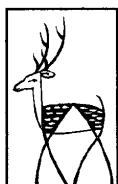


Sexuality Repositioned: Diversity and the Law

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New Battlegrounds: Genetic Maps and Sexual Politics

LYNNE SEGAL

FULLY FOUR DECADES on from the moment when so many celebrated its emancipation, trouble still lurks all around sex and sexuality:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three . . .
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles first LP. (Larkin, 1974)

Larkin, perhaps, should not have regretted—however playfully—that sexual freedom came too late for him, when sorry, secret moments, punitive public sanctions, violent fantasies and remorse, relentless commercial marketing and suspect enticements, surround our sex lives still.

LOVE HURTS

The more things change, the more it seems fresh obstructions or incitements arise to trouble the joys or consolations we might seek in intimacies with others. Where the multiplicity of sexual pleasures and identities has been most strenuously insisted upon, theorized and catered for, in the USA, we have the starkest portrayals in fiction or film of the cunning perils of its pursuit. Massively popular with its readers and audiences, portrayals of the pains of sex and relationships are evidently eagerly consumed: whether in the hysterically fear laden, unhappy, violent sexual obsessions of a Thomas Pynchon character, Don DeLillo's isolated, fragmented men and women for whom pleasure is always combined with anguish or, most hideously ritualistic, in Brett Ellis's conjuring up of a new anti-hero from the USA. In *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman's obsession with ravenous, murderous sex can only ever trigger a hunger for even more sadistically murderous, dismembering, encounters:

My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. (Pynchon, 1991; DeLillo, 1998; Easton, 1991: 377).

In the social sciences, one of the founders of Men's Studies in the USA, the sociologist Harry Brod, addresses men's sexual discontents generally, while writing of his own sexual discomforts and anxieties, mourning:

There have been too many times when I have guiltily resorted to impersonal fantasy because the genuine love I felt for a woman wasn't enough to convert feelings into performance (Brod, 1989).

He blamed contemporary culture, the pin-ups of *Playboy*, for indoctrinating him with desires that could never be fulfilled. Women's continuing sexual sorrows, at least according to one strand of feminism—one that perhaps surprisingly became rather influential in the Social Sciences—were projected firmly on to men. Those same centre-folds were also held to blame for culturally constructing men's sexuality as predatory, if not sadistic: 'With lovers like men—who needs torturers?', British feminist literary scholar, Susanne Kappeler, asked in 1986 (Kappeler, 1986: 214).

Increasingly, in the closing decades of the 20th century, ever more diverse and innovative therapies have flourished in the self-help arena, designed to treat the newly coined 'sex-addiction', with its ten definitive attributes, a national treatment centre for its cure in California, and support groups dotted across the landscape from New York to Nashville and Los Angeles. Those not suffering from 'sex-addiction', however, may be incubating an alternative 'disorder of desire', including the 15% of men overall said to report lack of sexual interest, the 'tragic' 50% of men over 40 years reported by drug companies to be suffering from some form of erectile dysfunction, reaching, we learn, a 'catastrophic' near 70% in men over 70: all in all, as many as 30 million men, it is estimated, may be suffering from this new sexual 'disease' in the USA alone (Feldman *et al.*, 1994).

The sexual frustrations and miseries described in literature, women's studies, sociology or the psychotherapeutic domain, all tended to be attributed to hierarchical gender regimes or a general cultural malaise attending the frantic consumerism of 'late' capitalism. However, the medicalisation of sexuality associated with diagnoses of erectile dysfunction represents a return to biology in the sexual domain. Indeed, in many areas, culture itself is being newly subsumed back into biology in an upsurge of Darwinian teleology, especially in my own first discipline, psychology. The propagation of evolutionary psychology, which has been especially admired in popular science journalism, has tended to provide confirmation of traditional blueprints for sexual difference. It has refocused attention on the presumed stability of gendered polarities of sexual behaviour, just when the visible shifts and complexities of desire and sexual practices would seem to give us every reason to reject them. But, 'if sex is that straightforward Darwinian project', as the astute psychoanalyst Adam Phillips asks, 'why does it give us so much trouble?' Why indeed? More provocatively still, Phillips adds, 'Freud shows us how if we are *not* in trouble we are not having sex' (Phillips, 2003). Uniquely, Freud, and his psychoanalytic legacy, right up to the present day, has rarely failed to emphasise a pessimistic vision of the

ineluctable dangers and disappointments of sex. Although via a different theoretical route, in the early years of sexology—now more than a century ago—Freud's contemporary, and the founding father of sexology, Krafft-Ebing, had also stressed the perils of perversion, when the sexual instinct, for a variety of congenital causes or self-indulgently induced degeneracies, failed to follow the 'natural' or nonpathological course of its biological substratum. However, in the twentieth century, especially in the wake of the 1960s, the now increasingly welcomed science of sexology tended to stress the multiple pleasures of sex, once men and women learned to overcome their 'psychologic inhibitions' and all acquired the appropriate skills for giving and receiving full orgasmic satisfaction. With pleasure-seeking in the air, in the post-Fifties 'American'-led Western world, there was an explosion of behaviouristic sex therapy available, launched by Masters and Johnson (Masters and Johnson, 1966; Masters and Johnson, 1970).

