The Everyday Sexual Self in Late Modern Life

by

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Summary

This research, which seeks to better understand the everyday sexual self in late modernity, rests within the theoretical orientation developed by George Herbert Mead in which sociality constitutes the self. There is a clear sociological tradition that argues that Mead's scholarship about the self provides a coherent account of constitutive social interaction and applies it to sexual self-making. Data from this study resonate with this argument.

Whilst scholars of late modernity highlight some of the key shifts present in contemporary life, their claims are overstated and problematically dichotomise tradition and post-tradition to the detriment of a deeper understanding of these concepts. Other scholars argue that the contemporary world has become so complex and lives so transitory that it is no longer relevant to think about the individual and society as separate from one another. In this new scheme of seemingly liquid social conditions, it is argued that the sexual self has become a key part of reflection on the past, present and future, and that studies of the everyday ought not inform theory. In this thesis, I argue against these positions and instead demonstrate that the application of Mead is vital to better understanding the everyday sexual self in late modern social life.

Using an inductive tradition data were obtained through in depth interviews with thirty men and women (n=30) aged between thirty and sixty-five years of age, the data highlight factors that generate increased opportunities for sexual self-making. In particular, participants cited specific biographical events such as experiences gained

through engagement with others in employment and travel, as well as relationships with significant others as transformatory for the sexual self because they provided new opportunities for sexual self-making. Participants in this study noted the constraining effects of social inequality.

The overall finding of this study is that the sexual self in late modernity is 'made' through social processes. Whilst agency may be theorised through the engagement in playful learning and imaginative accounts of the perspectives of the generalised other, ultimately sexual self-making is constrained by social and cultural scripts. It is vital to extend Mead's theory of sociality to sexual self-making, his notion of play to adulthood and to critically understand the intersections between biography, spatiality and temporality to adequately theorise the everyday sexual self in late modernity.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Priscilla Dunk-West

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Date

Acknowledgements

I feel privileged to have participated in many conversations about the sexual self over the years. These have occurred in my varied roles at university, including as a student, activist, and later as a lecturer and researcher, as well as outside university life. Working as a social worker in London and later as a sexual health counsellor in Australia enabled me to hear how people made sense of their sexualities. It was here I witnessed people's shifting ideas and thinking about their sexual selves. Therefore, I thank my clients for being the inspiration behind this research. It was through them that I witnessed transformations evident at the 'everyday' level: transformations that had occurred despite what might be considered great social disadvantage. In my professional role I drew heavily on my sociological knowledge and I feel thankful that I worked in an environment where sexuality was viewed through a socio-political lens.

I have also been fortunate to have had the support of many colleagues from varied academic institutions over the past five years. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Lesley Cooper and Professor Hilary Tompsett who provided support and encouragement at crucial periods during my academic career. Similarly, Professor Fiona Verity has inspired and continues to inspire me, not least for being the only person I know who lists one of her hobbies as 'thinking'. Dr Trish Hafford-Letchfield has been a joy with whom to collaborate on various projects and I value her unbounded enthusiasm for this field.

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Dedication

To Brad, for teaching me how to play the long game.

A Guide to Reading the Thesis

This thesis is informed by inductive empirical work which highlights the importance of recognising the constructed nature of knowledge. In line with this tradition, I have, where relevant, chosen to write in the first person. This choice has been made to reflect my position as the researcher with the aim of not wishing to distract from the participant accounts upon which this study is based. Spelling is based on English language conventions except where terms have been popularised in literature with specific spelling (such as globalization, generalized other, detraditionalization and so on).

The chapters are arranged around the themes emerging from the data and discussion of theoretical material grows from an analysis of these themes. This means that data and theory are intertwined—with the former informing the latter. Again, this choice reflects the constructionist epistemology that underpins this study. Data discussion involves relevant theoretical ideas and makes up the bulk of the thesis. A general discussion of the material contained within the thesis as a whole precedes presentation of the chapters from One to Seven. The purpose in doing this is to highlight and cross-reference the ways in which the chapters examine material relevant to this project. Key terms are explained at the beginning of the thesis to assist in locating the work within a particular sociological tradition since there are many competing and complimentary traditions within sociology that examine the self, the everyday sexual self and periodization of the late modern era: all of which this thesis is concerned.

Introduction

In my early twenties I designed and carried out a participant observation study outside the suburban sex shops in central Adelaide to examine people's behaviours when they walked past or into these shops. This study was carried out for my sociology major. Twenty years later I am still researching sexuality. My somewhat naïve fascination with what I thought was rather taboo for that first piece of research has been replaced over the years by an appreciation of the decidedly mundane and ordinary sexual self. This appreciation has been influenced by the varied empirical projects I have undertaken and supervised but I have also been influenced by my sexual health work. Despite the vast range of literature and empirical work in the area of sexuality—some of which reinforces the privileged and transformatory position sex occupies in popular discourse (for example, see self-help texts such as Cox 1999)—there is still much to be learned through the examination of the sexual self in ordinary or day-to-day life.

The aim of this research is to understand sexuality as part of sexual self-making in late modernity. This entails understanding how the sexual self is constituted in everyday life through social interactions. Sociality, or the interactions of people with those around them, is central to the process of sexual self-making. As I demonstrate, this research found that while everyday sexual self-making occurs through social interactions, these processes are shaped by scripts in which broader social inequalities are manifest.

Using an inductive tradition, data were obtained through in depth interviews with thirty (n=30) men and women aged between thirty and sixty-five years of age. Participant

accounts were analysed in relation to the relevant literature to better understand everyday sexual self-making. In this introduction to the research project, I identify interactionism, and in particular George Herbert Mead's account of self-making, as the theoretical tradition within which this research rests. A strong case that sexuality be considered using Mead's framework of sociality is well established within sociology (see Jackson 2007, 2008, 2010b; Jackson & Scott 2007, 2010a, 2010b; see also Plummer 1975, 2002, 2007). Data from this study resonate with this argument.

There is a plethora of scholarly literature concerned with better understanding sexuality, which fall both outside and inside sociology. Varied epistemological starting points within sociology are reflected in the language used to describe this area of scholarly interest. For example, varying perspectives examine 'love' (as explored through diverse works such as Bauman 2004; Luhmann 1986; Symonds & Pudsey 2008), 'intimacy' (Giddens 1992; Gross & Simmons 2002), 'eroticism' (Featherstone 1999) and sexual behaviour (Masters & Johnson 1966), as well as what some might term 'sexual identity' or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer studies (see Humphreys 1975; Laurentis 1991a; Sedgwick 1993; Seidman 1995; Weeks 1989; Wilton 2004) to name a few.

Not only is there a range of approaches that focus on either the individual or the social, but there are also many scholars on the periphery of a sociology of sexuality who draw upon differing traditions and disciplines. Areas of transdisciplinary inquiry in sociology that feature sexuality include psychoanalytic (for example see Elliott & Lemert 2006), feminist work that explores the embodied sexual self (for example, Grosz 1994 or McNay 2000), historical approaches (Hawkes 2004; Weeks 1999) and social constructionism in sexuality (Seidman 1997). Notably, thinkers associated with

poststructuralist traditions (Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1990, 1992, 1998) have contributed significantly to current theories about identity and sexuality.

All of these, and more, encompass the term 'a sociology of sexuality'. The gamut of terms used in both sociological literature and other traditions underlie the importance of outlining where this research 'fits'. Whilst individual definitions of sexuality and the self differ, it is possible to make general statements about what a shared meaning of sexuality might entail. Thus, it is recognised that the sexual self may be comprised of sexual thoughts and behaviours, and sexual desires and preferences, and that one's sexuality is something that is often shared with others through intimate relationships. Ultimately, however, this research sits within an interactionist tradition that sees social processes as constitutive of the sexual self (Jackson 2007, 2008, 2010b; Jackson & Scott 2007, 2010a, 2010b).

The overall finding of this study is that the sexual self in late modernity is 'made' through social processes and these processes can be better understood through the application of temporality, spatiality, play and scripting theory. Analysis of thirty in depth interviews with men and women aged between thirty and sixty-five years identifies the specific ways in which the sexual self is made in late modern social life. Data from this study clearly demonstrate that interactions in social life constituted participants' sexual selves. Specific events demonstrating this process were recalled during the interviews. Data were analysed for emergent themes, which are systematically examined in Chapters Three to Six in relation to relevant literature.

As will be demonstrated in Chapter One, there is a general consensus that contemporary

social life is marked by shifts brought about by new technologies. For example, the widespread increase in communicative technologies have changed the social landscape through the emergence of alternative ways of communicating, which has increased exchanges between cultural settings (for example, see Bauman 1998, 2000; Beck et al., 1994; Giddens 1991; Lash & Urry 1994).

The social landscape has also changed through increased mobility, meaning that the new social order is "borderless" (Urry 1997): this claim is critically examined through the analysis of data which relates to travel in Chapter Four. Yet in this new 'mobile' landscape, travellers do not simply disembed from their lived experiences once they are away from their homeplace, "…unmarked by the traces of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and geography" (Cresswell 1997, p. 377). People's lived experiences of the broader categories of class, gender, culture, sexual identity and geography do not disappear with travel. Similarly, people's life events in which inequalities brought about by these categories are not simply discarded in favour of newer, more positive experiences.

Rather, it is important to see the traveller in the same way that interactionists view individuals, with the "self as the moving centre" (du Gay 1996, p. 30). Travel is highlighted in this research as providing participants with the means through which their existing sexual selves are exposed to new ways of thinking about their sexual selves. This is because immersion in a different culture comes with travel and provides another opportunity for sexual self-making.

The act of immersion in a new culture on its own was not reported as sufficient to

provoke shifts in participants' sexual selves; instead participants recounted active engagement with newer ways of relating and making sense of the world around them. I argue that this kind of engagement with a new cultural setting requires a kind of 'playfulness' (see Chapter Four). Drawing from Mead's notion of play, I argue that the liminal state of being outside a cultural setting in one sense but engaged with it physically and socially in another sense (see Turner 1982; Masters 2008) challenged participants' views of their sexual selves.

Participants' descriptions of how they engaged in new ways of sexual self-making relied upon a sense of adventure which also meant engaging in new ways of thinking and relating about the sexual self. Ultimately, I argue that 'play' in this context involves playful engagement with, and a degree of risk-taking in learning about, the views of others (Crossley 2001, p. 146).

The central placement of work in late modern life was evident in participant accounts in this study, as highlighted first in Chapter Three and in more depth in Chapter Six. Participants emphasised the liberation they felt from previously held values and views about sexuality, and noted that these shifts came about because of interactions with colleagues (and clients for one participant). Alongside these accounts were references to 'older' ways of being that required reconstructing the past and contrasting it with existing events, as well as the personal interpretation of such events. Work was found to have provided new opportunities for participants' sexual self-making.

In Chapter Six, I argue that it is important to view 'the past', as it relates to participants' biographies, through a Meadian lens rather than one informed by psychoanalytic theory.

The structure-agency debate is less important in Mead's theory of self than other sociological traditions because the constitutive nature of sociality in social life produces the self which in turn produces the social (Martin 2005, p. 232). However, participants in this study cited the constraining effects of social inequality on expressions of agency. This was an important issue in their descriptions of their pasts and raises broader issues which relate to the tensions between agency and structure. This thesis illustrates that understanding the past may only be achieved through engaging with participant accounts and applying a Meadian articulation of childhood as a time of learning about the generalizable other.

Whilst work and travel are highlighted as key themes in sexual self-making in late modern life, so too are relationships with significant others such as lovers, friends and relatives. All are important to the sexual self. The newly 'liberated' sexual selves that participants reported (see Chapter Six) are argued to have manifested through their relationships with younger relatives, specifically through passing on learning/ wisdom during interactions. The application of interactionist scholarship about temporality is central to theorizing the sexual self.

Tensions between agency and inequality prevail throughout the examination of the findings in this thesis. Agency is carefully articulated because of the clear reports of broader inequalities shaping participants' day-to-day lives. This, along with the knowledge that social inequality continues to broadly define late modern life, has meant that additional, relevant sociological theories have been argued to apply to the study's findings. For example, in Chapter Five, gender and agency are critically explored in relation to participant accounts about their sexual selves.

Many claims are made about the new social landscape in late modernity. One of the key claims in social theory relates to the relatively recent shifts in gender roles. Giddens and others argue, for example, that people are no longer defined by 'traditional' roles. The theory of detraditionalization sees globalization as a major force in setting actors free from lifestyles in which they would otherwise have been historically fixed to traditions such as the gender roles set through marriage, which reinforce women's subordination in the home environment. Similarly, scholars such as John Urry argue that the contemporary world has become so complex that it is no longer relevant to think about society as such, but rather to understand the interlaced "scapes and flows" that characterise new 'mobile' lives (see Urry 2000, p. 13). In this scheme, "'everyday life' become[s] less clear cut" (du Gay 1993, p. 583).

In Chapter Five I argue that whilst scholars of late modernity highlight some of the key shifts present in contemporary life, their claims are somewhat overstated and dichotomise tradition and post-tradition to the detriment of a deeper understanding of these concepts (see Alexander 1996). Take Giddens' (1991) treatment of gender, for example. He argues that feminism has invariably shaped contemporary understanding of identities and prompted women to question how to "liberate themselves from the home" (Giddens 1991, p. 216). However, his assumption that self-identity is exempt from class or gender (see Skeggs 1997; Adkins 2003) fails to take into account the prevailing inequalities evident in late modern life.

Other important contributions to gender debate include the analysis of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), which helps to frame nation-based notions of masculinity,

including the imbuing sport-based violence (for example, see Newburn & Stanko, 1994). However, just as hegemonic masculinity has been reconceived recently in light of global and social shifts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, Beasley, 2008), it is important to understand that traditional gender roles dominate in late modern life. This being the case, how can agency be conceived of using a Meadian framework to understand the sexual self?

I argue throughout this thesis that agency, as it applies to the sexual self, involved participants shaping their perceptions of sexuality in light of firstly, their biography; secondly, the broader social and cultural environment within which they were immersed; and thirdly, exploration through meaningful, or what I refer to as 'significant', relationships with others (such as friends, colleagues, family members) as well as through broader social interaction. Amongst other things, agency entails employing a kind of playfulness with which participants described approaching novel situations. I argue that this facilitated increased opportunities for sexual self-making. Ultimately, however, agency is limited by social scripts; it is shaped by the inequalities evident in the contemporary world. Therefore, I argue that although individuals are capable of engaging in social relations that broaden, shift and shape the sexual self, ultimately this sexual self is constrained by social and cultural scripts. I now provide a brief explanation of the key terms used throughout this thesis before describing the content of each chapter.

Definition of Key Terms

Who individuals see themselves as and how others see them are evident in day-to-day social exchanges; thus, identity "matters enormously" (Jenkins 2004, p. 3). For

example, individuals call their sense of self their 'identity', their 'self' or their 'subjective experience'. However, in scholarly literature, each of these terms invokes varying ontological associations. What follows is a brief explanation of key terms used in this thesis. These are included to provide a basic orientation to the ways in which they are relevant to this project as well as to define the terms. Whilst critical discussion about some of the key terms is crucial to understanding how they relate to this research, this in depth discussion occurs in various chapters throughout the thesis, to which these are referred to in the following summary.

Identity

The term 'identity' came to prominence in the 1990s. It has become ubiquitous in varying disciplines' lexicons (Jenkins 2004, p. 8), in which the contemporary or late modern world is connected to people's sense of themselves. The term 'identity' is sparingly used throughout this thesis because this research is concerned with sexuality in late modern social life. The term 'self' is the preferred term for describing one's identity. This preference is due to the association of the term 'self' with interactionist traditions in sociology. The term identity is only used to replace the term 'self' in this thesis in order to avoid unnecessary repetition of the term 'self'.

Self

It is important to recognise that for some people "identity can imply a fixity about who one is" (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 122). The term 'self' is primarily employed throughout this thesis because of its association with Meadian traditions in which the changeable process of sociality is central to self-making. Mead's notion of the self implies a changeable form of identity (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 123). Thus, the terms 'self' and 'identity' are used in this thesis according to the explanation above, that is, to

signify the same concept: 'self' is used much more often. 'Identity' is only employed to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Self-making

The 'construction of the self' refers to the processes that 'make up' or constitute the self. Throughout this thesis I use Skeggs' (2004) term 'self-making' to mean this ongoing process of the constitution or 'making' of the self. These ongoing social processes are made up of various types of social interactions—from discussions with colleagues and communications with others (both verbal and non-verbal) to the intimate communications and actions between lovers.

Sociality

The notion of sociality is what is important in interactionist appreciations of the self. This thesis shows that sociality, or the processes involved in social interactions, is central to understanding the sexual self. Sociality is theorised by George Herbert Mead as the process through which the self is constituted. The term is discussed throughout the thesis and in depth in Chapter One.

Reflexivity and Reflectiveness

'Reflexivity' is also explored in great detail throughout the thesis, and distinctions are made between Mead's notion of 'reflectiveness' and late modern notions of reflexivity. Whilst it is important not to confuse or conflate these two concepts, it can be noted for the purpose of providing a simple definition of what is meant in relation to these that they both suggest varying degrees of awareness of one's self and its relationship to the surrounding world. Reflexivity is examined in detail in Chapter One.

Late Modernity

Various disciplines interested the study of social life employ periodization which divides particular epochs into named, historically recognizable points in time. The names given to each of these periods signify particular forms of expression and resonate with a large audience. For example, the term postmodern can be used to describe various things, from architecture to the design of a cereal box. The term 'late modernity' is used in this thesis to denote the current historical period, since this research is concerned with the sexual self in this period. The term has been chosen because of its recognition within sociological literature about identity, but can just as easily be substituted with 'contemporary life' or something similar. Late modernity is critically discussed in detail in Chapters Three, Four and Six.

Scripting

Finally, the term 'scripting', as it relates to studies of sexuality by Gagnon and Simon ([1973] 2011), is central to this project. The term is applied to sexuality to make sense of the limits to human agency. Just as a film or play is scripted, individuals may engage in acts of spontaneity akin to dramatic improvisation, but they are limited by the choices available to them. Thus, although individuals can choose their sexual scripts to some extent, their choices do not fall outside a predetermined set of actions and interactions. Scripting theory is applied to better understand inequality throughout this thesis and is specifically explored in relation to gender in Chapter Five.

Thesis Overview

The following chapter summaries provide an overview of this thesis. In Chapter One, I set out the theoretical foundation upon which this study is built. The scholarly tradition

offered by George Herbert Mead is argued to satisfactorily counter the claims about sexuality in late modern life made by scholars such as Anthony Giddens: claims that place the sexual self within a broader project of self-identity in which broader economic shifts such as globalization consciously fashion and influence it (Giddens 1991). I briefly discuss the role that reflexivity or 'reflectiveness' plays in identity-making social relations and argue that rather than accepting the assumption that reflexivity is bound up with the concerns of late modern social life with conscious self-identity construction, people should view 'reflectiveness' as a necessary condition of social competence (see Mead 1932).

In Chapter Two, I examine the research design for this empirical work that explores everyday sexuality and identity. This entails showcasing the Schutzian phenomenological approach used in this study. As I argue, this approach is best situated to yield data that provide greater insight into the ways in which the late modern sexual self is made in day-to-day life. I examine the implications of both participant and researcher reflexivity, and argue that my sample, whilst non-representative, provides rich data and thus constitutes a modest yet valuable contribution to assist in better understanding the everyday practices and broader understandings of how the sexual self is made in late modernity. I also discuss the limitations of NVivo analysis and outline how I overcame these limitations.

In Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six I use the data to inform theorizing and discuss the data in conjunction with scholarly literature. Data are arranged into themes. Chapter Three establishes the case for seeing the sexual self as constituted through sociality and begins to provide a better understanding of the specific ways in which this is achieved.

It examines what it means to 'make' the sexual self in late modernity and the significant role others play in the making. In this chapter, I argue that Giddens' depiction of the 'project' of identity fails to highlight the constitutive nature of sociality (see Mead 1934). Taking the lead from participants' accounts and applying recent theorizing about Mead and sexuality (see Jackson 2007, 2008, 2010b; Jackson & Scott 2007, 2010a, 2010b), I argue that participant narratives show us how the everyday sexual self is 'made' through social interaction. The role of significant others is central to these narratives. Participants differentiated between certain relationships as being pivotal to their sexual selves, and opportunities to drastically shift their previously held self-narration. Whilst Mead's (1934) self is in an ongoing process of constitution, fuelled by interactions with others, study participants cited significant relationships as heralding a more intense or radical pace of this process. Thus, I argue that the Meadian notion of 'play' occurs within intimate relationships and assists in the change process.

Chapter Four begins with an examination of the theme of travel. Looking at participants' accounts of travel gives insight into their reality that their environments influence their sexual selves. Participants in this study identified experiences gained through global travel as important to sexual self-making. Travel was important because it helped participants reinterpret cultural values including variations of what constitutes beauty, for example. Travel also provided a sense of freedom from the constraints of participants' cultural norms and values and thus interrupted the flow of day-to-day life. Global mobility is an area of increased interest to sociologists (see, for example, Urry 1999) and, as international travel becomes increasingly accessible, these narratives help identify the specific ways in which broader social trends and biographies come together. The meaning of travel was deeply connected to participants' previously held values and

experiences throughout their lives. The new social interactions brought about through travel offered participants the opportunity to 'let go' of existing ways of defining their sexual selves in relation to newer, culturally-situated values. Thus, travellers described the process of understanding the culturally specific 'generalized other' (see Mead 1934). In the second part of Chapter Four, I examine the theme of 'illness'. Participants reflected upon illness as being central to considerations of their sexual self and discussed it in specific relationship to the body. Although there is significant theoretical work about the body and sexuality (for example, see Grosz 1995), I argue that participants' accounts are depicted with emphasis on the effects of illness on interactions with significant others and broader society. Like travel, illness was cited by participants to have disrupted their previously held notions of their sexual self and thus interrupted their everyday interactions and the ways in which they made their sexual selves.

In Chapter Five, I highlight the theme of gender in participant accounts and examine how participants made sense of gender in relation to the sexual self. Participants reported that gender influenced their sexual selves. They reflected upon traditional gender roles as being present in their everyday experiences, which is contrary to claims made by theorists of late modernity (Giddens 1992). These traditional gender roles were reported as both constraining one's world view (this was particularly the case for women) as well as providing opportunities to imagine the 'other' in order to make sense of life events. Gender inequality was evident in the accounts of participants' day-to-day lives. Thus, I critically examine agency in this context. Margaret Archer's work is examined along with theories that underplay traditional gender roles, such as the theory of detraditionalization (see Giddens 1992). It is argued that both perspectives neglect to

appreciate the centrality of social interactions to self-making to a greater or lesser extent (see Gronow 2008). Mead's "idea of the social self…provides a view of the sexual as social while allowing for agency through the emphasis on interpretive practices" (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 94). Whilst this was reflected in participant accounts, it did not negate the existence of inequality. I argue that it is important to appreciate the role and impact of the generalized other upon social interactions (see Mead 1934) and that the central problem with the theory of late modern reflexivity is that it fails to appreciate this.

Chapter Six provides an examination of participant accounts of professional and familial life. The chapter begins by examining the role of work because it was a key part of narratives about the sexual self. Opportunities provided through the working environment were reported to have facilitated access to different forms of sexual self-making. This is because work was reported to have given participants a space where they interacted with others for many hours, day after day. The 'transformation' that occurred within this context—that is, participants spoke of being 'blown away' through exposure to new ways of thinking about sexuality and the sexual self—led to rapid shifts in sexual self-making. I argue that the past is drawn upon in order to highlight the shifts and changes evident in participants' sexual self-making.

The theme of inequality is discussed in relation to participants' everyday experiences as well as broader social issues being reported such as childhood abuse and domestic violence. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the role of familial relationships, such as the parenting role or being an aunty, in sexual self-making. It was through these intergenerational relationships that participants reported feeling that they passed on

some of their learning about their sexual self. I used recent interactionist theorising about temporality and sexuality to understand the significance of these reported interactions.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis. It provides an overarching synthesis of the key arguments. The central argument that the sexual self in late modernity is 'made' through social processes is highlighted. Specifically, this is argued to be best understood through recognizing that biography—or life events—and the ways that individuals make sense of it influence sexual self-making. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the study's limitations and implications, and identifies areas for future research.

Chapter One: Everyday Sexuality in Late Modern Life

> It is in everyday life that the sum total of relations that make the human—and in every human being—a whole takes its shape and form
>
> (Lefebvre 1991, p. 97).

Introduction

Much is made of sex in late modern social life. Sexualised iconography is ubiquitous in advertising and various media. Rapid increases in technologies in recent decades have brought about unprecedented changes in the way people live and interact with one another, which invariably has a bearing on the sexual self. Additionally, representations of sex have become pervasive in late modern life. The ubiquitous 'Playboy bunny', for example, once a symbol of the exploitation of women (see Steinem's well-known study, 1986) now graces many mainstream products targeted towards both men and women, from reality television shows to bedding and household items to women's clothing and underwear. Alongside these kinds of shifts in which a kind of sexual expression that was previously on the periphery has moved into central popular cultural discourse is a narrative of emancipation that purports that people are now, more so than ever, sexually liberated.

Yet despite the emergence of more "transgressive practices" (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 163) of sex in popular culture, brought about in part by the proliferation of access to internet-connected devices and an increasing acceptance of sexual images (Mulholland 2011), sex ought to be viewed primarily as a mundane aspect of living one's day-to-day life (Jackson & Scott 2010a). The aim of this research is to better understand the day-to-

day or *everyday* sexual self in late modernity. In this chapter I argue that George Herbert Mead's scholarly work on selfhood is crucial to understanding the everyday sexual self in late modernity (Jackson 1997, 1999, 2010a). This chapter therefore provides a critical analysis of Meadian notions of the self and demonstrates how this theoretical tradition provides a firm foundation upon which the everyday sexual self can be better understood.

My small-scale qualitative study sought to better understand the everyday sexual self. Rejecting psychoanalytic notions of the self, Jackson and Scott (2010a) argue for the "sociality of sexuality", drawing from George Herbert Mead's (p. 122) pragmatist "…account of the self as located within the wider social relations through which it is constituted". This means that the sexual self is produced through actors' social interactions with one another.

