sup>109</sup> 'Feministas Hispanas' were often marginalised by the racist assumptions of white anglo feminists and by Hispanics who regarded feminism as a white women's movement. Ada Maria Assisi-Diaz observed,

To be able to name oneself is one of the most powerful abilities a person can have. A name is not just a word by which one is identified. A name provides the conceptual framework and

<sup>104</sup> Linda E Thomas, 1998, 'Womanist Theology', [www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/thomas.htm), on 22.10.06.

<sup>105</sup> Dolores Williams, 1994, 'Womanist Theology', p.83—5.

<sup>106</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>107</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>108</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas: A Name of Our Own', first published in the *Christian Century*, May 24—31, p.560, on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>109</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

mental constructs that are used in thinking, understanding, and relating to a person.<sup>110</sup>

*Feministas Hispanas* believed a different name might increase their unity and afford a more accurate description of their concerns. The lyrics of Hispanic love and protest songs refer to strong women as '*mujer/woman*'. *Mujerista* is a hybrid Chicana word that has been equated with 'a Latina womanist' whose politics are subjective.<sup>111</sup> In describing *mujeristas*, Asisi-Diaz recalls one song in particular,

Today I sing to the God of my people with my guitar, I sing a song of a woman who liberates herself. . . . God listened to the cry of our people, became an ally of the poor and the exploited, and frees woman from the chains imposed on her with cruelty for centuries. . . . la mujer, la mujer, la mujer.<sup>112</sup>

Asisi-Diaz declares, 'Yes, we are *mujeres*, and those of us who make a preferential option for *mujeres* are *mujeristas*.'<sup>113</sup>

It is difficult to isolate Assisi-Diaz's understandings from the fervour of her expression. She defines '*mujerista*' as a woman who struggles to liberate herself; who is consecrated by God to proclaim the hope of her people; who is faithful to the tasks of ensuring the flourishing of justice and peace; and, 'who chooses the cause of the Christian God and his law of love.'<sup>114</sup>

*Mujerista* identity is inseparable from Roman Catholic Christianity, and a *mujerista* who rejected Catholicism would also reject her *mujerista* identity.<sup>115</sup>

*Mujerista* theologies reflect the inseparability of Christianity, cultural mores, tradition, and *mujerista* identity,

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<sup>110</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874). The processes involved in 'naming lesbians' (described in Chapter One, 'Sexual Identity and Western Culture') reflect a similar process whereby self-knowledge was necessary for lesbians' political awareness and activism.

<sup>111</sup> Dolores Delgado Bernal, C Alejandra Elenes, Francisca E Godinez, & Sofia A Villenas, 2006, 'Chicanas/Latinas Building Bridges: An Introduction', pp.1—9 in Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, eds., *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press), p.7.

<sup>112</sup> Rosa Marta Zarate's song, cited by Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>113</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz acknowledged her debt to black feminists who preceded *mujeristas* in the struggle to name themselves (1989, 'Mujeristas', at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874), on 30.9.06).

<sup>114</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874), referring to an unnamed song by Rosa Marta.

<sup>115</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

As we name ourselves, we want to rename our theological enterprise. What we called up to now Hispanic women's liberation theology will henceforth be *mujerista* theology. *Mujerista* theology is being formulated out of the daily voice of the *mujerista*, for Christianity is an intrinsic element of Hispanic culture.<sup>116</sup>

*Mujerista* theology has its origins in liberation theology, from which it inherits the belief that riches and power distort the view and the poor and oppressed have epistemological privilege.<sup>117</sup> It maintains a reverse discourse whereby authority comes 'from the bottom up', and the religious expressions of the least powerful become the means of their empowerment.

Most theologies follow from, and reflect upon, religious praxis. In *mujerista* theologies, praxis and reflection represent one moment, and the community sharing it participates in the theological enterprise.<sup>118</sup> In this way, theological articulations are always born of the community and are understandable to it. Because *mujerista* theologies reflect a moment in the praxis of a community, its daily struggles are integral to theology, which is always in a state of flux.<sup>119</sup> *Mujerista* theology offers a view and a methodology forged from the combination of Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology and cultural theology.

Womanist and *mujerista* are self-claimed names, prior to which the religious interests and concerns of the women in these groups were largely ignored. By claiming the names, women deployed the power of naming in strategies that facilitated their positive identification and allowed the conceptual frameworks of their religious understandings to be formalised. Buddhist women who belong to minorities also need their differences to be acknowledged. The variety of social influences and identifications in western contexts require Western Buddhists to respect their own cultural heritage as much as they respect the cultural heritage of Buddhist traditions. In Western Buddhism, naming minorities' interests would acknowledge them, encourage their positive regard and might elucidate previously hidden understandings.

## **ii. Naming Buddhism**

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<sup>116</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>117</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>118</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

Buddhism is understood to have developed in three phases or three turnings of the wheel of the *dhamma*. 'Early Buddhism' represents the first turning, and is often defined in relation to the Eighteen Schools of Buddhism that, based in their assessments of the *arahant* ideal, Mahayanans have often disparagingly referred to as 'Hinayana/Lesser-vehicle'. The sole surviving representative of Early Buddhism is the Theravada tradition.<sup>120</sup>

Mahayana/Great-vehicle' Buddhism, represents the second turning of the wheel, and is defined in relation to the *bodhisattva* ideal. The third turning of the wheel, Tantric Buddhism, is referred to as the 'Vajrayana' or 'Diamond-vehicle', after the thunderbolt image used to symbolize the imperishable nature of enlightenment.<sup>121</sup> The names Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, reflect an historical convention of naming Buddhist traditions in accordance with their respective paths to enlightenment.<sup>122</sup>

Western scholars created an additional three-tiered convention of naming Buddhisms according to their traditions, their geo-political placements, and their global placements.

In the first tier, the names of Buddhist traditions acknowledge the continuity of understandings and practices often expounded in texts and commentaries. The convention that represents the second tier is naming all the Buddhist traditions in a particular country or geo-political area accordingly; for example, Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese Buddhisms. At this level of differentiation, each name acknowledges a continuity of cultural influence, even if these reflect a lack of consistency, as in Japanese Buddhism. In the third tier, all geo-political traditions are gathered under four global headings, Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western, according to their general direction from India, Buddhism's historic homeland. Directions have often been associated with each of the vehicles/*yana*: Southern Buddhism is associated with Theravada (Hinayana); Eastern Buddhism is associated with Mahayana; and Northern Buddhism is associated with both Mahayana and Vajrayana. It is important to acknowledge that no vehicle/*yana* exists in isolation and each has vestiges

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<sup>119</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, 1989, 'Mujeristas', on 30.9.06, at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=874).

<sup>120</sup> 'Eighteen Schools of Early Buddhism', 'Mahayana' (S), 'Hinayana' (S), in Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p.84, 107, 167—168; and, 'Hinayana' (S) in Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner, eds., 1994, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston, Shambhala), p.129.

<sup>121</sup> 'Vajrayana', in Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p.322.

<sup>122</sup> 'Yana', in Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p.339.

of the others' influence.<sup>123</sup> Eastern and Northern Buddhisms in particular have been influenced by pre-existing religions that were indigenous to their locations.<sup>124</sup> The latest transmission of Buddhism was to the West, which is now home to an unprecedented number of Buddhist traditions. Western Buddhism represents all the traditions and groups found in America, Australasia, and Europe, and contains branches of most Buddhist traditions.

The division of Western Buddhism into geo-political areas—such as, English, French and American—acknowledges their various historical engagements with, and transmissions of, Buddhism. At the time when the three-tiered system arose, nationality was assumed to reflect all significant cultural differences. However, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, population shifts have resulted in multi-cultural societies that belie such modernist assumptions. In postmodernity, individuality and social diversity are acknowledged, and nationality is now seen to ignore differences within borders and similarities across them, so that the focus of Buddhist studies upon traditional and geo-political differences may now be recognised to have been often at the expense of differences interior to traditions and the views and experiences of individuals.

Modernist scholars often took the pronouncements of the most powerful and articulate to represent a consensus, and they relied upon a fixed concept of religious identity that failed to take into account different experiences.<sup>125</sup> The name of a tradition has often been taken to signal the singularity of its members' understandings. Modernist conventions have inhibited the recognition of differences within a single tradition and cultural differences not marked by nationality or global placement. Geo-political and global names raise questions of the point at which any branch of a tradition outside its homeland becomes identified with its new context. For example, at what point does Tibetan Buddhism in western contexts become Western Buddhism: is this new title conferred simply because of its placement or are cultural adaptations and accretions also necessary.

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<sup>123</sup> LS Cousins, 1991, 'Buddhism', pp.278—343 in John R Hinnells, ed., *A Handbook of Living Religions* (Harmondsworth, Penguin): Southern Buddhism, pp.296—316; Eastern Buddhism, pp.316—331; Northern Buddhism, pp.331—339.

<sup>124</sup> LS Cousins, 1991, 'Buddhism', Eastern Buddhism, pp.316—331; Northern Buddhism, pp.331—339.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, 2002, 'Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures', pp.17—33 in Charles S. Prebish & Martin Baumann, eds. *Westward Dharma*, p.17, 24.

'The West' represents a number of countries with a rich mixture of languages and cultures that are home to an unprecedented number of Buddhist traditions. In postmodernity, values have changed, and each Buddhist understanding is now recognised as deserving of recognition and acknowledgement. To be comprehensive and culturally appropriate, Western Buddhist studies must acknowledge the variety of understandings that may be rooted in a single tradition, several traditions, or in no tradition at all. Buddhist understandings and practices have proliferated in western contexts, and the name 'Western Buddhism' represents little more than the transmission of Buddhist teachings into western contexts, whose diversity cannot be represented adequately by traditional systems of naming.

The problems associated with identifying Western Buddhists have been considered in the US. Thomas Tweed recognised and named several ways in which Americans might identify with Buddhism: those born into it he described as *indigenous* or *cradle Buddhists*; those not born into it he called *convert Buddhists*; those who acknowledge dual or multiple religious identities he called *not-just-Buddhists*; those who practice intermittently he called *lukewarm Buddhists*; those moving frequently from one group to another he called *dharma-hoppers*. Tweed also described *Buddhist seekers*, who do not identify as Buddhists, and *Buddhist interpreters*, who represent Buddhism to a western audience and might be journalists, film-makers, scholars, poets, artists, and novelists. Finally, he described *night-stand Buddhists*, who are tentatively drawn to Buddhism.<sup>126</sup>

The imposition of a name would result in identifications that are unacceptable to some and would not be an accurate way to identify the range of Buddhist engagements. Some problems associated with defining American Buddhism have been elaborated by Charles Prebish,

On one hand, it is the native religion of a significant number of Asian immigrants, and on the other were mostly Euro-Americans, who created their own culture that is literate, urban, upwardly mobile, and perhaps even elite in its life orientation. That bifurcation makes even the issue of Buddhist identity and membership a murky problem, further exacerbated with confusion about various Buddhist positions on ethical issues, sexuality, gender roles, and the like. This developmental pattern and the issues associated with it need to

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<sup>126</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, 2002, 'Who Is a Buddhist?', p.28—29.

be explored alongside a careful consideration of each of the Buddhist traditions now present on American soil.<sup>127</sup>

The strands of influence described in American Buddhism are replicated throughout Europe and Australasia, and the problems associated with finding acceptable identifications for the various western engagements with Buddhism may appear insurmountable.

The established conventions for naming Buddhism are inadequate to represent the range of geographic, economic, social and cultural circumstances of Western Buddhists. Traditional naming conventions fail to recognise the influence of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, which are significant aspects of western cultures. Some Western Buddhists are calling for the recognition of racial and ethnic differences, and in 2003, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's magazine, *Turning Wheel*, was sub-titled 'Black Dharma', and focussed upon some of the issues attending race in Western Buddhist contexts.<sup>128</sup> Three famous womanist activists, Alice Walker, Lori Pierce, and Jan Willis, described how being black in western cultures may influence experiences of Buddhism.<sup>129</sup> Concerns about racism have sometimes been confronted by Buddhists who believe that identity should be transcended in the affirmation of a common humanity and exert pressure to ignore race and all aspects of identity.<sup>130</sup> Pierce argues against this understanding, saying that it implies a false universalism in which race is counterpoised with humanity, and it is necessary to relinquish identity issues only if they are barriers to realization.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Charles S Prebish, 1998, 'Introduction', pp.1—12, in Charles S. Prebish & Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *Faces of Buddhism in America*, p.7.

<sup>128</sup> Lewis Woods and Susan Moon, eds, 2003, *Turning Wheel: the Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 'Black Dharma', Summer (Buddhist Peace Fellowship), which contains nine articles, including a section entitled, 'Resources for and about African American Buddhists', (pp.42—43) which refers primarily to resources in New York and California.

<sup>129</sup> Alice Walker, 2003, 'This Was Not an Area of Large Plantations: Suffering Too Insignificant for the Majority to Notice', pp.14—19; Lori Pierce, 2003, 'Buddhism and the Body Problem: a Historical Perspective on African American Buddhists', pp.20—22, & 30; Jan Willis, 2003, 'You're Already a Buddha, So Be a Buddha', pp.31—33; all articles are in Lewis Woods and Susan Moon, eds, *Turning Wheel*, 'Black Dharma', Summer.

<sup>130</sup> Lori Pierce, 2003, 'Buddhism and the Body Problem', p.22.

<sup>131</sup> Lori Pierce, 2003, 'Buddhism and the Body Problem', p.22. A new line of enquiry into how Buddhism is being translated in the West in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts is developed in Sharon Smith's (2009) forthcoming thesis, *Buddhism, Diversity and 'Race': Multiculturalism and Western Convert Buddhist Movements in East London: a Qualitative Study* (Goldsmiths' College, London University).