In a new twist, today there is less emphasis on the acquiring of skills, technique and appropriate sex-positive attitudes (though these ideas persist), but they are overlaid by a somewhat different return to biological and chemical basics. Here, it is not so much our ancestral past, although knowledge of the human genome is seen as crucial, but rather the rise of the professional molecular biologist who will help determine our sexual futures. New genetic dreams of a cure for all that ails us, both physically and emotionally, has fuelled the extraordinary rise in the medicalization of sexual anxieties, nowhere more so than in the attention paid to the auditing of men's penile performance. Sexual dysfunctions that were hardly known to exist till recently are diagnosed in tandem with the medical solutions designed to alleviate them, as pharmaceutical corporations increasingly set the contemporary sexual agenda.

This chapter will therefore survey the renewed interest in what is seen as the biological foundations and future of human sexuality, but only after placing it in the context of the highly conflictual struggles that were waged in the name of sexual liberation and sexual politics in the closing decades of the 20th century. These struggles, as many others here have written, illuminate the power relations never far removed from human sexuality. Aspects of power occur across the broadest spectrum of sexually imbued practices, even those not recognised as such: from the personal investments we have in our sexual identities, to the high levels of both coercion and constraint, incentives and seductions, that surround sexual life, as well as the institutional arrangements and cultural discourses which guide and give meaning to our most intimate encounters, dreams, fears and frustrations. It is these struggles which turn our bodies into battlegrounds, on which, as the outstanding French anthropologist, Maurice Godelier, comments: 'it is not so much sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body's sexuality' (Godelier, 1981: 17).

The latest return to biological basics boosted by pharmaceutical interests in administering to our body's sexual proclivities and possibilities is, in my view, testimony to one main thing: the more we are promised simple pathways to

earthly delights, the easier prey we become as objects of manipulation, eager to escape realities where love hurts and sexual pleasure eludes us. This is all hardly surprising, if we believe we live in times when people are increasingly uprooted and unsettled, too often bereft of confirmatory meaning and social belongings, in cities that become dumping grounds for globally created problems and changes, as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, and numerous other sociologists of everyday life from the late twentieth century have been arguing (Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001). But let me look back a generation.

SEXUAL LIBERATION AND THE RISE OF SEXUAL POLITICS

The cultural and legislative shifts of the 1960s in much of the metropolitan 'Western' world, at a time of full employment, rising wages and increasing equality, really did transform the sexual landscape, shifting the ways the world impinges upon our sexual lives.¹ If sex is always somewhere at the centre of society, the space it occupied emerged more visibly, with far greater insistence upon its own centrality and significance, than it ever had before. With huge success, young people set out to overturn the sexual hypocrisy of the previous decade, celebrating the importance of sexual openness, indeed, the importance of sex as pleasure, sex for its own sake alone. '*Make love. We must make love. Instead of making money*', the popular poet, Adrian Mitchell, summed up the decade: *instead of making war, competing for status, committing any other transgression or iniquity*, he might well have added, in that hedonistic utopian moment. It was a little more complex for women. The legacy of that tumultuous decade, when for some prosperity and transformation seemed equally pervasive, is now a battleground. It arouses fondness or loathing, but mostly moralistic dismissal as the last moment of irresponsible, self-absorbed, dreamers. Feminist historian, Sheila Rowbotham, in her memoir of the 'Sixties', *Promise of a Dream*, depicts herself as a confused teenager in the late 1950s, determined (with all her close friends) to break out of the invasive patterns of passivity and hypocrisy, though still surrounded by silence, ignorance and prejudice, without the least guidance, resources or protection for doing so. Although determined to recover from the ordeal of an attempted rape (while still a virgin at seventeen), by engaging in freely chosen sexual contact, she remained, she recalls, for several years comprehensively ignorant about everything to do with sex, still wondering what exactly it was several years after becoming sexually active within the beatnik Bohemian haunts of London and Paris: 'I was not the only one steering without a compass between the dreaded Scylla of frigidity and the humiliating Charybdis branded "nymphomania"' (Rowbotham, 2000: 48).

¹ Wages rose by 72%, prices by only 45%, between 1951 and 1963, (Hewison, 1986: 6).

Incongruously, for those anti-materialists wishing to subvert the old order, a booming commercial market was itself suddenly promoting the hedonistic youth movement of emancipation, sex and pleasure: Che Guevara T-shirts for all, 'armed love' on the high streets. Nevertheless, in these years when the notion of 'sexual politics' came to the fore, political struggle against exploitation and oppression, on the home front and abroad, was increasingly seen as inseparable from personal liberation. The term itself was borrowed from Wilhelm Reich's Sex-Pol years, when he had tried to combine Freudian and Marxist perspectives to offer practical advice on sexual matters back in 1920s inter-war Berlin. By the end of the Sixties, whether citing Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Allen Ginsberg or David Cooper, throbbing to the beat of rock, dazed by drugs, dazed by the underground press or simply influenced by the stylish liberalism of the day, sexual pleasure was widely seen as a progressive force, one capable of transforming human relations, however divergently people saw such progress.