The aim of this chapter is to outline the overarching theoretical tradition upon which this study is interpreted. Specifically this relates to George Herbert Mead's theory of the self. I argue that the various claims about sexuality made by scholars of late modernity, such as Anthony Giddens, whilst providing a useful orientation to the influence of broader social shifts brought about by late modern conditions are not able to adequately provide a detailed assessment of the everyday sexual self. Whereas psychoanalytic theory has informed many traditions which interpret sexuality, Mead's interactionist approach is argued to provide the basis to better understand the sexual self (Jackson & Scott 2010a). Sociality, reflexivity and scripting are identified as important to this project and are therefore examined in relation to everyday sexuality.

Everyday Sexuality

Investigating sexuality at the everyday level is concerned with examining how individuals in day-to-day life experience their sexual selves. Sexuality is often seen as unusual or out of the ordinary, which is problematic because "sexual expression, whether highly conventional or extravagantly unconventional, is always embedded in wider patterns of sociality" (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 162). Younger people's sexualities are often the subject of research projects across many academic disciplines (for a recent sociological analysis, see Mulholland 2011). Older people's sexualities, after being neglected for so long (Gott 2006), are increasingly of interest in scholarly studies (see, for example, Vares 2009). Conversely, this research is focused on the everyday sexual self which is experienced by the comparatively under-researched population of those within the middle age range of 30–65 years.

The interactionist sociological analysis of everyday human experience seeks to better understand people in their 'natural', everyday settings. Studying the everyday is well established in scholarly literature. Henri Lefebvre, "the most prolific and influential critical theorist of everyday life" (Gardiner 2008, p. 429), argues that day-to-day life enables us to explore the relationship between the personal and the social because various forces come together in the course of interactions in everyday lives:

> Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond and their common ground. It is in everyday life that the sum total of relations that make the human—and in every human being—a whole takes its shape and form (Lefebvre 1991, p. 97).

Recent sociological scholarship has seen a turn towards the everyday (Crook 1998).

Gardiner (2004) argues that studying the everyday has many benefits, particularly as it avoids empirically investigating only highly visible social phenomena. Examining such visible phenomena exacerbates the risk of neglecting the "overlooked norm" that is discernable only through empirically examining day-to-day life:

> ... what has come to be known as 'everyday life studies' concerns itself with the supposition that to focus exclusively on the memorable, highly visible or extraordinary events of the sociocultural world is something akin to a category mistake, because to do so universalizes the atypical and ignores the overlooked norm (Gardiner 2004, p. 229).

Yet it is important to understand what emphasis ought to be placed on the everyday. This involves understanding whether knowledge acquired through analysis of the everyday ought to be privileged above purely theoretical insights. For example, are small scale qualitative day-to-day life studies superseded by the lure of the larger sample associated with quantitative studies that position 'fact' from interpretation? Notwithstanding the contested nature of knowledge (Seidman 2004), some argue that studies of day-to-day life are limited by individual interpretations of the social world. For example, in *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens (1984, p. 282) argues that:

> The study of day-to-day life is integral to analysis of the reproduction of institutionalized practices. Day-to-day life is bound up with the repetitive character of reversible time—with paths traced through time-space and associated with the constraining and enabling features of the body. However, day-to-day life should not be treated as the 'foundation' upon which the more ramified connections of social life are built. Rather, these more far-flung connections should be understood in terms of an interpretation of social and system integration.

However, minimizing the importance of everyday life studies ignores not only the accounts that have been silenced in a system where histories were 'told' and theorised

from the dominant group's perspective; it also diminishes the substantial and influential contributions made through studies at the 'micro' level.

In line with inductive empirical work, the research described in this thesis is concerned with the everyday. Its examination of everyday sexuality focuses on the 'overlooked norm' that is sexuality as lived in ordinary, day-to-day life. It commenced with seeking to better understand how individuals thought about their sexual selves in their day-to-day lives.

The everyday level of analysis signifies a shift to the 'ordinariness' of social phenomena. Knowledge gained through analysis of the everyday should not supersede purely theoretical knowledge but can provide unique insights into some of the claims made in theoretical work. Theory and empirical work can coexist in research projects and each can be in constant dialogue with the other through the researcher. Therefore, an inductive approach was selected for this study because of the need to build knowledge based upon data (see Saranakatos 2005, p. 306). The methodological approach is explored more fully in Chapter Two.

Gender and Sexuality

Gender and sexuality studies have begun to reflect an interest in the everyday in their empirical methodologies (for example, see Chisholm 2008; Morrissey & Higgs 2006; Tyler 2004; Wilton 2004) although to date there is a dearth of empirical studies in which individual, everyday sexuality is considered in relation to identity or self-making. The benefit in undertaking this current study is that through drawing from existing scholarship in the interactionist tradition of sexuality and examining data in relation to

this, the nuanced and specific contexts of sexual self-making are better understood in relation to the everyday. Such an understanding provides a small but worthwhile empirically-based contribution to the existing scholarship in the area of everyday sexuality in late modernity. Better understanding the mechanisms by which sexuality is understood at the individual level has the potential to contribute to existing sociological theorizing about sexuality. Others have noted the clear need for empirical work in this area. As Jackson notes, "We need ... to understand more about the ordinary day-to-day patterns of sexual relations through/in which most people life their lives" (Jackson 2008, p. 34).

One of the difficulties with empirical work that seeks to investigate subjective sexuality has been its tendency to concentrate upon pathological areas of the sexual self. Such forays have included sexuality positioned as compromising health and deemed deviant (Heap 2003), risky (Ryan 2005) or dangerous (Mort 1986). Studies in sexual health, for example, have tended to rely upon positivist research methods in which sexual behaviour is the starting point of analysis (Morrissey & Higgs 2006).

More recently, sociologists have been interested in empirically investigating sexuality as mundane or grounded within day-to-day social practices. For example, critical and empirically-led analyses of heterosexuality have utilised the everyday in order to examine the "taken-for-granted" social meanings of this sexual identity (see Hockey *et al*. 2007). Like Hockey *et al*.'s study, Paul Johnson's (2005) *Love, Heterosexuality and Society* also draws from qualitative interviews with heterosexual participants. Johnson highlights the potential for theorizing by drawing from his 24 interviews with heterosexual men and women. He notes that sociological analysis of such data allows

for "consideration … of individual experiences of heterosexual love and the conditions under which these experiences are shaped" (Johnson 2005, p. 18).

Johnson's analysis of how people are "doing heterosexuality" (2005, p. 1) provides sophisticated insights, particularly about the *process* of sexuality in everyday life and the analysis of this is influenced by Butler and Foucault. Much is to be gained from such studies. Indeed, Johnson's research design and sample size is similar to the approach employed in this study.

However, the focus on heterosexuality by both Hockey *et al*. and Johnson, who draw from postmodern notions of identity, limits sexuality to one identity category (heterosexuality) and does not adequately account for the ongoing sexual self-making that occurs in day-to-day life. The acceptance of heterosexuality as clearly defined or fixed leaves no space for ongoing sexual self-making which sees the sexual self as continually changing. Thus the category of heterosexuality can only be applied within an interactionist tradition of self-making as a category that represents the self at one particular point in one's biography. Put simply, an interactionist reading of sexual categorisation would allow for one's sexual identity to shift at varying points from one category to another. These categories might include lesbian, bisexual, gay or heterosexual and so on. Recent interactionist work highlights the historical relevance of these terms which have moved meanings "…from 'old gay' to 'new gay'" (Stein 2007, p. 94) or even 'postgay' (Plummer 2011, p. 166). To use any of these terms as inclusion or exclusion criteria in empirical studies would mean that participants who self-define a sexual identity differently at various points in their lives would be excluded from studies of 'heterosexuality', for example. Conversely, this study into everyday sexuality

seeks to understand sexuality through those practices that make the self which entails the interactions that are linked to individuals' broader biographies and wider socially recognised meanings. Thus, whilst the terms 'heterosexuality' or 'same-sex attraction' each suggest a particular way of defining or categorizing one's sexual preferences or orientation, their unchallenged application to research populations is problematic. For example, is same-sex attraction experienced by someone in a heterosexual relationship classifiable through one particular category? The opportunity for participants to define their sexual preferences or practices, and the complexity or simplicity involved in doing so, was left open in this study. Thus, sexual identity categories were neither part of the inclusion/ exclusion criteria nor were they something participants had to disclose. Sexuality was approached as a common framework within which many sexual identities, both fluid and fixed categories, could be included and defined by the participants themselves at a particular point in their biographies. This is evident in the accounts of sexuality in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six in the way that identity categories are described only in connection with participants' wider biographies and interactions with others.

The individualization of sexuality has been theorised through the work of scholars of late modernity such as Anthony Giddens. Giddens' (1992) 'reflexive project of the self' applies global analysis to everyday life, including intimate relationships (Crook 1998). Giddens argues that in the social conditions brought about by late modern life, reflexivity is applied equally to all aspects of everyday life. Such theorizing has failed to take into account the gendered nature of social relations, which means that certain groups 'miss out' on access to power thus becoming 'reflexivity losers' (Adkins 2003).

Further, Giddens and other scholars of late modernity neglect the mechanisms by which transactions and reflexive processes occur in everyday life (Gross & Simmons 2002), even though Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2004) assert that late modern social life is inextricably bound with sexual 'self-making' (Skeggs 2004). Given this situation, how might the everyday level of experience, removed from the conditions of late modernity, bear sociological weight? The application of Mead's theory of self-constitution through social interactions helps generate a better understanding of the everyday sexual self and gives weight to the findings of this study.

Psychoanalytic and Social Theories of the Sexual Self

George Herbert Mead's scholarship cannot be underestimated for its significant, and continuing, contribution to sociology (Alexander 1989; Joas 1997). The Meadian theory of selfhood remains an enduring, though contested, area of sociological scholarship. Yet Mead's unpublished and posthumously edited work has been the subject of so much interpretation which has resulted in various scholars' work being critiqued for misreading or misinterpreting Mead (Puddephatt 2009, p. 90). Mead's theory of the self is examined in some detail throughout this thesis however it is his theoretical contribution contained in *Mind, Self and Society* that is of primary interest to this project. Put simply, Mead (1934) argues that sociality is constitutive of the self. The specific ways in which the sexual self is constituted in late modernity is of central concern to this research. Therefore in this project the ways in which the sexual self is constituted through sociality is paramount. Thus it is crucial to understand *how* the sexual self becomes constituted in everyday life. According to Mead (1934), all social interactions—interactions involving more than one person engaged with another through gestures and language, conversations and behaviours—are constitutive of the

self.

George Herbert Mead is placed as a key figure in the "micro-sociopsychological tradition" (Misheva 2009, p. 159) but is also the founder associated with symbolic interactionism (Da Silva 2007, p. 160; Misheva 2009). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to detail the varying strands of and tensions between differing theorists within symbolic interactionism however this tradition continues to provide a rich and diverse area of scholarship in the discipline of sociology. Specifically, it is Mead's theory of self that is of interest in this project. Mead's theory of self provides a rich framework within which to analyse sexuality and selfhood (Jackson 1999; Jackson & Scott 2010a). Understanding everyday sexuality means being interested in the day-to-day production of the sexual self. This is best served by Mead's theoretical tradition because it allows for full analysis of the social practices involved in the production of the self. Before considering the merits of applying Mead's scholarship to that of sexual self-constitution it is important to critically examine his scholarly contribution and key ideas. Thus to see where Mead's theoretical tradition departs from dominant discourses about the self requires a brief examination of historically significant theories of the self. The ways in which psychoanalytic theory places childhood, for example, differs from the function of childhood in Meadian selfhood. Psychoanalytic theory is therefore examined in this chapter before moving on to Meadian notions of the self. A critical discussion of the data in relation to psychoanalytic theory occurs in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Whereas in psychoanalytic theory the self is formed through internal psychic processes and conflicts, Meadian sociality emphasises social processes, which are 'outside' the self, as constitutive. The formation of the self in childhood is important to both

psychoanalytic theory as well as for Mead (Crossley 2001, p. 145) however the importance of fantasy fleshes out the differences between these approaches to understanding the self. Whereas for Mead fantasy or "abstract thought" is the means through which the generalized other is manifest (Mead 1934, pp. 155-156) in psychoanalytic theory fantasy symbolises the deeper tension that characterises the self, as we shall see in the following critical discussion. Because of the prominence of psychoanalytic theories of the self in everyday life it is crucial to critique these approaches and examine their differences to the social construction of the self.

Psychoanalytic scholarship about the sexual self represents an established intellectual tradition and one which has been argued to apply to sociological understandings of the self and its sexual dimension (see, for example, Elliott 2001, 2005a). The contrast between the ways in which the sexual self can be examined through Meadian analysis and psychoanalytic theory could not be further apart. Despite the historical emphasis and subsequent proliferation of therapeutic discourse in late modern life (Furedi 2004), Mead's theoretical tradition better accounts for the sexual self than its psychoanalytic counterpart (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 11). Yet there is some common ground between the two approaches: the prominence of childhood in the formation of the self and the role of language and communication are central to both approaches, though the ways in which each of these are theorised in relation to the self differ.

Psychoanalytic theory is of interest in sexuality studies and greatly influenced empirical studies about sex until the 1960's until social constructionist theory-building shifted the emphasis away from the Freudian self more towards the social self (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 9). Sigmund Freud's depiction of the sexual self has had significant purchase

in various disciplines since the nineteenth century though it is the work of other scholars such as Lacan (1977) and others (for example, Marcuse 1964) in which Freud's ideas were extended and explicated upon that hold particular significance for the ways in which the sexual self has been thought about in the social sciences (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 11).

Freud's notion of sexuality is one that is embedded in the self which creates conflictual internal forces largely due to the incredible force of human sexual desire (see Freud, 1905/1953). Freud theorised that it is sexual desire that compels one to act in a particular way but in order to understand how desire became to be formed in individuals one must understand sexuality as a developmental process that begins from birth onwards. This is because:

> … [i]t has been found that in early childhood there are signs of bodily activity to which only an ancient prejudice could deny the name of sexual and which are linked to psychical phenomena that we come across later in adult erotic life—such as fixation to particular objects, jealousy and so on (Freud 1940, p. 5).

Thus sexuality becomes linked to a developmental narrative in which the individual's experience through various prescribed stages becomes enmeshed with meaning as a consequence of non-resolution of the tensions, or *conflicts*, to invoke an Eriksonian (Erikson, 1968) concept of development. The precipitating events for the divergence of the unconscious from consciousness occur outside of and repressed by the individual, within his or her social world (for example, as advanced by Marcuse, 1966) however this is not to say that the social becomes more important than those internal processes. It is in only by unlocking the internal, hidden processes of thought and action that the self may be revealed and ultimately reshaped. In noting the relationship between social

processes and those internal processes, Freud argues that:

> In consequence of the inverse relation holding between civilization and the free development of sexuality, of which the consequences can be followed far into the structure of our existences, the course taken by the sexual life of a child is just as unimportant for later life where the cultural or social level is relatively low as it is important where that level is relatively high (Freud 1905/1953, p. 242).

How are individual and social worlds constructed in such a view? The individual, for whom action is connected to tensions between the unconscious and conscious, is moved to action by a desire that ultimately manifests in the social. Thus, the reconstituting of the social involves individuals moved to action by unconscious desire: a desire that is unknown to them but nevertheless sees them moved to action upon the stage of the social. In order to further understand the nature of such desire and what this means for a sociological view of the self and agency, critical revisions of Freud's work help to flesh out the contribution of the field of psychoanalytic scholarship to contemporary selfhood.

The prominence of Freudian ideas such as the importance of childhood in self formation continues to persist in popular culture however the ways in which the gendered sexual self is theorised remains unsatisfactory. In the 1970s, feminist scholarship in which women's sexuality was explored critiqued and rejected many of the claims made by Freud about early sexual development such as those that privilege the role of masculine traits and roles over those of women's (Chodorow 1972; Firestone 1970; Millett 1970; Mitchell 1974). For example, Nancy Chodorow's 'reversal' of Freudian-based emphasis on the father figure argued a central positioning of the woman/ mother role in the development of child gender and sexuality (Chodorow 1978). It was during this time that research that situated individual experiences, in particular, those of women, was

placed alongside other well-established theories of the self. This turn towards a gendered understanding of not only the self but scholarship about the self meant privileging women's experiences over those of expert knowledge as well using a gendered lens to view the epistemology of (amongst others) psychoanalytic approaches (this is further elucidated upon in Chapter Three in relation to the design of this research). Further, feminist scholarship in which women's position in society was critically examined enabled for a better understanding of the ways in which oppression entrenched within the social structure were manifested in the self. As Jackson and Scott note: "With the development of second wave feminism, Freud was subjected to far more critical scrutiny" (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 11).

Contemporary feminist critiques have also highlighted the phallocentrism inherent in Freud's depiction of the relationship between the masculine and feminine which has the masculine threatened by the feminine (for example as advanced in the Oedipal complex) or the female as depicted as unknowable or lacking (as outlined in phallic stages of development as well as in the concept of penis envy and hysteria; for example, see Irigaray's [1985] charge of phallogocentrism against Freud).

Notwithstanding these criticisms of Freudian psychoanalytic theorising about the theory of the unconscious mind, they attend to the role that desire plays in promoting or limiting agency. For example, Lacan (1966) positions language as foundational to the formation of the unconscious as a structure (McNay 2000, p. 123). To appreciate Lacan's contribution to the field of psychoanalytic theory would entail analysis beyond the scope of this thesis however the role his work played in shifting from the materialism set up by Freudian psychoanalytic scholarship to the depiction of the

unconscious as reliant upon linguistics, or the "…linguistification of the subject" (Elliott 2005b, p 26) is relevant to our discussion. Lacan represents a radical move away from psychoanalytic placement of identity and has given rise to a major theoretical and ontological debate in the area of desire and the notion of the unconscious (Giddens 1979a, p 38). Lacan's account of desire consciously differs from Freud's:

> For what Freud intends to make present in the function of this libido is not some archaic relation….The libido is the effective presence, as such, of desire. It is what now remains to indicate desire—which is not substance, but which is there at the level of the primary process, and which governs the very mode of our approach (Lacan 1973).

Lacan's ideas about desire have been contested and advanced by many scholars, notably by those who argue for a feminist commentary of the sexual self. Theorists such as Kristeva (1991), Irigaray (1985) and Cixous (1981) in particular have highlighted the importance that language, the subjective, power and culture all play in constituting the contemporary sexual self. What can be termed as post structuralist feminist accounts have been able to reconcile the increased awareness of Freud's gendered constructs, said to characterise sexual development, with subsequent understandings of the role of women. Those accounts that stress the importance of the linguistic dimension to psychoanalytic theorising, for example, have also included a contextualising of the social and cultural meanings that make up the ontological basis for theorising. Kristeva argues that:

> … [o]ne cannot hope to understand Freud's contribution, in the specific field of psychiatry, outside of its humanistic and Romantic affiliation. With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes in integral part of the *same*…Freud's personal life…[m]y discontent in living with the other—my

> strangeness, his strangeness—rests on the perturbed logic that governs this strange bundle of drive and language, of nature and symbol, constituted by the unconscious, always already shaped by the other (Kristeva 1991, pp. 181-182).

There are two important points here. Firstly, Kristeva cautions against decontextualising Freud: this goes some way to say that though some of the issues that Freud grappled with have been superseded by theories that are more in line with contemporary mores, one ought not discount his sizeable contribution to theorising about the self. Secondly, she argues that the self must be seen to be interlaced with the individual experiences of psychic, lived experience, alongside social phenomena such as language and culture. Crucially, Kristeva says, these must be seen as relating to and deriving from those unknowable aspects of the self which are manifested through desire. This perspective does not promote a complete rejection of the concept of the unconscious. Instead, Kristeva moves towards reconfiguring the unconscious. The unknowable terrain of the unconscious, albeit one that ought to be accepted as being 'irreconcilable'—which is a movement away from traditional psychotherapeutic discourses–moves one away from one's self, into the sphere of the unknowable self. This is depicted, somewhat contrarily, as being a state at which the individual can be at 'ease' with this unknowable 'other' self. Kristeva says:

> It is through the unravelling transference—the major dynamics of otherness, of love/ hatred for the other, of the foreign component of our psyche—that, on the basis of the other, I become reconciled with my own otherness—foreignness, that I play on it and live by it. Psychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable (Kristeva 1991, pp. 181-182).

Kristeva's description of the 'journey' of psychoanalysis highlights the temporality intrinsic to therapeutic discourse. Linear temporality can also be seen within much of

psychoanalytic scholarship where the contemporary self is connected to a former, younger or incomplete self: thus the unconscious remains ontologically fixed to this perspective.

This has implications for the sexual self. The purpose in psychotherapy, then becomes to move from a self that is splintered or unaware of the unconscious self towards a self that is conscious of this hidden dimension of identity. At the beginning of the process of psychotherapy the self that is unreconciled with the unconscious self is seen as needing to undertake 'work' in order to address this divide.

This therapeutic turn is not only a process involving individual subjectivities, but is argued to have become a ubiquitous aspect of contemporary social life in Western societies (Furedi 2004; Lasch 1979; Reiff 1966). In this tradition the self is splintered in that it contains a conscious, socially mediated self as well as an unconscious dimension to identity. Symbols connected to the self such as language, dreams and everyday interactions offer interpretations of this conflict between the unconscious and conscious. Therefore the sexual self cannot ever be seen to be conflict-free. Accepting those theses that see desire and the unconscious as being problematically connected in time to stages of sexual development from childhood would seem to mean that the adult sexual self is unable to be free from pathology.

The psychoanalytic importance of linguistics means that the therapeutic application of these ontologies involves language. Specifically this equates to what has been termed the 'talking therapies' in which individuals can reflect upon and explore subjective issues arising from late modern social life. Although the ubiquity of therapeutic

practices is utilitarian (Elliott 1996; Elliott & Lemert 2006): they offer "...individuals a radical purchase on the dilemmas of living in the modern epoch" (Elliott 1996, p. 329), it is the contribution made by George Herbert Mead that enables for a richer and more socially-orientated analysis of the sexual self in late modern life (Jackson, 1999; Jackson & Scott, 2010a).

> Whilst psychoanalytic traditions have dominated studies in sexuality, "psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the unknowable unconscious, says little about everyday sexuality" (Jackson 2007, p. 4).

Gagnon and Simon's key text *Sexual Conduct* ([1973] 2011) provides a rich example of the application of Meadian conceptions of selfhood to the sexual self. Drawing from Mead (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 12), their radical placement of the social at the centre of considerations of sexuality destabilise psychoanalytic constructs on the basis that such accounts do little to provide for the social and cultural settings in which identity-making occurs (Gagnon & Simon [1973] 2011, p. 12). Whereas the mind contains an "unknowable unconscious" in psychoanalytic theory (Jackson 2007, p. 4), for Mead, the mind is only 'knowable' through social processes. Mead says:

> The social process, as involving communication, is in a sense responsible for the appearance of the individual organisms implicated in that process. Organic processes or responses; that is to say, any given biological organism is in a way responsible for the existence (in the sense of the meanings they have for it) of the objects to which it physiologically and chemically responds… The social process in a sense constitutes the objects to which it responds…awareness or consciousness is not necessary to the presence of meaning in the process of social experience (Mead 1934, p. 77).

For Mead the period of childhood is of crucial importance to social competence as it enables actors to learn the dominant norms and attitudes of society: "…in the instance

of the infant…effective adjustment to the little society upon which it has so long to depend" (Mead 1934, p. 368). A more detailed examination of childhood play occurs in Chapter Three as it emerges from the data however it is important to note the placement of childhood as central to Mead's sociality.

Because Mead's self is one that emerges through social interactions, understanding the sexual self empirically using this framework entails examining the ways in which social interactions manifest in everyday life. More specifically this entails understanding how participants make sense of their sexual selves, as constituted in everyday social relations. As we shall see, the process of self-making as an ongoing process which occurs across time and space is one that can be used to understand not only the broadly conceptualised 'self' but also the specifically situated 'sexual self'.

Mead's scholarly work about the self has recently been applied to theoretical explanations of contemporary sexuality (see Jackson 2007, 2010a, 2010b). Jackson and Scott (2010a, 2010b) argue that sociality, temporality and reflexivity are central to Mead's depiction of the self *as a process* grounded in social practices and interactions, and that this is applicable to understanding sexuality (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 123). Through examining Mead's notions of sociality, temporality and reflexivity I demonstrate how these relate to our understandings of the sexual self and argue that Mead's contribution provides an excellent framework to better understand the sexual self in late modernity.

Sociality

Since Mead's sociality is constitutive of selfhood (1934), it is crucial to critically

examine how sociality is theorised by Mead in the context of the everyday life worlds of actors. Though the self has been given prominence in Mead's work, it is also important to understand how society is theorised in relation to the ways in which selfhood is argued to be produced. I argue that understanding the relationship between mind, self and society, as set out in Mead's (1934) eponymous text, is crucial to laying the foundation for Meadian analysis of everyday sexuality. Central to this task is understanding sociality.

Individual behaviour ought to be made sense of in the context within which it takes place and yet the degree to which one person is able to exercise choice within this context is an historically enduring debate which dates back to Pre-Socratic texts (Handel 2003, p. 133). The so-called 'agency versus structure' debate is examined in relation to the data from this present study in later chapters of this thesis. However a useful starting point to understand how Mead views the dynamic between the individual and the social emerges through the explanation provided in the following quote:

> The social act is not explained by building it up out of stimulus plus response; it must be taken as a dynamic whole—as something going on—no part of which can be considered or understood by itself—a complex organic process implied by each individual stimulus and response involved in it (Mead 1934, p. 7).

Thus sociality is not only constitutive for the formation of the self but exists through complex, dynamic interactional processes. The individual is part of a broader "organic process" (Mead 1934, p. 7) in which other individuals interact.

Whilst Mead's conceptualisation of selfhood has achieved a great deal of attention in sociological literature, the ways in which he theorises 'society' has been of lesser

interest to scholars (Athens 2005, p. 305). Mead says:

> Human society as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members; but its individual members would not possess minds and selves if these had not arisen within or emerged out of the human social process (Mead 1934, p. 227).

Indeed the social milieu in which interaction takes place bears an important relationship to what Mead refers to as the generalized other which is the "attitude of the community" (Mead 1934, p. 154). These attitudes are internalised to a greater and greater extent through the process of socialisation until actors have intuitive knowledge of broader society's attitudes (Mead 1934, p. 155-156) and social interaction becomes so familiar it is routine (Crossley 2001, p. 145). It is a central question then to consider the role of the social in historical terms given the shifts and changes brought about by late modernity.