Universalist assumptions render all Buddhists the same and convert Buddhism into a 'one size fits all' religion. In reality, people have different qualities and attributes, and those who value and seek recognition for their differences should not be judged. While the fact of being human is the same for everyone, how it is experienced comes in many guises. Currently, many Buddhists are advocating the need to recognise differences based in gender, race, ethnicity, and gay sexual identity, with which lesbians' continuing silence and invisibility are incongruous. Buddhists who belong to minorities may face pressures to conform to a singular Buddhist type, and the variety of Buddhists' journeys is rarely appreciated. Despite class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual identity being acknowledged in social studies, mainstream Buddhist studies have rarely recognised them, and there is widespread ignorance of Buddhists' various circumstances. Nevertheless, studies and reports by Buddhist women have revealed the negative effects of gender discrimination upon their experiences of Buddhism and their responses have been named 'Women's Buddhism'.

*a. Women's Buddhism*

Most scholars of Buddhism have been men, and their studies have often enshrined masculine perspectives of androcentric traditions. The first western study to focus upon Buddhist women was published in 1930, although few publications before the 1980's considered Buddhist women's circumstances.<sup>132</sup> The 1990's witnessed an explosion in publications by and about Buddhist women, and the epithet 'Women's Buddhism' first appeared in 2000, in the title of Ellison Banks Findly's book, *Women's Buddhism: Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*.<sup>133</sup> Findly's introduction makes no claim to have named a new trend in Buddhism, which is inferred from the book's title and its thirty-two articles that focus upon the changes women are making in Buddhism.<sup>134</sup> Findly's book reports women activists raising issues that are important to women as a group and variously exploring the nature of women's relationships with spiritual advisers, how the most beneficial teachings and practices might be accessed by women, how involved women might be in social and political issues, and how worldly or otherworldly Buddhist women's practices might be.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> IB Horner, 2007 (reprint of 1930 edn.), *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass).

<sup>133</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, ed., 2000, *Women's Buddhism*.

<sup>134</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction'.

<sup>135</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, 2000, 'Introduction', p.14.

Gender discriminations are found at the heart of many Buddhist traditions, and naming women's innovations 'Women's Buddhism' allows Buddhist women's understandings and practices to be formalised and promoted. The name 'Women's Buddhism' highlights how little attention is paid to women in mainstream studies. Such a name might be dismissed by Buddhists who encourage all aspects of identity to be transcended in a unitary ideal of humanity. However, this ideal fails to recognise the disadvantages faced by many women, and renders critiques of androcentrism, male lineages and male *sanghas* invalid. Furthermore, because sexist dogmas often rely upon tradition, tensions exist between those who maintain tradition is inviolable and those who believe sexist dogmas are dispensable.

'Women's Buddhism' refers to women's particular Buddhist experiences and positively embraces the innovations of women who may belong to a variety of Buddhist traditions or to none at all. Women's Buddhism favours community over individualism, and communication over isolation, and women's lay practices often present a coherent challenge to the traditional lay/monastic dichotomy. 'Women's Buddhism' embodies Buddhist women's understandings and the name formalises the understanding that women and men may experience Buddhism differently. Feminist methodologies require the differences between women to be acknowledged, and an ethic of difference is integral to feminist theology.<sup>136</sup> The inclusion of lesbians within the scope of Women's Buddhism supports the naming of 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

### **Conclusion**

While hegemonic patriarchal values have influenced all women's perceptions, not all women are able to recognise that they have been disadvantaged. Nevertheless, many Buddhist women do recognise the problems caused by patriarchy and are working to ensure the accommodation of Buddhist women's needs. If asked to describe themselves, most Western Buddhists in addition to referring to their religion would refer to qualities that reflected their class, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation; however, Buddhist analyses have rarely recognised the influence of these criteria. In contrast, feminist theologies acknowledge self-claimed identities and the importance of validating the differences between

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<sup>136</sup> Linda Hogan, 1995, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology* (UK, Sheffield Academic).

women. Naming is a feminist strategy, and in Christian contexts, under-represented groups of women have named themselves and formalised their conceptual frameworks. Understandings particular to Buddhist women may qualify as feminist theologies worthy of the name 'Women's Buddhism'. In this context, it is possible to extrapolate that feminist theology is the discipline into which the arguments for 'Lesbian Buddhism' fit most comfortably.

The arguments for recognising Women's Buddhism and Lesbian Buddhism are similar; however, the recognition of Lesbian Buddhism is more problematic because of lesbian's invisibility and the lack of acknowledgement currently given to lesbian Buddhists. The silence and invisibility that shrouds the lesbian aspects of Buddhist women signals the political work that enables lesbians' recognition is still to be done in Buddhism. 'Women's Buddhism' acknowledges the role of gender in creating different experiences, while 'Lesbian Buddhism' acknowledges the roles of gender and sexual orientation, and requires the fourfold differentiation of heterosexual men, heterosexual women, gay men and lesbians. Few studies have acknowledged Buddhist women being lesbians or considered how lesbianism might influence Buddhist understandings and experiences. The following chapter offers a Lesbian Buddhist's view, and calls for theologies to debate Buddhism from a lesbian standpoint.

## Chapter 8

### Lesbian Buddhism

#### **Introduction**

The social significance of sexual alterity in the West has rendered coming out a political act and 'lesbian' a political category. Western values, such as democratic imperatives, the emphasis upon individuality, and assumptions of social justice, encourage lesbians to develop critical and political skills that might be frowned upon in some Buddhist contexts, where traditional expectations may require unquestioning respect. This chapter illustrates a Lesbian Buddhist standpoint by presenting a lesbian Buddhists' perspective of significant issues and arguing for a discipline of Lesbian Buddhist Theology.<sup>1</sup> The first section, 'Lesbian Buddhism: More Than a Name', describes how the name serves to validate lesbians' views and encourages debates of sexual morality. The second section, 'A Lesbian Buddhist View', reports Buddhist understandings that affirm lesbian identity, while the final section, 'Lesbian Buddhist Theology', argues for such a discipline and provides an example by arguing that 'Androgyny is a Heterocentric Illusion'.

#### **A. Lesbian Buddhism: More Than a Name**

According to Gayle Rubin, western social and religious mores have determined that good, normal, and natural sexuality is heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, non-commercial, coupled, in an ongoing relationship within the same generation and occurs at home.<sup>2</sup> It should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, and roles other than male and female, and transgressions of these expectations may be judged unnatural.<sup>3</sup> According to these mores, sexuality is either good or bad, there is no middle ground.<sup>4</sup> Sexuality is the focus of many social and religious taboos, and to be consistent with modern western values, Western Buddhists need to

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<sup>1</sup> Use of 'theology' in relation to Buddhism is justified in the Introductory Chapter and below, in section C, 'Lesbian Buddhist Theology'.

<sup>2</sup> Gayle S Rubin, 1993, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', pp.3—44 in Henry Abelove, et al, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (NY & London, Routledge), pp.13—14 (first published in Carole S Vance, ed, 1984, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* [Routledge & Kegan Paul])

<sup>3</sup> Gayle S Rubin, 1993, 'Thinking Sex', p.13—14.

<sup>4</sup> Gayle S Rubin, 1993, 'Thinking Sex', p.15.

establish pluralistic and egalitarian understandings of sexual morality, which are often missing in Buddhist contexts. The acceptance of these cultural values requires emancipation from traditional Buddhist expectations.

The lack of English translations of texts that explicate traditional Buddhist attitudes towards sexuality, together with the lack of Buddhist discourses of sexuality, ensure current assessments of sexual morality for the laity are based almost exclusively upon the precept of causing no-harm/*ahimsa*. A single criteria is inadequate to determine a comprehensive sexual ethic, although no-harm might be the basis of the more detailed ethics required by people living in complex modern societies. The 'middle way' advocated by the Buddha implies Buddhists should avoid extremes and find a middle ground that is neither for a particular set of sexual values nor against different kinds of sexual existence. A Buddhist sexual ethic might comply with Rubin's ethic, and judge sexual acts in relation to how partners treat each other: the degree of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quality and amount of pleasure they provide.<sup>5</sup> Debates of sexual issues might provide all Buddhists with a wealth of information and facilitate the development of a pluralistic sexual ethic.

The oppression of lesbians in Buddhist contexts often takes the form of heterosexist assumptions and trivialising lesbians' concerns.<sup>6</sup> While uncertain of how their sexual identity would be received, many lesbians will remain wary of the epithet 'lesbian' being used to intimidate or embarrass them. Indeed, in contexts where lesbianism is 'beyond the pale', lesbians are encouraged to remain closeted, and the cycle of prejudice and non-disclosure is self-sustaining. Buddhist teachings often rely upon shared human experiences, and while lesbian Buddhists remain silent and invisible, their experiences are concealed. Lesbians are a muted group, and while muted models of the world may resemble dominant models, their small deviations are crucial: 'Just as the pinch of caraway seed may transform a basic recipe, so any small, unique differences in world view may make all the difference.'<sup>7</sup> Lesbians' life experiences may represent that pinch of caraway seed added to Buddhist recipes. Few lesbian Buddhists have had the

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<sup>5</sup> Gayle S Rubin, 1993, 'Thinking Sex', p.15.

<sup>6</sup> Prejudice against lesbians and gays in Buddhist contexts are reported in the 'Prequel'; Chapter Three, section B.ii., 'Inside Western Buddhism'; and, Chapter Seven, section B.ii., 'Women's Innovations'.

courage and opportunity to speak out; nevertheless, a significant proportion of the few articles in which they are represented report instances of discrimination. Buddhist studies have failed to acknowledge lesbians or to consider whether lesbian culture might afford an alternative perspective and different understandings. A recognised trend in emerging religions is to demand uniformity, and this may be established in moves that mistake diversity for dissent and conformity for cohesion, which might be a tendency in newly established Buddhist traditions in the West.<sup>8</sup>

Buddhism in the West has been widely criticised for appealing almost exclusively to well-educated, middle-class, white, men and one purpose of the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' is to draw attention to its heterocentrism.<sup>9</sup> Widespread deprecations of womanhood were reported in Chapter Six, 'Buddhism and Women', while the 'Prequel' reported several examples of negative attitudes towards lesbians, gays and homosexuality. The institutionalised prejudice reflected in the androcentrism and heterocentrism of Buddhist traditions becomes apparent only when questioning how Buddhism is practiced and by whom. Indeed, patriarchal norms are maintained in so many Buddhist traditions as to beg the question, is the transcendence of gender possible at all.

While gender issues have been addressed in a significant body of Buddhist work, issues related to women's sexual orientation and identity have been largely ignored.<sup>10</sup> Adaptations made by Buddhist women are acknowledged in the name 'Women's Buddhism', and any adaptations made by lesbian Buddhists remain unacknowledged. Lesbians and straight women may have different attitudes towards sex, gender and same-sex friendships, which have the potential to influence religious choices; for example, in Christianity they might influence the choice of Church, and in

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<sup>7</sup> Shirley Ardener, 1977, 'Introduction', pp.vii—xxiii, in S Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women* (London, Dent), p.xix.

<sup>8</sup> Eileen Barker, 1989, *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (London, HMSO), p.11.

<sup>9</sup> Among those who have critiqued Western Buddhism's appeal to well educated white men are: Sandy Boucher, 1993 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (Boston, Beacon Press), p.307; Jan Willis, 1996, 'Buddhism and Race: An African American Baptist-Buddhist Perspective', pp.81—91, in Marianne Dresser, ed. *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier* (Berkeley, Ca, North Atlantic Books); Lori Pierce, 1996, 'Outside In: Buddhism in America', pp.93—104, in Dresser, ed., *Buddhist Women on the Edge*; Marlene Jones, Guy McCloskey, Paul Haller, Charles Prebish, 2005, 'Forum: Barriers to the Dharma', pp.40—47, in *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly* (Canada, Shambhala Sun), Vol.3, No.4, Summer.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Three, 'Lesbians in Buddhist Studies'.

Buddhism the choice of a spiritual friend/*kalyana-mitra*. Both women and *pandakas* have been denigrated in Buddhist traditions, and establishing the equal status of all Buddhists would require drastic changes. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of sexual diversity by Buddhist traditions would be welcomed because it would facilitate the positive esteem of all Buddhists. Naming 'Lesbian Buddhism' is a first step towards that acknowledgement, and is a strategy that uses lesbians' culture for their empowerment. Raising the profile of lesbian Buddhists is intended to encourage debates that hinge upon awareness of sexual orientation being a Buddhist issue.

For historical and cultural reasons, lesbians are most visible and powerful, and arguments for their positive regard are most persuasive, in western contexts. The name 'Lesbian Buddhism' focuses attention upon lesbian Buddhists' circumstances and might encourage mainstream Buddhist studies to consider long-ignored western socio-cultural factors. Western studies go to great lengths to accommodate indigenous Buddhist cultures, and western influences require similar levels of consideration. For lesbian Buddhists themselves, the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' facilitates four things. Firstly, in keeping with other named Buddhisms, it defines a field, an area of belonging in which to consider their particular issues. Secondly, it provides a name with which to identify lesbians' understandings, practices, and productions: books, articles, retreats and classes. Thirdly, it marshals resources with which to challenge the misrepresentation and invisibility of lesbian Buddhists. Finally, 'Lesbian Buddhism' is a banner, a focal point that serves lesbian Buddhists' social, psychological, and religious esteem and enables their mutual support and critique. 'Lesbian Buddhism' has a political trajectory consistent with a feminist strategy.

### ***B. A Lesbian Buddhist View***

Few lesbians have been identified in Buddhist sources and Buddhist issues are rarely addressed from an openly lesbian perspective. The following sections address issues of naming, sexuality and ignorance from a lesbian Buddhist perspective to illustrate its specificity.

#### **i. Self and Identity Politics**

Currently, the onus is upon those ignored by Buddhist traditions to draw attention to their exclusion, and this thesis is written to challenge the widespread misapprehension of lesbianism not being a Buddhist concern. The thesis does not call for all lesbian Buddhists to be out: no lesbian

should come out unless she believes the circumstances are right for her to do so. Nevertheless, assessments of the influence of sexual orientation and identity upon Buddhist understandings and practices are hindered by the insidious hegemony of heterosexuality.