Furthermore, for all the new snares, anxieties and terrors sex might still hold for them, it was women who gained most from the many legislative reforms on contraception, abortion, divorce and, later, equal pay and recognition of violence against women, especially policy reforms enacted between 1967 and 1975. Women could now be sexually freer and begin challenging the hitherto ubiquitous double standards (hailing young men's sexual prowess as his entry into 'manhood', while desiring 'virginity' in single women) with the marketing of the (then rather dangerously high-dosage) contraceptive pill from 1961—made available free on NHS prescription from 1967. Women did have far more sexual autonomy.² The marketing of the pill also made sex newsworthy, inciting endless public debate. Sex was now a new medium of pleasure for almost everybody on achieving adulthood, the route to social recognition and identity, long before marriage—if it came. Moreover, from quite early on, and although feeding new forms of virulent machismo, it was also clear that men, despite perhaps mouthing applause for women's new sexual freedom, often felt threatened by it. That old chauvinist cheerleader, Norman Mailer, sounded an early alarm: now that women have gained control over reproduction, he lamented, a man might have to bow out 'to the vibrations of his superior, a vibrator' (Mailer, 1972: 126). (His words would prove prophetic, at least for a few feminists, for a short while). Meanwhile, it was only gay men who benefited directly from the partial decriminalisation of consenting homosexual activity in the Sexual Offences Act of 1967.³

With feminism hovering in the wings, it would not take long for women to move on from hearing sex celebrated as liberation to seeking 'liberated sex'. In the counter-culture flourishing in the late Sixties, surrounded by demeaning images of themselves in ever more blatant, indeed increasingly sadistic, sexist iconography, militancy was being forced upon women. Meeting together, they

² See Rowbotham, 2000; Segal, 1994, chapter 1.

³ See Hall, 1980.

would soon begin speaking of women's active sexual choice and agency, first of all, in the context of a highly politicised, egalitarian, protest milieu (with the Vietnam war, and female guerrilla fighters, its backdrop). The birth of Women's Liberation and a specifically feminist sexual politics was now ineluctable. Newly born feminists, alongside the gay men and lesbians of early Gay Liberation (lesbians would soon leave Gay Liberation to join Women's Liberation), quickly saw that pleasure was as much a social and political as a personal matter, one they analysed then as hitherto defined and regulated in ways that served the interests of the state and the capitalist market. (This was before the discovery of Michel Foucault, and his genealogy of the multiple cultural institutions and discourses dictating the norms and regimes of 'sexuality'.) It was seeing and hearing the everyday language and iconography of the joys of sex focussed on the power and activity of straight men, while subordinating and disparaging straight women (as 'chics'), lesbians and gay men (as 'queers'), that inspired the women's and the gay liberation movements into a battle against both sexism and, soon, 'heterosexism' and 'homophobia' as well. This radical sexual politics had yet to become more sensitive to race, or to place sexual exploitation in its global context, which is at the heart of the most progressive sexual agendas today.⁴

The dismissive disdain for the frivolities of 'sexual liberation' and the 'sexual politics' it triggered is widespread nowadays, even within feminist scholarship. Yet, it was the ramifications of that battle that led all the way onwards from confronting sexism, to opposing all gender hierarchies as well as challenging the dominant understanding of both 'sexuality' and 'gender'. From the far-reaching, still ongoing debate about the care and treatment of women in relation to all aspects of fertility control and childbirth, the continuing pressure on men to share the responsibilities of household tasks and parenting, campaigns against violence against women and child sexual abuse, to the celebration of diverse or multiple sexualities and the highly successful 'safer sex' strategies pioneered by gay communities against the spread of HIV and AIDS, the struggle for sexual liberation would play *a*, if not *the*, key role in changing patterns of life in Western countries. Indeed, it was the repression of any movements of sexual liberation in the former Eastern European 'state socialist' countries that constituted the prime source of the oppression of women in those regimes. Despite greater access to childcare facilities and extensive participation in the workforce, Eastern Europe saw almost no politicisation of interpersonal relationships or sexual experience, making sexism, violence against women and exclusive maternal responsibility for childcare and housework as unchallenged as it was ubiquitous (Einhorn, 1991).