For example, the complex, late modern landscape in which technologies are rapidly expanding and shifting the social environment (Lash & Urry 1994) challenge Mead's fixed depiction of self formation as requiring more than one actor in order to produce sociality (Mead 1934, p. 7). Unlike the mental abstraction of the generalized other, sociality for Mead requires a physically present, in-person, communicative exchange. This means that mental representations of others do not constitute sociality (Athens 2002, pp. 26–27). Mead's theory of sociality becomes problematic in applying it in late modern life because of the increasing, and varying, platforms through which social exchanges take place (Dunk-West 2011). Online communications, for example email, text and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter host interactions between individuals and groups that occur in real time yet would not be considered examples of sociality because they do not take place in person.

This is not to say that Mead's notion of sociality cannot be applied to late modern life; indeed as is demonstrated throughout this thesis, Mead's conceptualisation of sociality as producing selfhood is crucial to understanding the study's findings. Rather, Mead's conceptualisation of sociality ought to be extended to adapt to the conditions of the late modern setting. This would involve viewing sociality as including interactions with others through technologies but also would enable for a greater emphasis upon the role that imagined representations of others plays in self-making (Athens 2002, pp. 26–27). However including, say, engagement with fantasy or imagined representations of others as examples of sociality serves to internalise rather than externalise this process and is therefore incompatible with Mead's sociality. Internalised representations of others are associated more with psychoanalytic and psychological discourses: "… unlike contemporary versions of theory of mind … Mead understood interpreting the actions of others as an intersubjective process that privileges action with others over introspective thought" (Martin 2006, p. 74). Exchanges that take place using technology-based communication differ from the internalised exchanges with an imagined 'other' self even though exchanges that occur online do not require person-to-person, *physical* interaction in the sense that Mead describes. Yet if the key to understanding sociality is the centrality of communication then a closer examination of this aspect to sociality helps to make sense of the encounters that can be regarded as examples of sociality in late modernity.

Whereas theorists of late modernity focus on broader social and economic changes, Mead's theory of interaction or sociality, at first glance, seems less applicable to the contemporary landscape. Scholars interested in late modern social life make links

between broader forces such as globalisation and individualisation (see, for example, Giddens 1992) and the ways in which these are manifest in the decisions individuals make in everyday life. For example, the relatively recent trend in which people in committed intimate relationships live apart from one another, so called 'living apart together' (LAT) (see Holmes 2006) can be used as evidence of the increasingly de-traditionalised (Giddens 1992, pp. 178–181) environment in which couples negotiate their lifestyles, jobs and relationships. Certainly Meadian sociality offers much in the way of making sense of such new forms of relationships however as noted above, the ways in which technology has shaped intimate interactions is less effective using a strictly Meadian definition of sociality. However the centrality of communication to Mead's thesis helps to mount the case for including technological forms of exchange as meeting the conditions for sociality.

Mead notes the importance of communication in the ongoing interaction between actors. In particular, communication is attained in the same manner as all knowledge which is required of social competence: through socialisation. Mead stresses that communicative action is a social process, yet it also links the individual with the means by which to reflect upon his or her self. He says:

> The process of communication simply puts the intelligence of the individual at his [sic] own disposal. But the individual that has this ability is a social individual. He [sic] does not develop it by himself and then enter into society on the basis of this capacity. He [sic] becomes such a self and gets such control by being a social individual, and it is only in society that he [sic] can attain this sort of a self which will make it possible for him [sic] to turn back on himself [sic] and indicate to himself the different things he [sic] can do (Mead 1934, p. 243).

For Mead, communication is intrinsically connected to the socialising process which, in

turn, forms the ongoing social interaction which produces the self (Mead 1934, p. 257). Mead examines other forms of interaction—such as an actor reading a novel or a journalistic text—and demonstrates that although these are varying communicative forms which require knowledge about the generalised other they are forms of communication (Mead 1934, pp. 256–257). Social exchanges in which no personal interaction is required—say that which occurs through engagement in social networking sites or via email or instant messaging—meet the requirements for Mead's depiction of sociality. This is because firstly, such exchanges draw from written forms of communication, secondly, they involve more than one actor and thirdly, they occur as part of existing networks between individuals. Technology both facilitates and replicates interaction that is similar to interaction in the social world (West, Pudsey & Dunk-West 2011). As Mead says:

> You cannot build up a society out of elements that lie outside of the individual's life-processes (Mead 1934, p. 257).

In this way, forms of communication which utilise new technologies such as through Web 2.0 (see Gauntlett 2007) can be included as involving Meadian social interaction.

Sociality and Temporality

This research is concerned with the sexual self in late modern life and as previously argued, Meadian sociality as constitutive of the self continues to have much to offer towards better understanding the sexual self in this current era (Jackson 1999). This historical orientation towards understanding the sexual self helps to address some of the claims made by scholars of late modernity about the sexual self (see, for example, Giddens 1992).

In interactionist terms, the ongoing interaction of actors constitutes not only the self, but

the sexual self. Sociality is an ongoing process in which the self is made and re-made and re-made again. Conversely, Giddens (1992, pp. 184–185) argues that the emancipation of women and sexual minorities has resulted in a 'freeing' up of both heterosexual and same-sex intimate relationships, which has generated post-traditional lifestyles (Giddens 1992, pp. 178–181). This shift is argued to have come about due to social changes brought about by various, historically significant movements and changes. Thus, the temporal location of the sexual self influences the ways in which the self is experienced and shaped by actors. Giddens argues that the removal of gender limitations which were historically grounded have resulted in more choice in sexual self-expression and definition. Such liberation is said to have coded sexual behaviour as pleasure-based as opposed to the focus of sexual behaviour being around reproduction and this new form of sexuality is therefore less rigid and more 'plastic' (Giddens 1992, p. 49).

Unlike Mead's interactionist placement of social interactions as central to the making of the self, Giddens' periodization argues that the self is primarily shaped and largely influenced by external, social and historically significant movements such as the movement of women into the paid workforce (Giddens 1992). As noted, the ways in which actors engage in sexual activities is argued to be an example of the emerging 'plastic sexuality' in which pleasure and choice characterise the modern sexual landscape. Similarly, Giddens argues that there has been a 'transformation of intimacy' (1992) which has seen the unprecedented rise of equality in intimate partnerships. This so-called pure relationship refers to:

> … a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver

enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it (Giddens 1992, p. 58).

Although Giddens' theory of intimacy goes some way to account for the shifting patterns of relationships in late modernity, it does so to the detriment of the everyday level of social life. For example, although Giddens acknowledges that late modern relationships cannot all be defined in positive terms, his analysis focuses on individual pathology such as 'addiction' or 'ontological security' rather than social issues (see, for example, Giddens 1992, p. 90). This means that his periodization and reliance upon broader social issues does little to account for the ways in which individuals, through their day-to-day lives, encounter inequality. A far more promising approach comes from Mead's theory of sociality. Unlike Giddens, Mead's social relations are central to producing identity rather than being passively connected to it. For Mead, "all selves are constituted by or in terms of the social process" (1934, p. 20). Applications of Meadian notions of self constitution demonstrate their utility in understanding the everyday sexual self (Jackson 1997, 1999; Jackson & Scott 2010a).

As noted earlier, Gagnon and Simon's *Sexual Conduct* (2011 [1973]) takes a Meadian stance, arguing that social processes are required to produce sexuality and these processes are scripted; sexual interactions are limited to the range of scripts prescribed within the social environment. Similarly, an individual sexuality that is made through social interactions requires an understanding that selfhood is not locatable from within a so-called psyche; it emerges through external relationships with others in social life. This raises the question: If the sexual self is constituted through social interactions, what role does the individual play in shaping and challenging existing norms and values about sexuality? For example, how much agency does an actor have in resisting dominant expectations or perceptions of sexual roles? *Sexual Conduct* (Gagnon &

Simon 2011 [1973]) importantly highlights the limits to individual agency through the argument that choices in relation to sexuality are not limitless. Instead, sexual conduct is constrained by sexual scripts that set out particular courses of action.

Mead is clear about the relationship between the individual and the social, which, for him, is "not in the least bit incompatible with … the fact that every individual self has its own peculiar individuality" (1934, p. 201). Thus, whilst social processes constitute the self, it is an individual's "own particular and unique standpoint within that process" (Mead 1934, p. 201) that determines their interpretation of those very social processes that produce identity. However, this position is criticised as having a 'blind spot (Athens 2002) to the reality of the inequalities that are manifest in social interactions.

In a society in which inequalities continue to shape interactions, it is inevitable that "the division of labor [sic] that arises invariably during a complex social act's performance necessitates that sooner or later superordinate roles become differentiated from subordinate ones" (Athens 2002, p. 31). This view is not incompatible with the notion that individuals make sense of their social interactions through reference to their own lived experiences (as illustrated in relation to gender in Chapter Five) while at the same time recognizing the effects of social inequalities.

Further, Gagnon and Simon's scripting theory speaks to the importance of socially-defined actions and identities. Although individual perceptions gender, for example, may exist, they may only do so firstly because of their constitution through social processes, and secondly through their fit with social interactions in which their meanings are implicit or explicit (Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973]). Further, Athens'

(2002) critique of Mead fails to take into account the compatibilities between Meadian notions of social exchange and other orientations such as Marxism (Burkitt 1991, p. 26) and poststructuralism (Jackson & Scott 1997, p. 96).

When brought together, these traditions may both acknowledge the reality of material inequality and aim to better understand the social processes that 'make' inequality. This is another reason to research at the everyday level of analysis, and why Mead's appreciation of how one's biography helps to shape the self and make sense of social encounters is so important. Empirical examination of the everyday offers an insight into how inequalities are manifest in daily living, because:

> … as feminists have long appreciated, the ordinary and routine give us clues to understanding the many forms and the persistence of sexual violence and exploitation, while a sensitivity to inequality and oppression is essential to a critical analysis of the variability of sexual relations and practices (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 162).

In addition, recent theorising by interactionist scholar Ken Plummer points to the importance of temporality as well as periodization. Using an interactionist framework, Plummer argues for the combination of a developmental, lifespan approach as well as a critical understanding the role of generation in the constitution of the sexual self. Temporality for Plummer means an analysis of time from both the Meadian perspective which is interested in the "…pasts, presents, and futures" (Plummer 2011, p. 166) as well as the meaning of time in relation to one's biography and the biographies of those around them. He explains how this relates to the sexual self:

> Our social sexual worlds always lie at the intersections of our generations (along with other locations such as class, gender, nation, and ethnicity). All sexualities

> dangle from an age perspective. They are situated in age standpoints. At any moment of thinking about the sexual, we will usually find at least five generations helping shape that moment. And these are just the living generations—to this there will also be the legions of dead generations, whose ghosts may still be heard speaking past sexual stories (Plummer 2011, p. 165).

Thus viewing age as a definitional and categorical aspect is important to understanding the sexual self. Plummer identifies two important aspects to seeing time as important in an analysis of the sexual self and these are diachromic and synchronic. He argues that each of these are equally applicable to studies of the sexual self: "Synchronic age means we can study sexuality at various given moments in time, which diachronic age means we can study sexualities through time—in their historical movements" (Plummer 2011, p. 168).

Plummer's recent work in the area of sexuality and time (2011) notes that for any empirical work into the sexual self, what is being examined is at a particular given moment in time and is therefore only part of a broader biography and historical epoch. Because of the ongoing nature of self-constitution through social interaction (Mead 1934), which equally applies the ongoing nature of sexual self-constitution (Jackson 1997, 1999; Jackson & Scott 2010a), temporality in Plummer's estimation reinforces the importance of seeing the sexual self located within its historical point in time. Thus, this legitimises the focus on the everyday sexual self *in late modernity* in this present study.

The social practices that participants in this study engaged in in order to 'make' their sexual selves are analysed in subsequent chapters of this thesis and Plummer's work is returned to in Chapter Six. I now move on to continue to build the theoretical

foundation upon which this study is built by critically exploring reflexivity and the late modern sexuality associated with the contemporary self.

Reflexivity and Sexual Self-making

Reflexivity has been so aligned with identity theorists' notions of selfhood that the 'extended reflexivity' (Adams 2003) thesis has become synonymous with late modern identity. Sexual self-making is argued to have 'transformed' through the process of contemporary reflexive processes and it is important to critique this claim since this study is concerned with the sexual self in late modernity. Reflexivity is briefly discussed here. A more comprehensive interrogation of reflexivity and selfhood, and how these relate to contemporary sexuality, follow in subsequent chapters.

Many contemporary social theorists interested in identity cite relationship breakdown as evidence of the instability of social life brought about by unstable modern conditions. For example, in modern social life actors are argued to have become less connected to community and tradition, and more interested in individual choices. This is argued to be to the detriment of intimate relationships because commitment no longer heralds lifelong partnerships. Bauman (2003, p. viii) asserts that broader social changes have encouraged this lack of commitment and dissatisfaction with intimacy:

> … [i]n our world of rampant 'individualization' relationships are mixed blessings. They vacillate between a sweet dream and a nightmare, and there is no telling when one turns into the other… In a liquid modern setting of life, relationships are perhaps the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence.

Although Anthony Giddens' theories about intimacy take a more optimistic stance than Bauman, they similarly bring together late modern social conditions with the emergence

of a new generation of actors for whom identity has become an 'ongoing project' (Giddens 1992, p. 30). Like Bauman, the link between late modern conditions and the nature of contemporary partnership patterns is assumed. Giddens theorises intimacy merely as part of a broader pattern in which individuals are increasingly faced with choices relating to identity production and continual, voluntary adjustment. Therefore, an individual's sexual self is not only part of their broader identity but is affected by the ubiquitous move towards increasing self-awareness. As Giddens (1992, p. 30) says, "[t]he question is one of sexual identity but not only this. The self today is for everyone a reflexive project—a more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future".

This research is concerned with sexual self-making in the 'here and now', which involves the personal and social dimensions to temporality. These are explored further later in this chapter as well as in Chapter Six. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, the term 'late modernity' is used to denote an awareness of the historical and social contexts that shape everyday life. Periodization scholars are interested in theorizing sexuality and identity through an analysis of this current epoch (named differently as 'late modernity' [Giddens 1992] or 'liquid modernity' [Bauman 2003]) however they conflate everyday life with broader social shifts. The overemphasis on reflexivity within analyses of periodization is not without contention because such analyses undervalue the importance of everyday social life. As Heaphy (2007, p. 4) notes:

> The reconstructivist theory of reflexive modernity proposed by Giddens and Beck, for example, has argued the emergence of new universalities and commonalities in global and individualized experience where there are no 'others'. This argument may be (relatively) convincing when it is focused on the abstract theoretical working out of the 'reflexivity' of modernity, but it fails to be convincing when the theory is brought down to earth and compared to other arguments about how otherness and difference are centrally important—locally

> and on a global scale—to shaping personal and day-to-day experience, and to strategies of power.

Both Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992) argue that the characteristics of the late modern world, such as globalization, have enormous implications for the everyday interactions in people's social worlds. For Giddens however, the notion of reflexivity is not merely descriptive of the fact of being aware of oneself; rather, it extends beyond the individual. Broad economic and social changes are positioned as explaining the new 'transformatory' ways in which actors interrelate in their personal relationships in their day-to-day lives.

Giddens' 'extended reflexivity', in which complex social conditions are theorised to have provided new conditions for self-fashioning, does little to account for everyday social and cultural practices (Adams 2003). Indeed, the assumption that globalizing forces have prompted increased reflexivity is rather uncritically stated in Giddens' and Bauman's work. Rather than globalization bringing about reflexivity, for example, sexual reflexivity can be argued equally to have brought about culturally-situated, globalizing shifts. The categorization of sexual behaviours within HIV prevention approaches in Africa is an example of this phenomenon (Moore, H.L. 2010, pers. Comm. 4.2.2011). Further, viewing actors as highly individualized and concerned with reflexive self-fashioning is flawed by Giddens' tendency to dichotomise tradition and post-tradition (Alexander 1995). The problem with this dichotomy is the underlying assumption that tradition is relatively simplistic compared to the complex post-traditional order (Alexander 1995).

Whilst Giddens' extended reflexivity is viewed as a product of late modernity, Mead

argues that what he calls 'reflectiveness' is firmly embedded within social relations. Both Giddens and Mead highlight the importance of the social setting from the onset of human life (Adams 2003, p. 232), and Mead's conception of the self is neither the decentred postmodern depiction nor the psychoanalytic subject (Jackson 2007 p. 7).

Mead argues that 'reflectiveness' means being an 'other' to oneself, only through continual interaction with social processes. Mead says that 'reflectiveness', or what can be called 'reflexivity', is not merely a tool for self-fashioning but is required for social functioning (Jackson 2007, p. 8). What people think of as their 'minds' are, in fact, firmly locatable outside their selves (in contrast to psychoanalytic notions of subjectivity which see identity as related to an 'inner' world of individual thoughts and reflections): minds 'arise' only through social interactions. Mead (1934, p. 134) argues that "reflectiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind".

The notion of reflectiveness is therefore a compulsory condition for sociality, which in turn 'makes' the self. It is a feature of human life and human action (Archer 2007). The degree to which reflectiveness forms social interaction and personal cognition is developed in Margaret Archer's work and is discussed in detail in Chapter Five. However, the importance of social processes should not be overlooked through an overemphasis on reflexivity. For example, in relation to sexual self-making, the term reflexivity has been simplified in the social sciences because of a failure to recognise the complex processes associated with sociality (Gagnon 2011 in Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973], p. 314). Gagnon says:

> Being reflexive is enormously complex because the actor has to think of many possibilities and many consequences not only for others, but for the constitution

> of the self. The pressure to select, to choose one of the many lines of action, increases the more you get into the public world, but at the same time the integrity of the fantasy must be maintained… The task of the actor is to continually link and adjust and transform and stabilize the interpersonal and the cultural while maintaining the plausibility of the self (Gagnon 2011 in Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973], p. 315).

The process of reflectiveness is central to sociality, which is in turn constitutive of the self (Mead 1934) and sexual self-making, which is both an aspect of a broader identity and part of a more private sphere. *Sexual Conduct* (Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973]) sets out three levels of constitutive processes in explaining sexual behaviour, each level with its own set of scripts. These levels are interpersonal and intrapsychic as well as cultural, with the latter receiving greater attention in subsequent work around sexual scripting (Simon & Gagnon 1986) due to the increased awareness of, and scholarly development about, the role of culture in sexuality (Gagnon 2011 in Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973], p. 315).

Scripting theory argues that choices of sexual behaviour are limited by prewritten 'scripts' set out in social life. Sexual agency is always curtailed by these preordained scripts through which sexual interactions occur, so much so that "very little … can in a full measure be called spontaneous" (Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973], p. 13).

This brings me to ask the question: given that scripting theory explains the nature of human sexual relations (Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973]), do similar limits to action extend to studies of sexuality as they relate to sexual self-making? The answer is yes, although it is necessary to understand that late modern sociocultural sexual scripts contain paradoxes and contradictions (Jackson 2007). It is important to remain aware of

these contradictions and their intrinsic complexities because doing so enables a nuanced understanding of the sexual self in late modern life. Therefore, a range of sociocultural scripts can coexist in this new complex landscape despite contradicting one another. For example, homophobia continues to thrive at the same time as lesbian chic (Jackson 2007).

The reflectiveness central to sociality (discussed above) continues to provide the mechanism through which the sexual self is made. However, the increasingly complex cultural scripts available to us through late modern social life have proliferated. As Jackson (2007, p. 12) says, "our confessional culture does … provide copious resources for fashioning a sexual self—for drawing on others' sexual stories in order to tell one's own. Late modernity also offers new avenues for sexual self-telling".

Whilst some studies have investigated sexual scripting at the intrapsychic level (see, for example, Plante 2007), to date there have been few empirical studies into the everyday sexual self in late modern social life. Therefore, little is known about how individual actors negotiate the scripts or choices available to them (Jackson & Scott 2010a). This thesis offers some insight into how the study participants negotiated their identities and scripts.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified the theoretical foundations upon which this study into everyday sexuality is built. I have proposed that the scholarly tradition offered by George Herbert Mead offers a firm theoretical foundation upon which empirically-derived understandings of the everyday sexual self in late modern life may be

explicated. The socially constituted self has been argued to provide a fuller account of the sexual self than the approaches advanced by scholars such as Anthony Giddens. I have briefly explored the role reflexivity plays in social relations of identity-making for the purpose of highlighting its role in Meadian notions of the self. This will be taken up further in subsequent chapters. I now examine the research design for this empirical work exploring everyday sexuality and identity, before moving on to the critical analysis of data in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six before concluding the thesis in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods

> *I may be reflective after I have read a particular book that's touched me in some particular way and think about how does that apply to my life, you know. But that's usually, it's a lone thing. Like, I just do it within my own head. So to do it with somebody else I think is really wonderfully, it's really useful too. Yeah. And I think, you know, we, we really don't have the opportunities to do that and we could learn so much more about ourselves and others if we did do it, you know*
>
> Edward, 57, research participant

Introduction

In broad terms, this research into everyday sexuality sought to examine the sexual self in late modern social life. More specifically, the study's aim was to better understand everyday, contemporary sexuality in relation to individuals' identities or selves. I carried out thirty in depth interviews with fifteen men (n=15) and fifteen women (n=15) between the ages of 30 and 65 years in order to empirically examine everyday sexuality and identity. These interviews yielded rich data which, once analysed and coded, provide insight into the sexual self. In this chapter, I provide a methodological justification for this inductive, interpretive research.

In the past, I worked as a sexual health counsellor (or sex therapist) for an Australian, State government-funded sexual health agency. More recently I have held lecturing positions in both Australian and British universities. My role as a sex therapist entailed working with individuals and couples experiencing what can be termed (rather clinically) 'sexual dysfunction', but the reality of the work was more akin to clinical sociology or socioanalysis as it entailed in depth discussions with clients about social

and individual expectations and values about sexuality. The work, whether with men or women or couples, involved awareness-raising, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality. Although I saw individuals and couples experiencing 'problems' with their sexual lives, and I was referred clients through self-referrals, GPs and by other medical professionals, my role was not limited by medical approaches to sexuality. Instead, our conversations within the counselling room often led to enlightening discussion about how the client had been socialised in relation to gender and sexuality. I greatly enjoyed this work. It was important for my own professional self to be able to engage in and appreciate the political dimension to the work and to examine, alongside clients, gendered experiences of sexuality and name the inequalities that manifest in day-to-day life. The sexual health team was located in a very impoverished area in South Australia and, being a service embedded within a community health model of health, my role also entailed consultancy work (training GPs, nurses and youth workers), running groups and other community development activities.

I believe the interpersonal skills gained through all of my professional roles helped me to establish a good rapport with the participants in the study. As I discuss later in this chapter, it was also important for me to acknowledge that my lived experience would form part of the research itself, since the inductive, qualitative methodology used recognises that in this type of research the researcher brings with them their experiences, biases and political viewpoints (as noted by Stanley & Wise 1990).

Methodology and Methods

This research, which seeks to examine everyday sexuality, requires "an interpretative orientation that focuses on the complex and nuanced process of the creation and

maintenance of meaning" (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2006, p. 2). 'Non-standardized' interviews (Gilbert 2001) (also called in depth, semi structured interviews) were used because they allow researchers more freedom to probe and clarify participant meaning and context than their structured counterparts (May 1995), and are recommended for topics considered personal (Denscombe 1998).

Empirical interactionist traditions recognise the need for flexibility. They emphasise relationships between the researcher and the person(s) with whom they interact:

> … data are valid when a deep mutual understanding has been achieved between interviewer and respondent. The practical consequence is that most interactionists reject prescheduled standardized interviews in favour of open-ended interviews. The latter allow respondents to use their own particular way of defining the world [and] assume that no fixed sequence of questions is suitable to all respondents (Fielding 1996, p. 151).

Whilst interactionist empirical work is often critiqued for ignoring social structure (Brickell 2006), much is to be gained from examining subjective accounts such as the research conducted by Gagnon and Simon (1973). In sexuality studies, focusing on individual subjectivity has provided the basis for important theorizing that brings together individual accounts with an appreciation of the sociality of sexuality (for example see Gagnon and Simon 1973; Plummer 1975, 2002; Jackson 2010a as well as more general theories of selfhood and sociality such as Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1980/1956).

Schutzian phenomenology (Schutz 1967) seeks to highlight individual meaning-making processes and underline the role of shared social meanings. Thus, a Schutzian interpretive approach is deemed best for exploring people's everyday experiences in

relation to their sexualities. It was chosen as the major influence on the design of this research for two main reasons. The first relates to a well-established tension in sociology that can be thought about in terms of the individual and social, micro and macro, or subjective and social divide. Schutzian phenomenology resolves the tendency to dichotomise subjective and social life by arguing that social structures can be talked about and investigated by those very narratives that exist at the individual level. Further, this is an approach that is ideally suited to everyday life because:

> … [i]n terms of common-sense thinking in everyday life men [sic] have knowledge of these various dimensions of the social world in which they live… common-sense knowledge of everyday life is sufficient for coming to terms with fellow-men, cultural objects, social institutions–in brief, with social reality ... because the world (the natural and the social one) is from the outset an intersubjective world and because … our knowledge of it is in various ways socialized (Schutz 1954, p. 492).

The second reason for choosing Schutzian phenomenology was that it acknowledges the embeddedness of the researcher not only in the research but also in the broader social world. Thus, both the researcher and those being 'researched' have shared understandings of the world that can be drawn upon throughout the research process. In order to utilise this shared understanding of the social and subjective spheres, the researcher needs to embrace the desire 'to understand' throughout the research process. Researchers cannot objectively 'understand' others' feelings. Rather, Schutz's (1954, p. 493) usage of 'Verstehen' acknowledges the embeddedness of the researcher and participants within the social setting:

> The fact that in common-sense thinking we take for granted our actual or potential knowledge of the meaning of human actions and their products is, I suggest, precisely what social scientists want to express if they speak of understanding or *Verstehen* as a technique of dealing with human affairs.

> *Verstehen* is, thus, primarily not a method used by the social scientist, but the particular experiential form in which common-sense thinking takes cognizance of the social cultural world.

Phenomenological approaches have been argued to underplay "the centrality of power in social life" (Giddens 1976, p. 53), however feminist approaches that recognise the presence of power in research argue that empirical work needs to consider both the relationship between the researcher and the researched as well as the importance of the researcher, or 'I', throughout the research process (Stanley & Wise 1990).