Claiming a lesbian identity may involve difficult processes, including the internal confrontation with, and acceptance of, previously repressed feelings, as well as facing the possibility of familial and social disapproval and rejection. Like all identities, sexual identity is ultimately insubstantial. However, acknowledging identity's impermanence does not deny its provisional existence, and the need for political activities that secure social environments supportive of personal esteem. Buddhist teachings of the insubstantiality of identity/*anatta* do not negate the need for social interactions, which are acknowledged in the need for a supportive community or *sangha*, one of Buddhism's three jewels/*tiratana*. Ideally, a Buddhist community would value integrity and discourage the secrecy and avoidance that denial of a lesbian identity may bring.

Buddhist teachings deny the substance of all things because of their transitory nature, while names facilitate discrimination between the transitory and insubstantial objects they identify. Discriminatory processes allow favouring one set of transitory elements/*dhammas* above another. Relinquishing a name may shrug off any prejudice attached to it, and this ability underpins the argument that claiming a lesbian identity also claims the prejudice attached to it. Nevertheless, simply relinquishing a name fails to address any stigma attached to it and the negative effects of discrimination.

Some might believe that denying a 'lesbian' label assists desire's transcendence and the realisation of 'no-self'. However, a name is not a self, and the only connection a lesbian identity has with desire is to indicate its direction. Sexual identity says nothing about the strength of desire or degree of attachment to it; rather, it is a social convention that has enormous political significance in western religious contexts. The concept of 'no self/*anatta*' denies anything is self-created, unchanging and eternal, and this realisation has only the most tenuous connection with denying lesbian aspects of a personal identity. Relinquishing a lesbian identification is quite different from transcending the notion of a permanent self. Nevertheless, lesbian Buddhists may be advised that the transcendence of a permanent



self requires lesbian identity to be relinquished and be guided into denial and repression, which are psychologically damaging.

Rina Sircar's study of the *Abhidhamma* considers how denial and repression force 'natural' desires out of the conscious mind and may lead to psychological disorders.<sup>11</sup> Because denial, repression and suppression, are internal processes, an outsider might confuse them with transcendence. The differences between repression or suppression and transcendence are in their mental and *kammic* outcomes. In psychoanalysis, repression and suppression respectively describe the subconscious and conscious banishment of anxiety-arousing information in ways that allow residues to remain in the unconscious and preconscious mind.<sup>12</sup> These residues are *kammically* significant. Transcendence, on the other hand, moves beyond an issue, and allows no *kammic* residue to remain, thereby achieving a *nibbanic* state. The ability to distinguish between repression, suppression and transcendence, requires knowledge of how these things function, the extent of their remit, and detailed knowledge of the subject at issue, notably desire and sexuality. To ensure Western Buddhists are transcending, rather than repressing or suppressing their sexuality, it is necessary to develop Buddhist understandings that take into account and address western cultural norms and understandings of psychology, sexuality and desire.

Some teachers of Insight Meditation believe that identifying oneself results in the loss of 'one's true balance', and letting go of identity enables freedom from religious formalism, dogmatic teachings and religious sectarianism.<sup>13</sup> However, achieving the status of no sexual identity is problematic in western contexts because unspecified sexuality is presumed heterosexual. Furthermore, transcending the self requires more complex procedures than simply relinquishing a label or name that reflects a social convention. Areas of consciousness that might be problematic involve 'clinging' and resistance to change. Letting go of a name or label may facilitate respite from social concerns; however, it would be overly simplistic

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<sup>11</sup> Rina Sircar, 1999, *Psycho-Ethical Aspects of Abhidhamma* (Maryland & Oxford, University Press of America), pp.119—120.

<sup>12</sup> 'Repression' and 'Suppression' in Andrew M Colman, ed., 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.), *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), pp.650—651, & 742.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Goldstein & Jack Kornfield, 1987, *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom: The Path of Insight Meditation* (Boston, Shambhala), p.173, quoted by Gil Fronsdal, 1998, 'Insight Meditation in the United States: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness', pp.163—180, in Charles S Prebish & Kenneth K Tanaka, eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, University of California Press), p.177.

to assume that relinquishing the 'lesbian' label would directly effect attachment to permanence and aversion to change.

It may be accepted by Buddhists that the philosophy of negating the self/*anatta* has only tenuous connections with humanitarian political movements, such as the Dalai Lamas' group of Tibetan Buddhists, and the democracy movement of Aung San Suu Kyi, in Burma. Nevertheless, parallels may be drawn between the needs of these groups, which are arguably extraneous to Buddhist spiritual practice, and the needs of lesbians within Buddhist traditions, where historical and cultural influences may be barriers to inclusion. The significance of sexual identity turns upon cultural difference. In western contexts, sexual identity has personal, social, political, economic and religious significances, and denying its relevance in Western Buddhism denies the relevance of western cultural influences.

The insidiously situated and hegemonic status of heterosexual identity excuses heterosexuals from explaining their sexual orientation, justifying the culture associated with it, and from demands that it should be relinquished. Even liberal and accepting Buddhist traditions, such as Triratna/FWBO and Soka Gakkai, may pay undue attention to lesbian identity because it must be claimed deliberately and may be regarded as a wilful act rather than a personal disclosure.

Identity fulfils different purposes for different people in different contexts. Important social functions, including monastic life, rely upon names, and in western democracies, relinquishing an identity might involve relinquishing the rights and responsibilities that are essential aspects of the social contract. Identity politics have enabled the representation of many minority groups, whose names have been used to establish and maintain egalitarian values. Inherent to these politics is the knowledge that identity is socially constructed and changeable, and it would be cavalier to deny an identity that is associated with acts of political unity and resistance to oppression. Such circumstances require analyses to distinguish between relinquishing a name or label and transcending a permanent self.

While some Buddhists claim mundane reality is illusory, its existence is rarely nihilistically denied. Relinquishing an identifier does little to address the sense of self, of there being something ongoing and permanent: a shadow throughout life and possibly beyond. Relinquishing identity for specific periods and purposes in Buddhist contexts may be a beneficial exercise. However, if 'letting go' of identity invokes enlightened behaviour,

then it must also invoke insight and compassion, which require the ability to discriminate between sets of conditions/*khandha*, for which names and labels are convenient conventions. The enlightened continue to function in mundane contexts and to recognise both mundane and ultimate realities.

## **ii. Celibate, Heterosexual or *Pandaka***

Buddhism acknowledges three aspects of sexuality: the perfection of asexuality; the acceptability of heterosexuality; and, the unacceptability of all other sexualities. 'Perfect' sexuality has transcended desire in asexuality, and a commitment to celibacy is a commitment to this goal. Sexuality may be regarded as epitomising lust, clinging and desire, and only the purposefulness and productivity of heterosexual intercourse render it acceptable, while all other sexual expressions are unacceptable. The acceptable status of sexuality appears biologically determined, where the fit between male and female sex organs and their ability to procreate ensure heterosexual intercourse being sexuality's only 'acceptable' expression.<sup>14</sup> People whose sexuality lacks the ability to reproduce have been associated with moral degeneration, less spiritual capacity and classified '*pandaka*' in judgements that exclude them from ordination.<sup>15</sup> *Pandakas* have been compelled to remain lay Buddhists in a system that maintains a dichotomy of celibacy and reproductive heterosexuality. Celibacy is a lifelong commitment often undertaken by monks and nuns and, as an important aspect of the Buddhist path, it is not to be undertaken simply because a person's sexual orientation does not fit religio-cultural norms.<sup>16</sup> The *Vinaya*'s atonements being no worse for homosexual than heterosexual acts has been understood to signal Buddhism having a neutral attitude towards homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> However, if homosexuality is one of the reasons for being

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<sup>14</sup> As it is explained by the Dalai Lama, the Gelukpa view of sex and gender is underpinned by biological determinism; see 'Prequel', section B.ii., 'Sexual Misconduct in Tibet'.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality as seen in Indian Buddhist Texts', pp.203—213, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender* (Albany, SUNY); 'Homosexuality' in Damien Keown, 2003, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p.108.

<sup>16</sup> Short periods of ordination may be undertaken in Theravada traditions and require celibacy, while celibacy is not required of married monks in Japanese Buddhism. Lay Buddhists may make a commitment to celibacy for the duration of religious festivals.

<sup>17</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Buddhism', pp.81—101, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality and World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pa., Trinity Press), p.82; Leonard Zwilling, 1992, 'Homosexuality', pp.204—205. For arguments about understandings of '*pandaka*', see Chapter Three, section A.i. 'Philology'.

categorised '*pandaka*', and *pandakas* are denigrated and excluded from ordination, then a neutral attitude is not maintained towards unordained homosexuals.

### **iii. Circumstantial Ignorance**

Precise understandings of the *dhamma* require it to be set in its original cultural contexts, and westerners learning Buddhism are required to suspend expectations and judgements based in their indigenous cultures. Consequently, both western and non-westerners alike may base their Buddhist understandings of same-sex sexuality in traditional teachings that have defined 'lesbian' solely in relation to physical desire and sexual activity. Equivalences have not been constructed between modern western and traditional Buddhist understandings, and Western Buddhism may incorporate and propagate understandings that have no western cultural basis. In Western Buddhist contexts, the lack of adequate information and debates about sexual morality ensure a lack of certainty of what ethically constituted sexual behaviour might be. If western understandings were taken seriously, they might be seen to demonstrate westerners' requiring a different approach from that traditionally applied to the transcendence of sexual desire.

Lesbians who are tempted to speak out about circumstances they find harmful and oppressive may be silenced by being judged overly sensitive or aggressive, and 'not far along the Buddhist path' because they are 'clinging to identity'. Comments such as these may be damaging to those who seek guidance and clarity and they contradict the Buddha's emphasis upon compassion and the need to develop knowledge and insight. The Buddha's recommendation that teachers teach according to the circumstances of the pupil requires skilful/*kusala* teachers to have knowledge of their pupil's circumstances.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha advocated free enquiry and authorised personal assessments of beneficial events and circumstances, and indirectly validated regarding lesbian identity as beneficial.<sup>19</sup>

### **C. Lesbian Buddhist Theology**

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<sup>18</sup> *Samyutta Nikaya VI.1, Ayacana Sutta*, 'The Request', trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/index-author.html#i>, on 17.10.07. Also see Chapter Five, section F.i., 'Kusala'.

Because religious commitments were thought to interfere with academic rigor, academic institutions historically required 'objective studies' of Buddhism, and academics with various religious commitments have produced studies critically analysing Buddhist data at a distance from tradition.<sup>20</sup> The lack of a theological discipline ensured academic studies of Buddhism were unable to critique the world and Buddhism from within a tradition.<sup>21</sup> However, recent scholarship challenges this.<sup>22</sup> While 'Buddhist Studies' and 'Buddhology' include studies by non-Buddhists and Buddhists, they are indistinguishable, and these names are incapable of specifying works by Buddhists.<sup>23</sup> If, as Roger Coreless suggests, Buddhist traditions regard non-Buddhist understandings as mistaken, there is sufficient reason to distinguish Buddhists and non-Buddhists works. The latter are already included in Buddhology and Buddhist Studies, and in western academies, Buddhists' own understandings are best described as 'Buddhist Theologies'. A theologian has a known commitment to a religious tradition, is trained in the use of its tools and the theological process constructs dialogues between tradition and the contemporary world. Because 'theology' is closely associated with theistic religions, it is necessary to question if the same word is appropriate for Buddhist works, which neither affirm nor deny God's existence. One of four meanings of 'theology' in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is 'the rational analysis of a religious faith', which suggests theologies may be produced by non-theistic religions and that 'theology' would be a useful way to indicate an intellectual approach to any religion.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Anguttara Nikaya*. I.189, v.10, trans. Soma Thera, 1981, *The Wheel*, No. 8; (Sri Lanka, Buddhist Publication Soc.). See Chapter Seven, section A.ii., 'Authorising Adaptations'.

<sup>20</sup> Roger R Jackson & John J Makransky, 2000, 'Preface', pp.ix—x, in Jackson & Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology*, p.ix. Some arguments about the use of 'Buddhist Theology' are included in the 'Introductory Chapter', section A.i., 'Religion – Mainstream Buddhist Studies'.

<sup>21</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, SUNY), p.13.

<sup>22</sup> The inability to critique from within Buddhist traditions is challenged by Frank J Hoffman & Mahindra Deegalle, eds., 1996, *Pali Buddhism* (Richmond, Curzon), and Roger R Jackson & John J Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology*.

<sup>23</sup> Definitions of 'Buddhology' are hard to find, and it is best understood by splitting it into 'Buddh', which comes from the *Sanskrit* root 'budh', meaning to awaken, and 'ology', signifying an area of knowledge or expertise. Roger Corless suggests 'Buddhology' is the academic study of Buddhism, and that 'traditional Buddhism' cannot accept a non-Buddhist understanding of Buddhism as anything other than a mistake (2000, 'Hermeneutics and Dharmology: Finding an American Buddhist Voice', pp.95—107, in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* [Richmond, Sy, Curzon Press], pp.98 & 96).

<sup>24</sup> 'Theology' in *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on CD-ROM*, 2002, v.2.0 (Oxford, Oxford University Press); and, Roger Jackson, 2000, 'Buddhist Theology: Its

This understanding allows that Buddhists have always engaged in theological activities similar to those of theistic religions.<sup>25</sup>

In 1996, Frank J Hoffman and Mahindra Deegalle grouped one third of the articles in their book, *Pali Buddhism*, under the heading, 'Insider's Understandings', in the belief their authors' Buddhist affiliations were relevant.<sup>26</sup> Consistent with postcolonial challenges to vestiges of colonial power, Hoffman and Deegalle argued that, rather than regard Buddhist insiders as passive and ill informed, they should be regarded as conversation partners who may enhance scholarly insights into Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> Many contemporary scholars wrote articles in *Buddhist Theology*, published in 2000, and were largely in favour of a standpoint within Buddhism from which to consider Buddhism and contemporary thought.<sup>28</sup> Rita Gross described 'Buddhist Theology' as a hybrid western enterprise made up of the self-conscious reflections of western converts who have a professional interest and some religious training.<sup>29</sup> While the English word 'theology' might reflect a commonly accepted western concept, to acknowledge only the theological efforts of western converts appears insular, at best, and Western Buddhist theologies might more accurately be regarded as reinvigorating and expanding ancient traditions of debate.<sup>30</sup> Consistent with Buddhists having a theological standpoint, 'Lesbian Buddhist Theologies' might explicate lesbians' relationships with Buddhism. The questions asked might include:

- Do traditional Buddhist understandings and assessments of gender and sexuality maintain their authority in western contexts?
- How prevalent is the understanding that lesbian sexual relationships constitute misconduct?
- To what extent are Buddhist understandings of desire heterocentric?