Nevertheless, trouble soon stalked feminist sexual politics specifically, and feminists fell out with each other as early dreams of the significance of their new-found sexual freedoms unravelled. The persistence of men's sexual coerciveness

⁴ See Lancaster and di Leonardo (1997).

and violence towards women was the first obstacle, contaminating and eventually silencing straight feminists' talk of liberation. Alternative visions of feminist sexual practices, supposedly freeing desire from fantasies of power, submission or other echoes of phallocentrism, bred new forms of feminist prescriptiveness, quite at odds with the ambiguous dynamics of sexual pleasures, fantasy and desire itself. Some feminists, appropriating both Freud and Foucault for their own ends, did move on to analyse the fuller complexities, ambivalences and unsettling elements of power and submission present in all desire—female as well as male.⁵ But there was an overall retreat in mainstream feminism to one situating women as comprehensive victims of men's lust and violence, in need of protection from the 'degrading' images of pornography which fanned them (Dworkin, 1981; MacKinnon, 1987). The 1980s would prove a decade of 'sex wars' between feminists, continuing to this day. In my view, some level of confusion is quite inevitable when re-thinking women's sexual agency, given the crucible of contradictions at the heart of sexual desire, which might position us as defenceless and passive at the very same time as we feel most assertive and powerful, or the opposite, and everything in between. In sex we attempt to relieve narcissistic wounds which carry the traces of all our earlier frustrations, hurts and humiliation or, simply, the losses of time passing. All this can be captured easily in fiction, but rarely if ever in traditional measuring tools of the social scientist, although recent narrative analysis at times brings us closer.

In the wider world, well beyond feminist contention, new sexual anxieties were soon triggered by a change in the political climate. As governments of the Right were firmly installed in power in the UK and USA in the 1980s, recession, unemployment and other set-backs meant that the time was now ripe for all kinds of backlash against the recent sexual 'permissiveness', as social anxieties all too easily find displaced expression in sexual scaremongering. An emerging moral Right launched new attacks against women's economic independence (said to be at the expense of men), against single mothers and homosexual practices, massively reinforced when HIV-AIDS struck down its first sufferers (in the West, most visible amongst gay men). For women, a retreat from early feminist dreams of a freer, compassionate world was always likely to accompany the defeat (despite many partial successes) of overall attempts to build a more equal society. Simply finding the time and space for exploring the ambivalent structures of intimacy proved more difficult in less secure times, at least according to many North American and British commentators observing the increasingly busy and fragmented lives of 'late modernity'.⁶

⁵ See Vance (1984); Snitow *et al* (1994).

⁶ See, for example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995); Dunant and Porter (1996).

CONSERVATIVE RETRENCHMENTS: BIOLOGICAL TALES

As the German philosopher Theodor Adorno was already arguing back in the 1920s, it is inconceivable that any object or concept could be viewed from a single all-encompassing standpoint, least of all, we should now be well aware, confronting the elusive topic of sexuality. His 'negative dialectic' called for a notion of 'open thinking' to throw light upon the endless array of potentially new perspectives obscured or hidden behind familiar conceptions (Adorno, 1973). However, one of the founding metaphors of Western science, surviving three centuries of just such critique, is the exact opposite: the fantasy that the explanation of all life, from the molecular to the social, can be explained in terms of a few single overarching laws.⁷ No scientists have pursued this goal more assiduously than those hoping to bring order to the unruly domain of gender, sex and sexuality. It is to sustain belief in some such underpinning simplicity, beneath the disarming complexity of life, that we find again the most flagrant misappropriations of Darwin's legacy, overturning much that we seemed to have already worked out long ago. Thus does Britain's foremost science promoter, Richard Dawkins, battle to defend the classic ideology of science, asserting as its first axiom: 'Plants and animals alike are all—in their immensely complicated, enmeshed ways doing the same fundamental thing, which is propagating genes.'⁸

However, this time around, Darwinian notions of descent through natural selection are usually not, as they were in the beginning, used to confirm racial hierarchy—then seen as intertwined with sexual hierarchy (racism usually arrives culturally freighted nowadays) but rather to shore up the ever more ambiguous blueprint for sexual difference. Whatever the contingencies of identity stressed in feminist philosophies, like that of Judith Butler (1989), we are told, scientific law and order comes from the sex cells: 'the "gametes" of males are smaller and more numerous than the gametes of females', Dawkins explains, 'it is possible to interpret all other differences between the sexes as stemming from this one basic difference. . . . Female exploitation begins here', he declared in 1976 (Dawkins, 1976, p 153; 162). All human behaviour, his American counterpart, EO Wilson, echoed, 'faithfully' obeys this *one* biological principle:

It pays males to be aggressive, hasty, fickle [and] indiscriminating . . . females to be coy, to hold back until they can identify the male with the best genes' (Wilson, 1978: 552).

When first propounded in the 1970s, this new 'Sociobiology' was deeply embattled. Critics emerged from both the biological and social sciences (Lewontin, 1993; Sahlins, 1977) In the 21st century, with US-led corporate capital aggres-

⁷ See Dupré, (1993: p 2).

⁸ Cited in Colin Hughes, (1998: 6).

sively hegemonic globally, and rampant individualism triumphant, it has been more successfully rebranded as 'Evolutionary Psychology'.