Combined with Schutz's 'common sense', which recognises that the researcher and participants form the same part of the social world, these approaches assist in providing guidance about how to approach the research method. I now move on to consider the 'problem' of reflexivity in interviews.

Reflexivity and Interviews

A Schutzian phenomenological approach involves encouraging researcher and participant reflexivity. As noted, interviews were approached as a means by which both I, as the researcher, along with the interviewee could engage with seeking to understand how the interviewee was able to make sense of their sexuality. Using such a framework to elicit empirically rich data invites reflexivity and, crucially, requires the researcher to gain the trust of, and establish rapport with, the participant. As Diamond (2006, p. 472) explains, "the intense interpersonal engagement afforded by in-depth interviews, especially when the topic at hand is personal and personally meaningful to the participants, tends to engender reflexivity, or bidirectional influence, between researcher and participant".

Such an active researcher role can be seen as problematic because questions asked by the researcher can convey particular discourses of sexuality or values about sexuality and thus affect the participant's responses. However, it is not possible for the researcher role to be less 'active' in the process due to the nature of conversation, where:

> … as one person speaks, thoughts are building up in his [sic] mind, and his [sic] listener is following him every step of the way just as the thoughts occur. In other words, none of the thoughts come out as prefabricated unities. They are constructed gradually, and they are interpreted gradually. Both speaker and listener live through the conversation in such a manner that on each side Acts of meaning-establishment or meaning-interpretation are filled in and shaded with memories of what has been said and anticipations of what is yet to be said (Shutz 2002, p. 35).

In this way, reflexivity as a requirement of the interview method can be argued to decrease reliability and authenticity (Silverman 1985). The researcher, by asking questions about sexuality, can be argued to have participated in the beginning of a process of reflexivity whereby the participant's responses are altered due to the asking of the question itself. Such an argument, however, would be made by those coming from "a strict empiricist perspective" (Diamond 2006).

Conversely, the position taken in this research is one that sees actors as having a strong role within the interview process; they are seen to possess and utilise a high level of agency. This position draws from the theoretical perspective advocated by theorists such as Archer (2000, 2003, 2007) and feminist social theorist Lois McNay (2000) whose work seeks to argue for a "generative logic for a theory of agency…[which] yields an understanding of a creative or imaginative substrate to action" (p. 5).

The existence of structural level discourses about sexuality (Foucault 1998) make it important to identify the individual's role in mediating, interpreting and shaping those messages at the subjective level. Thus, interviewing is a method that is well suited for such an investigation (Denzin 1978; Fielding 1996; Silverman 1985; Strauss & Corbin 1990). In conversing with actors about their sexuality, it is remembered that "creative or productive aspects immanent to agency … explain how, when faced with complexity and difference, individuals may respond in unanticipated and innovative ways" (McNay 2000, p. 5).

Using a Shutzian phenomenological approach acknowledges the shared meanings between participant and researcher, and grants participants agency. Similarly, McNay's (2000) work recasts the individual as being able to exert control and to influence the ways in which social structures impact upon their lives. It is a new reading on the traditional tension in sociology between structure and agency.

Another important feature of reflexivity is that during conversations between actors, or between the researcher and participant, shared understandings about social practices are drawn upon. More specifically, when I met with each participant and attempted to elicit conversations about identity and sexuality, shared understandings about identity and sexuality, and the attributes and make-up of the social life of which we are both a part form non-communicated but 'known about' knowledge between us. As Giddens (1984, p. 3) notes:

> … [i]t is the specifically reflexive form of the knowledgeability of human agents that is most deeply involved in the recursive ordering of social practices. Continuity of practices presumes reflexivity, but reflexivity in turn is possible only because of the continuity of practices that makes them distinctively 'the

> same' across space and time. 'Reflexivity' hence should be understood not merely as 'self-consciousness' but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life … [i]t is useful to speak of reflexivity as grounded in the continuous monitoring of action which human beings display and expect others to display.

Like McNay (2000), Giddens (1984) argues that the monitoring of action forms part of a transformatory process powered by reflexivity that sees social action affected by the continuation of individual practices. For the researcher, then, this means an acceptance of one's role of immersion not only in the structural realm of social life but also as a participant in the knowledge production and sense-making processes in which individuals engage when undertaking identity construction practices relating to the sexual self. Amongst other things, this requires a shared sense of what Schutz terms 'social reality':

> … the sum total of objects and occurrences within the social cultural world as experienced by the common-sense thinking of men [sic] living their daily lives among their fellow-men, connected with them in manifold relations of interaction. It is the world of cultural objects and social institutions into which we are all born, within which we have to find our bearings, and with which we have to come to terms. From the outset, we, the actors on the social scene, experience the world we live in as a world both of nature and of culture, not as a private but as an intersubjective one, that is, as a world common to all of us, either actually given or potentially accessible to everyone; and this involves intercommunication and language (Schutz 1954 p. 490).

Thus, interviews in this study drew upon complex and shifting, but notably intersubjective, *shared* notions between the researcher and the interviewee mostly through the medium of spoken language. These shared understandings of self, sexuality and identity for example, were arrived at through rich and somewhat complex

conversations.

The following dialogue taken from my interview with Claire, a 48-year-old woman, demonstrates how reflexivity is part of the interview process. Here, she tries to make sense of the interview process as well as trying to make sense of her sexual self intersubjectively. Specifically, this excerpt shows Claire at the very beginning of the interview, testing out and making sense of the interview process. In talking about "going red", Claire checks in with me about the physical manifestation of discomfort that arises with talking about sexuality. She highlights that "everyone" must respond in this way, thus referencing the intersubjective dimension to my conversation with her in relation to my conversations with others. In contrast to this physical sign, Claire talks about how comfortable she feels with talking about her sexuality.

During the dialogue about "going red", I recode this by using another explanation, which is perhaps what Claire was getting to herself. What is agreed between us is not only, as Giddens notes, "self-conscious"; it is also an example of the 'monitoring of action', or the "sense making process in which both participants and the researcher are engaged" (Colombo 2003) during the interview process. Even though we have shared assumptions about the feeling of embarrassment being portrayed corporeally through a reddening of her cheeks, for example, our shared notions of this needed to be deconstructed and referenced through reflexive dialogue. The exchange was as follows:

Clare:

You know, does that describe my sexuality, it does in a sense, I have sex with men. Do I just go on?

Priscilla:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Clare:

[laughs] Okay, all right. Because I am not in a relationship and for most of my adult life really haven't been in a, what do you call it, kind of solid relationship, you know, a traditional relationship I think. But, and I am going to go red, I am sure everybody does, you must be used to that.

Priscilla:

[laughs] I am pretty red anyway because I am so hot.

Clare:

[laughs] But, but feel very comfortable about, and fortunately for me, have always felt quite in control of my sexuality and comfortable with it, you know, and also I have long periods of not having a sexual partner, years. And I also feel quite comfortable with that. So, in fact I am one of the, I think feel one of the few people who doesn't have huge, it's not need isn't the right word, doesn't need, but anyway, I am comfortable kind of wherever, I think I am comfortable wherever I am. Does that explain? Okay, alright.

It was common for participants to continue talking about the experience of being interviewed after the end of the interview. Many reported wondering or worrying about what I might ask them, which seemed to have initiated a kind of reflexivity prior to the interview process. One participant, Erin, a 32-year-old woman, emailed me after the interview with an attachment in which she had recorded further reflection and felt that this might be helpful for the study because it provided further analysis of her relationship to her body following childbirth.

This text, as well as the excerpt from Edward at the beginning of the chapter, is a useful reminder that the research process is not a 'one-way' dialogue with the researcher being the only participant to gain from an exchange. Both quotations describe being interviewed as having brought about a positive process of reflexivity and insight, and

stand as examples of the way that what we might assume to be 'shared notions' require reflexive deliberation. An excerpt taken from Erin's document reads as follows:

> *Also on further reflection following our interview, I was able to define my sexuality with my partner pre-pregnancies and children as very "unproblematic", meaning the only things we cared about were mutual enjoyment. There was no-one else to consider and few physical limitations (other than occasional insecurity, or my "issue" with having oral sex performed on me). In comparison, now feels very problematic or able to be affected/ distracted easily by thoughts like those outlined above, or by children waking up, or by proximity to breastfeeding (before or after). There seems to be so many factors that can affect it in a negative sense, which adds to that feeling of "why bother". That is all until I write more!*

Although Erin did not send me any further correspondence relating to her reflections, her account demonstrates the influence of the research on her subjective meanings about her sexual self. As noted previously, in this way and in light of casting reflexivity as "treating one's self as subject for intellectual enquiry", the study connected to the meanings brought about by the "changing self posited in feminist social thought" (Stanley 1993, p. 44).

Sample and Methodological Procedure

The Sample

The sample consisted of fifteen women and fifteen men aged between 30 and 65 years. This age range was specified in order to avoid groups that can be termed 'younger people' and 'older people'. Hegemonic messages about sexuality posit that younger people are seen to be in more of an exploratory phase whereas older people are seen to be devoid of sexuality (Gott 2006). Older people's sexuality is an emerging area of inquiry whereas younger people and sexuality has been researched widely. Particular

and nuanced analyses are required that are pertinent to these specifically defined populations. Constructionist epistemology, in conjunction with feminist and phenomenological methodologies influenced the non-representativeness of the sample recruited for the study. Thus, generalizability, as defined mostly through quantitative measures, was not intended.

Recruitment Method

Participants were recruited who fitted the above age criteria. It was also specified that potential interviewees needed to view their sexuality as 'non problematic'. This criterion was intended to exclude minority populations who may have been adversely affected by being interviewed. Crucially, it was in line with the research aim that sought to explore the meaning of *everyday* sexuality as opposed to sexuality that might be seen as deviant, unusual or exoticized.

Typical case sampling, an approach that seeks to avoid selecting 'atypical' or 'deviant' populations (Patton 2002, p. 236), aligned with studying everyday sexuality. Snowballing (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981) was used as a sampling method to recruit volunteers. This meant utilizing existing relationships between the researcher and other actors with whom the researcher had contact on either a professional or personal level to contact third parties with details about the research. Potential interviewees heard about the study via word of mouth (for example, via a forwarded email or in person from someone who was aware of the study) and were invited to contact me. Most did so via email initially, with a smaller number telephoning me. The research design was such that participants were told about the study and invited to 'opt in'. This approach allowed a greater sense of agency for the participants and a greater sense of transparency around

the volunteering process than other approaches.

Potential participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix A), a consent form (Appendix B) and a letter of introduction (see Appendix C) prior to attending the interview. Friends and family were ruled out as potential research subjects.

Those who volunteered to be interviewed tended to come from professional or relatively highly educated backgrounds. This was largely because of my professional networks and my educational background. Whilst the sample is non-representative and participants tended to be rather privileged, such privilege does not remove the broader issues of power and oppression such as those experienced by cultural, sexual and gender minority groups.

Women overwhelmingly responded to the calls for participants, much more so than their male counterparts. This may be due to women feeling silenced generally, that is, having little opportunity for their experiences or voices to be heard (Reinharz & Chase 2002), and therefore taking up the opportunity to be heard more enthusiastically than men.

Another reason for women's increased interest in volunteering to be interviewed may have been the choice of methodologies. Given that women raised and socialised in Western-style cultures may be expected to be more articulate about themselves than men, generally speaking, they may be more able to 'story' their lives. The prospect of sitting and talking about their story to a woman researcher may have made women participants more comfortable than their male counterparts with this research approach.

This phenomenon is reflected anecdotally in the higher take-up rates of women to men in what may be termed 'talking therapies', which I argue goes some way towards explaining the significant overrepresentation of women in both health and mental health services in Australia (ABS 2009a). Eventually, I was able to recruit the number of male participants needed for the study, aided by the snowball sampling method; others who had been interviewed could tell potential men participants that I was 'okay' to talk to.

Establishing Trust and Credibility

Self-disclosure with minority groups is argued to assist in establishing trust and credibility (Sanders 2006). The fact that I have been 'out' as a queer woman for a number of years in Adelaide, and have had positive working and social relationships with key members of the queer communities undoubtedly assisted in establishing trust from the participants who passed on details of the study to relevant parties. Although the research was intended to invite a range of people whose sexual identities might be grouped as heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, gay and many other labels, I did not specify a target group because I anticipated that participants would disclose their sexual identities if these related to their narrative of how they made sense of their sexual self.

This did not mean that I did not need to be mindful of the position of power that researchers can hold, even though such power is not straightforward or unidirectional (Bloom 1998, pp. 34–36). For example, when I was looking for participants for the study, a prominent bisexual rights campaigner emailed me and asked me to disclose my sexual identity. They did this through a desire to protect queer communities from being 'researched on' rather than 'researched with'. I responded to the email and

communicated in a way that showed I was mindful of the historical and political dimensions relating to research with, and expert knowledge of, minority sexual identities. For example, the pathologization of same sex attraction through categorization in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM) persisted until the mid-1970s, a time at which homosexuality was still illegal in most Australian regions (Hawkes & Scott 2005a, p. 8). I also responded by revealing my personal sexual identity, namely that I identified as a queer woman.

This exchange between the bisexual rights campaigner and me, as the researcher, illustrates an informal process whereby the campaigner acted as a 'gatekeeper' for the research. Once I had responded in a way that demonstrated knowledge about, and understanding of, oppression of sexual minorities, the campaigner could let others know about the research.

Interviews: Setting and Methods

The interviews were conducted in Adelaide, South Australia, which is where I was living when I undertook the research. Adelaide is, in most ways, broadly representative of Australia, although I stress that it should be remembered that the sample is non-representative.

Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia, is a picturesque Australian city with an estimated population of 1.6 million people (ABS 2009c). In terms of demographics, Adelaide has one of the highest ageing populations of all Australian cities (ABS 2004). Despite a radical political climate in the 1970s, Adelaide is now perhaps considered moderately conservative in comparison to other Australian capitals and territories,

particularly east coast regions such as Sydney and Melbourne. Housing is relatively cheaper in South Australia when compared with the national average (ABS 2009c) South Australia attracts a slightly higher percentage of higher education students than the national average (ABS 2009c). There are three local universities in Adelaide. Although the marriage rate in South Australia was slightly lower than the national average in 2007, the duration of marriage in South Australia was 10.4 years compared to 8.9 years nationally, when expressed as a rate per 1,000 of the total population (ABS 2009c).

Interviews were conducted between March and August 2007 in my office at Flinders University, at the interviewee's work place (in a smaller number of cases) or within the interviewee's home. The interview location was negotiated in the initial stages of contact between the research participant and the researcher. The duration of the interviews ranged from half an hour to an hour. A small digital recorder was used to capture the conversation and convert this to an MP3 file, which was then transcribed.

Interview guides allow the researcher to have notes to hand about aspects they want to cover during the interview (Gilbert 2001). Accordingly, a list of key themes to guide the interviews was developed for this study (see Appendix D). These were incorporated into, or referred to, during each interview in order to provide a sense of continuity between interviews rather than being used as a prescriptive list of questions. The themes were broadly stated and I referred to them throughout the interviews as needed. Themes asked respondents to describe or define how they viewed their sexuality; whether they had always seen their sexuality in this way; if and how their sexuality related to other identifiers of the self; and what assisted in making sense of sexuality in a way that could

counter perhaps negative messages about sexuality at the structural level.

Interviewees were also asked at the end of the interview whether they felt there was anything else that might be important to add. This provided an opportunity for participants to detail other information or stress a particular point that was made in the interview. Additionally, at the end of the interview (while the interview was still being recorded), interviewees were asked how the experience was for them.

Ethics

The application for ethics approval for this study was submitted to the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in February 2007. Final approval was granted in March 2007 (see Appendix E). I felt confident that I understood my ethical obligations to the research participants because I had taught the social science subjects 'research methods' and 'ethics' to university undergraduate and postgraduate students. I identified potential organizations to which I could refer participants if they became upset or distressed during the interview process, and completed a risk assessment checklist on the ethics application.

I had worked with many women who survivors of child sexual abuse in my professional roles prior to the research, therefore I was not concerned that I would 'unearth' abuse by talking to women about their everyday sexualities.

The ethics committee, however, responded to my initial application saying that although I was coming from a particular understanding of child sexual abuse, my research participants might not. They requested that I provide further clarification about what I

would do if a respondent disclosed child sexual abuse. I responded by stating that I did not believe that if a respondent disclosed this that it would necessarily, in itself, be harmful. I reiterated that I would refer people on to appropriate services if they appeared to need these, and I named a number of organizations with which I was familiar that could provide therapeutic services to participants if required.

Although I felt that the concern the ethics committee had for disclosures of child sexual abuse demonstrated the prevalence of therapeutic culture because their view represented "…serious doubt about the capacity of the self to manage new challenges and cope with adversity" (Furedi 2004, pp. 107–108), I understood that they were attempting to minimise the risk of distress to my participants. The guiding tenet was to 'do no harm'.

This notion, also known in ethics literature as 'non-maleficence', is a principle underpinning contemporary medical and social sciences research (for example, see Beauchamp & Childress' 1979 text on bioethics), and my knowledge about this concept and related ethical principles influenced my research design. For example, I kept the consent forms locked away and ensured transcripts contained no information that could 'identify' respondents. This ensured confidentiality and participant privacy. Similarly, the open design of the interviews ensured participant autonomy was promoted.

In the same letter, the ethics committee requested to see my interview questions. I responded by stating that although I had a 'guide', there were no set questions as I wanted to carry out the interviews without having to be constrained by a fixed format, as per the 'open' interview approach. Having clarified these matters in writing, within a few weeks the ethics committee granted their approval for the study. I did not need to

refer anyone to counselling services, although I talked about specific books and services available in Adelaide to one participant who said he was having problems in his marriage.

Analysis

Data were analysed using NVivo qualitative analysis computer software. There can be a sense of depersonalization and the somewhat 'mechanistic' limitations of NViv I needed to overcome. Thus I employed strategies that counterbalanced the limitations utilizing NVivo in the study. Some of these strategies included keeping a research journal, creating other 'hand-made' tools such visual maps and drawings which helped to maintain an ongoing 'dialogue' between my data and me, and ensured that individual narratives were embedded within wider biographies and broader contexts.

Interviews were transcribed, after which data were coded and entered into NVivo. Noting that data analysis implies one particular process, firmly located within a temporal slot, I stress here 'analysis' is a broad term used to mean many processes (Wolcott 1994). I kept a research journal as a means to record reflection, analysis and events that occurred throughout the project timespan. During the interviewing stage, for example, I recorded an incident in my research journal that occurred with a former colleague who reported her husband's response to her inviting him to be part of the study. She reported that they had a "good laugh" about the research and he suggested, via her, that I would not get any male volunteers unless I used euphemisms for 'sexuality'. This incident caused me to reflect upon the sensitivity of the research (something I could easily forget, particularly given my professional background as a sex therapist) as well as think about aspects of research design such as the language I used.

One way I responded to this feedback was to offer alternative language to potential participants in the study. Rather than simply using the term 'sexuality', I invited participants to ask any questions or address any concerns about what the research was specifically about. I found that at the beginning of interviews, participants raised any concerns they had about the topic but these concerns related to their desire not to "get it wrong". When I said that sexuality meant different things to different people and that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, respondents seemed to be put at ease.

The journal was helpful in capturing emerging themes while I conducted the interviews, as well as whilst transcribing, and this tool assisted me in making tentative and then final identifications of particular codes (or 'nodes' as known in NVivo). The journal was a place where I could record articles of interest and thoughts I had about the emerging 'story' the data were telling me, as well as list some of the day-to-day activities I needed to complete to keep 'on track' with the research.

Further, hard copies of transcribed interviews were used to record emerging themes. These were noted by hand. This assisted me when I entered data into NVivo because I had revised and refined many of the themes by that stage. It also allowed comparisons between the transcripts and the research journal. Thus, data analysis and interpretation occurred through the continued 'dialogue' between me, as the researcher, and the data, with the literature providing a critical interface for theories about sexuality to be reflected upon in light of subjective accounts of sexuality.

NVivo was used to arrange and highlight themes (or 'nodes') I identified during the

process of coding. Thus, it was important for me to be familiar with the data; a process made easier by the experience of undertaking all of the interviews myself. Although NVivo enables the intricate arrangement of data into major and minor themes (for example, identifying relationship types allows complexly related data to be mapped out in relation to their interconnectedness), I found it difficult to use this function with my data.

Lifting sections of participant accounts and labelling them in relation to themes felt somewhat mechanistic and depersonalizing, hence my discomfort during this process. There seemed to be a tension between needing to logically arrange and merge participant accounts on the one hand and to treat participants as distinct individuals with unique biographies and ways of seeing the world on the other hand. I overcame my discomfort to some extent by seeing the separation and thematic arrangement of people's stories as an inevitability of codification but not an inevitability of analysis. Therefore, I have presented individual narratives embedded within wider biographies and have tried to remain faithful to the connections participants made in terms of self-other relationships. Indeed, many participant accounts described sexuality in everyday life in which self-other interactions occurred. I was able to capture and connect these and other themes in NVivo, and to create visual examples of the ways in which themes played out in individual participant accounts (cases) as well as across variables (attributes). Whilst I found NVivo to be a highly sophisticated technology for arranging data, it was equally important to reflect upon, and critically analyse, my data in relation to sociological theories about sexuality so that I could uncover gaps in the existing literature while exploring new areas of theorizing about everyday sexuality. Thus, I used NVivo as well as more 'old fashioned' or traditional methods for my analysis to make

sense of my data. The traditional methods included pictorial representations of themes, hand-drawn maps and 'puzzles'. Combining these methods enabled me to engage in specialised technology as well as to participate in reflective and analytical thinking and theory building, each process complementing another and promoting my learning. The benefits of such a fusion between traditional and new learning technologies are examined in West *et al.* (2011). In 2007, when I was conducting the interviews, I wrote in my research journal (as described earlier in this chapter) and hand wrote emerging themes. This meant that I could engage with participant narratives at completion of the interviews as well as during transcription, and could begin to think about their relationship to the relevant existing scholarship.

Two years after collecting the data, including during the writing up of this thesis, I continue reflecting upon it, reading, thinking and reconceptualising my findings. Although I describe research participants' backgrounds, relationships and other information relevant to their accounts in my discussion, I provide a brief participant demographic 'snapshot' here.

Interviewees' Characteristics

Data were generated from 30 interviews with an even split of men and women participants who ranged from 30 years to 64 years of age. Basic demographic data were gathered from the participants who self-reported their age, gender, occupation or field of work, and the highest education level completed. The frequency tables on the following pages (Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4) depict the ranges in each of these variables.

The age of participants was generally evenly spread across the age range, as illustrated

in Table 2. The even distribution continued across the gender variable, which can be seen when age is expressed as a mean across this variable. Thus, Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate that the mean age for male participants was 44.8 years and for female participants it was 43.7 years.

Table 4 shows that almost half of all participants had completed postgraduate studies at university, with a further 37 per cent having completed undergraduate studies. Diagram 1 displays the split between the highest education level achieved. It is evident that both secondary school education and TAFE studies (which are intermediate studies undertaken at the equivalent of further education colleges) are in the clear minority in relation to other categories.

Frequency Tables

Table 1 Summary of Interviewee Statistics for Frequency Tables

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Age	30	100.0%	0	.0%	30	100.0%
Gender	30	100.0%	0	.0%	30	100.0%
Education	30	100.0%	0	.0%	30	100.0%

Table 2 Age Frequency

Age

Age in Years		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30.00	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	32.00	3	10.0	10.0	13.3
	33.00	1	3.3	3.3	16.7
	34.00	2	6.7	6.7	23.3
	35.00	1	3.3	3.3	26.7
	36.00	1	3.3	3.3	30.0
	39.00	2	6.7	6.7	36.7
	41.00	1	3.3	3.3	40.0
	44.00	2	6.7	6.7	46.7
	45.00	2	6.7	6.7	53.3
	46.00	2	6.7	6.7	60.0
	47.00	1	3.3	3.3	63.3
	48.00	1	3.3	3.3	66.7
	49.00	1	3.3	3.3	70.0
	50.00	1	3.3	3.3	73.3
	52.00	1	3.3	3.3	76.7
	53.00	3	10.0	10.0	86.7
	54.00	1	3.3	3.3	90.0
	57.00	1	3.3	3.3	93.3
	61.00	1	3.3	3.3	96.7
	64.00	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 Gender Frequency

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	15	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Male	15	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 Education Level Frequency

Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	postgraduate	13	43.3	43.3	43.3
	secondary high school	4	13.3	13.3	56.7
	TAFE	2	6.7	6.7	63.3
	undergraduate	11	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Distribution Diagram

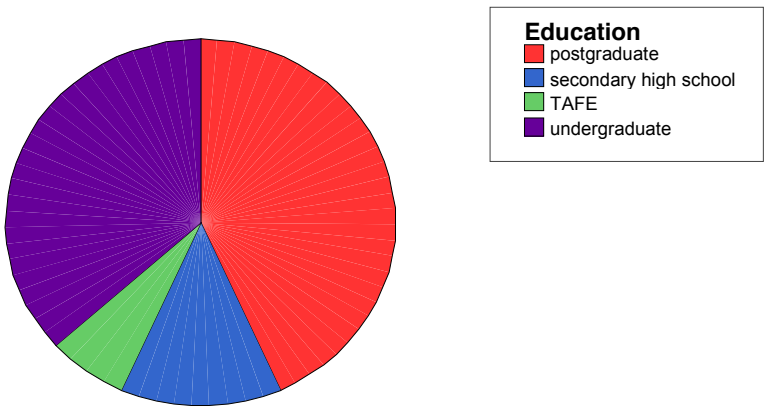

Diagram 1 Education Level Distribution

Summary of Age and Gender Cases for Mean Table

Table 5 Summary of Statistics used for Age Mean across Gender Variable

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Age * Gender	30	100.0%	0	.0%	30	100.0%

Table 6 Mean Age by Gender

Gender	Mean Age	N	Std. Deviation
Female	43.7333	15	10.00333
Male	44.8000	15	8.87372
Total	44.2667	30	9.30678

Participant Information

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education level
Anthony	44	Male	Academic	Completed Postgraduate
Bernadette	34	Female	Librarian	Postgraduate completed
Charles	49	Male	Earthmoving Contractor	Undergraduate completed
Charlotte	36	Female	PhD student	Currently postgraduate
Claire	48	Female	Child Protection	Postgraduate completed
Daniel	41	Male	Social Worker	Postgraduate completed
David	50	Male	Social Planner	Postgraduate completed
Davina	39	Female	Counsellor/ Social Worker	Studying postgraduate
Edward	57	Male	Education	Postgraduate completed
Emile	32	Male	Primary Carer for his son	Undergraduate completed
Erin	32	Female	Graphic Designer	Undergraduate completed
Fernando	35	Male	Sexual Health Worker	TAFE (college) completed
Francis	52	Female	Project Officer	Undergraduate completed
Frank	32	Male	Work in Television	High School
Genevieve	33	Female	Social Worker	Undergraduate completed
Harriet	46	Female	Public Servant	High School completed
Henry	45	Male	Company Director	High School yr 10 completed
Isabella	44	Female	Education and Training	Undergraduate completed
Jane	53	Female	Counsellor	Undergraduate completed
Jeffrey	61	Male	Accountant	Undergraduate completed
Louisa	53	Female	Nurse	Graduate Diploma completed
Margaret	30	Female	Speech Pathologist	Undergraduate completed
Marijka	53	Female	Program Manager	Graduate Diploma completed
Maxwell	46	Male	Sexual Health Educator	Postgraduate completed
Monique	64	Female	Company Manager	College completed
Ramon	45	Male	Education	Postgraduate completed
Rowan	34	Male	Youth worker and other diverse jobs	Undergraduate completed; currently studying undergraduate
Ruth	39	Female	Executive Director	Undergraduate; currently postgraduate
Stephen	47	Male	Full Time Parent	Undergraduate current
Walter	54	Male	Human Services	Postgraduate completed

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the Schutzian phenomenological approach used in this study; an approach best suited to yielding data that provide greater insight into everyday

sexuality in late modern social life. I have argued that my approach requires both participant and researcher reflexivity, and that my sample, while non-representative, nevertheless provides a valuable contribution to better understand how sexuality is positioned in everyday practices of identity construction. The limitations of NVivo analysis were also discussed, along with strategies to overcome them. I now move on to consider the key findings from the study in the following chapters (Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six). The next chapter focuses on findings about routine sexual self-making in everyday life.