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Historical Context', pp.1—13, in Roger R Jackson & John J Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology*, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Jackson, 2000, 'Buddhist Theology: Its Historical Context', p.2.

<sup>26</sup> Frank J Hoffman & Mahindra Deegalle, eds., 1996, *Pali Buddhism*, p.8.

<sup>27</sup> Frank J Hoffman & Mahindra Deegalle, eds., 1996, *Pali Buddhism*, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> Roger R Jackson & John J Makransky, 2000, 'Preface', p.ix.

<sup>29</sup> Rita Gross, 2000, 'Buddhist Theology', pp.53—60, in Roger R Jackson & John J Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology*, p.53.

<sup>30</sup> Buddhist traditions of debate have their origins in early encounters between Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophers, and later encounters between rival Buddhist groups. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, CE, all matters of debate had been codified, and the rules are preserved in Tibetan Buddhism, where debate is part of the Gelukpa monastic curriculum ('Debate' in Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p.71).

- What similarities and differences exist between western and traditional Buddhist understandings of self/*atman*, sexual desire and sexual identity, and how might they be related to each other?
- Would any unconventional sexual characteristics, beliefs and practices, warrant exclusion from ordination or counter the epithet 'Buddhist'?

The following section presents an example of lesbian Buddhist theology in which the tantric concept 'androgyny' is considered from a lesbian-feminist, non-tantric, Buddhist perspective.

### **i. Androgyny is a Heterocentric Illusion**

The conjoined father-mother/*yab-yum* image in Tibetan Buddhism depicts an ideal that has been eulogized as a perfect model of complementary qualities. However, a lesbian feminist analysis might argue that such qualities rely upon patriarchal models and heterosexist priorities, and the androgyny they represent is a heterocentric illusion.

Tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism teaches that while the universe is mundanely perceived in dualistic terms, typified by the male/female dichotomy, ultimately this is to be transcended. Practitioners aim to transcend duality by acknowledging both male and female within themselves,

The polarity-oriented thought of the Tantra finds its strongest expression in a many-layered sexual imagery. Transcendence of the duality of the masculine principle (skilful means/*upaya*) and the feminine principle (wisdom/*prajna*) through the union of the two is given as the key characteristic of supreme yoga Tantra.<sup>31</sup>

Images of the sexual unions of male and female deities have been used to symbolise a unitary state of mind and translated into models for androgyny.<sup>32</sup>

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Luce Irigaray observed that western philosophy had functioned with reference to a unitary model of humanity in which male authors failed to recognise women's absence and specificity, and took 'man' to represent the whole.<sup>33</sup> Historically, western philosophy has

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<sup>31</sup> 'Tantra' in Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner (eds.), 1994, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston, Shambhala) p.355.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Sponberg, 1992, 'Attitudes towards Women', pp.37—61, in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, p.27

<sup>33</sup> Luce Irigaray, 1996, *I Love To You*, trans. Alison Martin (Routledge, London), pp.35—41. Luce Irigaray's critique of rationality is analysed by Margaret Whitford,

been dominated by men who reflected their intuition that they represented the whole of human kind and failed to consider that 'man' could represent only half of humanity.<sup>34</sup> References to 'female' and 'femininity' were either absent or rendered inferior to 'male' and 'masculinity', and only men were credited with subjectivity before the second wave of feminism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> The masculine subject position is reflected in many intellectual endeavours, especially where gender and other differences have been ignored or forced into hierarchies. In tantrism, androgyny functions in a similar way: it relies upon two, male and female, and functions on the basis of one, the male.<sup>36</sup> Irigaray suggests that a climate in which difference is acceptable must move beyond the impetus to singularity and that gender equality and the valuing of difference require the validation of at least two kinds of subject, to which androgyny is antithetical.<sup>37</sup>

Gender qualities have been constructed as opposite and complementary, and the association of active and assertive qualities with men and masculinity has determined the association of passive and submissive qualities with women and femininity.<sup>38</sup> Miranda Shaw described tantric unions as 'an exquisite aesthetic expression of interdependence and complementarity', and she believes the interdependence of women and men to be the anchor of the tantric system.<sup>39</sup> It is argued here that the tantric system's symbolism would not survive women's independence. Indeed, the current system might be regarded as the religious reinforcement and

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in 'Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality' (1988, pp.109—130, in Morwenna Griffiths & Margaret Whitford, eds, *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy* [UK, MacMillan]), and a wider analysis of Irigaray's philosophy is presented in Whitford's monograph, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (1991, [London, Routledge]).

<sup>34</sup> Luce Irigaray, 1996, *I Love To You*, pp.35—41.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Whitford, 1988, 'Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality', pp.112—114.

<sup>36</sup> June Campbell, 2002 (Revised edn.), *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity and Tibetan Buddhism* (London & NY, Continuum), pp.152—172.

<sup>37</sup> Luce Irigaray, 1996, *I Love To You*, pp.20—42; June Campbell, 2002, 'Questions of Self and Other', pp.150-172, in *Traveller in Space*.

<sup>38</sup> Western cultures have been influenced by the Pythagorean table of superior and inferior opposites developed in Greece during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and described by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (Margaret Whitford, 1988 'Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality', p.113). According to Genevieve Lloyd, the Pythagoreans saw the world as a mixture of principles associated with determinate form, which were regarded as good or superior, and their alternatives, associated with formlessness—the unlimited, irregular or disorderly—which were regarded as bad or inferior. The Pythagorean table of superior and inferior opposites had ten such contrasts: limit/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, male/female, rest/motion, straight/curved, light/dark, good/bad, square/oblong. The contrast between form and formlessness ensured 'male' being superior to 'female' (1984, *The Man of Reason: Male and Female in Western Philosophy* [London, Methuen], p.3).



exploitation of gender stereotypes established under patriarchy. The socio-political significance of androgyny for tantric women in history is the subject of debates, and while some believe androgyny to have revalued the feminine, others question whether it improved women's status in wider society.<sup>40</sup> Modern psychology suggests healthy adult relationships are based upon sharing between two independent beings and it is widely accepted that well-being requires men and women to develop integrity, independence and autonomy.<sup>41</sup> In tantrism, however, only men have subjectivity and women are taught to view themselves and the world from a masculine position.<sup>42</sup>

Female symbolism in Hindu and Buddhist tantrism is distinct, while Tibetan Buddhism has secretly maintained both. The female consort in Hindu tantrism symbolises active energy/*sakti*, while in Buddhist philosophy she symbolises passive wisdom/*prajna*.<sup>43</sup> In Hinduism, the female/*sakti* represents a creative force that maintains the universe and makes all life possible: *sakti* is the primal sexual energy that unites male and female polarities and brings forth new life.<sup>44</sup> In Buddhist philosophy, the female aspect represents wisdom/*prajna*, which although highly valued is passive and utterly dependant for vibrancy upon the active male symbol of skilful means/*upaya-kausalya*.<sup>45</sup> In tantra, the redeeming function is assigned to the dynamic principle, which in Hinduism is the female and in Buddhism is the male. Tibetan Buddhism maintains the primacy of active/male and passive/female symbology, while simultaneously it has maintained images of independent dynamic goddesses.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Miranda Shaw, 1994, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press), p.200.

<sup>40</sup> Those who believe tantrism revalued the feminine include Miranda Shaw (1994, *Passionate Enlightenment*, pp.11, 195—205), and Rita Gross (1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, pp.90, 119, 221—288, 295—298). Those who question this include Bernard Faure (2003, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* [Princeton, Princeton University Press], pp.126—127), and Alan Sponberg (1992, 'Attitudes towards Women', p.28).

<sup>41</sup> 'Self-actualization', denotes the motive to realize one's latent potential, to understand oneself, and establish oneself as a whole person. According to Abraham Maslow, it represents the highest level of psychological development ('Self actualization', Andrew M Colman, ed., 2006, *Dictionary of Psychology*, p.679).

<sup>42</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller in Space*, pp.152—172; Liz Wilson, 1996, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (London & Chicago, University of Chicago Press), p.154.

<sup>43</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, p.124; June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller in Space*, pp.143—144.

<sup>44</sup> 'Shakti' in Stephan Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner (eds.), 1994, *Encyclopedia*, p.313.

<sup>45</sup> Bernard Faure, 2003, *Denial*, pp.124—5.

<sup>46</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller in Space*, pp.143—144, citing Agehananda Bharati, 1992, *The Tantric Tradition* (Rider).

Rita Gross, a feminist, tantric, Buddhist, believes androgyny engenders sexual equality by promoting an egalitarian model, but her claim of the *equal* inclusion of male and female disregards the frequently diminished status of women and womanhood in Buddhism, and the passive status of the feminine in Buddhist philosophy.<sup>47</sup> Gross's theology ignores the essentialism in tantric understandings of gender and uses the occasional manifestations of strong, creative, intelligent females in the history of Tibetan Buddhism to argue that the androgynous ideal may benefit *all* women.<sup>48</sup> For Gross, the basis of sex and gender inequality is human sexual differentiation, and she believes Buddhist thought will only be free from androcentrism when male and female are generally regarded as variants of a singular human model.<sup>49</sup> Of tantrism's androgynous model, she observes,

They are not two separate entities nor are they one entity; they are a dyadic unity, in which each mutually interpenetrates the other, is inseparable from it, and is co-necessary with it.<sup>50</sup>

Her religious model is based upon merging two human types, male and female, and her arguments assume a post-patriarchal context that fails to recognise the ongoing nature of gender politics. She presents an ethereal notion of unitary humanity in which everyone has transcended sex and gender: biology and socialisation. Her theological intent allows Gross to prioritise tantric Buddhist sources and to ignore factual evidence from science and society. Thus, Gross's theology advances religious dogma at the expense of psychological, biological and sociological data.

Although biology is not wholly responsible for differences between men and women, it would be foolish to deny its influence. Because men and women have different musculoskeletal qualities, their performance of the same physical feat may be quite different, and this is acknowledged in the gender segregation of many competitive sports.<sup>51</sup> Hormones exert another biological influence; for example, testosterone is found in greater quantities in men than women and is known to stimulate competitiveness and

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<sup>47</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, pp.119, 221—88, & 295—8

<sup>48</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, p.109.

<sup>49</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, pp.119, 221—288, 295—298.

<sup>50</sup> Rita Gross, 1993, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, p.103.

<sup>51</sup> Men and women compete against each other in few sports competitions, such as equestrian events and mixed-doubles racket sports, while most events, including athletics, badminton, football, gymnastics, hockey, rowing, skating, skiing, swimming, and tennis, segregate the sexes.

aggression.<sup>52</sup> In addition, men and women have different reproductive organs and nervous systems and are socialised differently. Despite these differences, men and women may manifest the same qualities, albeit how they are expressed might differ. Most human beings are born fully equipped for life, with the potential to develop both active skills that facilitate independence and autonomy, and passive skills that facilitate compromise and co-operation. In modern western understandings, while sex might indicate different tendencies, neither sex has exclusive access to any quality, and while the range of qualities available to both men and women is the same, any particular quality may be manifested differently because of social and biological influences. Tantrism may promote androgyny to encourage the realisation that men and women may access the same qualities; however, tantric understandings do not acknowledge that men and women may express the same quality differently.<sup>53</sup> Tantrism maintains gender scripts that are wholly polarised and complementary, so that perfection and balance may be achieved only by the incorporation of qualities described as 'male' or 'female'. In this model, a woman may be aggressive, but aggression remains a 'masculine' quality, which discourages women's anger.

Two models of gender are at issue here. In the tantric model, genders are polarised and complementary and cannot exhibit the same quality without collapsing into androgyny. This model fails to validate the independence of each sex. Although it allows women to become 'masculine', it does little to challenge androcentric and patriarchal social values. Furthermore, because it reflects and encourages a unitary vision, this model cannot tolerate difference. In the alternative western liberal model, male and female differences are embraced. Men and women have access to the same qualities that might be expressed differently. This model allows individuals to be balanced and independent without having to transcend biology and socialisation. It accommodates women's subjectivity and the sexes having equal power and status, but does not accommodate traditional tantric expectations. When the genders are not regarded as interdependent and complementary, and differences between male and female expressions of the same quality may be acknowledged, androgyny is incapable of signifying the transcendence of duality.

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<sup>52</sup> 'Testosterone' in Andrew M Colman, ed., 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.), *Dictionary of Psychology*, p.758.

<sup>53</sup> June Campbell, 2002, *Traveller in Space*, pp.125—126.

Traditional tantric concepts of androgyny have relied upon, reflected and endorsed polarised, complementary and interdependent notions of gender that do not convey that men and women are capable of independence. Nevertheless, tantric Buddhism has portrayed some female aspects positively and in some instances has allowed women authority, but its use of androgyny does little to emancipate women as women. At best, tantric Buddhist concepts of androgyny support the development of 'masculine' traits in women, while propagating male views and maintaining male subjectivity. Many women, including lesbian-feminists, would prefer not to have to rely upon apparently masculine traits for their vibrancy, independence and enlightenment. Using only *yab-yum* images assumes everyone shares their heterocentric ideal, and although most would recognise their symbolism, the lack of alternative imagery ensures few distinctions are made between attempts to redress polarised gender scripts and their promotion in androgyny. Using exclusively heterosexual imagery promotes it as the norm, renders alternatives abnormal, and restricts discourses about sex.