On the rise throughout the 1990s within my own discipline of psychology, and well beyond, evolutionary psychology is eager to stress that it recognises the role of culture, which produces individual and cultural differences, although such variations are not the objects of its concern. But the apparent respect for culture is misleading, when that domain itself is newly biologized—seen as flexible superstructure to the more fundamental cognitive, neural base. As John Tooby and Lena Cosmides spell out, evolutionary psychology can provide us with the elemental 'building blocks out of which cultures themselves are manufactured' through 'content-specific evolved psychologies' (Tooby and Cosmides, 1992: 207). The notion of 'content-specific evolved psychologies', advocated by all leading evolutionary psychologists from Tooby and Cosmides, to Plotkin, Pinker or Dawkins, suggests that culture is passed on as particles or packages of heritable information (sometimes described as 'memes') consisting of rules or representations for the production of appropriate behaviour when our cognitive structures resonate with the demands of specific environments. These 'evolved architectures' of the mind can be specified quite independently of any particular social contexts or practices, and the meanings we collectively bring to them. The social anthropologist Tim Ingold is just one of the forceful critics who reject this misleading portrayal of culture:

what people do is embedded in lifelong histories of engagement, as whole beings, within their surroundings, and is not the mechanical output of interaction between pre-replicated instructions (whether genetic or cultural) and pre-specified environmental conditions (Ingold, 2000: 2). See also D'Andrade (1981); Rose and Rose (2000).

Like sociobiology before it, evolutionary psychology dismisses all that is unique, culturally diverse and individually specific about human behaviour, human societies and how we negotiate our way within them. Moreover, when seeking out putative behavioural universals and consigning them to the operation of postulated invariant cognitive modules, depicted as genetic adaptations, it is to gender contrasts they repeatedly return. These prove to be precisely those normative behaviours which are as extremely controversial as they are dramatically contested: sexually dimorphic mating strategies; men's preference for younger mates; women's desire for mates with resources; sex-linked shifts in mate selection across the life span; patterns of spousal and same-sex murder etc.

Sexy Science, devoid of Romance, but overflowing with polemical intent, would be one way of characterising the genre. Throughout the 1990s the best-selling science promoter, Robert Wright, ridiculed feminists seeking equality with men as doomed by their foolish denial of the 'harsh Darwinian truths' about human nature: 'Feminists are right to dread some of the rhetorical [note] resistance Darwinism will abet' (Wright, 1994:34). Expressing specious concern that feminism may falter from its own 'doctrinal absurdities', he challenged us to face up to the evolutionary basis of 'the "natural" male impulse to control

female sexuality', 'men's natural tendencies to greater promiscuity', 'natural selection' for men to make 'the Madonna-whore distinction', concluding 'Human males are by nature oppressive, possessive, flesh-obsessed pigs' (Wright, 1994:36). Put more prudently by David Buss, John Archer and others, assertions of the inevitability of men's predatory chase of attractive young females with large breasts and small waists is indeed one of the most frequent cited explanatory accounts in evolutionary psychology. 'Ask the American President!', or 'Look at the second wives of most academics!', Charles Jencks reports E.O.Wilson concluding his lectures, with a grin and a wink, in 1998 (George Bush and Tony Blair are clearly far from models of the male blueprint).⁹ Is this any more than pseudo-scientific pornography? Let me join in the fun, with the help of some recent sociological research.

For her recent field research on family relationships in the USA, leading sociologist Judith Stacey interviewed dozens of couples about their sex lives. And she does indeed produce a file with the title 'Men are Pigs', containing the following descriptions:

[Unlike me] Lance can't get turned on by someone he respects and loves; he can only have sex with someone he's not emotionally committed to . . . I couldn't tolerate it, so I had to move out

When I came home from work the other night, Jake . . . was totally in heat. And we had sex. We didn't make love . . . and it's like I woke up the next morning, and it's like, I just felt so . . . *shitty*. Why did I do that? I said it was great, I got off, but I feel rotten. I have felt rotten the last two days.

Let's face it. When you reach a certain age, men are either already taken or they're looking for someone younger and more beautiful. We all know how men are dogs. Absolute dogs.

And so the less predatory lovers lament. Or sometimes, they get what they want, and celebrate:

Rob and I just fell like I don't know I've fallen before. He knocks my socks off and its damn near everything I want in a man; he's kind, loving, compassionate, gives of himself to others and his community . . . (Stacey, 2002).

The lovers? Well, as I suspect you won't be surprised to learn, these all too familiar erotic griefs and desires come with a twist. They may be the clichés of evolutionary psychology, evocative of patriarchal precedent and radical feminist, or 'feminazi' slogans, but they are in fact the voices of *men*: the experiences of some men with other men, both gay, all with their chromosomes, primary and secondary biological apparatus, all male—no transsexuals, or intersexed.

Certainly, I could have cited evidence of straight men boasting of their many sexual conquests in the 35 countries David Buss visited, where in line with their

⁹ Cited in Jencks, (2000: 40).

expected behaviour, they reported three or four times the number of sexual couplings with 'young and attractive' partners compared to the women interviewed around them. For this to be possible, as sceptics have noticed, we need only assume that a tiny minority of enormously hyperactive, young and beautiful women were peculiarly fighting their nature to oblige a huge army of randy men (Einon, 1998).