Chapter Three: Routine Sexual Self-making in Everyday Life

> … sex for humans is never "just sex"… It is located within the worlds that philosopher George Herbert Mead heralded as self, shared communications, significations, and significant others; Those who study sexuality without a full recourse to such concepts and ideas do sexualities a grave disservice. Human sexual meanings overlap with, and are omnipresent in, all of social life
>
> (Plummer 2011, p. xiii)

Introduction

In this chapter and Chapters Four, Five and Six I closely examine the data and interrogate relevant literature to better make sense of the findings. Data are arranged around the key themes identified through data analysis (as discussed in Chapter Two). These themes are not presented in order of importance but have been selected due to being coded as important in participant accounts as a whole. As will be shown in the remaining chapters, participant discussion of the sexual self is always related to interactions and experiences with others. Secondly, participants' narratives are grounded within specific timeframes that relate to particular reference points within their wider biographies.

This chapter is concerned with investigating the importance of participants' narratives, beginning with a focus on the theme of making the sexual self through everyday social interactions, followed by exploration of the narrative related to significant others and sexual self-making. It moves on to consider intimate relationships as play, late modern social life and sexual self-making, and the role of others in self-making: the temporal,

spatial and interpersonal elements of the accounts within participants' wider biographies.

A "broadly interactionist conceptualization of the sexual self" (Jackson 2007, p. 3) is introduced and argued to provide a robust theoretical framework to better understand the data in this study. Analysis of participants' accounts leads to a better understanding of how the sexual self is made through everyday life. Specifically, George Herbert Mead's (1934) thesis that social processes enable actors to constitute the self has been applied to sexuality (see, for example, Jackson 2007, 2010a; Jackson & Scott 2010a). In line with this recent theorizing, I argue that Mead's (1934) emphasis upon the sociality of the self provides a theoretical framework that enables us to better understand how participants 'make' their sexual selves in late modern social life.

The chapter examines how participants' broader biographies are important in shaping their experiences and shifts in thinking about themselves. The role of others is crucial, not only because social interaction is the means through which the sexual self is made but also because intimate relationships with significant others are reflected upon as a site of play. As shown in this chapter, relationships were cited as enabling participants to reflect upon their sexual selves and opened up new ways of thinking about those selves.

The chapter also provides the means of gaining a deeper insight into the specific ways that time and space are relevant to participant biographies and their sexual selves, and examines how the notion of 'play' helps us understand how relationships with significant others provide new opportunities for sexual self-making.

Making the Sexual Self through Everyday Social Interactions

Maxwell is a 46-year-old sexual health educator. At the beginning of our interview, I asked him if he could define or describe his sexuality to me. Here is how Maxwell described his sexual self:

> *Okay I would, I would say that my sexuality is probably all encompassing as I see myself the way I live. So I would see my sexuality as, I guess I portray, the way I portray myself and I will portray myself in a range of different ways sort of depending on where I am and the feeling that I get from people. I would also say that instead of just describing it that I feel it's a really big part of who I am. A part of my life.*
>
> Maxwell, 46-year-old sexual health educator

Participants' responses to the invitation to define or describe their sexual selves emphasise that the social constitutes the sexual self. Maxwell uses the word "portray" throughout his narrative in relation to how he comes across to others. He also says that sexuality is a "really big part of who I am", which highlights its importance in relation to broader identity. Maxwell notes that in his day-to-day life he engages in "a range of different" social settings "depending on where I am and the feeling that I get from people". His narrative contains consistent references to both how he interacts with others and an awareness of the way he comes across towards other people. Here, Maxwell describes himself as what Mead (1934, p. 73) would call "a reflective individual" in constant interaction with those around him and aware of the way in which he "portrays" his sexual self in this process. Whilst Maxwell draws upon "who I am", his self is bound to social processes. This is because of the immersion of the actor in social processes; and it is through social processes that the self, and the sexual self, is constituted. As Mead argues:

> Mind arises in the social process only when that process as a whole enters into,

> or is present in, the experience of any one of the given individuals involved in that process. When this occurs the individual becomes self-conscious and has a mind; he [sic] becomes aware of his [sic] relations to that process as a whole, and to the other individuals participating in it with him [sic]; he [sic] becomes aware of that process as modified by the reactions and interactions of the individuals—including himself [sic]—who are carrying it on (Mead 1934, p. 134).

Additionally, in everyday life, actors interact in a range of situations and with a range of people who are both familiar and non-familiar, as referenced in Maxwell's account. The following accounts demonstrate two important issues related to the making of the sexual self: firstly, they describe the way cultural and social contexts are constituted in an ongoing fashion; secondly, the accounts demonstrate how social settings can provide participants with unique opportunities to engage in playful sexual self-making.

Rowan is a 34-year-old man who has worked in various jobs, including as a youth worker. He recently returned to university full time and has been married for the past five years. Rowan grew up in the United States of America where he went to college. It was after graduating that he began to question some of the expectations that had been placed upon him: "I then wound up doing a lot of travelling around the country once I graduated school and I wound up, strangely enough, rejecting the path that I'd been put on". In line with other participant accounts discussed in this chapter, Rowan reflects that travel enabled increased opportunities to reimagine his identity, and in particular his sexual self.

Whilst participants described sexual behaviour in relation to pleasure, the social context in which this was said to have occurred needs to be understood. 'Plastic' sexuality is an

attempt to capture historically relevant attitudes towards sexuality. Sexual mores have changed due to the emancipation of women and sexual minorities, resulting in a 'freeing' up of both heterosexual and same-sex intimate relationships. This, in turn, has resulted in post-traditional lifestyles (Giddens 1992, pp. 178-181). Rowan's account centres on sexual behaviours and identity, but the social context is described as being integral to making and remaking his sexual self.

Here, Rowan describes how the sexualised social space, or "resort town mentality" enables for an inclusive environment where sexual activity is negotiated regardless of gender:

> *Like there is a resort town mentality … You'd just walk in and women were just like [whispers]: "I am just so fucking horny, I just, you need, come here". I mean it was just like that kind of acceptable thing like it was all right to be turned on. And it was all right to want whatever it is that you wanted and you knew that no one was going to judge you. And I think that I don't know if it was a more honest reflection of what, you know sexuality in our society would be without the guilt and the judgement. But it felt that way. It felt very much that women were allowed to embrace what it is they wanted and fully go after it and men almost were the opposite. Where they were knocked back, it, you know. It wasn't about getting laid or how many, you know, that whole kind of mentality that I always hated about guys, like: "yeah, God, fuck that one". Like that was gone and it was much more towards what I liked which was that kind of mutual kind of you know, power was equal among the sexes. The sexuality therefore was a reflection of that. It was cool. It was really cool. [laughs]*
>
> Rowan, 34-year-old full time student

A first reading of Rowan's account might attribute it merely to late modern sexuality where behaviours are aimed at satiating sexual desire and actors are free to choose partners in the absence of traditional roles. Yet Rowan's analysis highlights the

importance of social mores surrounding sexual interactions, and it was through his interaction in this "sexualised environment" that he remade his sexual self. George Herbert Mead's social self is agential (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 164), and we see Rowan's identity emerge through his depiction of increased engagement with the environment in which he finds himself. In his next narrative, Rowan explains the microcosm of the ski resort, and its population, where people were sexually active with one another in 'non-traditional' ways:

> *The sexuality aspect of that I was suddenly in a very sexualised environment. There was a lot of drugs. There was a lot of alcohol. And there was a lot of sex. And the first girl I hooked up with there was bisexual, which led to threesomes and just this very anything goes kind of situations you have. And things that you became more, that originally I would have thought would take a while to get to this point were now very common. You know, um, groups of people were having sex in the same room. We were going out and we knew that part of the room was going to be a bunch of people were going to having sex in the spa and we were going to be watching each other and you know that was part of the thing. I really, I was actually, I was very comfortable with my sexuality at that point. And all of that just kind of came and I was you know pushing boundaries and you know although the homosexual aspect never came into this, I really don't have any interest in going down on men or men going down on me or having anal sex or you know, I, I find men can be attractive, like their physical form, I have no issue with being next to naked men or having sex next to me, you know it was more of a camaraderie thing rather than a sexual thing. So although I think in some higher terminal order I would have explored that if the right paths had occurred, it never came about and it was never really an option, and it was never really something. So it was never something that really became my focus. And it was very much more of well, if there's 20 guys naked in a room with one girl, that would have been all right you know. It wouldn't have bothered me you know. I wouldn't have had to question my sexuality of "Oh my God, am I attracted to men?" and all those things. So I mean those events were very much opened me up to the idea of oh ... And plus, at that point I'd had homosexual*

> *friends, I'd had both female and male and all of those kinds of things you know, and that whole concept of there's only one right way: it was completely shot out of the water for me.*
>
> Rowan, 34-year-old full time student

It is vital to understand how participants viewed the 'social' when examining how the sexual self is made. Rowan's description of the social environment includes social and sexual interactions through behaviours. His awareness of the "rule structure" (see Crossley 2001, p. 146) highlights his learning about the values and expectations of the 'generalized other' within the community in which he finds himself. Thus, Rowan's awareness of the differences between the "resort town mentality" and wider society allows him to critically evaluate existing norms of sexual behaviour. Gender forms part of his analysis. Better understanding the social is vital to examining the sexual self. As Adkins notes:

> … in light of the sociology of mobilities and the reflexive modernization thesis, many of the defenders of the 'social' for the analysis of sexuality and gender may be seen to be working with taken-for-granted understandings of the social which may have limited purchase in the contemporary world (Adkins 2002, pp. 10–11).

Increases in narratives about alternative sexual practices in late modern life have given actors wider opportunities for sexual self-making (Jackson & Scott 2011, p. 163), as exemplified in Rowan's account. Yet what enables actors to engage in new ways of sexual self-making? Mead's analysis of game-playing helps us to understand the ski resort's differing 'rules' from those of broader society. Just as a childhood 'game' requires participants to take all others' viewpoints (Mead 1934, pp. 153–154), "the organised community or social group which gives to the individual his [sic] unity for

self may be called 'the generalized other'. The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community". The process of learning the attitudes of the community, or the 'generalized other' can be noted in the process of learning in participants' accounts in which they approached the community or culture as the 'other'.

As I have argued, what emerges in this research is firstly the centrality of social processes to self-making, and secondly the beginnings of learning more about what social experiences help shape the sexual self. When Marijka, a 53-year-old programme manager, found herself at a conference, she said that the overall environment and being surrounded by like-minded people helped to reinforce her sexual self. Thus, this community was noted to have shared values and beliefs that were compatible with Marijka's. Her first experience at a lesbian conference where there were performers and a large number of conference delegates was reported to have enabled her to feel that the social space was as inviting as being "family". Her cultural identity as a Dutch woman similarly invoked the feeling of "home".

Our late modern ability to move away from traditional roles, including kinship roles, has been theorised to have enabled greater choice about who and what constitutes family (see Weeks *et al*. 2001), thus bringing about new, "non-standard intimacies" (Berlant & Warner 2000) and relationships. Marijka's conception of 'family' and 'home' emerges because of her chosen social settings. She says:

> *As soon as, I suppose, yes, I can remember the first lesbian conference I ever went to here and like when I, it was a concert in Melbourne, it was like two lesbian singers were singing and thinking shit there is 3,000 of us… And we all, it was just like, it was like a big family in some ways because you didn't have to*

> *hide ... Travelling overseas I went recently to Holland, but that's more my culture stuff, there is my homeland, not necessarily lesbian. So I suppose, I am Dutch lesbian, I suppose that that's substantially not so much, so, when I went, in the space, when I am with [partner's name] it's, it's home. Like home is our space, people come in.*
>
> Marijka, a 53-year-old programme manager

Participants, in their accounts of where their sexual selves were being 'made', reflected upon the geographical environments as being instrumental to identity creation processes. As discussed earlier, Mead's account in *Mind, Self and Society* highlights the importance of the other as well as the sociality of the self because it is only through relations with others that the self is made. The next section considers the role of significant others in ongoing sexual self-making processes.

Significant Others and Sexual Self-making

As I have argued, choice is overstated in late modern theories of identity. Giddens (1992 p. 182), for example, argues that there has been a "democratization" of roles in relationships, and broader social shifts in gender relations are theorised to have brought about new levels of compromise and negotiation in the dyadic relationship. The pure relationship "... is a version of love in which a person's sexuality is one factor that has to be negotiated as part of a relationship" (Giddens 1992, p. 63). However, Giddens' version of late modern life has been critiqued as failing to take into account continued gender inequalities post "emancipation" (McNay 2000, pp. 103–105). Further, Jamieson (1999) argues that Giddens fails to elucidate how these negotiations might occur at the individual level.

Additionally, it is argued that Giddens undervalues social processes as constitutive of identity, instead drawing from psychological discourses that privilege experiences during childhood as providing an imprint for future behaviour (O'Donnell 2003). Only the ontologically secure are able to successfully negotiate roles in the pure relationship. Indeed, Giddens sees the "... unconscious and conscious as a universal part of the human psyche" (O'Donnell 2003, p. 761). Giddens draws from developmental psychoanalytic theorist Erik Erikson's concept of 'trust'. Although Erikson moved away from Freud's "unconscious sexuality" (Peterson 2004, p. 55), his focus on childhood as formative stems from the well-established psychoanalytic tradition. Erikson's theories about conflicted identity continue to be influential (Friedman 1999). In the first year of life, for example, the conflicting states that require resolution are basic trust and mistrust (Erikson 1968).

Giddens makes the point, however, that he is only interested in aspects of Erikson's work in so far as they are relevant to a sociological analysis (as suggested in his earlier analysis of Erikson in Giddens 1984, p. 59). Giddens (1991, pp. 39–40) says that childhood trust:

> ... can be seen as a sort of *emotional inoculation* against existential anxieties—a protection against future threats and dangers which allows the individual to sustain hope and courage in the face of whatever debilitating circumstances she or he might later confront... It is the main emotional support of a defensive carapace or *protective cocoon* which all normal individuals carry around with them as the means whereby they are able to get on with the affairs of day-to-day life.

In contrast to Giddens' notion of ontological security, participants in this study reported that it is not *internal psychological* factors that shape their selves, but *external social*

relations that enable an ongoing shaping of their sexual self. As seen in previous accounts, the external social setting in which participants found themselves helped them to redefine their selves. The following accounts illustrate the importance of relations with others in the formation of identity through interactions with friends and lovers.

When I asked Ruth, a 39-year-old executive director, if she could define her sexuality, she said that she does not "cause it much thought". While Ruth reports that some of her friends "cause" their sexuality "thought", she notes that her sexual self is not how she "defines" herself. In Ruth's account it can be seen that she is aware of others' self-perceptions and this awareness is drawn from her social experiences with others. She says:

> *I don't know if it's how you sort of think of yourself, some people sort of certainly define their selves with their sexuality quite strongly. I've got a couple of friends who are very much like that. And then there are other people who maybe don't cause it much thought. And I probably sit in that category of not necessarily causing it much thought.*
>
> Ruth, a 39-year-old executive director

In the same way that changes in one's geographical environment enabled participants to experience new ideas and values, which helped the ongoing process of sexual self-making, interactions with friends allowed participants to try out new identities. Ruth's understanding of her own identity is reliant upon how she believes others see themselves. Similarly, Anthony, a 44-year-old academic, reported being influenced by his friends through his engagement with other cultures. Anthony is in a relatively new relationship with a woman. At the beginning of our interview, Anthony told me:

> *You're not going to get a straight answer from me on anything unfortunately…because…the contingency of sexual, well the potential*

contingency of sexuality.

Anthony, 44-year-old academic

Like all other participants, Anthony's discussion of his sexuality included descriptions of social situations that were depicted as being significant to the process of sexual self-making. For example, when in his 20s, Anthony's friends were experimenting with abstinence, which prompted Anthony to also experiment. He says:

> *I remember I had friends in Ashrams, things like that. And I thought: okay, I wonder what it'd be like to go without sex. Three days is the most I could do and that was just torture.*
>
> Anthony, 44-year-old academic

Whilst Anthony's account above, as well as his discussion of entering into an open relationship, may be interpreted as an example of the increased choice that is said to characterise late modern social life, further on in the interview Anthony highlighted the strength of what he called "social conditioning".

Giddens' (1992 p. 30) assertion that we are engaged in "continuous interrogation of past, present and future" does little to highlight the social processes central to sexuality self-making. Here, Anthony notes the manifestation of what can be described as the generalized other through his discussion of alternative forms of relationships and the broader social attitudes towards them Anthony describes having to explain to his son why a television character had become angry with another character because of jealousy:

> *I did do the open relationship thing for a few years because it was, it became like, you know, your own um body and soul and psyche becomes like a lab experiment and um it's really tough to break free from those, I don't think you*

> *can, I still think it's worth attempting to because it definitely shifts, well a classic sort of scenario is the jealousy thing, that's a tough thing. And I mean, obviously there's social conditioning, when my 5 year old, well he's not 5 now, but when my son was 5 or 6 or something, I can remember watching a rerun of Doogie Howser or something, it was just some crap sitcom and Doogie had a best friend, and um Doogie also had um a girlfriend, so this is nice, Doogie and his girlfriend kiss, that's nice, Doogie and his best friend are friends, that's nice you know you're 5 or 6 years old, nice, nice, then Doogie's best friend and Doogie's friend kiss, that's nice, two people kissing, that's nice and then Doogie punches his best friend, and he's like: so why did Doogie punch his best friend?*
>
> Anthony, 44-year-old academic

Anthony's account in which interpersonal ethics relating to sexual behaviour are placed as being socially produced is in line with Gagnon and Simon's (1973) claims that sexuality is "sociogenic" (Whittier & Melendez 2007, p. 192). Mead highlights the importance of language and communication in the adult and child relationship, and it is through children's play and games that children experiment with new knowledge through role play (Mead 1934, p. 364–366). Thus, Mead would highlight the importance of the interaction between parent and child in helping to shape the child's knowledge of social norms and rules. Anthony goes on to explain how, through his interaction with his son, the strength of the social and its relationship to individual perception emerged:

> *And there's no good answer for that. It's just some kind of social conditioning, kicks in somewhere, it doesn't make any sense, other cultures do it differently but it's not very easy to shift, and when you do the open relationship, then, then all that sort of stuff gets laid bare and you've just got to deal with it. ... the idea that just keeps getting, in all sorts of fields, it just keeps getting popped up, that there's some sort of simplistic answer, and it depends on us thinking the right thing, is just ludicrous. Because that stuff is just sooo deeply ingrained. So to go around saying "I'm not racist". You're kidding yourself. And to go around*

saying "I'm not sexist". Forget it. You just haven't looked hard enough, you're just busy standing on a pedestal.

Anthony, 44-year-old academic

Intimate Relationships as Play

Whilst it may be tempting to assume that intimate relationships are sites where one's sexual self is influenced to a greater degree than travel, environment or interaction with friends, the results of this study show this is not the case. Participants' reflections upon their emotional, social and sexual interactions with significant others place these relationships no more centrally to self-making than any other social interaction. Understanding the role that lovers played in relation to sexual self-making related to the intersection of various aspects of participants' broader biographies. This points to the need for an appreciation of the complexity of late modern social and interpersonal life.

Charlotte, a 36-year-old PhD candidate, described rediscovering her sexual self after leaving an oppressive relationship. Notwithstanding the political issues that relate to sexuality and gendered oppression (which are often ignored in theories of sexuality, particularly psychoanalytic stances [Herdt 2007, p. 218], and examined in further detail in the subsequent chapter), Charlotte's intimate relationship served to "curb" her sexual self. Charlotte said that during her ten-year marriage, her husband's controlling behaviours meant that she felt her only role was as "… a mummy and a wife". Her account disrupts Giddens' (1992) assertion that women and men may negotiate relationships equally in late modern social life. It was not until Charlotte had left the relationship that she felt able to re-engage with her own wishes and desires.

Broadly speaking, relationships can be coded as being a site for 'play'. In fact, the

majority of participants in this study noted their relationships as sites for playfulness and experimentation. Mead (1934, p. 158) argues that there are "two general stages in the full development of the self", the first of which involves understanding the perspectives of the self and the generalized other in social actions. The second involves understanding that:

> … self is constituted not only by an organization of these particular individual attitudes, but also by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he [sic] belongs (Mead 1934, p. 158).

Through a reconceptualization of the notion of play, I note the importance of social processes to sexual self-making while better appreciating the specific contexts in which social acts take place as sites for experimentation and risk-taking.

Participants described relationships as being a "space" whereby exploration and playfulness with roles could enable the freeing up of sexual mores and attitudes. Ramon, a 45-year-old man working in the education sector, described his ex-wife as being "a free spirit". This characteristic, along with her medical knowledge, was said to have influenced him to "ask some questions and explore a bit", something he continued to do in subsequent intimate relationships:

> *It was only when I went out with my ex-wife, and she sort of had very free and caring, you know, a free spirit. She was doing medicine as well so I think like the human body was not something to be afraid of in any way. But it was more her attitude really. So, yeah, I think that the fact that I was involved with somebody sexually meant that you could actually ask some questions and explore a bit. But I think, you know, even more now, you know, so during different relationships, I have explored more and more.*
>
> Ramon, 45-year-old working in education

If we argue that play in intimate relationships enables for experimentation and learning, the Meadian notion of the generalized other and the ability to take on the view of the other is integral to play. Ramon's account demonstrates his ability to take on others' perspectives. He sums up his ex-wife's approach to sexuality, which was described as being down to her overall "attitude", her studies in medicine and her "free and caring … spirit". Ramon was also able to engage in interaction with his ex-partner and subsequent partners; interactions in which his own self has been in a process of exploration and reinvention.

Louisa, a 53-year-old nurse in a relationship with a woman, reported being "comfortable" within her relationship to engage in "push[ing] the boundaries more", which she attributes to her partner's involvement in consciousness-raising:

> *So with [partner], you know, she went through feminist consciousness-raising groups and so we, you know, we are prepared to push the boundaries more. And it's so much easier to do that when you are a couple and particularly when you feel comfortable with yourselves ... So that was, I would say that was huge, that partnership has enabled me to, you know, confront a whole pile more things that, you know, would have taken a lot longer or maybe wouldn't have done.*
>
> Louisa, 53-year-old nurse

Again, in Louisa's account, I note the placement of the relationship as a site for exploration and play, which meant "confront[ing] a whole pile more things" than she ordinarily would have encountered in broader social life.

Engagement in play has been theorised as central to childhood learning (see, for example, Mead 1934; Piaget 1964) and play is often referred to as the 'work of childhood' because of its centrality to social, cognitive, emotional and physical

development. The central importance of play to childhood rests upon its meaning for socialisation (Mead 1934, p 150). Although play is argued to occur in the context of a child imitating those around them (see Leys 1993), there is far more to Mead's theory of play than the imitation of others. In particular, play enables children to engage with one another through fantasy and role-playing and in thus promote the ability to take on the perspective of others. Taking on the perspective of others is different from simple imitation. Mead explains how play helps to 'build a self':

> A child plays at being a mother, at being a teacher, at being a policeman; that is, it is taking different roles… *In the play period the child utilizes his own responses to these stimuli which he [sic] makes use of in building a self* (Mead 1934, p. 150, italics added).

Although activities in which play is the central means by which activities are created and shaped, Mead is careful to distinguish play from engagement in games. Whereas play involves a free-flowing action and spontaneity, games entail fixed roles and there are subsequent, prescribed expectations of these roles which relate to the game. As Mead explains: "the child who plays in a game must be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in that game, and …these different roles must have a definite relationship to each other" (1934, p. 151). The ability to take on the perspectives of others is, instead, learnt through the child's engagement in play (Mead 1934, pp. 364–365) and the key to this is in the child's unique "response to…stimuli" which "he [sic] makes use of in building a self" (Mead 1934, p. 150). Though Mead associates play with childhood, his notion of play can be applied to make better sense of the sexual self in adulthood.

Recent research into academic learning in an undergraduate sociology course found that

playful incorporation of learning technologies facilitated adult learning and engagement with traditional learning materials (West *et al* 2011). Participant accounts from this study, as outlined above, suggest that intimate relationships are sites where engagement in playful activities has assisted in knowledge acquisition about the sexual self. The application of Mead's theory of play to intimate relationships helps to better understand the means through which learning about participants' sexual selves was reported to have occurred.