These arguments about androgyny have been motivated by lesbian experiences of Buddhism and might have been more obviously related to lesbians had lesbian Buddhist theologies established a framework in which questions of tantric imagery might be addressed. Without lesbian theologies, lesbians' engagements with Buddhism would remain largely unreported, any reports made would be informal, and Buddhist Studies and Western Buddhism would be incapable of addressing adequately concerns about sexual morality. Lesbian Buddhist theologies would not simply attack established understandings; rather, they might formalise new ways in which to regard Buddhist teachings and encourage the recognition of new ways of being Buddhists.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed several important and related issues from a lesbian Buddhist standpoint. It began by explaining how the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' may enhance the recognition given to lesbian Buddhists' perspectives and promote awareness of their particular circumstances. Buddhist literature refers to three sexual categories: celibates, heterosexuals, and *pandakas*, and equating *pandakas* with today's lesbians and gays makes traditional Buddhist discriminations more visible and draws

attention to the need for reformation. Western lesbian Buddhists must juggle understandings in three cultural contexts: in their Buddhist tradition, in mainstream western contexts, and in lesbian contexts. Each context may have a unique understanding of gender and sexuality, and have a unique code of sexual ethics. Buddhist theologies allow Buddhists to address contemporary thought from Buddhist perspectives, and Lesbian Buddhist theologies, in addition to providing an arena for debates, might validate and empower lesbian Buddhists' views and assist in the construction of equivalences between contextual understandings.

Buddhism is sometimes regarded as beyond discrimination, and although the Buddha's teachings/*dhamma* exclude no one, Buddhist traditions have discriminated against women and sexual minorities. The various methods of teaching Buddhism often promote traditional androcentric and heterocentric views, which few have recognised and challenged outside Women's Buddhism. The uncritical application of traditional Buddhist values to indigenous western topics is culturally inappropriate. While it is widely recognised that Western Buddhists need to accommodate both western and Buddhist values, the need for Buddhist traditions to engage with marginalised western groups has been largely ignored.

Although few people are excluded from Buddhism, many are excluded from Buddhist representations, and if Western Buddhist traditions are to promote egalitarian ethics, they must consider issues of diversity. To be inclusive and welcoming of lesbians, Buddhist attitudes towards sexual orientation and identity should be made known and, if necessary, changed. Buddhist women are being innovative, and, given that lesbians have produced the most radical theologies in Christianity, it is reasonable to assume lesbians are producing the most radical innovations in Buddhism. However, while so little is known about lesbian Buddhists, this remains speculative. By defining an area in the public domain for reporting and debating previously ignored experiences, the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' challenges the status quo and creates an area dedicated to lesbian Buddhists' affirmation and support.

## Chapter 9

### Summary and Conclusion

#### *A. Summary*

This thesis is based in egalitarian values that have resulted in the acknowledgement of lesbian culture. The 'Introduction' offered some background information about the thesis, described its methodology and reviewed the most relevant literature. The 'Prequel' demonstrated the need for affirmative action in Buddhism by reporting negative and dismissive attitudes towards lesbians, gays and homosexuality found in a wide range of traditional and academic sources.

The concept of sexual identity was shown to be indigenous to western cultures in the first chapter, 'Sexual Identity and Western Culture', which described historical developments in the understanding of sexuality. Two views of lesbian history were juxtapositioned. The report of 'mainstream' history described scientific studies of sexuality converting what had previously been regarded as isolated homosexual acts into homosexual people and pathologising them. Scientific studies were the first to render homosexuality a psychopathology; however, lesbians' own histories challenge the assumption that scientific studies were the first to stigmatise same-sex sexual relationships. Lesbians' historical research has revealed that groups of women since the 17<sup>th</sup> century have enjoyed same-sex sexuality and created societies and cultures apart from the mainstream. Lesbians' histories revealed shared meanings and structures that became the subject of 'Lesbian Studies' during the 1980's, and were renamed 'Lesbian Cultural Studies' in the 1990's. By tracing the development of studies of sexuality in western contexts, the first chapter demonstrated the concept of sexual identity being indigenous to the West, that its understanding varies, and the developments that indicate 'lesbian' represents an encultured perspective.

Chapter two, 'Lesbian Invisibility', elaborated the significance of representation to lesbians. The relatively high media profile of lesbians since the 1990's has resulted in the concept of lesbian invisibility being less obvious; nevertheless, lesbians are under represented in many contexts, and

are not represented at all in others.<sup>1</sup> Assumptions of heterosexuality, the stigma associated with homosexuality and the dangers of coming out, indicate heterosexuality being a compulsory norm and the severity with which it is policed has created 'the closet'. To maintain their integrity, lesbians must 'come out' and declare their sexual orientation; however, less well informed people may regard coming out as a mark of sexual obsession, rather than personal integrity. Lesbians' invisibility is maintained by four things: heterosexual hegemonies; the failure to recognise the specificity of lesbian existence; mistaken assumptions of lesbians' interests being represented under alternative headings; and the recent rise of 'queer', in which lesbians are deliberately indistinguishable from other 'queers'. By exploring how lesbians' invisibility is maintained, the second chapter brought attention to the need for specifically lesbian representations. The first two chapters illustrate a recurrent mainstream cultural theme of widely accepted but inadequate understandings of 'lesbian'.

Chapter three, 'Lesbians in Buddhist Studies', explored representations of lesbian Buddhists under two headings: 'Lesbian Buddhists as Homosexuals', which considered articles that might refer to both lesbians and gays, and 'Lesbian Buddhists', which considered articles that refer solely to lesbians. The first section demonstrated that references to 'homosexuals' in Buddhist literature often lack gender awareness, are primarily androcentric and encourage the assumption that lesbians share the culture of gay men. Indeed, the articles that addressed 'homosexuality' from a gay standpoint might arguably be referred to as 'Gay Buddhist Theologies'. The second half of the chapter considered references to women's same-sex sexual relationships in non-western and western contexts, respectively. It demonstrated how references to lesbians might disappear, while other references brought attention to the need to avoid negative inferences in referencing groups who have previously been stigmatised. In western contexts, lesbian Buddhists have been reluctant to identify themselves, and knowledge of them relies upon a handful of anecdotal accounts whose political and theological significance has rarely, if ever, been considered. In a review of English articles referring to same-sex sexuality among Buddhist women, chapter three demonstrated how representations of lesbian Buddhists are currently inadequate.

Chapter four, 'The Christian Religious Milieu', brought attention to

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 1995, *Space, Time, and Perversions*, (London & NY, Routledge), p.219.

sexual orientation being an important issue in western religious contexts. Christianity is the most influential religion in the West, and Christian values underpin many encultured norms and expectations. Established readings of several Biblical texts are understood to vilify and condemn homosexuals and homosexuality. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these readings have been challenged by Lesbian and Gay Theologies that have contextualised textual accounts and created readings situated in modern western contexts. Lesbian and Gay Theologies have deconstructed dominant theologies, exposed bias in textual readings and established positive representations of a previously despised minority.<sup>2</sup> Lesbian and gay Christians have been the vanguard of a movement drawing attention to how religion maintains discrimination based upon sexual orientation.<sup>3</sup> By reporting the development of Lesbian and Gay Christian theologies, chapter four demonstrated sexuality being a major concern in modern western religious culture. In western religious contexts, attitudes towards lesbians and gays are contested in the public domain and homosexuality's acceptance or rejection has both religious and political significance. In contrast, understandings of sexuality in Buddhist traditions often remain obscured. The relationship between Buddhist and western understandings of sex and gender remains largely unexplored and lay Western Buddhists may be uncertain of how traditional understandings of sexual morality relate to their circumstances.<sup>4</sup> By considering the circumstances of lesbians and gays in Christianity, chapter four established the high profile of sexual identity in western religio-cultural contexts, and demonstrated precedents for lesbian and gay Buddhist theologies.

Chapter five, 'Buddhist Doctrine', brought attention to the lack of equivalence between western and Buddhist religio-philosophical constructs and provided a conventional account of the most relevant Buddhist teachings. It described how mundane realities might be transcended by following the Eightfold Path, in which ethical behaviour is an aspect of the

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, 2003, *Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Hampshire, UK, & Burlington, US, Ashgate), p.76.

<sup>3</sup> Lesbian and gay movements are also active in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism; and anthologies by Asian, African American, Chicana, Latina, and Native American lesbians and gay men have addressed the cultural and personal significance of religion. Another type of writing identifies a specifically gay, lesbian, or queer 'spirituality', which is often presented as an alternative to organised religion (Gary David Comstock & Susan E Henking, 1999, 'Introduction', pp.11—16 in *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* [NY, Continuum], p.11).

<sup>4</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex' pp.60—68 in *Buddhadharma: the Practitioners Quarterly*, Summer, Vol.7, No.4 [Boulder, Shambhala Sun Foundation], p.64.



path to *nibbana*. Nevertheless, traditional Buddhist understandings include negative views of womanhood and non-heterosexual sexuality, and historical views render modern dialogues about women's sexual orientation and identity problematic. Nevertheless, if it is accepted that the *dhamma* may be presented best in ways that are apt for the pupil, knowledge of lesbian Buddhists cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to Buddhism. The Buddha indirectly validated regarding lesbian identity as beneficial when he advocated personal assessments of beneficial things. Although traditional Buddhist understandings are not a perfect fit in western contexts and Buddhism has largely ignored non-heterosexual sexuality, it would be ethical to establish positive Buddhist understandings of lesbians and lesbianism.

Chapter six, 'Buddhism and Women', demonstrated the need for modern women's innovations by describing the negative understandings of womanhood that have been maintained in many Buddhist traditions. Concern for women's soteriology has often been secondary to concern for maintaining tradition, and before relationships between women may be regarded as worthwhile and significant, women are required to construct positive understandings of their gender. Thus, lesbians must prioritise gender issues, while positive traditional attitudes towards masculinity allow gay men to make credible interventions and challenges to Buddhist understandings of male sexuality. For those who espouse egalitarian ideals, the established disadvantages of women in so many Buddhist traditions render the status quo insufferable, and modern Buddhist women must either accede to traditional expectations or create new ways of being.

Chapter seven, 'Western Women's Buddhism', the largest chapter in the thesis, achieved several things and described the circumstances of many women in Western Buddhism. It first described how some non-feminist women suffer from a 'false consciousness' and fail to recognise the need for feminism, before considering how the changes required by feminist values might be authorised. Subsequent sections described the conditions in the West that support change and listed many innovations made by Western Buddhist women. The feminist strategy of naming was introduced and two examples illustrated how its deployment has allowed groups of under-represented women to formulate and establish their theologies. Western conventions of naming Buddhism have recognised differences consistent with cultural and geo-political boundaries, and types of Buddhism have been named accordingly. The effects of geo-political and cultural placement upon

Buddhist practices are beyond dispute, and while the effects of gender have been widely acknowledged, the effects of sexuality, which include differences in sexual culture, have still to be recognised. Innovations in women's Buddhist practices have been referred to as 'Women's Buddhism', and feminist theological methods require that women's differences be acknowledged. The name 'Lesbian Buddhism' facilitates the recognition of lesbians' cultural differences and any understandings that might be based in them. Chapter seven did several things: it acknowledged feminist and non-feminist views; it described western cultural influences that require Buddhist practices to change; it explained how change might be authorised; it described some adaptations made by Buddhist women; and, finally, it demonstrated naming being used as a feminist theological strategy and vindicated the name 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

Chapter eight, 'Lesbian Buddhism', illustrated a lesbian Buddhist standpoint, and by presenting a lesbian Buddhist perspective on several issues demonstrated 'Lesbian Buddhism' being more than just a façade. By validating lesbians' views and debates of sexual morality, the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' has a political impact. The relationship between the Buddhist 'self' and identity politics was considered before the three sexual categories referred to in Buddhist texts—celibates, heterosexuals, and *pandakas*—were considered. The equation of *pandakas* with today's lesbians and gays makes the institutionalised discrimination in some traditions more apparent, and draws attention to the need to interrogate traditional understandings. Currently, lesbian Western Buddhists are forced to juggle understandings in three cultural contexts: in their Buddhist tradition, in mainstream western contexts and in lesbian contexts. Each of these has a different code of sexual ethics, and may have a different view of gender and sexuality, which draws attention to the need for some rapprochement between Buddhist and western understandings. Modern Buddhist theologies may address contemporary thought and Buddhist traditions from a Buddhist perspective, and acknowledging the theological potential of lesbian Buddhists might validate and empower them. The chapter's final section argued for Lesbian Buddhist theologies and provided an example by arguing that the concept of androgyny is a heterocentric illusion. Chapter eight demonstrated a Lesbian Buddhist standpoint and illustrated the theological potential of 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

The thesis, 'Lesbian Buddhism?', argued that lesbian Western Buddhists face discrimination and prejudice, the circumstances of which

were described and contextualised while arguing for a possible solution. The thesis has demonstrated that sexual orientation and identity are Buddhist concerns, and that Lesbian Buddhist theologies may have significance for all Buddhists. Regardless of its variable and insubstantial nature, identity has social, cultural, and religious significance, and lesbian identity may reflect a set of encultured values that are capable of influencing experiences of the *dhamma*. While Women's Buddhism may include covert lesbian Buddhists, their invisibility maintains the partiality of Western Buddhism, which can only be challenged by politically engaged critiques and theological explorations from an openly lesbian Buddhist position.

## **B. Concluding Remarks**

This thesis is grounded in mundane understandings that discriminate between people and calls upon egalitarian ideals to argue that lesbian identity and culture warrant increased consideration in Buddhism. The arguments for naming 'Lesbian Buddhism' rely upon various academic disciplines, including Buddhist Studies, Lesbian Cultural Studies and Feminist Theology, and triangulate between religious, cultural and political perspectives, which is the protocol of these concluding remarks.