A more plausible assumption might be to suggest that such self-proclaimed virility measurements indicate a type of shared identity work performed by many men to confirm cultural expectations of sexual dominance, rather than any evolved adaptations. For once we look behind gender cliché, at the broader scope of historical and sexological research, it is hard not to admit that there could hardly be *less* fit between evolutionary predictions and shifting human sexual and reproductive practices. In the West, gender polarised differences are fast diminishing, non-procreative, lesbian and gay sexual practices are flourishing, non-penetrative oral sex has been increasingly popular for many decades, birth rates dropping, single motherhood increasing, same sex parenting on the rise, women cohabiting and marrying, if they do, later in life and more women and men remaining childless.¹⁰ Mr Wright and neo-Darwinians, meet women freer to choose how we want to live, though regretfully, rarely in conditions of our own choosing.

Those who point to the evidence of cultural shifts in gendered sexual patterns are always accused of dismissing biology altogether, unless they are prepared to specify just what bearing biology does have on such behaviour. As Martin Johnson illustrates in his contribution to this book, researchers interested in pinning down the biological basis of human sexuality usually emphasise interaction between environmental and genetic contributions. He argues, as well, that there is more overlap than difference in men's and women's sexual practices, while nevertheless hoping to elaborate the distinct biological and evolutionary underpinning for differing gendered practices and specific sexual orientations.¹¹ But that is just what is so very hard to isolate if, as it seems, both meaning and context are crucial in how humans react to differing states of arousal, such that human conduct can never be disentangled from the social and symbolic: it has been repeatedly shown, for example, that we cannot predict either a man's or a woman's sexual tastes, desires, or behaviour from any biological measurements.¹² Indeed, whether or not arousal is interpreted as 'sexual', and what people do when sexually aroused, are themselves already saturated with cultural ideas. Meanwhile, the battles over evolutionary psychology, with its belief in a 'universal human metaculture' which underpins traditional sexual and gender contrasts, occurs most usefully *inside* biology itself, where presumably no-one can be accused of ignoring biology. Critics of the new Darwinians are led in this country by Steven Rose and Steve

¹⁰ See Laumann (1994); Wellings *et al* (1994).

¹¹ See in this volume, Johnson (2004).

¹² See Kolodny (1979); Meuwissen and Over (1992).

Jones, who claim that they see their own biological labours mocked by the pseudo-scientific posturing of evolutionary psychology (Rose, 1997; Jones, 2000). They have also hastened to defend Darwin from his eager new followers, insisting that for him evolution was never narrowly, or even primarily, a biological affair, but a slow, heterogeneous, profoundly environmental process (Rose and Rose, 2000). Quite staggering changes in the nature of the world occur with few, if any, ties to genetic change.

PREDATORY MALES AND OTHER BUGS

Despite some feminists rallying to evolutionary psychology, the work making media impact is that which, in the footsteps of Wright, demands a return to a profoundly conservative sexual politics. Most provocative of all, the publication of Thornhill and Palmer's *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* greeted the new millennium, affirming the opposed sexual natures and interests of women and men (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). Carefully selecting the biological data they handle, they return us to the biology of the male scorpionfly, with an appendage on its abdomen, we learn, for the sole purpose of facilitating 'rape'. Leaving aside their anthropomorphic use of 'rape' (one whose meaning has shifted dramatically in recent years as feminists redefined notions of 'consensual' sex and women's sexual agency), what happened to this 'rape appendage' in evolutionary history? It migrated to become a 'mental' rape adaptation in reproductively frustrated men (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000: 64–5). In support of this hypothesis they assert that infertile women are less likely to be raped than fertile women, and if raped they suffer 'less psychological pain' from it (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000: 192–3). Both claims fly in the face of all that is now known of the extent, and prolonged destructiveness, of child sexual abuse.¹³ We are also told that evolutionary science teaches us that the way to prevent rape is to inform men of the enormous 'power of their sexual impulses', and instruct them to learn self-control. This is precisely the message every boy already picks up throughout much of his life, his masculinity constantly policed by other boys in our rape-prone society.¹⁴ Feminist friendly voices—repeatedly ridiculed by Thornhill and Palmer—supply the only counter arguments. Offering an exhaustive critique of these authors 'astonishing tone-deafness' to the theoretical diversity in both recent biological and cultural debate, the feminist anthropologist Emily Martin, for instance, concludes that this book is insidious primarily because 'their protestations to the contrary, their account actually amounts to an incitement to rape' (Martin, 2003: 378).

¹³ See, e.g., La Fontaine (1990); Saraga, (1993).

¹⁴ See Frosh *et al* (2002).

It is the human pornographic imagination, like that of Brett Easton, which resonates most easily with Thornhill and Palmer's account of the similarity between, for instance, women and the female dung fly:

Struggling females [i.e. female dung flies] sometimes prevent copulation . . . and the resultant rape when their resistance is overcome by certain males, may be a female adaptation that helps females mate with males of superior phenotypic and genetic quality (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000: 83).