Mead acknowledges the importance of children's caregivers in helping them learning about others' perspectives through play however Russian scholar Vygotsky (1962, 1978) provides a more comprehensive account about how the role of others helps during play. Piaget's theories of child development were drawn from his famous studies in which he asked children of varying ages to complete particular tasks and Piaget's central thesis is that children think differently to adults (Piaget 1964). Piaget's empirical can be critiqued for assuming that task failure equates to inability to undertake the task because of cognitive limitations and variations which are dependent on age however his work is widely regarded as central to better understanding the variations in children's ages in relation to cognitive and social development. Vygotsky's work similarly seeks to examine the ability of children to engage in different learning activities however his focus on the relationship between the learner and the learned is central. The so-called 'zone of proximal development', for example, relates to the importance of caregivers in facilitating children's learning as they can offer assistance in task completion. Though a child may not be able to achieve mastery of a particular task, they may be able to do so with varying degrees of assistance from an adult. Thus the 'zone of proximal development' is the difference between the unachievable element of the task and the

'achievable with assistance' or potential for the child to complete the task with varying levels of adult help (Vygotsky 1978).

Clearly participants in this study reported that relationships had enabled them to think and experience their sexual selves in different ways than previously. As we have seen in the accounts examined earlier, respondents in this study reported having conversations within their intimate relationships which transformed the ways in which they experienced their sexual selves. In the same way that Mead depicts play as being an important process through which children learn about the roles or perspectives of others, the notion of play, positioned as a central feature of intimate relationships, helps to explain how learning about one's sexual self was reported to have taken place for participants in this study. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theorises change as only being possible with the assistance of others, the exchanges between the participant and their intimate partnerships were highlighted as having transformed them in a way that would not have been possible without the assistance of their partner.

There is some compatibility between Mead and Vygotsky in relation to their perspectives about child development (Martin 2006, p. 74). For both Vygotsky and Mead communication and language are central to the learning process. This helps to explain why participants reported particular conversations and interactions with their partner to provide evidence of how their experiences within intimate relationships had enabled further learning and insights into their sexual selves. As discussed, the application of play to help explain the learning that was reported to have taken place draws from Mead's theory of play in childhood: "In the play period [relationship] the child [adult] utilizes his own responses to these stimuli which he makes use of in

building a [sexual] self (Mead 1934, p. 150, parentheses added). Since Mead's self is socially made through the ongoing process of social interaction which occurs throughout the lifespan (Jackson 1999), play too can be applied not just as a way to understand childhood but as a way to understand ongoing learning throughout the lifespan and new ways in which the sexual self is made.

Although play in this context helps us understand sexual self-making through learning, it is important to note that this is explanation for participant accounts is not the same as claiming that relationships promoted learning about the sexual self. The participant accounts in which relationships were positioned as transforming their sexual selves were overwhelmingly positively reflected upon. Participants noted the level of trust needed to engage in the playful learning that has been examined and used words such as 'trusting' and 'comfortable' and 'safe' to describe their intimate relationships.

Late Modern Life and Sexual Self-making

Ruth, a 39-year-old executive director who, although she did not complete secondary schooling, went to art college and has recently completed higher education distance studies in social sciences. Ruth grew up in London "during the Margaret Thatcher years" before moving to Sydney in her early twenties. She later moved to Adelaide where she permanently resides with her male partner and two children.

When I asked Ruth to tell me about her sexuality, she began the interview by talking about her work life and some of the challenges she had faced in the workplace by being a young woman amongst middle-aged, suited men. Ruth recalled the first board meeting she attended and the clothing she chose to wear, which "wasn't necessarily about the

sort of 'sex' side of sexuality". Rather, she had wanted to wear clothing that was not the "dark suit and tie" that her male counterparts all wore. During the same conversation at the beginning of the interview, Ruth reported that she no longer felt the same lack of confidence she once did in the workplace:

> *... umpteen years on you get, you know, you gather a bit more confidence about yourself and what have you but um the power I think of how you put yourself across I think is very tightly aligned to your sexuality or how you visualize yourself or how you want other people to visualize you*
>
> Ruth, 39-year-old executive director

Ruth's depiction of the gendered realities of professional working are far from the freedoms espoused in theories of detraditionalization (for example, see Giddens 1992, 1984, pp. 258–259), which I examine in greater detail in Chapter Four. What does Ruth's account tell us about identity and sexuality? At this point, it is important to bear in mind that Ruth's response came at the beginning of the interview after being asked if she would talk about her sexuality. This was a key finding of the research. Her account was not getting "off topic". In short, Ruth described her workplace experience as a woman amongst men and proceeded to give an example about her clothing in the workplace when she was in her late twenties, and then noted that now, in her late thirties, she felt much more confident. Ruth noted that how "you put yourself across … is very tightly aligned to your sexuality or how you visualize yourself or how you want other people to visualize you".

The relationship of gender and sexuality is explored in Chapter Five, however two key features in the account are important to explore initially. Firstly, Ruth's discussion of her sexual self is always in relation to her interactions and experiences with others.

Secondly, the narrative is grounded within specific timeframes and reference points within Ruth's wider biography. Thus, investigating the importance of the temporal and spatial/interpersonal aspects of Ruth's account will help frame this data theoretically.

I highlighted in Chapter One that Anthony Giddens' account of identity in late modern social life is linked with globalizing forces. Through Giddens' (1992, p. 30) lens of late modern social life, Ruth would be said to be engaged in the "continuous interrogation of past, present and future". Giddens' 'extended reflexivity' (Adams 2003) means that reflexive processes do not merely occur in the social arena through interpersonal relations, but reflexivity is so bound with globalizing forces that it is impossible to understand identity formation without accounting for it within broader economic and social changes. Whilst this study seeks to better understand everyday sexuality within its late modern setting, Giddens' (1992) notion of reflexivity has been the subject of wide critique based on his non-accounting for the cultural contexts within which actors are situated (for example, see Alexander 1996). Further such accounts of reflexivity do not adequately explain the findings of this study.

In focusing on the individualization that is borne out of detraditionalizing processes, Giddens (1992) depicts actors as cut free from the ties of tradition. One needs only to look at Ruth's account of the ways in which gender has influenced her experiences in the workplace to see that liberatory discourses do little to acknowledge structural and institutional oppression. Indeed, if all ties to tradition are severed, choice would be limitless. As expressed by King: (2009, p. 274) "If individuals are always free to do otherwise, then, theoretically, they could apply rules in any way they chose".

Interactionist theories place the "self as the moving centre" (du Gay 1996, p. 30), which is helpful when we consider the two key characteristics of spatiality (in the sense of how one relates and interacts with others) and temporality highlighted previously in Ruth's account.

George Herbert Mead, in contrast to scholars of late modernity such as Giddens, argues that identity is formed only through social processes. In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead sets out a rich theoretical framework which, when applied to my data, provides an explanation for the finding of this study, which is that sexuality is 'made' through social processes. For Mead (1932, p. 180), sociality (social acts) meant the interaction of more than one actor.

Ruth's focus in her account of the interpersonal exchanges in her workplace is crucial for her to examine, and explain, her sexual self. In Mead's theory of identity, he argues that the self is constituted through social processes. In other words, we construct or 'make' our selves only through social interactions. He says "the self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience" (Mead 1934, p. 140).

As discussed in Chapter One, Mead has been criticised for not taking into account other forms of social exchange. For example, mental representations of a fantasy figure during masturbation do not constitute sociality in Meadian terms (Athens 2002, pp. 26–27). Yet such a criticism of the definitional limits of sociality goes against the findings of this research into everyday sexuality. Social interactions, such as those outlined by Mead's notion of the social act, enabled participants to constitute their

sexual selves. It is clear that Ruth's self is described as having arisen through social experience. Her explanation of her sexuality is bound up with her interactions in the workplace.

Further, Ruth's reference to particular points in her biography is significant for a number of reasons. Ruth demonstrates that the way she has thought about herself in similar situations has shifted over time. Though similar social experiences in the work environment have remained similar over decades, the manner in which Ruth is able to relate and reflect on her identity or self in these given situations has shifted.

Late modern reflexivity is not able to satisfactorily account for this because of its insistence on a coherent project of selfhood (Jackson 2007, p. 6). Ruth's differing 'selves' across time are not incongruous in interactionist terms because the self is not a late-modern 'project'. Instead, it is made through social processes that differ in any given temporal location.

This is not to say that identity is fragmented to the extent that it is entirely reliant upon social processes at any given time, such as in postmodern and poststructural accounts of the self. Poststructural approaches such as queer theory and the "refusal to name a subject" (Seidman 1993, p. 132) means that poststructuralist accounts of sexuality do not provide an adequate theoretical explanation for identity across time.

I argue that the self is in an ongoing process of formation which is able to occur by drawing upon social experiences and interactions across time. As Jackson notes:

> A … metaphor for the self as ongoing might be a complex, many-stranded cord running through our lives, but one which does not necessarily stay the same

> since the threads that comprise it can be frayed or strengthened and are continually being spliced or woven in with other threads, re-made over time… while we have a sense of our self as continuing, that self is never un-changing… [and is] constructed and reconstructed through everyday social practices (Jackson 2007, p. 7).

Jackson and Scott's (2010a, 2010b) application of Meadian theory to sexuality identifies not only temporality but also sociality and reflexivity as being central to Mead's project. Whilst separating these terms is helpful, temporality is difficult to investigate without reference to reflexivity. I now move on to explore participant accounts of sexual self-making and argue for the application and extension of a Meadian theoretical explanation for the findings of this research.

The Constitution of the Sexual Self

Charlotte is a 36-year-old PhD student. In our interview she described feeling a newly-found freedom since leaving her male partner who used to prescribe what she was 'allowed' to wear as well as 'hold her back' in other areas. Charlotte reported that she was currently seeing a man and said they engaged in sexual activities with other couples as well as in threesomes with other women. Having grown up in a very traditional religion named any sexual activity not related to procreation (for example, masturbation) as sinful, Charlotte reflected on the guilt she continues to feel at times about her sexual behaviour.

Being a mother to two boys has meant that her sexual activities are at times incompatible to those expected of her in this role. Charlotte says:

> *I get a bit guilty about my feelings about my sexuality with the fact that I have two children and I sort of feel like I'm supposed to be a mummy.*

The physical setting is named as being very important to Charlotte. She reports having to "restrict" where she "is sexual" so that her children are not aware of her behaviours and throughout our interview, Charlotte described the importance of keeping her sexual life from the day-to-day life as a mother. Since the children were reported to spend some time with their biological father on a regular basis, sexual activity featured during this time when the children were out of the house. This sexual activity involved sex with a main male partner as well as with him and other women in threesomes. Speaking about "being with girls or strippers or whatever" for a threesome, she says:

> *I'm fussy about being at my house, I won't take them home but then I can be that person elsewhere and not it be around baby powder and nappies and that sort of stuff [laughs].*

Similarly, Daniel, a 41-year-old social worker in an opposite sex relationship, talks about the differing roles he plays. These include being a father, being a worker, being a student and being a partner. When I asked how these roles relate to one another, Daniel responded by saying that his father role is "a predominant need at the moment" which "cuts across everything" including work, being a student and being a partner. He gave the example that he took his daughter to work with him "when she is on holidays". Daniel was able to articulate the differing roles he played in social life and the intersections and complexities involved in managing these in day-to-day living. When I asked how these roles interact with or affect his sexual self, Daniel said that his sexuality is part of each role, saying, "I think my sexuality does come across".

Like both Daniel and Charlotte, Erin is a parent. A 32-year-old graphic designer who works from home part-time, Erin is married to a man and has two preschool aged children. Having breastfed her babies, Erin reports having to change her sexual

repertoire with her partner because of the disjunction between her breasts as sexualised and her breasts in motherhood. She explains that:

> *It's very hard, with a baby sucking on your nipple and that's something that I cannot experience with my partner. Whereas I could have when I was 25, happily, but now it's, it's no, that's a vision of my baby. So it would make my partner look like my baby and it would just be all wrong to me.*

Erin explains why the role of mother impacted on her sexual life in such a way, and calls it:

> *... the stay at home, stay at home mum, mum, mum, mum, mum. Just mum and it's, it's not that I think for someone else that isn't right. It's more that there is also another part of me that's creative and skilled….*

How might the above accounts from Charlotte, Daniel and Erin be interpreted? Clearly their accounts of their family relationships are important to explaining their sexual selves. Sociology has long been interested in family relationships. Historically, contributions have ranged from anthropological approaches to studies in traditional societies (see Malinowski 1927, 1929) to functionalist approaches of the family (see Parsons & Bales 1956) to feminist accounts of gender and power within traditional family roles (see Freidan 1965; Gavron 1966). More recently, there has been an interest in non-traditional or detradtionalized forms of family relationships, including "non-standard intimacies" (Berlant & Warner 2000) and "families of choice" (Weeks *et al*. 2001). Yet merely studying family relationships or connections to others outside the family would not satisfactorily explain the references to roles and social space that participants reported because it would miss the importance of social interactions, or sociality, which is evident in interviewees' accounts.

Participants can be said to have engaged in deliberations about their roles and relationships yet, as I have suggested, what is evident in the above accounts is the sociality in which the sexual self is immersed. Ruth's narrative was explained through an exploration of the temporality that is associated with the Meadian construction of self. The sociality of the sexual self, along with associated temporality and reflexivity (Jackson 2010a; Jackson & Scott 2010a, 2010b) provides a cogent theoretical explanation for the accounts in this study.

In *Mind, Self and Society,* Mead (1934) argues that social roles are differently expressed depending on the company one is in and the broader environment. He argues that the context in which social interactions take place impact upon the way that the self is constituted. He says there are multiple selves which are borne out in differing ways depending on the social context. Thus,

> There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience (Mead 1934, p. 142).

This has resonance with the accounts from participants discussed above. The multiple selves participants discussed included the self as a partner, worker, student and parent. Mead (1934, p. 143) argues that we "…recognise the lines of cleavage that run through us" and this ability to identify the nuances between differing 'selves' is what participants drew from in order to participate in the interview. Through recognising that their sexual selves differed depending upon the specific circumstance they were engaged in social interaction, participants highlighted the importance of social interaction (through the varied familial roles they played) to their sexual self. Yet how

do social processes 'make' the sexual self in Meadian terms? Interpersonal relationships are central to this process, as the following accounts illustrate.

Returning to Charlotte's account, it highlights the importance of the role of significant others. In this excerpt, Charlotte was telling me about what helped her feel better following the breakup of her marriage. This involved explaining to me that she had 'become' another person during her lengthy marriage due to the controlling behaviours of her ex-partner. Charlotte has two primary school-aged boys, close in age, whom she had while she was married. When I asked what helped her to recover from what must have been a terrible time, Charlotte said that there was one friend who had known her before she was married and it was her friend's account of "the 'old' Charlotte" that helped her reconnect with her older, more confident ways of relating and interacting with others, including during sexual encounters. In this excerpt, Charlotte explains how this came about and the subsequent "realization" about her selfhood:

> *And one girlfriend in particular, um, you know a year ago, maybe not quite that long but she talked about the old 'Charlotte' and what we'd get up to and what we'd do and how confident I'd be and I realised. And it sort of really hit me at that point. Oh my god. And that sort of where the process of healing came and all unravelled and I realised. So she was probably the catalyst to it...*
>
> Charlotte, 36-year-old PhD student

Jeffrey is a 61-year-old accountant and during our interview he made a great number of references to his family members and friends. Anecdotes included examples where the tensions between his brother and himself were manifest. Later in the interview, Jeffrey told me that he was adopted along with his twin brother and that this was something he found out about when he was an adult. He talked about the difficulties he had with his adopted father, whom he described as controlling and distant, so when his father died,

Jeffrey sought his birth mother. When they met, Jeffrey said she told him that her mother had told her that her babies had died at birth and she had only found out about his and his twin brother's existence when they were 55-years-old. Despite this tragedy, Jeffrey was happy that he had "cleared the air" through meeting her. Throughout Jeffrey's account there was a strong sense of the role that others had played in helping him define himself. Sometimes his sense of self was in contrast to others, for example, he described himself as friendly and generous with others, which he contrasted with the picture he painted of his father. At other times he gave examples of times throughout his life when others' concepts of him had helped him create a clearer sense of himself. For example, in 1960 Jeffrey met another boy on a ship to England (where his parents came from) and they became close friends. It was this friend, said Jeffrey, who had him confirm his sexual identity as gay:

> *We never, we never had anything between the two of us and there never will be but he was just one of those guys that just sort of took me by the hand and just, you know, just settle down and just accept what you are.*
>
> Jeffrey, 61-year-old accountant

Mead (1932, p. 86) rejects the idea that the self is explicable through biology. Instead, he argues that "the appearance of mind is only the culmination of … sociality". Jeffrey and Charlotte's interviews, which show how their notion of their selves is reliant upon close friends' perceptions of them, fit this Meadian argument. Using Mead to explain how social processes 'make' the sexual self involves discussing reflexivity and self-other relationships as well as the 'generalized other', which is the knowledge of the "attitude of the whole community" (Mead 1934, p. 154). Understanding how others are likely to respond to one's self is central to social competence. As Mead (1934, p. 86) explains, "… the organism, by occupying the attitudes of others, can occupy its own

attitude in the role of the other".

Understanding and pre-empting the attitudes of the community requires the kind of knowledge Bourdieu conceptualised in his depiction of habitus as a "socialised subjectivity" (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992, p. 126). For Mead, the socialization process occurs through play in childhood, and former as well as subsequent knowledge is carried forward in adult interactions.

Using the notion of the generalized other in social interactions requires reflexive processes: "when 'I' adopt the role of the other as a means of turning back on myself, to reflect upon myself as 'me'" (Crossley 2001, p. 147). Thus the incorporation of the generalized other turns the 'I' into the 'me' through which the "internalizing the attitudes of others" (Burr 2009, p. 325) occurs. The sociality of the self refers to the argument that the self is 'made' through relationships with others in social settings. Again this has been shown to be the case in this study. Interactions with friends have been identified as very important in shaping each of the participant's notions of self in the accounts above. For both Jeffrey and Charlotte, this meant a 'realization' that altered the way they saw themselves. The examples they provided in the interview were depicted as pivotal times in their lives. For Jeffrey and Charlotte, the notion of their identities was reflected in the ways in which others close to them saw their character. These reminders of themselves, whether as a liberated woman (Charlotte) or a gay man (Jeffrey), were reported to have helped them at a particularly challenging and pivotal point in their lives. The timing for these encounters was depicted through their narratives as crucial.

Jackson and Scott (2010a) point out that temporality, sociality and reflexivity are central to Mead's project. Temporality has ben examined here in relation to participant biography and I have argued that participants' narratives demonstrate that reflexivity is embedded within constitutive processes. Similarly, these concepts are embedded within the notion of sociality as applied to the sexual self. Erin's exploration of the differential coding of breasts in relation to sexual activity and breastfeeding is an example of a reflexive process in which she represents the generalized other (which is that breasts are a legitimate part of sexual touching). Thus, not only are temporality, sociality and reflexivity central to understanding the ways in which the sexual self is made, the ways in which the generalized other is manifest in coding sexuality is evident in participant accounts. Understanding the role of others is central and "taking the perspectives of others generally is held to be of considerable importance…for the development and maintenance of good interpersonal and community relations" (Martin 2005, p. 231).

The narratives in which Charlotte, Daniel and Erin describe the tensions between being a parent and other selves demonstrate how the sexual self is in constant dialogic relations with the social. Charlotte's reference to the physical reminders of parenting (baby powder and nappies) can be explained as both a recognition of the generalized other (the social expectation that parents do not engage in sexual activities around children) as well as an example of the recognition of the different social roles or "lines of cleavage" (Mead p. 143) that were reported to run between the roles played out in everyday life.

There are other examples of how the sexual self is in a continuous dialogic relation with the social self. Daniel is able to represent the views of the generalized other when he

speaks about his parenting taking precedence over his work role, or indeed, his intimate relationship, and he outlines how he negotiates these differing roles. Ruth's narrative earlier in the chapter details her interaction in the workplace across a number of years. These accounts can be explained, in Meadian terms, as processes that constitute the self because:

> The process of relating one's own organism to the others in the interactions that are going on, in so far as it is imported into the conduct of the individual with the conversation of the "I" and the "me", constitutes the self (Mead 1934, p. 179).

The Role of Others in Self-making

Participants in this study into everyday sexuality highlighted the important role that interactions with others played in the ongoing constitution of the self. These accounts described the importance that key relationships held at particular points in participants' life histories, and the subsequent learning that grew from these relationships was described as particularly important in the ongoing constitutive process of the sexual self. Participants noted the influence these significant relationships had on promoting learning or challenging the ways in which they had previously thought about their sexual selves. Maxwell, a 46-year-old sexual health educator told me that from his late thirties, he began "really examining what my sexuality meant" and he did this through "learning" within "a series of relationships".

Whilst Maxwell saw himself as a "learner" in relationships, Edward, a 57-year-old, saw himself as the "teacher" in relationships by being a role model for progressive attitudes. He said this came about when he found barriers to communication within his relationships with women:

> *I was interested in, you know, an equality in sexual relationships. And so when I discovered that partners didn't have the sense, the same sense of openness or communication that was necessary I tried to model that.*
>
> Edward, a 57-year-old working in education

Erin, whose account about breastfeeding and sexual behaviour was explored earlier in this chapter, said she needed the presence of a partner to "encourage" her to move on to increased reflexivity that saw her become more confident in expressing herself sexually. She explains that "…it took somebody, it took a partner to encourage me to explore myself by myself".

Similarly, Jane, a 53-year-old counsellor, reported being challenged by the experiences her partner had had prior to them entering into a relationship. She explained how this came about when her male partner disclosed to her that he had been in a sexual relationship with a man prior to being with her. This revelation propelled Jane into thinking more about her sexual self as well as her existing attitudes to date:

> *... the guy I ended up marrying at 20 disclosed to me that he'd had a same sex relationship which really you know blew my mind apart and confronted me at the most personal level probably possible at that point in life to put these theoretical ideas and this personal experience… "Ah shit! [laughs]… What do I do with this?" ... So that was one of the sort of early stages of really stirring the pot up in a big way. And um yeah. I mean so that was a big stage. Mmm.*
>
> Jane, 53-year-old counsellor

Clearly, interpersonal relationships were cited as providing prompts for participants' views, beliefs and experiences of sexuality being challenged. The importance of these relationships was described during the interview as promoting rapid change in self-perception. Like other accounts, reflexivity, temporality and sociality are key to

understanding these accounts. The generalized other was manifest through its comparison with the conflicting values held by significant others. For example, Jane's expectation of a heterosexual relationship was described as being an unspoken understanding between her and her then partner. Her anticipation about the ways in which her relationship would operate was not compatible with her partner's disclosure about having had relationships with men and the 'stirring of the pot' a "big stage" of rapid change of values and expectations about relationships.

The reflexive engagement with one's sexual self and the constitution of the self as a process are evident in the above examples. However, broader experiences in social life also influenced participants' experiences of their sexual selves. Involvement in education was a strong example of this.

Education tended to promote the formation of sexual selves in line with particular ideologies such as feminist or socialist. Further, encountering theoretical ideas within an educative context was described in everyday terms because of participants' immersion in full time study. Interviewees also reported how formal ideas sometimes unrelated to sexuality had an impact on the ways in which they experienced and renegotiated their sexual selves. Many of these formal ideas entailed theoretical ideas about the social, as enshrined within particular academic disciplines, and were then described specifically as they related to individuals' identities.

For some, such ideas impacted not only upon their sense of identity or who they are, but also upon their behaviours. For both Davina (a 39-year-old social worker and counsellor) and Marijka (a 53-year-old programme manager in community health), this

meant rejecting traditional relationship forms and socially expected ways of bodily presentation as a woman respectively. Citing feminist theory, both participants found the formal ideas they encountered at university transformatory for their sexual selves and both described this process as occurring quickly.

Davina had open relationships while in her twenties as a means to explore differing ways to become more satisfied with her sexual encounters with men. Davina had been unhappy with the way she had related to men prior to being in non-monogamous relationships, and reported feeling that this new way of relating could open up possibilities for reconceptualizing her "understanding of [her] sexuality". The prompt towards experimenting with new forms of relating came from:

> *... being at uni, um one, I had a child and was at uni, I was doing philosophy degree and I ended up studying a lot of feminist theory and realizing that I actually wasn't happy with the, kind of, way that I was understanding my sexuality and the way that I was interacting with men around my sexuality .*
>
> Davina, 39-year-old social worker and counsellor

Similarly, Marijka reported finding feminist scholarship liberating for not only her thinking about gender, but also for the way she had represented herself, physically, to date. Marijka's engagement with feminism altered the way she 'made' herself both figuratively and literally, since it gave her permission to alter her physical appearance:

> *And so finally finding feminism and saying, having the guts to say, so what I did was cut my hair I, like really extreme I think, just to make a point. I cut my hair, I think my partner at the time cut my hair and I had a tail and it was like oh my god, do you have to, because at the time I had curly locks, I had curly locks and, you know, beautiful clothes, you know, the dress and, you know, the feminine as opposed to the female [...] And then grew my hair, my legs, didn't shave any more. And so, all those outward signs because I could see now, it doesn't really*

matter, I can do what I like.

Marijka, 53-year-old programme manager in community health

For others, the formal nature of the educational setting was recognised as impacting upon not only intimate relationships but other aspects of social life. Genevieve, a 33-year-old social worker in a long-term heterosexual relationship, told me that her interaction with education "…would spark with those formal, those formal structures and just branch out into all these other sectors and areas which, you know, I am so again, very blessed to be a part of, yeah".

Like other narratives about participants' changing values, those focusing on education highlighted the rapidity within which their values and attitudes about sexuality shifted during a particular point in their lives. Whilst the Meadian model highlights the constitutive process of sociality, and this is central in making the sexual self, it is clear that relationships with people also distort temporality across the lifespan. Thus, rapid change in values and attitudes towards sexuality—and in turn rapid shifts in the ways in which the sexual self is made—was reported as being due to key relationships in everyday life, rather than this process being due to other, broader social factors such as rapid technological change (see Lash 2001). This highlights the importance of understanding the interactions that occur in everyday life as constitutive.