### **i. Religion**

An inspection sensitive to sexual difference reveals the only acceptable sexuality in Buddhism is heterosexuality and that lesbians and gays are subjected to various types and degrees of discrimination. This study has revealed that Buddhist scholars have disrespected and trivialised concerns about sexual orientation; that almost all of the information about homosexuality in Buddhism is androcentric; and that authors who have considered homosexuality in Buddhist contexts have often ignored the circumstances of lesbian Buddhists. The Dalai Lama discriminated between non-Buddhists and Buddhists and in his tradition all homosexual acts between Buddhists are classified 'sexual misconduct', although he did call for further research. One lesbian Buddhist, Varabhadri, wrote of relinquishing her sexual identity in favour of a Buddhist identity and implied that lesbian and Buddhist identities conflict.<sup>5</sup> Fearful of appearing overly concerned with their sexuality, some lesbian Buddhists have refused to be

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<sup>5</sup> Varabhadri, 'Sexuality and a Buddhist Way of Life', pp.170—184, in Kalyanavaca ed. 1997, *The Moon and Flowers: A Woman's Path to Enlightenment* (Birmingham, Windhorse), p.175, and is reported above, in Chapter Three, section B.ii, 'Inside Western Buddhism'.

identified and withheld permission for their conversations about Buddhism and sexuality to be published.<sup>6</sup> Arinna Weisman, a lesbian teacher of Insight Meditation, was refused residency in a Buddhist community with the advice to reapply excluding references to her partnership with a woman.<sup>7</sup> Weisman teaches the relationship between lesbianism and Buddhism is positive, but only one lesbian Buddhist, Kate O'Neil, has written of the liberatory aspects of coming out in Buddhist contexts.<sup>8</sup>

In many modern contexts, discrimination against lesbians and gays is unacceptable, and Buddhist traditions in western contexts must examine traditional understandings of sexual morality for views that are discriminatory and no longer culturally appropriate. Many Buddhists deny that homosexuality is relevant to enlightenment, but this is contradicted by traditions saying that homosexual acts give rise to negative *kamma* and classify any such acts as sexual misconduct. If sexual misconduct may rely upon the gender of the people engaged in sexual acts, then both gender and sexual orientation are relevant to the attainment of enlightenment. Because gender, desire and sexual orientation are transcended in enlightenment, they must be addressed somewhere along the mundane path that leads to it. While sexuality is ultimately relinquished, the means of achieving this may vary with sexual orientation and the cultures with which it is associated.

Despite the neutrality of the Buddha's teachings, many Buddhist traditions maintain misogynistic and heterocentric views, and while some traditions are making efforts to be more accommodating, there is little evidence of a groundswell in favour of abandoning traditional discriminations. Some Buddhist traditions have 'welcoming' attitudes; for example, Triratna/FWBO and Soka Gakkai sometimes organise lesbian and/or gay events.<sup>9</sup> However, the wider public often remains ignorant of the discriminatory attitudes held by some Buddhist traditions in the West. The

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<sup>6</sup> Sandy Boucher, 1993 (first published 1988), *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (Boston, Beacon), p.26 & xvii, reported in Chapter Three, section B.ii, 'Inside Western Buddhism'.

<sup>7</sup> Arinna Weisman interviewed by Ruth Frankenberg, 2004, *Living Spirit, Living Practice: Poetics, Politics, Epistemology* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press), pp.237—240, reported above, in Chapter Seven, section B.ii., 'Women's Innovations'.

<sup>8</sup> Kate O'Neill, 1996, 'Sounds of Silence', pp.19—38 in Marianne Dresser, *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier* (Berkeley, Ca, North Atlantic Books), reported above in Chapter Three, section B.ii., 'Inside Western Buddhism'. Arinna Weisman is known to embrace and advocate a positive stance, but no publications by her were found.

June Campbell, 2002 (Revised edn.), *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity, and Tibetan Buddhism* (London & NY, Continuum), p.148.

<sup>9</sup> FWBO has recently changed its name to Triratna Buddhist Community.

laity's knowledge of Buddhist sexual morality is often limited by a tendency to extrapolate their understandings of Buddhist sexual morality from the precept of no-harm/*ahimsa*, together with a failure to recognise the discriminations practiced in traditional Buddhist contexts.<sup>10</sup> Because authoritative opinions based on thorough and unbiased analyses are not currently available, modern lay Western Buddhists remain uncertain of the constitution of Buddhist sexual ethics. Right or moral action being central to Buddhism's soteriology requires clear guidance about right or moral issues. Perhaps more than any other relationships, sexual relationships require moral judgements, and it is important that western and Buddhist understandings should eventually become synonymous in a morality fit for modern Western Buddhists.

The orientation of sexuality informs fundamental structures in most people's lives, and sexual morality is an important aspect of religious understandings. Like Jesus, the Buddha was silent about homosexuality; however, Jesus' silence did not translate into Christian traditions being safe havens for lesbians. Similarly, the Buddha's silence cannot be assumed to render Buddhism 'lesbian friendly'. Silence may be read variously, as approval, disapproval, or neutral indifference and the silence about traditional attitudes towards sexual orientation in Western Buddhist contexts encourages the proliferation of misguided assumptions.

## **ii. Culture**

If they have been considered at all, questions of how lesbian identity and culture intersect with Buddhism have probably been regarded as a different order of enquiry from how Tibetan or Japanese identities and cultures intersect with Buddhism. Drawing out lesbians' cultural constructs makes it easier to recognise the bias and misrepresentations inherent in studies that have focused solely upon sexual acts to define 'lesbian'. Sources that imply sexual orientation hinges upon a simple choice between sexual acts grossly underestimate the personal and social processes involved in realising a lesbian identity. In modern western understandings, sexual orientation is an aspect of personal identity and often associated with a set of norms, values and beliefs. The depth and variety of lesbian and gay Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon has written of western Buddhists being either unaware of what the classical Indian and Tibetan tradition had to say about sexuality or ready to dismiss it because it does not fit with their preconceptions of Buddhism's essential tolerance (Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex' pp.62—64).

theologies demonstrate that lesbian sexual orientation and identity feature strongly in western religious consciousness, while in Buddhism it has not been addressed at all.

Buddhists who believe it necessary to make a choice between worldly concerns and soteriological advancement might experience difficulties trying to integrate Buddhist morality and western approaches to social and political concerns. Stephen Batchelor observed resignation and hopelessness among Western Buddhists considering their ability to change *samsara*, and that they often settled for a small change in consciousness and their immediate social circle.<sup>11</sup> Such disheartened attitudes might be challenged if the efficacy of traditional Buddhist understandings were questioned in western contexts. Translating Buddhist understandings into western equivalents and questioning traditional claims might facilitate clearer understandings. Important questions for this process might include: how sensitive can Buddhist traditions be to western social and cultural phenomena, in particular as they relate to women, and are traditional Buddhist teachings able to accommodate western mores. By considering the significance of western concepts in Buddhist frameworks, Lesbian Buddhism may help to create a truly Western Buddhism. If traditional Buddhist concepts of gender, sexuality and sexual morality are to be rendered fit for modern western contexts, then the new contexts must be acknowledged as requiring new questions to be asked.

Lesbian Cultural Studies provide evidence of variable but consistent understandings that challenge hetero-normative assumptions, and Buddhist studies might benefit from paying attention to voices from the margins. Gay men's Buddhist studies are challenging some heterocentric views and assumptions and the lack of similar works by and about lesbians has resulted in an unbalanced view of homosexuality in Buddhism, which is problematic. Lesbian Buddhists' adequate representation requires that they engage constructively with the processes that are shaping Western Buddhism. Similarly, if Western Buddhism is to embrace egalitarian values then it must acknowledge lesbian Buddhists.

### **iii. Politics**

This thesis is thoroughly imbued with political insight and purpose. It is the first analysis to reveal lesbian Buddhists lack of adequate representation

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Batchelor, 'Appendix: The Chinese Lesson', pp.109—125, in *The Faith to Doubt: Glimpses of Buddhist Uncertainty* (Berkeley, Parallax), p.122.

and to report the discouragements they face in Buddhism. Androcentrism, heterosexism and invisibility are not simply a backdrop for the thesis, they are the fundamental circumstances that constitute the fabric of lesbians' lives and drive the need to come out. In addition to the disadvantages faced by all women because of established patriarchal values and androcentrism, lesbian sexual orientation carries a further stigma. Analyses of lesbian issues must consider both gender and sexual orientation and take both women's status and lesbians' disparagement into account. The problems faced by Buddhist women are exacerbated for lesbians by the failure to acknowledge that sexual orientation and identity are Buddhist concerns. To ensure Western Buddhism fully embraces egalitarianism, it must be willing to address both sexism and heterosexism and to acknowledge the presence, priorities and practices of lesbians. This process requires acknowledging the different understandings of sex and gender in western and traditional Buddhist contexts. Feminist theological strategies of naming have facilitated the formalisation, validation and propagation of previously unacknowledged and under reported religious views and experiences, and the name 'Lesbian Buddhism' may instigate a similar process for lesbian Buddhists. Naming 'Lesbian Buddhism' is a political move intended to encourage Buddhists of any tradition or none at all to consider how lesbian sexual orientation and identity may relate to Buddhist teachings and experiences.

### ***C. The Need for Clarity***

Heterosexism is hidden in Buddhism because studies have rarely considered the hegemony associated with sexual orientation and the direction from which the *dhamma* has been perceived and taught. Historically and culturally, heterosexuality might have been the only validated sexual orientation in Buddhism; however, in modern western contexts, this is not the case. Lesbian and gay Christian theologies demonstrate even the most firmly established religious prejudices may be challenged by contextualising texts and constructing new paradigms.<sup>12</sup> The disparagement of homosexuality is not as blatant in Buddhism as in Christianity; nevertheless, traditional Buddhist views and assessments must be revised, which is supported by the name 'Lesbian Buddhism'.

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Four, 'The Christian Religious Milieu'. A number of revisions in Protestant and Catholic Christian traditions are reported in Marvin M. Ellison, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Protestantism', pp.149—179, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality in World Religions* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Trinity Press); and in Denise and John Carmody, 1993, 'Homosexuality and Roman Catholicism', pp.135—147, in Arlene Swidler, ed., *Homosexuality in World Religions*.

Religious beliefs often underpin the most pernicious attitudes towards lesbians, and uncertainty about traditional Buddhist attitudes is an unnecessary obstacle to lesbians' peace of mind. The religio-historical circumstances of western lesbians require that attitudes towards sexual orientation are transparent, which is not the case in Buddhism. The Dalai Lama encouraged lesbians and gays to lobby and campaign for change; however, it is difficult to instigate campaigns for change where there are few representations of lesbian Buddhists and their circumstances remain shrouded.<sup>13</sup> Buddhist traditions may be self-conscious of their traditional understandings not being a perfect fit in modern western contexts; nevertheless, modern techniques of historical and cultural contextualisation ensure there is no justification for the current obscurity of Buddhist understandings of sexuality and sexual morality. Buddhist teachers are assumed to teach all of their understandings, including those of 'sexual misconduct'; however, traditional attitudes towards same-sex sexuality are rarely taught or explained.<sup>14</sup> Debates of sexual morality in Western Buddhist contexts may be overly simplistic when they focus solely upon the precept of doing no harm/*ahimsa*.<sup>15</sup>

Sexual desire is the most powerful and pervasive type of desire, and all Buddhists aim to reduce and ultimately transcend it. Desire's transcendence might be supported by knowledge and insight, and the reduction of sexual desire may be encouraged by awareness of the conditions that maintain it. Sexual names and labels may give clues about the different processes required for the transcendence of sexual desire; however, left to its own device, the heterosexual hegemony suppresses alternatives and encourages lesbians' invisibility. Rather than lesbian sexual identity being dismissed as irrelevant or even antithetical to Buddhist practice, openness to the experiences of lesbian Buddhists might encourage awareness of the various ways in which sexual desire may be related to teachings and practices. Where 'difference' receives little or no recognition and sexual identity is trivialised or dismissed, lesbians are encouraged to

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<sup>13</sup> In response to the Dalai Lama's call for research, Jose Ignacio Cabezon decided to research sexuality in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, and it was close to completion in Summer 2009 (Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex' p.62).

<sup>14</sup> Jose Ignacio Cabezon, 2009, 'Rethinking Buddhism and Sex', pp.62—64.

<sup>15</sup> Three popular sources of information demonstrate this technique: Peter Harvey, 1990, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history and practices* (Cambridge, Cambridge Uni Press), pp.205—206; Walpola Rahula, 1990, *What the Buddha Taught* (London, Wisdom), p.80; and, Hammalawa Saddhatissa, 1987, *Buddhist Ethics* (London, Wisdom), pp.88—92.



remain closeted and silent, and any insights they have remain closeted with them.

The conflation of sexual desire, sexual orientation and sexual identity may lead to the misapprehension that transcending lesbian desire is as simple as rejecting the 'lesbian' label. A person who has transcended sexual desire is best described as 'asexual'. However, when a lesbian is not clearly identified as such and there is uncertainty about her sexual orientation, heterosexuality, rather than asexuality, is assumed. Furthermore, relinquishing a 'lesbian' label does not necessarily relinquish the sexual desire and cultural values with which it is associated.

There can be little doubt that soteriologically it would be more advantageous to focus upon sexuality's ultimate emptiness than upon sexual identity, per se. Nevertheless, traditional teachings about transcending sexual desire do not refer to what is understood in the West by 'sexual orientation' or 'sexual identity'. In western contexts, denying the significance of sexual identity and maintaining ignorance of lesbians' moral status are wholly inappropriate. Lesbians who raise the issue of sexual orientation in Buddhist contexts are vulnerable to accusations of being overly concerned with sex, and issues of sexuality may be dismissed by saying, for example, that such questions are inappropriate in a religious tradition that aims to transcend identity and desire. These negations fail to grasp two important things: that the hegemony of heterosexuality has supported the social and religious opprobrium of lesbians and gays; and, that lesbian, gay and heterosexual orientations represent different sexual cultures and give rise to different sets of moral values that are significant for Buddhists' soteriology. The tendency towards the opprobrium of homosexuality, combined with the Buddhist emphasis upon right or moral action, results in the need for reassurance about the moral equivalence of all sexual orientations. Nevertheless, lesbians are currently ignored, reassurances are not forthcoming and the lack of attention given to sexual orientation raises questions about the commitment of some Buddhist traditions' to compassion and insight.