Rape is hardly something to be opposed then, Thornhill and Palmer's quaint paternalism notwithstanding, but significant in the breeding of the superior dung fly.

Meanwhile, those who prefer a different form of anthropomorphic titillation could turn their head from its engagement with flies on the cowpat to survey the mating habits of neighbouring insects. The male praying mantis is frequently eaten by the female he mates, during the sex act itself. However, this doesn't interfere with his mating; as he continues having sex even as his female partner ingests his head entirely, indeed, losing his head is reported to deprive him of all 'inhibitions', sending him into a 'sexual frenzy' (possible inspiration for Nagisa Oshima's next film, perhaps!). A different small bug, the male xylocoris, can be observed raping other males, sometimes when his 'victim' is himself mating with a female. Another of Thornhill and Palmer's chosen species, the redback spider, indulges in even greater 'masochistic' orgiastic practices than the praying mantis, ensuring that he is eaten very, very slowly during prolonged copulating, thereby guaranteeing both that the female spider's eggs are fertilised and that she will lose interest in sex once he is dead. These 'dissident' animal behaviours, which evolutionary psychologists prefer to ignore, are reported by the evolutionary biologist, Tim Birkhead, who likes to celebrate not patriarchal precepts but 'postmodern' diversities, down among the animals. Living up to its title, his book *Promiscuity: An Evolutionary History of Sperm Competition and Sexual Conflict* accumulates evidence to establish that, contrary to what Darwin himself believed and today's evolutionary psychologists cheerfully reiterate, the females of most species actively seek multiple partners for sexual engagement. Few, however, can match the 'nymphomania' of our own closest relative, the female chimpanzee, who will copulate between five hundred and a thousand times for each pregnancy, with many different males, inside and outside their own extended family group.¹⁵

Clearly, there is fun to be had combating the selective reasoning of evolutionary psychology. Nevertheless, it remains infuriating that we still have to do battle with such accredited researchers as Thornhill and Palmer, on a playing field that, ridiculously, either pits science against culture, or else attempts to colonize it.

¹⁵ All examples taken from Birkhead (2000); see also Bagemihl (1999).

PHARMACEUTICAL AGENDAS: SEX REMEDICALIZED

There have been even more powerful attempts in recent years to by-pass cultural dynamics and insist that sex is nothing more than a medical function, analogous to breathing or digestion, coming from the pharmaceutical industries. Nowhere is this more obvious than in its infiltration of the field of sexology and sex counselling, evident in all its public manifestations, such as the World Congress of Sexology. The World Association of Sexology (WAS) is supported by the World Health Organization (WHO), and is today expanding rapidly, drawing educators, researchers and practitioners from diverse domains. Its most distinguished members include molecular biologists, urologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, health researchers, policy initiators and providers. As it aims to be, it is a powerful progressive force, promoting sexual wellbeing as essential for the health of individuals and society alike. It also stresses the variety of sexual lives and relationships and the multiple functions of sex. This is all the more important at the moment, given the triumphal rise of the Christian Right in the White House in the USA, with its promotion of 'Abstinence Only' sex education policies, known to give rise to teenage misery and disastrous health outcomes in that country and, given US global hegemony, affecting aid programmes world wide.¹⁶

However, the overwhelming numbers of academics and practitioners who participate in WAS are direct recipients of funding from the pharmaceutical corporations, Pfizer, Lilly, Takeda, Bayer, but above all, Pfizer. These companies do not dictate the outcome of their research, but they do set the agenda for it and, at huge international conferences, they fund participants and orchestrate all the major debates. One point alone sums up the dangers of relying upon the private sector for research funding. At WAS conferences one 'disease' has now pushed to the side-lines all other sexual health issues, world-wide, including the continuing pandemic of AIDS. Pfizer, it is said, had the name of their drug, 'Viagra', before it discovered either a relevant medication (the substance was originally tested for cardiac regulation) or knew the nature of the disease, 'erectile dysfunction', now said to be afflicting the global male population in huge numbers. Before the second half of the 20th century, it was a condition that was rarely mentioned; female 'frigidity', not erectile dysfunction dominated the conceptual domain of sexual disorders.¹⁷

Today, hitherto unknowing health workers learn new sexual priorities from Pfizer-funded researchers:

¹⁶ See, e.g. Levine (2002).

¹⁷ See The Second International Consultation on erectile and sexual dysfunctions, Paris, June 28–July 3, 2003. www.congress-urology.org/index.htm (accessed 12 Dec 2002; *Int. J. Impotence Research: The Special Supplement*. (1998).

many of the adult male patients in your clinical practice undoubtedly suffer from the agonizing effects of erectile dysfunction, a condition that may affect 50% of men over 40 years of age and older [sic]; . . . The tragic reality is that it is estimated that less than 10% of men seek treatments.