David, a 50-year-old social planner, also talked about his personal sense of ideology during the interview and this was a philosophy which he saw as cutting across other aspects of himself through the varied roles he played in everyday life. Towards the beginning of the interview, for example, I asked him if he would describe his sexuality. By way of explaining how his personal ideology came about, he described a period of

rapid change in his personal politics. The interactions that occurred through being at university in the late 1970s brought about a radical shift in the way he thought about both the world around him as well as issues that were relevant to his day to day relationships. He said:

> *[…] in that context again perceptions and self sense of my sexuality and things, I suppose the main issues there were the things that derived more from, I suppose, intellectual and / or ideological issues about issues such as monogamy and the basis for relationships and all those sorts of things. And that's, I suppose, coming from having been, having gone to uni in the late '70s into the early '80s initially just, I suppose a developing sense based upon broadly socialist themes type philosophies about the way in which people and social systems work.*
>
> David, 50-year-old social planner

How we make sense of the role that significant others play alongside the broader social experiences such as education in constituting sexuality involves understanding how these interactions intersect with personal biography.

Giddens' (1992) pure relationship is depicted as prompting reflexive processes that result in personal transformation. There is a strong tradition in sociology of appreciating the importance of the social arena. Berger and Luckmann (1973, p. 194), for example, argue that "[i]dentity is … a key element of subjective reality and, like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society". Both Giddens' and Berger and Luckmann's accounts only go as far as providing theoretical frameworks to explain the findings presented in this thesis. Mead's (1934) insistence that the self is a process embedded in sociality offers a far more substantial and fitting framework for the data from this study into everyday sexuality. Specifically, Mead suggests that the significance of social processes is that they constitute the self.

The partner or significant other (as discussed above), as well as the formal ideas encountered at university, have equal roles to play in the constitution of the self and therefore of the sexual self.

What is evident in the participant accounts thus far is that sexualities are reported to have developed and changed over time, and that these shifts were said to have occurred not only within participants' social worlds and interpersonal relationships but *because* of their interaction in their social worlds (for example through university studies) and interpersonal relationships (for example, through intimate relationships).

Does this mean that we are all in a constant process of radical reinvention? Or are processes that constitute the sexual self stabilised or routinised? Postmodern notions of performativity (for example, see Butler 1990) emphasise the potential for transgression or subversion from identity norms, however it is important not to underestimate the influence that broader cultural settings (in which social processes take place) have on social life (Alexander 1996). Whilst respondents described periods in their lives when their values and understanding of sexuality and their sexual selves changed rapidly, these points in their biographies were depicted as occurring more rapidly than usual. The routine, everyday constitution of the sexual self involves a steady, ongoing process of sexual self-making. Unlike the 'liquid' modern landscape depicted as fragmenting once-solid relationships (see Bauman 2003), participants' narratives of their sexual selves were grounded in tangible social roles and experiences. As Plummer notes:

> Empirically I have found it very rare indeed to come across people who live their lives in such fleeting, fragmentary, and unstable ways (Plummer 2007, p. 23).

Mead's theoretical framework for the making of the self through social processes helps us to better understand such accounts.

At the beginning of this chapter Plummer (2011, p. xiii), an eminent interactionist sexuality researcher, notes that sexuality is locatable in the social environment and, as argued in this thesis, the interactionist tradition highlights social processes as pivotal to the manifestation of selfhood. Sociologists Gagnon and Simon's *Sexual Conduct* (1973) has resonated through gender and sexuality scholarship since it was published. It has paved and continues to pave the way for new theorizing about sexuality. As Kimmel (2007, p. ix) points out, "Without Gagnon and Simon, there could not have been a Judith Butler".

Gagnon and Simon's (1973) approach has been identified as falling within social interactionism (Jackson 2007; Jackson & Scott 2010a, 2010b). Although Gagnon and Simon refute this classification (Plummer 2007), Gagnon reports that *Sexual Conduct* arose more from the influence of the American pragmatist tradition than German constructionists such as Shultz and Berger, and Luckmann and the like (Gagnon in an interview in Kimmel 2007, p. 275). As Plummer (2007, p. 18) notes, "constructionism itself can mean many things to many people". The meaning of interaction is equally as important to consider in relation to the data in this study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have begun to explore the data from this empirical study into everyday sexuality. I have argued that the sexual self is socially constituted. Using George Herbert Mead's theoretical contribution, as well as interactionist accounts of the self, I

have demonstrated how such approaches help to provide a theoretical explanation of the data. Through examining data which describe routine, everyday social encounters with significant others and in broader social life, I have begun explore how these interactions are constitutive of the sexual self. Examining participant narratives reveals the importance of time and space to broader biographies that affect sexual self-making. The role of others is central in sexual self-making and participant narratives show how specific interactions rapidly shifted existing values and attitudes about sexuality. In line with recent theorizing in the Meadian tradition by Jackson and Scott (2010a), I have argued that the sexual self is made through social processes because I found that late modern theories of selfhood do not fully account for the complex intersections of participant biographies.

Extending the Meadian concepts of game and play along with the notion of the sociality of selfhood enabled a broader appreciation of the role of close relationships, which become sites for play and experimentation. In the next chapter, I investigate the data about everyday sexuality in relation to travel and illness.

Chapter Four: Disrupting the Everyday? Travel and Illness

Introduction

In Chapter Three, I examined the way relationships with significant others were linked to the everyday sexual self, and highlighted other experiences in social life, such as through education, as important in shaping one's sexual self. Specifically, this entailed exploring the role that relationships with others played in relation to sexual self-making. Applying the notion of 'play' led to a better understanding of relationships as sites of experimentation and risk-taking, which meant they provided participants with new opportunities for sexual self-making. Participant narratives enabled an appreciation of the importance of time and space in relation to individual biographies, and the impacts these made on the ways in which the sexual self was reported to have been altered.

This research is interested in the everyday sexual self and, as has been shown already:

> Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond and their common ground. It is in everyday life that the sum total of relations that make the human—and every human being—a whole takes its shape and form (Lefebvre 1991, p. 97).

Yet some life events were presented as manifest in participants' day-to-day lives whilst simultaneously being positioned as disrupting everyday life or somewhat out of the 'ordinary'. Two such events are travel and illness.

This chapter is concerned with exploring in detail the role of travel and illness—both of

which were depicted as somewhat complex since they were both disruptive to and evident in routine, everyday life. Participants also positioned them as transformatory for the sexual self. I explore how this disruption was described as occurring and consider its broader implications in relation to relevant theory. The aim of this chapter is to make sense of the varying significance of travel and illness on individual participants' sexual selves.

Travel and the Making of the Sexual Self

Travel was reported to have played an important part in the ongoing making of participants' sexual selves in everyday life. As Gagnon and Simon argue in *Sexual Conduct* (1973), sexuality cannot be examined without an understanding of the "increasingly complex" (Simon 2011, p. 294) social, cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic interactions. In this study, accounts of sexuality related to the specific ways in which environmental or cultural factors interplayed with the ongoing construction of the sexual self. Traditionally held and socially learned attitudes about sexuality were described as being challenged as a direct result of participants' travels to, and immersion in, a culture different from their own. For example, Erin is a 32-year-old woman with two young children for whom she cares at home while managing her graphic design business. Living in Sri Lanka, she said, prompted her to rethink her ideas of beauty:

> *...over there boobs, or curves I guess, and being a bit more plump as they probably would have called it, was more attractive.*
>
> Erin is a 32-year-old woman

George Herbert Mead's generalized other provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the way in which individuals can preempt the social views of the society

in which they are immersed. For example, Erin reported that it was "…seeing what they [Sri Lankans] all saw as beauty" that enabled her to better appreciate culturally specific aesthetics. Erin's ability to understand Sri Lankans' notions of beauty required an active engagement with her cultural setting.

In increase in affordable travel in contemporary times has resulted in a marked rise in global movements and earned the description of this new social world as "borderless" (Urry 1997). Yet, in contrast to postmodern notions of fluidity, travellers do not disembed from their lived experiences once they are away from their homeplace in an environment in which they are "…unmarked by the traces of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and geography" (Cresswell 1997, p. 377). Erin highlights her engagement with the Sri Lankan corporeal aesthetic *because it differs from her own*.

Therefore the significance of travel is not in the act of travel itself; rather travel provides a resource to sexual self-making because it provides new cultural values including standards of beauty, for example. Participants reported travel as giving a sense of liberation from the constraints of one's own cultural norms and values in that it offered opportunities for new, non-routinised social interactions. Finally, travel is reported as providing people space and time to play or experiment with their sexualities.

Participant accounts in this study, which articulated their existing and new social values, demonstrated participants' ability to take on the views of the generalized other. Indeed, participants reported the process of getting to understand a culture as being an opportunity to engage in the ongoing creation of their sexual selves. Francis' account describes the process of travelling as helpful to thinking about her own identity but

stresses that without getting outside her usual cultural setting, she could not have reflected upon her identity:

> *I went travelling too in that period of time and that was, that pushed me right outside my comfort zone so you and I thrived on it… I remember it gave me permission to step in and find my own personal values and beliefs and explore my sense of who I was. And even my sexuality in a way that I possibly wouldn't have done if I hadn't done, stepped outside.*
>
> Francis, 52-year-old project manager

The sociality of identity construction in relation to the sexual self is evident in the accounts in this study. Further, participants showed how shifts in geographical locations altered their social interactions. Erin clearly described the cultural values that enabled her to engage in rethinking some of her existing values about beauty, and Francis specifically named her values and beliefs and those around her as being important to the making of her self. Mead says:

> Since it is a social self, it is a self that is realized in its relationship to others. It must be recognized by others to have the very values which we want to have belong to it (Mead 1934, p. 204).

Mead's notion of the social is as a social in action and interaction; a social made up of *processes*. Thus, individual identity is made through interactions with others. I have begun to analyse how the everyday sexual self is made through social processes and what influences such processes. The geographical social setting participants experienced through travel has been described as being important to how their sexual selves were shaped. But what is it about the late modern social landscape that differs from Mead's depiction of identity making?

As we saw in the previous chapter, the notion of play helps to provide an explanation

for the relaxing of social rules and subsequent experimentation that gives ways to a sense of enlightenment. Applying the notion of play can also help in providing a better understanding of how Mead's social remains relevant in our contemporary world. Various sociological theories have addressed the relationship between actors and their environment, and the subsequent tensions between individual action and the social structures that can be depicted as constraining agency. Play, for example, has been of interest to sociologists because it is an important social action in which a range of activities, from learning to play (see West *et al.* 2011) as "the activity of socialization" for gender roles (Lever 1976, p. 478) can be specifically identified. Bourdieu's concept of 'field' uses a game analogy in which 'players' work within the rules of the game "…but they can also get in to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992, p. 99).

Mead's emphasis on the importance of play through games seeks to highlight the social processes that enable not only self-making but also the provision of knowledge for the routinization of interactions. These processes, which form a part of the 'action' of play, enable learning about the view of others (Crossley 2001, p. 146). Thus play, in all its liminality (see Masters 2008; Turner 1982), enables behavioural experimentation to take place; an activity where social interaction occurs while social rules and the self are realised. For example, participants reported that the sense of freedom that arose from being a cultural outsider enabled them to make their sexual selves in new ways. Walter, a 54-year-old public servant, describes himself as mostly heterosexual. Although he was born in England, Walter had travelled extensively from a young age before settling in Australia with his family, which he described as a:

> *... liberation from ...England where you feel so constrained that you do the things that people like you do and nothing else and nothing more.*

Walter, a 54-year-old public servant

Walter reported that he has been in three long-term relationships with women, including the one he is in currently. Walter's account articulates the freedom brought about by travel and experiencing differing cultures. Throughout his narrative, Walter referred to the cultural differences between European cities and the United States of America, all of which he did as an outsider. This outsider, liminal role of the traveller has been developed in sociological analyses of tourism (see Cohen 1992) and Walter's account highlights his being on the periphery of the social landscape within which interaction occurs. However, Walter's references to the broader historical contexts were also cited as shaping interactions. Here, Walter describes how his sexual behaviour changed as a result of being on holiday in Spain in the 1970s:

> *... in the 1970s was, you know, do anything really.* Hence a little bit of experimentation with one, only one really one time a bloke on holidays. But I *don't think that was, I mean for so*me people that might have been experimenting in the sense of is this right for me? ... So yes, growing up in England undoubtedly was constraining *... I think Australia is a bit more open* about that. We are not quite Scandinavians but we are going more up that end I *would say...*
>
> Walter, a 54-year-old, public servant

Late modern social life is said to be so changed by globalizing forces that traditional roles are no longer reproduced (see Giddens 1991). However, it would be a mistake to attribute freedoms brought about by travel as being solely due to detraditionalizing processes. Further, the very existence of the social is rejected by some social theorists in favour of a new appreciation for the "scapes and flows" that characterise new 'mobile' lives (see Urry 2000, p. 13). Rapid increases in technologies in recent decades has brought about unprecedented changes in the way we live, interact with one another and

the ways in which actors experience time and space are argued to have irrevocably shifted (Lash 2001). Scholars of late modernity argue that our increasing mobility has relegated travel to a complex—yet ordinary—aspect of social interaction (Urry 2003).

In this study travel was cited both in relation to day-to-day life as well as positioned as occurring in such a way so as to disrupt the 'flow' of everyday living. These two ways of understanding travel, whilst somewhat incompatible, suggest that in late modern life competing discourses are able to co-exist (Jackson 2007). Given this new, complex landscape, within which sociality produces identity (Mead 1934), it becomes difficult to discern or attribute meaning. Indeed:

> As the 'economic' folds seamlessly into the 'cultural', distinctions between 'production', 'consumption' and 'everyday life' become less clear cut (du Gay 1993, p. 583).

For this reason, it remains vital to understand everyday sexuality with reference to the biographical events participants highlight as transformatory or significant.

Despite accounts in which travel is equated with the freedom to reinvent one's self, broader inequalities continue to shape behaviour and self-making in contemporary social life (Adkins 2002, p. 4). Isabella, a 44-year-old lesbian woman in a same sex relationship, described changing her usual behaviour when on holiday in Singapore because she said she felt unsafe displaying affection publicly:

> *Because I don't really care what other people think ... The only time I've been consciously aware of that was [laughs] on holiday in Singapore once. We were very conscious of it, it's like you're walking around, don't do anything, stand over there, do not walk anywhere together.*
>
> Isabella, 44-year-old working in education and training

Inequalities continue to define contemporary social life and claims made by mobility theorists such as Urry (2000, 2003, 2005) can gloss over this reality. Therefore, it is important to ask "…who gets mobile and how?" (Adkins 2002, p. 49). Respondents with higher education qualifications were over-represented in this study, which may account for the strong theme of travel in participant accounts. Notwithstanding this reality, it is important to better understand the claims made about late modern social life in relation to this study's finding of a socially constituted sexual self.

Late modern social life is said to be characterised by globalizing forces that have brought about increasing exchange between cultural settings (for example, see Bauman 1998, 2000; Beck *et al.* 1994; Giddens 1991; Lash & Urry 1994). Participants highlighted travel, newly affordable as a leisure pursuit in contemporary life, as an opportunity for engagement in new social exchange between participants and their new environment. Travel was also reported to have prompted changes in sexual behaviours and cited as affecting their self-making.

Mead's placement of the social as central to self-making is not incompatible with analyses that suggest late modern social life has changed due to globalizing forces. Rather, scholars of late modernity raise issues that can help to promote new ways of thinking about the sexual self. As Adkins (2002, p. 6) notes in relation to gender:

> … gender is not simply undone by mobility, but that such fluidity provides a ground for new articulations of gender. The latter do not concern social and/or natural forms of determination, but rather articulations of gender involving positions of mobility and immanence in respect to cultural styles.

Further, theories of detraditionalization undervalue the role of the social through their

assertion that late modern shifts brought about by globalization contribute to individualization. Cultural settings influence the constitution and manifestation of the sexual self and are one of the sites where social scripting can be said to take place (Simon 2011, pp. 293–294).

In Chapter One, it was argued that sexual scripting, as theorised in Gagnon and Simon's *Sexual Conduct,* importantly highlights the limits to individual agency and is vital to include in any examinations of everyday sexual self-making. Whilst Gagnon and Simon argue for the importance of allowing for agency, scripting highlights the limits to agency. However, sexual behaviour, as theorised through the notion of scripts:

> …should not be understood as closed texts which lock us into predictable plots and roles, but something much more fluid and open, offering opportunities to improvise. Scripts are played with, not simply played out; they are open to renegotiation (Jackson & Scott 2007, p. 110).

The above participant accounts illustrate how participants were provided with opportunities to alter their 'scripts' through their immersion in cultures other than their own. An example of this on a larger scale is the well documented changes in sexual behaviours of nationals in the years following colonization (Gagnon in Gagnon & Simon 2011 [1973], p. 270). Despite participants portraying their experiences of being exposed to new cultural norms around sexuality and gender as a liberating process, it is important to consider the cultural dimension in which sociality exists as being scripted. Francis cited feeling as though she had 'permission' to think outside what may be termed her existing cultural script. Yet alternatives to the existing script were only those offered through the new interpersonal and sociocultural settings; the choice was not open ended. Despite the increased opportunities for travel and cultural exchange

brought about by the conditions of late modernity, choice is not limitless (King 2009). A recent study which examined the link between everyday sexual behaviour with pornographic imagery argues that applying scripting theory links the self with socio-cultural attitudes and values and that these coexist in complex interplay with one another:

> The sexual scripts of everyday life and those that operate within the context of pornographic production are closely related. Everyday sexual scripts are elaborated by the person engaging in sex through an interplay of his or her interactive and intrapsychic scripts and the society's cultural scenarios. [There are]… layers of fantasies, interactive cues, and cultural narratives overlying the deeper layers of the participant's personal fantasies, scripts, and beliefs about social roles (Escoffier 2007, p. 77).

Although sexual scripts that relate to sexual behaviour are "open to negotiation" (Jackson & Scott 2007, p. 110) and exist alongside multiple layers of sexual expression (Escoffier 2007) in relation to sexual self constitution, they offer a framework that both highlights agency as well as providing a reminder of the limits to agency. Understanding limits to agency in sexual self-constitution is not simply a matter of applying scripting to suggest actors are limited to one script, but rather, participant narratives relating to illness suggest that although the ways in which illness was reported in positive ways, the negative associations that illness held at the socio-cultural level influenced sexual self-making. A striking reminder of comes from one respondent's account, which follows, in which Jane says: "just imagine that…[illness] was prestigious!"

I now move on to consider in greater detail the role that illness plays in the ongoing process of sexual self-making.

Corporeality, Illness and the Sexual Self

Jane is a 53-year-old counsellor who has completed a university qualification. Although she described herself as having "lived my life ostensibly heterosexually", she was married to a man whose prior sexual experiences with men prompted a "stirring the pot up in a big way". This meant, for example, that she became aware of how that disclosure affected their marriage in relation to sexual experiences and overall attraction. Her partner's sexual identity "wasn't settled for him" and eventually the relationship ended. Jane told me that she does not have "a sexual partner at the moment". She also recounted how her particular illness impacted on her and its broader implications for her sexual self. It is important to examine Jane's in terms of exploring the body and the sexual self.

Jane has Vulval Lichen Sclerosus, a skin condition affecting the vulval region. The diagnosis prompted her to think about the cultural embeddedness of illness, particularly this illness, which potentially impacts not only her sexual behaviour but also her sexual self. She told me:

> *I've developed a um, a new disease ... and it will um attack the vulva in my body, so it's called Vulval Lichen Sclerosus. And it's, in our culture not the sort of thing you'd tell many people at all, about, so it immediately comes with lots of sexual connotations ... But you know it's an example of how an experience becomes embodied sort of sexually but at the same time implicit in that there are*

these social prescriptions around it, you know, this is an attack on your sense of yourself sexually.

Jane, a 53-year-old counsellor

How might Jane's account be understood? At face value, Jane's narrative provides a commentary on her embodied, sexual self. Jane describes the pain associated with her particular disease and identifies the impacts this condition had on her everyday life. Many scholars highlight the body as central to examinations of sexuality or one's sexual self as a starting point to better understanding the everyday sexual self in late modern life. The rich sexological tradition is the legacy of this. For example, it may seem pertinent to better understand what the relationship of the body is to one's sexual self or whether the two can indeed be seen as separate. In the early twentieth century, socio-medical perspectives combined to form sexology (Hawkes & Scott 2005b). However, the focus on the body as separate to the 'mind' is problematic when looking at Jane's account.

After her disclosure of the illness, Jane went on to talk about what she called the 'cultural context' within which the disease is embedded. She began by talking about the effect having the disease had had on her sexual life. Specifically, this was described through using the word 'distance', which she suggested meant that the disease had made her feel less 'together' with her sexual self. Here is an excerpt from our conversation. In the latter part of the narrative, Jane articulates the ways in which cultural meanings such as illness and genitalia impact on her sexual self. She told me that the illness:

... distance[s] you from yourself sexually because of the pain that's going to be experienced around it…

Priscilla:

Yeah, yeah.

Jane:

And so if that happened in a different culture I suppose, something painful but it might be something that you know, er, is prestigious. Um do you know, just imagine that. Well you know immediately it's just obvious, that in and of itself it's just a change in skin condition and it can, it needs to be addressed because it can cause pain and dysfunction of the organs um but yeah, it's so bound up in our culture with you know the idea of female genitalia and are generally very yucky ideas in our culture anyway, so yeah.

The meaning of the body in Jane's account is depicted as being heavily determined by the cultural sphere. 'Culture' is presented as a strong force impacting upon others' attitudes towards the illness that affects Jane's day-to-day life. As Jane says, her illness is "so bound up in our culture with … the idea of female genitalia". This association and the "attitude of the generalized other" (in Meadian terms) is that the vagina is, as Jane notes, "very yucky…in our culture".

Towards the end of our interview, Jane told me about how she had recently discovered a poststructuralist text about supervision and noted its influence on her ways of viewing the world around her. Clearly, Jane's reading of her illness through a sociocultural lens had enabled her to better understand the meanings attached to her illness. What can be termed as social constructionism is pertinent to sociology in particular (Seidman 2003) because of its interest in social processes in which social forms are constructed, constituted and reproduced.

The meanings of sexuality and the body have been considered in poststructuralist

theorizing. Queer theory, for example, emerged in the early 1990s (see de Laurentis 1991; Turner 2000) and quickly gained momentum with academics and later activists who were interested in new ways of conceptualizing sexual identity as well as the intersections between gender inequalities and normative sexuality (for example, see Sedgwick 1990, 1993). Sociology was 'doing queer theory' (Green 2007) before it came to be named as such (see, for example, Epstein 1994, Green 2007; Moon 2008; Rubin 2002). However, despite the similarities between sociology and poststructural theories (Jackson & Scott 2007, p. 96), it is important not to treat them as "...reducible to each other" (Green 2007, p. 26).

Poststructural accounts of sexuality and gender have contributed to our knowledge about the sexual self because they have framed existing ontologies in which sex and the body are biologically determined as problematic. As Judith Butler (1993, p. 92), argues in *Bodies that Matter*:

> The constructed character of sexuality has been invoked to counter the claim that sexuality has a natural and normative shape and movement, that is, one which approximates the normative phantasm of a compulsory heterosexuality.

This resonates with Jane's account of the meaning her body—and illness—have in their cultural surrounds. For example, Jane positions the knowledge of the coding of her illness through culturally agreed-upon definitions of illness and "yuck" related to women's "genitalia" as helping her to better understand the broader context of this personal illness.

Judith Butler, in her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, highlights the social context in which gender is understood. Recasting gender and the sexual self as 'troubled' or

without fixity (see Butler 1993, 1990) opens up the transformative possibilities of not only individual subversion but shifts in the very culture that set broader social attitudes. This involves viewing identity differently than it had previously been thought about in feminist theories. Butler (1990, p. ix) says:

> ... it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics. Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity? What new shape of politics emerges when identity as a common ground no longer constrains the discourse on feminist politics? And to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself?

However Butler's emphasis on the social context is somewhat different from the constitutive nature interactionist accounts ascribe to social relations (Holmes 2007, p. 59). For example in Jane's account, there is a strong sense that despite her knowledge about what she terms "cultural" codes for her illness and the negative associations with women's genitalia as "yuck", she continues to feel ostracized from her sexual self. Although Butler's work places the broader social context at the centre of gender and sexuality her account of agency does not account for broader social inequalities.

Notwithstanding the above, Butler's account of agency can be useful to sexuality researchers (Warner 2004). In a recent study in which gender and classroom culture was investigated empirically using an ethnographic approach, Butler's "philosophical writings on identity" (Nayak & Kehily 2006, p. 459) provided a useful framework in which to analyse emergent themes. Specifically, the researchers gained an appreciation of the ways that young people's "...daily actions demonstrate how gender is regulated,

performed and embodied in school-based cultures" (Nayak & Kehily 2006, p. 468). Similarly, Jane's understanding of her experiences and feelings of 'isolation' from her sexual self are better understood in a broader social context.

Although Butler's work signals a shift in focus from feminisms that preceded it due to its concern with "...an epistemological account of identity" (Butler 1990, p. 144), the problem of agency is not reconciled. Unlike other theorists such as Foucault who have been labelled within the 'poststructuralist' tradition, Butler accounts for agency (Stoetzler 2005, p. 345). For example, subversion of dominant tropes relating to gender and sexuality may occur through changing everyday social practices. Choosing ways in which to exercise this agency involves understanding and locating the "...problematic within practices of signification" (Butler 1990, p. 144) and disrupting routine repetition of these practices.

However Butler's depiction of what constitutes subversive practices has been criticised for its lack of specificity about the everyday and broader implications for such actions. Indeed, poststructural accounts of identity depict subjective life as devoid of temporality and historical embeddedness (McNay 2000). Jane's account of her illness comes at a specific time in her life. Making sense of it in relation to her sexual self is clearly reflected upon throughout our interview through making reference to events in the past such as her marriage and subsequent separation. Jane's account provides an example of the ways in which social interactions have contributed to her present sense of her sexual self. It is also clear that Jane has limited agency to shift what she calls cultural (which might be termed social or sociocultural) meanings prescribed to her condition. Some control over the meaning of the illness was manifest in Jane's account; "just imagine

that Vulval Lichen Sclerosis was ‘prestigious!’”