While feminism alone is insufficient to represent lesbians' interests, many lesbians find feminism a necessary and instinctive political home. Indeed, to gain an authoritative voice in which to address questions of women's sexuality, lesbian Buddhists must first address the politics of gender and feminist theologies are an increasingly popular aspect of

Buddhist Studies. When the mutual imbrication of Buddhist and western understandings are recognised as forging Western Buddhism, the discomfort of Western Buddhists signals their need for further consideration and accommodation. This thesis signals the discomfort of lesbian Buddhists, who have lacked a discourse in which to construct positive understandings of their circumstances, and it initiates a new discipline in which to address Lesbian Buddhist issues.

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## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

### English

*androcentric* – centered upon the roles and interests of men.

*bi or bi-sexual* – person sexually attracted equally to both sexes.

*closet/closeted* – used since the 1970's to describe a status in which sexual identity remains hidden.

*culture* – distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlook, etc., of a society or group; the way of life of a society or group.

*Eightfold Path* – see *atthangika-magga*.

*essentialist/m* – belief that differences, especially between the sexes, are universal, based in nature and derived from biology.

*false-consciousness* – an ideology that dominates the consciousness of an exploited group or class that simultaneously perpetuates their exploitation.

*feminism* – a commitment to asserting women's positive esteem and autonomy.

*feminist* – person with a women-centred political perspective and commitment.

*feminist consciousness* – has its roots in feminist consciousness-raising during the 1960's and describes an awareness of, and commitment to, feminism.

*five aggregates* – see *khandha*.

*gay* – has been traced to twelfth century French, and seventeenth century English, and since the 1930's, has been a word chosen by homosexual men to describe themselves. Since the 1970's, increasing political activism has rendered 'gay' a positive identity claimed by

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all the definitions in this section are based upon information available in the following sources: Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, and Michael S. Diener, eds., trans. Michael H. Kohn, 1990, *Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston, Shambhala); George E Haggerty, ed., 2000, *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* (NY & London, Garland); Maggie Humm, ed., 1995 (2nd edn.), *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf); Damien Keown, 2004, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press); Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (Taiwan, Buddha Education Foundation); *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, CD-ROM, V.2.0 (Oxford University Press); Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., 2000, *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* [NY & London, Garland].



homosexual men and sometimes claimed by lesbians. Lesbians have been included under gay's remit almost by default, because of the negative connotations of 'lesbian'. The use of 'gay' to describe lesbians endorses the negative understanding of 'lesbian' and deprives lesbians of a language in which to describe themselves.

*homophobe* – person with a pathological aversion to homosexuality and homosexuals.

*homophobia* – prejudice that involves fearful or hateful attitudes towards lesbians and gays.

*homosexual* – lesbian or gay; a man or a woman whose primary emotional and/or sexual attraction is to people of his or her own sex.

*lesbian* – self-claimed identity by a woman whose primary emotional and/or sexual attractions are to women.

*lesbian-feminism* – various types of commitments made by lesbians to feminism; in this thesis, refers to a political commitment to feminism informed by lesbian sexual orientation.

*mainstream* – majority position reflected in views that may differ from those of minorities that have often been marginalised.

*male gaze* – refers to the cultural dominance of masculine objectifications of womanhood that inform mainstream culture and are often internalised by women. The phrase originated in the feminist film theories of Laura Mulvey.<sup>2</sup> Liz Wilson describes a similar process whereby Buddhist women have internalised culturally dominant masculine views of womanhood.<sup>3</sup>

*marginal/margins* – removed from the centre; to treat as marginal is to depreciate, undervalue and impoverish.

*merit* – see *punna*.

*monks* – *bhikkhus*, fully ordained men.

*mujerista* – self-claimed name for Hispanic feminists.

*nuns* – often refers to precept nuns; more accurately refers to *bhikkhunis*,

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Mulvey, 1975, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', pp.6—18, in *Screen*, No.16, on 1.4.08, at <http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/womenstudies/flc436/mulvey.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Liz Wilson, 1995, 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I": the self scrutiny and self-disclosure of nuns in post-Asokan Buddhist hagiographic literature', pp.41—80, in Emilie M Townes & Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, eds., *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Spring, Vol.II, also published as 'Seeing Through the Gendered "I": The Nun's Story', Chapter 5 in Liz Wilson, 1996, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press).

fully ordained women.

*out* – abbreviation of 'out of the closet', meaning openly lesbian or gay; may also refer to bisexuals and transnians.

*pass or passing* – one thing taken for another, often a lesbian taken for a straight woman.

*phallogentrism* – used in feminist theory to describe the way society regards the phallus as a symbol of power and believes that attributes of masculinity constitute the norm; the phallogentric fallacy in many disciplines has been that 'person' stands for 'male' and women's experiences are extraneous to the norm.

*precept* – see *сила*.

*precept-nun* – female renunciant who maintains a minimum of eight or ten precepts.

*queer* – historically, a derogative term for homosexuals, now reclaimed as an inclusive term that deliberately blurs the differences between lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transnians, and non-normative heterosexuals.

*Queer theory* – theorises about sexuality and gender, relationships between the two, and any political and intellectual ramifications; theorises subjectivity in relation to non-normative sexual practices and identities; originated in feminist, lesbian and gay scholarly trends. The term was first used in 1991 by Theresa de Lauretis.<sup>4</sup>

*self-actualised* – motivated to realize one's latent potential, to understand oneself, and to establish oneself as a whole person. Some psychologists, for example, Abraham Maslow, regard it as the highest level of psychological development.

*straight* – 1. heterosexual; 2. conventional.

*strategic essentialism* – Gayatri Spivak (1987) described historical moments of 'strategic essentialism' in which the dispossessed claim of essentialist identities has had powerful effects; ascribing to the understanding that lesbians have a set of common characteristics may be used strategically for political gain.<sup>5</sup>

*text* – commonly refers to any piece of writing; in postmodernity, this is regarded as privileging the written word and now 'text' may refer to any representation.

*tranny/trannie* – the OED describes as a transvestite; nevertheless, it is the

<sup>4</sup> Theresa de Lauretis, 1991, 'Introduction', pp.iii—xviii, in *differences*, 3, Summer.

<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Spivak, 1987, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London Methuen), cited by Maggy Humm, 1995, *Dictionary*, p.81.

colloquial and often preferred name for transgendered, transsexual, and transvestite people.

*transgendered* – person whose identity does not conform to conventional notions of male or female gender but combines or moves between the two; often refers to people undergoing or having undergone sex change procedures.

*transsexual* – person who has the physical characteristics of one sex and a strong and persistent desire to be the other.

*transvestite* – person who desires to wear the clothes of the opposite sex.

*welcoming* – an organisation or place that welcomes heterosexuals, lesbians and gays.

*west/the West* – often refers to the UK and US; may also include Europe, Australia and Canada.

*womanist* – self-claimed name for black feminists and feminists of African descent.

### **Non-English**

(P) = Pali, (S) = Sanskrit

*acinteyya* (P) *avyakṛta-vastu* (S) – the four questions not determined by the Buddha referring to that which cannot or should not be thought:

1. whether the world is eternal, or not, or both, or neither;
2. whether the world is infinite in space, or not, or both, or neither;
3. whether the Buddha exists after death, or not, or both, or neither;
4. whether the *atman* is identical with the body or different from it.<sup>6</sup>

*akusala* – 'unwholesome'; *kammic* volitions/*kamma-cetana* influenced by greed/*lobha*, hatred/*dosa* or delusion/*moha*.

*anatta* (P) *anatman* (S) – no self, the absence of any permanent and unchanging aspect of a being.

*apratistha-nirvana* (S) – unlocalized *nirvana*; the Mahayanist concept where due to compassion a *Buddha* does not take *nirvana* and remains between it and *samsara*/the world.

*arahant/arahat* (P) *arhat* (S) – in Early Buddhism, one who has attained *bodhi*/enlightenment by relinquishing the ten fetters; also referred to

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<sup>6</sup> *Cula-Malunkyoḍa Sutta, The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya*, MN 63, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1998, on 17.10.07, from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html>.

as *ariya-puggala*/noble one; the path/*magga* of the *arahant* is described in terms of four super-mundane paths that have four fruitions/*phala* (see diagram);

PATH AND FRUITIONS OF THE ARAHANT<sup>7</sup>

<u>TEN FETTERS/<i>samyojana</i></u>	<u>PATH &amp; FRUITION/<i>magga</i> &amp; <i>phala</i></u>
1. SELF BELIEF )	
2. SCEPTICAL DOUBT ) destroyed	1. STREAM WINNER/ <i>sotapanna</i>
3. RELIANCE ON RULES & RITUALS )	
4. SENSUOUS CRAVING ) reduced	2. ONCE-RETURNER/ <i>sakadagami</i>
5. HATRED AND ILL-WILL ) destroyed	3. NON-RETURNER/ <i>anagami</i>
6. CRAVING MATERIAL EXISTENCE )	
7. CRAVING IMMATERIAL EXISTENCE )	
8. CONCEIT ) <u>destroyed</u>	4. ARAHANT/ <i>ariya-puggala</i>
9. RESTLESSNESS )	
10. IGNORANCE )	

*ariya-puggala* (P) – 'Noble One'; see *arahant*.

*ariya-sacca* (P) *arya-satya* (S) – the Four Noble Truths at the heart of Buddhist doctrine:

1. *dukkha*/suffering;
2. *samudaya*/arising of *dukkha*;
3. *nirodha*/cessation of *dukkha*;
4. *ariya-atthangika-maga*/the Eightfold Path leading to cessation.

*asava* (P) *asravas* (S) – cankers, outflows; the three or four impurities or defilements that cause rebirth: sense desire, desire for eternal existence, ignorance, and wrong views (sometimes omitted).

*atta* (P) *atman* (S) – self or soul, a permanent and unchanging aspect of a being.

*attha-sila* (P) *astanga-sila* (S) – eight precepts, which are the ten precepts/*dasa sila* with seven and eight fused and the tenth omitted.

*atthangika-magga* (P) *astanga-marga* (S) – the Eightfold Path (see diagram); fourth Noble Truth/*ariya-sacca* leading to the extinction of suffering;

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH/ATTHANGIKA-MAGGA

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>UNDERSTOOD AS:</u>
iii. <i>Wisdom/Panna</i>	
1. Right view	based in the Buddha's teachings.
2. Right thought	free from lust, ill-will and cruelty.
i. <i>Morality/Sila</i>	
3. Right speech	used productively.
4. Right action	maintaining morality/ <i>sila</i> .
5. Right livelihood	avoiding harmful occupations.
ii. <i>Meditation/Samadhi</i>	

<sup>7</sup> Based on Nyanatiloka, 1987, *Dictionary, 'Ariya-puggala'*, p.21.

6. Right effort that fosters wholesome things.
7. Right mindfulness being fully aware.
8. Right concentration that cultivates wholesome consciousness.

*avacara* (P) – sphere or realm.

*avyakata* (P) – indeterminate moral state, neither wholesome/*kusala* nor unwholesome/*akusala*; *kammically* neutral.

*bhikkhuni* (P) *bhiksuni* (S) – nun who has received high ordination.

*bhikkhu* (P) *bhiksu* (S) – monk who has received high ordination.

*bhumi* (S) – 'level'; stage of spiritual development; commonly refers to the six or ten stages of a *bodhisattva*.

*bodhi* (P & S) – awakening or enlightenment, attained when the Four Noble Truths are fully comprehended.

*bodhisatta* (P) *bodhisattva* (S) – 'enlightenment being'; particularly significant in Mahayana traditions; one who has entered the path to Buddhahood and is cultivating the perfections/*paramita* (see diagram);

#### THE BODHISATTVA PATH<sup>8</sup>

<u>STAGE/BHUMI</u>	<u>PERFECTION/PARAMITA</u>
1. JOYFUL	GENEROSITY/ <i>DANA</i>
2. PURE	MORALITY/ <i>SILA</i>
3. LUMINOUS	PATIENCE/ <i>KSANTI</i>
4. BRILLIANT	COURAGE/ <i>VIRYA</i>
5. HARD TO CONQUER	MEDITATION/ <i>SAMADHI</i>
Personal development completed.	
6. FACING FORWARD	WISDOM/ <i>PRAJNA</i> (INSIGHT)
Bodhisattvas are perfect in ethics and wisdom and enter the threshold of the transcendent	
7. GOING FAR	SKILFUL-MEANS/ <i>UPAYA-KUSALA</i>
8. IMMOVABLE	VOW/ <i>PRANIDHANA</i>
9. THE GOOD	POWER/ <i>BALA</i>
10. DHARMA CLOUDS	KNOWLEDGE/ <i>JNANA</i>
BUDDHAHOOD	

*brahmacariya* (P) *brahmacarya* (S) – pure or chaste life, usually includes a vow of celibacy.

*Buddha* (P & S) – enlightenment/*bodhi* being; one who has attained enlightenment; Theravadins recognise three kinds:

1. *Samma-sambuddha* (P) – perfect Buddha, enlightened by own effort and teaches;
2. *Pacceka-buddha* (P) – enlightened by own effort and does not teach;
3. *Savaka-bodhi, arahant* (P) – enlightened by another's teachings.

<sup>8</sup> 'Bhumi', 'Bodhisattva', 'Paramita', 'Sad-paramita', (S) Damien Keown, 2004, *Dictionary*, pp.34, 38, 212, 242.

*cakka* (P) *cakra* (S) – 'wheel'; has three understandings:

1. may be used symbolically with eight spokes to signify the Eightfold Path or with twelve spokes to signify Dependent Origination/*Paticcasamuppada*;
2. in tantric practice, the *cakras* are energy centres in the body;
3. a circular religious diagram or *mandala*.

*cakkavatti* (P) *cakravartin* (S) – one who owns the wheel that symbolizes the conquering progress and expanding sovereignty from which derives the expression, 'he sets rolling the wheel of the law'; often used as an epithet for the Buddha whose teachings spread through many lands.