It has been left to troublesome feminist critics, headed up in the USA by the sexologist Leonore Tiefer, to analyse and object to the raging marketing of this disease, with its ever-increasing medicalization of sexual desire and the massive funding available for erectile auditing (Tiefer, 2001). It is obvious that sexuality in the private sphere was commodified long ago, with the bulk of advertising relying upon aspects of sexual titillation for marketing purposes and explicit sexual goods and services provided in mushrooming sex shops and the pornographic productions now saturating computer networks on the global Internet. But the commercial world has never before so successfully targeted the academic public sector, nor packaged the latest 'crisis of masculinity' as a readily remedial erectile function.

Not content with many millions of men who have had prescriptions written for Viagra since it was launched in 1998 (with Pfizer reporting sales of \$1.5bn in 2001 alone) the search is now on for an equivalent drug for women. *The British Medical Journal* itself recently expressed alarm over this rush to medicalize women's sexual needs, covering the search of drug companies for some clearly defined medical diagnosis for a Viagra equivalent.

The corporate sponsored creation of a disease is not a new phenomenon, but the making of female sexual dysfunction is the freshest, clearest example we have. A cohort of researchers with close ties to drug companies are working with colleagues in the pharmaceutical industry to develop and define a new category of human illness at meetings heavily sponsored by companies racing to develop new drugs (Moynihan, 2003: 5). That illness is female sexual dysfunction (FSD).¹⁸ Researchers are at this moment busy in laboratories studying cultured clumps of tissue from animals' genitalia to see how they contract and relax—rodent slides involving Viagra and rat vaginas are nowadays the most popular.¹⁹

Determined to resist such aggressive pharmaceutical agendas, a movement in the USA, headed up by the feminist sexologist Leonore Tiefer, has been working tirelessly against enormous odds to combat the trend to invent or medicalize women's sexual problems. Initiating a campaign for 'A New View of Women's Sexual Problems', she takes us all the way back to lessons in fact not so new, learned from feminism in the 1970s (Tiefer 2000; 2001). Her approach begins by stressing the cultural, political, economic and interpersonal aspects of sexual experience within our contemporary gendered world and consciousness. It addresses the importance of broad and imaginative sex education (completely absent in the USA), stresses the inadequate access to information and services

¹⁸ See Berman, Berman and Goldstein, (1999).

¹⁹ See Bancroft (2002).

for contraception, abortion and general health care provision (extraordinarily, Viagra for 'erectile dysfunction', unlike contraception, is covered by medical insurance in the USA), raises the need for richer vocabularies to describe desire and sexual experience, while arguing for assistance for those suffering the effects of sexual and domestic violence. Tiefer's campaign, though pursued vigorously, rarely makes it into media reports of the hunt for a 'Viagra' for women, with its simplistic notion of a sexual homology between women's and men's sexual interests and experience. This is a view that became hegemonic in mainstream sexology in the wake of Kinsey's and Masters and Johnson's stress on sexual sameness.²⁰

Quite at odds with this emphasis on sexual sameness, Meika Loe recently reported in the magazine, *Sojourner*, that letters to 'Dear Abby' and the Ann Landers columns in the USA from women were for the most part hostile to their male partners taking Viagra, blaming it for coercive sexual pressures from men after years of neglect, and for encouraging husbands to leave wives for younger women (Loe, 2001:10). Placed in a national, let alone global, arena, feminist critics point out, the erroneous emphasis on gender similarities also erases all the other inequalities which interweave with gender, as the fractures of class, ethnicity and geography continue to deepen, while those of sexual orientation become ever more ambiguous. Much more could be said on diverse interests, needs and challenges that women face in the sexual arena, but let me give the last word to that vigorous campaigner, Leonore Tiefer:

Women's sexuality is just coming into its own, for a lot of different reasons . . . and it breaks my heart to think [of these] sexual possibilities as all of a sudden being strait-jacketed into a narrow model of adequate performance and sexual acts. . . . That's why I see it as a boxing ring. It's not just us versus the pharmaceutical industry. It is a vision of women's sexuality that we're struggling over (Tiefer, quoted in Loe, 2001).

All we need to add to this, is that it is not possible to pursue this battle today anywhere but on the global stage. This means placing women alongside men and children in the particular spaces they occupy, many of them spending much of their life fighting off different forms of catastrophe, even as millions of dollars pour into studying the contractions of rodent erectile tissue.

'*Our bodies should be playgrounds/not just battlefields*': queer theorists used as a slogan to launch their own debates on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual politics back in their heyday in the mid-1990s. They were building upon the work of all those who since the 1970s had been stressing the actual diversities of sexual practices, either hidden or rendered abject by languages or discourses of sexual normativity. They wanted, as well, to return to sexuality as a source of pleasure and play, not just as an object of power and social regulation. They were right to do so. Nevertheless, out there in the wider world it remains appropriate to ponder that earlier slogan displayed on gallery walls by the artist,

²⁰ See Irvine (1990).

Barbara Kruger, in which she tried to crystallise feminist challenges on sexuality from previous decades, YOUR BODY IS A BATTLEGROUND. Today, it is still being fought over, for both ideological and commercial ends, both arriving within freshly coined biological discourses.

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