*cetana* (P & S) – intention, volition or motivation; one of the seven mental factors/*cetasika* bound up with consciousness, namely: 1. sense impression/*phassa*; 2. feeling/*vedana*; 3. perception/*sanna*; 4. volition/*cetana*; 5. concentration/*samadhi*; 6. vitality/*jivita*; and, 7. attention/*manasikara*.

*chanda* (P & S) – intention, desire, will, motivation; a psychological faculty that motivates action and may be good, bad, or neutral, determined by the character of the volition/*cetana*.

*dasa-akusala-karmapatta* (S) – 'Ten Bad Paths of Action'; negative expressions of the Ten Good Deeds/*dasa-kusala-karmapatta*.

*dasa-kusala-karmapatta* (S) – 'Ten Good Deeds', not to be confused with the ten precepts/*dasa-sila*; a formulation of moral precepts especially important in Mahayana traditions that include abstention from: 1. killing; 2. stealing; 3. sexual misconduct; 4. lying; 5. slander; 6. harsh speech; 7. frivolous or idle speech; and the cultivation of: 7. generosity; 8. compassion; and, 10. right views. They are mundane/*laukika* when adopted by ordinary beings and supermundane/*lokottara* when accompanied by the skilful means and insight of *bodhisattvas*.

*dasa-bala* (S) – the ten powers of a Buddha to understand: 1. what is and is not possible; 2. the maturation of *karma*; 3. the qualities of beings; 4. the tendencies of beings; 5. the constituents of the world; 6. the paths leading to realms of existence; 7. pure and impure behaviour; 8. the arising of meditative states; 9. the death and rebirth of beings; 10. liberation through the destruction of the outflows/*asavas*.

*dasa-sila* (P & S) – ten precepts, moral undertakings or 'steps of training' that incorporate the five/*panca* and eight/*attha* precepts/*sila*; may be referred to as *sikkhapada*; they are to refrain from,

1. killing or injuring sentient beings;
2. taking what has not been given;
3. misconduct in sensual matters;
4. unskilful speech;
5. taking intoxicants;
6. eating after midday;
7. dancing, singing, music and shows;
8. using garlands, scent and adornments;
9. using luxurious chairs and beds;
10. accepting gold and silver.

*dasasil-matas* (P) – 'ten precept mothers'; in Sri Lanka, the name given to ten-precept nuns.

*dhamma* (P) *dharma* (S) – has three meanings:

1. the natural order that underpins the universe;
2. the whole of the Buddha's teachings; and,
3. individual atomic-like elements that collectively constitute the psychophysical world.

*Dharmagupta* – one of the eighteen schools of Early Buddhism whose version of the *Vinaya* has been maintained.

*dukkha* (P) *duhkha* (S) – suffering or unsatisfactoriness; the first Noble Truth and cornerstone of the *dhamma*; has three aspects:

1. *dukkha* – suffering and pain;
2. *sankhara-dukkha* – the suffering inherent in conditioned states;
3. *viparinama-dukkha* – suffering caused by change and impermanence.

*garu-dhamma* (P) – eight additional 'weighty rules' the Buddha imposed upon *bhikkhunis* as a condition for the high ordination of women.

*guru* (S) – 'weighty'; general Indian term for a teacher.

*Hinayana* (S) – 'lesser vehicle'; disparaging term used by *Mahayanists* for the 18 schools of Early Buddhism, of which only the Theravada remains.

*Jataka* (P) – genre of Early Buddhist literature describing the former lives of the Buddha.

*kamma* (P) *karma* (S) – 'action'; conveys the consequences of good and bad actions and ultimately determines the conditions of rebirth.

*karuna* (P & S) – 'compassion'; in Theravada Buddhism, is one of the four Sublime Abodes/*brahma-vihara*; in Mahayana Buddhism, is the necessary complement to insight/*prajna* and an essential ingredient of enlightenment.

*khandha* (P) *skandha* (S) – the five aggregates, categories or groups into which all physical and mental phenomena may be placed, comprised of: 1. *rupa*/form; 2. *vedana*/feeling; 3. *sanna*/perception; 4. *sankhara*/mental formations; and, 5. *vinna*/consciousness.

*kusala* (P) *kausalya* (S) – karmically wholesome, morally good, skilful. In the *Abhidhamma*, *kusala* is part of the threefold qualitative division of all consciousness: wholesome/*kusala*, unwholesome/*akusala*, and kammically neutral/*avyakata*.

*lama* – Tibetan title denoting teacher; widely used to signify a Tibetan monk.

*Madhyamaka* – 'Middle School'; a system of philosophy founded by Nagarjuna in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, CE; an influential Mahayana tradition that maintains the Buddha's teachings of a middle course between eternalism and nihilism by a dialectic that reveals opposing positions being self-negating.

*Mahabodhi Society* – an organisation founded in India in 1891 to resuscitate Buddhism; established in the UK in 1925 and branches exist throughout the world.

*Mahayana* – 'the great vehicle'; collective name for all Buddhist traditions that ascribe to the *bodhisattva* ideal.

*mandala* (S) – circular or oblong diagram with mystical significance, often found in tantric Buddhism.

*Metteya* (P) *Maitreya* (S) – name of the Buddha to be, in contrast to the historical Buddha.

*Mulamadhyamaka-karika* (S) – 'The Root Verses on the Madhyamaka System', often referred to as the 'Fundamentals of the Middle Way'; title of Nagarjuna's text that formed the basis of the Madhyamaka School.

*neyyattha* (P) – implicit meaning

*nitattha* (P) – explicit meaning

*nibbana* (P) *nirvana* [S] – 'extinction' or 'blown out'; the *summum bonum* of Buddhism and goal of the Eightfold Path; its attainment marks the end of cyclic existence and delivery from *samsara*.

*pacceka-buddha* – see *Buddha*.

*panca-sila* (P & S) – five precepts; see 1—5 of the ten precepts/*dasa-sila*; common to most schools and undertaken by all Buddhists.

*parami* (P) *paramita* (S) – perfection; ten qualities leading to Buddhahood, formulated differently in Theravada and Mahayana traditions,

1. In Theravada they are: 1. generosity/*dana*; 2. morality/*sila*; 3. renunciation/*nekkhamma*; 4. wisdom/*panna*; 5. energy/*viriya*; 6. patience/*khanti*; 7. truthfulness/*sacca*; 8. resolution/*adhitthana*; 9. loving-kindness/*metta*; 10. equanimity/*upekkha*.

2. In Mahayana, they are: 1. generosity/*dana*; 2. morality/*sila*; 3.



patience/*ksanti*; 4. courage or effort/*virya*; 5. meditation/*samadhi*; 6. intuitive insight/*prajna*; 7. skilful-means/*upaya-kausalya*; 8. vow/*pranidhana*; 9. power/*bala*; 10. knowledge/*jnana*.

*paramattha-sacca* (P) *paramartha-satya* (S) – see *sacca*.

*parinibbana* (P) *parinirvana* (S) – extinction of the five groups of existence/*khandha*; occurs at the death of a Buddha or *arahat* who thereby attain *nibbana*; also referred to as *khandha-parinibbana*.

*Paticcasamuppada* (P) *Pratitya-samutpada* (S) – Dependent Origination; the teaching that twelve links condition all psycho-physical phenomena (see diagram);

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION/PATICCASAMUPPADA<sup>9</sup>

<u>CONDITION/NIDANA</u>	<u>ARISING</u>
1. Ignorance/ <i>avijja</i> is.	
2. Conditioned by ignorance/ <i>avijja</i>	karma formations/ <i>sankhara</i> .
3. Conditioned by karma formations	consciousness/ <i>vinnana</i> .
4. Conditioned by consciousness	name and form/ <i>namarupa</i> .
5. Conditioned by mind and body	six sense media/ <i>ayatana</i> .
6. Conditioned by the six senses	sense contact/ <i>phassa</i> .
7. Conditioned by sense contact	feeling/ <i>vedana</i> .
8. Conditioned by feeling	craving/ <i>tanha</i> .
9. Conditioned by craving	clinging/ <i>upadana</i> .
10. Conditioned by clinging	becoming/ <i>bhava</i> .
11. Conditioned by becoming	birth/ <i>jati</i> .
12. Conditioned by birth	aging and death/ <i>jara-marana</i> .

*patimokkha* (P) *pratimoksa* (S) – set of rules governing monks (*bhikkhu-patimokkha*) and nuns (*bhikkhuni-patimokkha*), found in the first division of the *Vinaya Pitaka*.

*pitaka* (P) – 'basket'; one of the three collections of texts that together constitute the *ti-pitaka*/three baskets of the Pali Canon.

*prajna* (S) – wisdom, insight, discriminating knowledge, cultivated through insight meditation.

*Prajna-paramita Sutras* – Perfection of Wisdom literature, which advocates the *bodhisattva* ideal, elaborates the doctrine of 'emptiness/*sunyata*', and develops the concept of skilful means/*upaya-kausalya*.

*pranidhana* (S) – *bodhisattva*-vow; resolution undertaken by *bodhisattvas* at the outset of their spiritual careers; includes the vow to postpone *nirvana* until all beings are liberated.

*punna* (P) *punya* (S) – merit, meritorious action, virtue or the results of such

<sup>9</sup> *Samyutta Nikaya* II, XII.2. trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, at [www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.html](http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.html), on 7.8.07; & 'Paticcasamuppada', Nyanatiloka, 1987, Dictionary, p.128—136.

actions; good *karma*.

*sacca* (P) *satya* (S) – truth, has three aspects:

1. *sammuti-sacca* – conventional, mundane, commonly accepted truth;
2. *paramattha-sacca* – ultimate, most accurate and philosophically precise truth;
3. *ariya-sacca* – the Four Noble Truths.

*sad-paramita* (S) – 'six perfections'; found in Mahayana traditions, an original list of six perfections practised by *bodhisattvas* during training was later increased to ten.

*Sakti/Shakti* (S) – force, power, energy; in Hinduism, the name of Shiva's consort and the personification of primal energy; the dynamic aspect of Brahman through whose agency he creates, maintains and dissolves; the expression is also used in Buddhist tantra.

*samma-sambodhi* (P) *sambodhi* (S) – a perfect Buddha; see *Buddha*.

*sammuti-sacca* (P) *samvrti-satya* (S) – see *sacca*.

*samsara* (P & S) – 'perpetual wandering'; repeated cycles of birth, old age and death, characterised by suffering/*dukkha*.

*sangha* (P) *sangha* (S) – traditionally, the community of Buddhist monks; the third of the three refuges/*tiratana*: Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*; *ariya-sangha* refers to the community of noble ones/*ariya-puggala*; the 'fourfold *sangha*' refers collectively to monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

*satya-dvaya* (S) – both relative/*sammuti* and ultimate/*paramattha* truths/*sacca*.

*sikkhamat* – in Thailand, the name given to precept nuns, who are also known as '*mai chees*'.

*sikkhapada* (P) – 'steps of training', moral rules; precepts, which may number five/*panca-sila*, eight/*attha-sila*, or ten/*dasa-sila*.

*sila* (P & S) – 'morality'; the first of three divisions of the Eightfold Path/*Atthangika-magga* that incorporates right speech, action and livelihood; common aspects are formulated in the ten precepts/*dasa sila*.

*songyum* – Tibetan, 'secret mother', refers to the real, imaginary, or metaphorical sexual partner of a lama.

*sunnatta* (P) *sunyata* (S) – emptiness (of permanence); the ultimate truth of the way things are; has a technical understanding in Mahayana traditions, where it is also referred to as 'suchness'.

- sutta* (P) *sutra* (S) – 'thread'; discourse of the Buddha; in the Theravada tradition, gathered in the *Sutta Pitaka* of the Pali Canon; in Mahayana traditions, *sutra* are often independent works written in Sanskrit.
- tanha* (P) *trnsa* (S) – 'thirst' or 'craving'; chief root of suffering and cycles of rebirth/*samsara*; eighth link of Dependent Origination/*Paticcasamuppada*.
- tantra/tantric Buddhism* – includes practices based on treatise known as *tantras* that promise accelerated access to enlightenment/*bodhi* and release from *samsara*; they involve yoga, sexual ritual and meditation, and were adopted into some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, most notably in Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism.
- tathata* (S) – thusness or suchness; equated with emptiness/*sunyata* and indicates the ultimate truth of the way things are.
- Theravada* (P) – 'doctrine of the elders'; the only school remaining of the eighteen schools of Early Buddhism, sometimes called Southern Buddhism or Pali Buddhism; the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings.
- thilashin* – Burmese, name given to precept nuns.
- tipitaka* (P) *tripitaka* (S) – the three baskets or collections of texts that constitute the Pali Canon: the *Sutra Pitaka* or Basket of Discourses; the *Vinaya Pitaka* or Basket of Discipline; and, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* or Basket of Higher Teaching.
- tiratana* (P) *triratna* (S) – 'three jewels', 'three refuges'; collective name for the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*.
- upaya* (S) – in Mahayana traditions, refers to skilful method or skill in means.
- upaya-kausalya* (S) – 'skilful-means'; in Mahayana contexts, refers to any method employed by an enlightened being to benefit others.
- Vajrayana* (S) – 'diamond vehicle'; the tantric Buddhist path named after the *vajra* or thunderbolt that symbolises the imperishable nature of enlightenment/*bodhi*, the indivisibility of appearance and emptiness/*sunyata* or compassion/*karuna* and insight/*prajna*.
- Vinaya Pitaka* (P & S) – 'basket of discipline'; one of the three divisions of the *tipitaka*/Pali Canon. The Theravada *Vinaya* survives in Pali, its original language; other versions exist in translation, and belong to Masamghika, Mahisasaka, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvastivadin, and Mulasarvastivada schools.

*Vipassana* (P) *Vipasyana* (S) – insight meditation, leads to insight into the *dhamma*; one of two types of Buddhist meditation, the other being *samatha* or calming meditation.

*yana* – way or vehicle; used by Mahayanists to refer to the three understandings of the *dhamma*: Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

*Yogacara* (S) – major Mahayana school that emerged in the fourth century CE, also known as Vijnavada, 'the way of consciousness'.