Seidman (1995, 2003) critiques Butler’s depiction of identity for casting subjectivity as unregulated, not least because it dilutes the political dimension to identity. For example, Seidman (1995, pp. 137–138) states:

> I detect in Butler the suggestion of a post-identity order as part of a social ideal characterized by minimal disciplinary and constraining structures. But what would such an order look like? What concept of self or subject is imaginable in the absence of a strong identity concept? Moreover, are not such identities productive of rich experiences, subjective stability, and social bonds? If self identities were not regulatory, what structures would serve to organize subjectivities?

Seidman raises a crucial point here. Butler’s depiction of subjectivity is one where identity is not fixed, yet participants in this study clearly demonstrated competence in articulating their sexual self through an engagement between themselves and the worlds around them. In this sense, there is a chasm between the theories of the poststructural self and the realities of everyday life, so that “…utterly fractured sexual and gender identity seems to be largely a myth created by social science!” (Plummer 2003, p 525). It is important to reconcile what agency entails in interactionist accounts of the self.

The next narrative about illness and the impact upon the sexual self comes from Charlie, a 49-year-old earthmoving contractor who has been married to a woman for 26 years. Charlie referred to his relationship with his wife with sadness and explained that physical affection is missing in his relationship. This lack of physical affection is upsetting for Charlie (as discussed more fully in relation to gender in Chapter Five). Charlie described feeling isolated not only from his wife but also from others. His

account highlights the importance of health professionals' attitudes towards people with whom they work. In particular, Charlie explained to me that he would not approach a GP (doctor) about his 'personal issues' because he felt that health professionals fail to understand the meanings attached to relationships with others and favour a more mechanistic view of the sexual self:

> *... in the last ten years or so I have been to a couple of GPs because I had a little bit of gastric reflux. And one of them, he is much older than I am and he just says "Here I will give you this pill, you take one a day for the rest of your life and you will be right". And on a subsequent appointment with him I sort of discussed it and said, "Look, isn't there perhaps a lifestyle issue, or perhaps dietary changes I could look at?" And he just laughed, practically sneered. "No, no, no, why would you want to worry about that? It's nothing to do with that. It's just a mechanical problem with your gut and you just need to take one pill a day for the rest of your life and you will be okay". So, if I can't talk with him about something as simple as digestion I feel, and, and subsequently I have gone to a different doctor at the same clinic and he is a much younger bloke but he is similarly difficult, if not worse, to communicate with than the older fellow. So GPs are the sort of people who, in this current context, really sort of get you in, stamp the Medicare card, get you out again as quickly as they can so they can get the next one in. They are not about to spend any time talking with you about lifestyle issues or anything on a personal level like that.*
>
> Charlie, a 49-year-old earthmoving contractor

Despite Charlie being aware of the importance of an holistic view of health and well-being, he describes being prevented from exercising agency (for example to change the way he makes sense of his situation or his ways of relating to his wife). Indeed, everyday changes in the body prompted by illness allowed respondents to explore the complexities of the embodied sexual self. This is in contrast with those phenomenological approaches that locate experience and meaning at the site of the body

(Merleau-Ponty 2003) or those that seek to theorise the body (Grosz 1994). The problem with viewing the body through poststructural or postmodern lenses is that sex (as in physiological differences between men and women) and sexuality can be presented as being different and yet connected to one another (for example, see Grosz 1995) without a clear emphasis upon the social interactions that make them so (Jackson & Scott 2007, p. 97).

Charlie's narrative reflects the way our bodies are subject to 'classification', both by ourselves as well as others (Crossley 2001, p. 151). Jackson and Scott (2007, p. 101) state that an interactionist perspective on the body:

> … does not deny the physical materiality of bodies—rather it emphasizes that bodies are not meaningful in themselves. All of us are embodied within social contexts, which profoundly affect how we experience our own and others' bodies… When we engage in sex with another person it is not about abstract bodies meeting in a social space, but embodied beings interacting in a social context, bringing with them a good deal of cultural and biographical baggage.

Although Butlerian sexuality is depicted as free from pathology, which entails a starting point free from "...empiricist or humanist conceptions of the subject" (Hennessy 1995, p. 147), the problem with more medicalised accounts of the sexual self is that they fail to recognise the importance of interaction with others.

Another participant, David, highlighted the importance of social interaction in his account of depression and the impact of this illness on his sexual self. David is a 50-year-old social planner in a long-term relationship with a woman. David described himself as having gone to university in the late 1970s and early 1980s, where he began to see himself as a socialist—a label he still 'wears' today. He emphasised the

importance of having "common interests" with his partner because without these, and the opportunity to engage in a social environment together, his sense of his self altered dramatically. David described being "incapable of socializing in some situations" due to his depression. He said:

> *...part of the issues that I have had in terms of difficulties with relationships, [...] had a lot to do with very late diagnosed chronic depression. So that actually is something I have to deal with and so, I, it just meant that at times, especially when I am, especially before I had medication to deal with it, I, I became very asocial and just wasn't particularly interested in meeting people and so on, and obviously, if you are in a relationship with somebody your social life does need to be balanced and mediated by common interests and stuff. And with me, at times especially, depending on the mental state, basically I was incapable of socializing in some situations. So, yeah. So that, that obviously bears strongly upon all aspects of your relationships ...*
>
> David, 50-year-old social planner

As evident in Jane's, Charlie's and David's accounts, the intersection of social and biographical contexts is central to the ways in which their narratives relating to their sexual selves are theorised. Although Jane identifies the notion of 'culture' as an important lens through which to examine illness, the term 'social' perhaps better describes the constraints to agency participants described (see Jackson & Scott 2007, p. 113). Underpinning each of these accounts was a shared understanding between the participants and me about broader social views about genital disease, relationship difficulties and depression, each of which carry some degree of social taboo.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have examined participant accounts in which their environments and close relationships were reported to have influenced their sexual selves. In line with

recent theorizing in the Meadian tradition by Jackson and Scott (2010a), I have argued that the sexual self is made through social processes. Late modern theories of selfhood were found to have failed to account for the complex intersections of participant biographies and social inequalities.

Participants in this study identified experiences gained through global travel as important to sexual self-making. Travel was important because it helped participants reinterpret cultural values, including, for example, variations of what constitutes beauty. Travel also provided a sense of freedom from the constraints of one's cultural norms and values, although this did not equate to the dissolution of social inequality. The new interactions brought about by travel enabled participants to experiment with their sexual selves.

Extending the Meadian concepts of game and play along with the notion of the sociality of selfhood enabled a broader appreciation of the role of environment as a site for play and experimentation. Just as with travel, illness was reported by participants to have interrupted the 'flow' of everyday life in that it prompted a conscious engagement with existing values about sexuality and the sexual self as well as subsequent re-orientation of these values. Illness and corporality, like travel, needed to be understood in relation not only to participants' biographies but also through a social and cultural lens. Unlike travel, the impact of the attitudes of what Mead calls the generalized other was noted by participants as restricting agency in relation to how the body and illness were coded.

Having examined the specific ways in which participants reflected upon travel and illness, and the way that the sexual self was described in relation to biographical and

social contexts, I move on to consider in detail participant accounts of sexual selfhood in everyday life, and to critically explore gender and agency in relation to sexual selfhood.

Chapter Five: The Sexual Self, Gender and Agency

Introduction

In line with theorists who draw from Mead and argue that sexuality is produced through social interaction (see Jackson & Scott 2010a, 2010b), I argue that the everyday sexual self is made through social processes, as evidenced by the study participants' accounts thus far. By analysing the role of others in the social constitution of the self, I have examined reflexivity, temporality, biography, geography and relationships with others, all of which have been argued to facilitate the varied ways through which the making of the socially embedded sexual self occur.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between gender and sexuality in light of the claims made by late modern theories that depict identity as detraditionalized (see Giddens 1992). The study participants reported that gender influenced their sexual selves and, in contrast to the claims made through detraditionalization theses, they reflected upon traditional gender roles as being present in their everyday experiences. The question of agency as it relates to making the sexual self is crucially examined through the analysis of data relating to gender.

I argue that despite changes brought about through the rapidly shifting social landscape and the subsequent changes in patterns of intimate partnerships in the contemporary social world (Bauman 2004), it is a mistake to afford unbounded agency to self-making. Instead, agency should be seen as existing alongside complex social interactions that are both interpersonal and intrapsychic and which are shaped by broader scripts.

Gender and Sexuality

The pure sciences have an enduring interest in both gender and sexuality. Traditions such as psychotherapy and neurology have popularised the notion that differences in men and women are biologically determined (for example, see John Gray's 1982 publication *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* and McGlone 1980). In relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual sexual identities, religious fundamentalists regularly cite biological determinism and choice narratives as evidence of the disintegration of 'family values' (Hawkes & Scott 2005a).

In stark contrast to these essentialist constructions, this research into everyday sexuality supports the notion that the sexual self is socially made. As has been shown already, reflexivity is linked to the production of the sexual self in social space. Participants in this study reported that their geographical location influenced the remaking of their sexual selves in particular ways. Chapter Three also highlighted the role of relationships with significant others, which provided a better understanding of the important ways such relationships impact on the constitution of the sexual self.

Respondents' sense-making of the relationship between gender and sexuality contributes to theories that draw upon economic and political discourses because individual accounts depict everyday experience in which intra and inter personal meaning-making processes are revealed. For some participants, gender was inextricably bound to a sense of the self that drew from the physical, embodied experience of the gendered body, and this was linked to reproduction for both men and women.

Sexuality through the Lens of Gender

Examining gender is of central importance in understanding everyday sexuality, particularly in relation to the claims made by reflexivity theorists of late modernity such as Giddens (1992). Agency is ascribed to actors through detraditionalizing forces, enabling them to reflexively create and recreate selfhood (Giddens 1992). The problem with depicting detraditionalization as permitting unbounded choice in self-making is that it not only fails to recognise continued material inequalities between men and women (Skeggs 1997) but it also threatens to disembody selfhood completely (McNay 2000).

Participants reported gender as an important issue in relation to the sexual self. As Emile, a 32-year-old primary carer for his son, told me:

> *But, yeah, to look at sex without gender is difficult in kind of our commonly accepted ways of talking about things.*
>
> Emile, 32-year-old primary carer for his son

The following accounts demonstrate how gender is intertwined with the sexual self as well as one's corporeal self. An examination of the internal repertoires in which sexuality is named and shaped begins to develop a better understanding of some of the claims made in the gender and sexuality scholarly literature. The complex and idiosyncratic ways in which gender is interlaced into one's everyday sexuality is particularly evident.

Davina is a 39-year-old social worker/counsellor. At age 22, Davina gave birth to her son. She and her son's father were in an open relationship for eight years. At age 30, Davina met a man with whom she "…wanted to be in a monogamous relationship", and

was for a period of seven years. She is currently single and describes herself as "…still working out how to own my sexuality".

During our interview, Davina told me about the struggles she had with feeling entitled to sexual pleasure as a young person, which led to a discussion about pregnancy and sexuality. Davina disclosed that she is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault as an adult, and that she "was completely disconnected to my body as a result of that trauma". Davina was pregnant twice while in her 30s but both children died. Her experiences of pregnancy were recalled as times when she was paradoxically less sexualised but more 'in sync' with her sexuality. Participant accounts of their sexual selves along with narratives about being a woman or a man raise the question: how does gender relate to sexuality for the late modern, everyday sexual self?

Davina's experience of sexuality is described as being very much tied up with her experience as a woman. Indeed, many women participants reported sexuality as being bound up with their gender, which perhaps is not surprising since gender and sexuality speak to both "one's bodily and material existence" (Smith 1987, p. 97).

For Davina, this takes the form of recalling her feelings about both her body and her sexual self as experienced through being pregnant. She depicts a complex interplay between how her body was experienced at that time, and how connected to gender she was and the resultant sense of freedom this afforded her, namely manifesting as being more comfortable than ever with her sexuality:

> *… so it's been a really complex story, the whole sexual, reproductive overlapping thing. Um, when I was pregnant with my other two children, I, I felt so fantastic and I felt better in my body than I ever had and I felt really free and*

> *wanting to be sexual in in this really kind of organic, gorgeous, holistic kind of sense, in a way that I never really, I don't feel even now, had never really felt when I wasn't pregnant. I know lots of women feel really crap when they're pregnant but for me it was completely the opposite. I felt fantastic. And I've got photos of me like, you know, heavily pregnant, naked, and I don't feel naked, I don't feel naked, I just feel completely comfortable and in my absolute element as a woman and that did um and I felt more probably more comfortable with my sexuality than I ever have as well.*
>
> Davina, 39-year-old social worker/counsellor

Davina's account resonates with the explanation of gender and sexuality given by Gagnon and Simon (1973) in their classic text *Sexual Conduct*. Scripting theory applied to sexual conduct means that sexual interactions between individuals are shaped by tradition and "routinized behavior", rather than spontaneity (Gagnon & Simon, 2011 (1973) p. 13). Sexual scripting involves invoking scripts relevant to the sexual encounter. The notion of scripting, as well as providing an understanding of how sexual scripts fit with embodiment (Jackson & Scott 2011, p. 148), can help generate a better understanding of Davina's recounting of her body as a *previously scripted* source of arousal, but in its pregnant state "naked" yet non-sexual. Scripting also helps explain Davina's reflection on her sexual self at this time as "more comfortable with [her] sexuality than… ever".

Importantly, however, it is interactionist accounts (such as Gagnon & Simon 1973; Jackson & Scott 2010a, 2010b; Plummer 2007) that elucidate the divisions and connections between sexuality and gender that facilitate a better understanding of Davina's narrative. In these explanations, first developed by Gagnon and Simon (1973), gender and sexuality can be viewed as separate (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 162), with

gender being socially assigned from birth onwards (Kessler & McKenna 1978). This means that an understanding of one's gender is realised before the sexual self is formed from adolescence onwards. Therefore, sexuality is always viewed through the lens of one's gender:

> The period from twelve to sixteen is probably the period of priority in developing and integrating the sexual into general patterns of gender development in Western societies (Gagnon & Simon [1973)] 2011, p. 53).

In Davina's account, there is a clearly referenced set of socially prescribed gendered expectations driven by her pregnancy. To what extent does Davina feel able to challenge and shift those expectations that have been set upon her? Her description of feeling "free" from the social expectations placed upon her as a *sexual* woman paradoxically enables her to engage with herself as "sexual"; that is, with the feeling of freedom from those expectations comes the ability to develop a 'new' sexual self.

In Chapter One I examined some of the theoretical disjunctions between seeing social processes as constitutive of self-making and individual perceptions. Mead's response to this conundrum, which is essentially concerned with the agency and structure debate, is that one's "unique standpoint" (Mead 1934, p. 201) enables individual interpretations of social acts. Davina's 'unique standpoint' involves a complex interplay between biography and the ways in which gender and sexuality intersect. Her example shows that her experience as a woman at the time she was pregnant intersected with a freedom from being sexual which, in turn, enabled her to feel sexual.

The "blind spot" for inequalities (Athens 2002) that Athens accuses Mead of is unfounded (as discussed in Chapter One) but Davina's account raises an important point

in relation to gender inequality. Davina's notion of being sexual and non-sexual and "free" invoke a decidedly *scripted* dichotomy where one's choice as a woman is either to be sexual or non-sexual, whereas in reality these can overlap in biographical and temporal terms. This concurs with the assertion that varying sociocultural scripts can coexist despite contradicting one another, and can be linked to the varying forms of sexuality available to actors in late modern social life (Jackson 2007, p. 12).

Another participant excerpt offers a related story of how one's sexuality is viewed through an understanding of one's own gender as well as a wider understanding of gender generally. For Charlie, a 49-year-old earthmoving contractor who has been married to a woman for 26 years, gender is socially assigned (Kessler & McKenna 1978). However, Charlie is able to reflect upon it from the perspective of the 'other' gender. Throughout our interview, Charlie described himself as "feminine" despite noting that others see him as masculine because he is a tall "truck driver … a crusty old fellow". He referred to his marriage with some sorrow, given the increasing need he reported feeling for some physical affection without it necessarily having a sexual aspect to it. His wife's menopause was reflected on as potentially further damaging their infrequent sexual encounters. In line with recent research (see Dworkin & O'Sullivan 2007), his depiction of their interactions suggests a deeply embedded sexual script that drew from traditional gender norms.

Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) helps to frame nation-based notions of masculinity, including the imbuing of sport-based violence with masculinity (for example, see Newburn & Stanko 1994). However, just as hegemonic masculinity has been recently reconceived of in light of global and social shifts (Beasley, 2008;

Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), it is important to recognise the continuing presence of traditional gender roles in late modern life.

As a man, Charlie notes that he believes that women are more aware of their gender because of the bodily presence of menstruation. The complex relationship he has with his gender is reflected in his statement in which he talks about being 'less' male than other men. This is because, he says, interacting with women is more enjoyable than interacting with other men. He is ambivalent about how this relates to his sexuality:

> *I don't enjoy male company to the degree I enjoy female company. And I don't know whether that's because I am more sexually driven than other men or whether it's because I am not as male as they are. It's a bit of a paradox … with women I think it's a sort of, it's an everyday subject, or every month subject with them.*
>
> Charlie, 49-year-old earthmoving contractor

In the same way that participants described intimate relationships as influencing their sexual selves, relationships with others also allowed for a reflexive examination of others' genders along with their own, which Charlie's narrative suggests. Thus, participants described being led to a sense of curiosity about not only one's own culturally or bodily assigned gender or sex, but also of how this interrelates with one's sexual self and others' sexualised and gendered selves.

Interactionist (Plummer 2007) and feminist accounts (for example, see Alexander's 1987 examination of gender and prostitution) in sexuality studies argue that women's experience is sequestered to a category of difference from the dominant gender of male: Jane and Marijka referenced both being a woman and *not being a man,* and linked this with traditional social notions of both genders. Jane, a 53-year-old counsellor articulates

this:

> *You know that that being female and what it means to be a woman is intrinsically linked with the fact that I'm not a man and so what it means to be a man in our culture certainly affects how I am as a woman sexually speaking.*
>
> Jane, 53-year-old counsellor

Similarly, Marijka, a 53-year-old programme manager says she "see[s] the world through female eyes":

> *I am a woman and a sexual being, okay, woman first, a sexual being and on top of that, and in addition I am a lesbian as well. So it's those kind of three all melded into one. I couldn't, I haven't had the experience of being a man […]Because I think as I see it, I was raised a woman so I see the world through female eyes.*
>
> Marijka, 53-year-old program manager

Both Marijka and Jane highlight the fact that gender inequality continues to shape women's experiences of themselves and their social interactions. Specifically, participants also reported gender as influencing their experience of their sexual selves. In contrast to the claims made by theorists of late modernity, in which gender is part of a detraditionalizing process, traditional gender roles were reflected upon by participants as being present in their everyday experiences. Given this clear manifestation of traditional gender roles in everyday life, to what extent did participants feel they were able to contest tradition in the ongoing process of sexual self-making? This is examined in the next section, in which I consider the role of gender and agency in the making of the sexual self.

Gender and Agency

Mead's interest in play and games, and the subsequent use of the imagination, have been identified in this thesis as providing mechanisms for engaging with the life worlds of others. Integral to participation in games is the understanding of others' roles. Thus, games and play are of interest to Mead because they enable learning about others' perspectives, which is central to taking on the view of the generalized other (Mead 1934, p. 155). Childhood gender socialization is learned through participation in games, as evidenced in Lever's famous study which found that childhood play prepared actors for traditional adult gender roles (Lever 1976). The accounts provided by participants in this study suggest that the freedoms espoused to exist alongside detraditionalizing processes (see Giddens 1992) are overstated.

As noted earlier in this chapter, gender cannot be examined without considering the body (Grosz 1994). In some participant accounts, the body was reflected upon as being closely aligned with both gender and sexuality. Importantly, participants described seeking to understand their (opposite gender) partner's embodied gender as well as their own. In doing so, they recruited 'imaginative' accounts that interlaced relevant to aspects of their life stories with reflexivity, an activity akin to learning about the values and "attitudes" of what Mead would call the 'generalized other'. The embodied and emotive consideration of gender, understood through taking others' perspectives, was evident in participant accounts. The ability to *empathically* take the perspectives of others has been popularised through the helping professions, notably through the work of humanist Carl Rogers (1957). Appreciating the use of empathy alongside Mead's generalized other helps provide a better understanding of these accounts. For example, participants' imaginative accounts of their partners enabled them to predict and make

sense of their partners' responses to events. This enabled participants to understand the responses to others as well as the broader gender scripts through which social interaction was shaped.

The following excerpts illustrate how knowledge of the generalized other is drawn on to recall general understandings of 'femininity' and what it means to be a woman in an intimate relationship. In particular, these participants reflect upon making sense out of relationships that had ended and demonstrate wondering how the need to fulfill traditional gender roles might contribute to understanding the everyday event of relationship breakdown.

Ramon explains his self in relation to his ex-partner. The sociality of the self underpins his explanation that he is not the hegemonic "big, strong man", therefore his ex-partner rejected him. Ramon is a 45-year-old man who works in the education sector. In this excerpt, Ramon is telling me about the breakdown of an intimate, long-term relationship. He references what he believes are his ex-partner's sexual desires and offers an explanation of these being present because of her physical, embodied presence as a woman, and her need to fulfill the traditional expectation of being less physically powerful than a man:

> *Probably what she needed was the excitement of a big, strong man who could take control of the situation, as much as anything because she is quite tall and she is a fairly, you know, statuesque woman and I think that that plays into her psyche about having somebody that could dominate her, you know, not in an abusive way of course, but to make her feel more feminine [...]*
>
> Ramon, 45-year-old working in the education sector

Mead (1934, p. 158) proposes that two processes are central to the making of the self.

Firstly, one must engage in "social acts" with others with an understanding of the "attitudes" of others towards oneself. Secondly,

> … the self is constituted not only by an organization of these particular individual attitudes, but also by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he [sic] belongs (Mead 1934, p. 158).

Not only does Ramon individualise the stereotyped gender attitudes of the generalized other onto his former partner, but he makes sense of their breakup by attributing it to her "psyche", which yearns for "domination" through the physical presence of her "tall … statuesque" embodied self. Such an account offers new possibilities for appreciating the importance of the 'other' in late modern sexual self-making because it is not only in person-to-person interaction that the self is made; sense-making occurs when individuals creatively bring together their imagined notion of the 'other' person *and* the attitudes of the broader society or generalized other.

Mead's 'perspectivism' is argued to account for "the emergence of agency within sociality, and to the nature of the self-societal dialectic" (Martin 2005, p. 233). This is relevant to late modern social life, which is "marked by both diversity and contestation" (Martin 2005, p. 233). Participants made sense of the breakdown of significant relationships through imagining their former partners' perspectives, emotions and physical experiences of gender.

Similar to Ramon, Walter, a 54-year-old man working in the human services, speaks about a former relationship. He talks about how he experienced the sexual, embodied aspect of their physical selves in relation to one another, and also about how he

imagines his then partner experienced this. Walter relates that he is unsure of how much women can disentangle themselves, or feel 'unbound', from their gender during sexual activity.

> *So that was, but that was really more about her than about me. So, it wasn't something I found very difficult. But probably never quite felt relaxed enough to be completely unbound physically. And of course not having been a woman I don't know how unbound women ever feel as a gender as opposed to men. That's hard to judge.*
>
> Walter, 45-year-old working in the human services

Both Ramon and Walter describe traditional gender roles in a way that draws upon their ability to 'imagine' what it must be like to be a woman. They describe what Mead (1934, p. 158) would call the "attitudes" of the individual (in this case, their previous partners as women) as well as talk more generally about the limitations they feel are 'bound up' with being a woman in late modern Western society. Ramon and Walter demonstrate that while some negotiation away from traditional gender 'scripts' is possible, the generalized other maintains clear "attitudes" about sex roles.

Some participants highlighted what Giddens would claim as evidence that traditional roles are able to be challenged by individuals in late modernity. Whilst Giddens goes some way to account for late modern detraditionalization based on gender roles, he overemphasises this process, citing the so called emancipation of women through their entry into the workforce (see Giddens 1991, p. 216). Critics of Mead claim that his theories of social interaction are not compatible with the diversified and fragmented nature of late modern social life (Elliott 2001). Alexander (1996) criticises Giddens' dichotomous understanding of tradition and post-tradition, noting that these are conceptualised too simplistically. Yet participants in the study clearly described some

complexities inherent in making sense of gender roles, particularly through intimate relationships.

Indeed, it should be noted that the study participants highlighted engaging in a more complex relationship with previously accepted gender categories. This goes some way to underscore that for some, detraditionalization is manifest in everyday interactions. This also reinforces the importance of understanding the meaning of interactions with others, both person-to-person and imagined interactions, in relation to sexual self-making. For example, 47-year-old Stephen told me that because he is a full time parent of school age children he has:

> ... *gone from the traditional sex model of being the bread winner and the father figure of the house to almost the woman's role*

He hastened to add that whilst individually he has been able to take on a caring role in unpaid work, which is often associated with women's work, when he goes to "barbecues … you get the divided conversation between male and female" and he does not "feel like [he] fit[s] in between either of them". Here, Stephen describes the liminality of his role and identity with the "attitudes" of the generalised other:

> *I think image wise, I don't think I fit the male stereotype. I feel, I don't feel different, I don't prance around or anything like that but I don't, as in, how can I put it. To, to isolate how your sexuality affects you through all those processes, I think it's got to affect you to a point that I still think, in my case, you have control, you have a choice about how you want to be.*
>
> Stephen, a 47-year-old full time parent

Agency and Sexual Self-making

Given the continuation of gender inequalities in late modern life, to what extent can one

exercise agency? Participants noted that whilst there were some constraining characteristics of social notions of gender, there were ways in which these could be mitigated through conscious individual action/interaction. For example, Louisa, a 53-year-old nurse in a long-term relationship with a woman, told me she felt that there was some "typicality or typicalness" around her choice of dress in relation to her age group but that her sexuality involved her "community" and her sense of dress. Louisa said that she "very definitely identif[ies] as lesbian" and this sets her apart from other women her age. Louisa was able to clearly articulate how her appearance differed from other women in her age group:

> *... so here I am with jeans and a vest on and my hair is short and I like it that way. And I like to wear a belt and flat shoes. Perhaps around the way that I am interested in fitness and health and physical activities. So perhaps more than women of my age.*
>
> Louisa, 53-year-old nurse

Louisa depicts her 'choice' of clothing and interest in physical activities and sports as setting her apart from her heterosexual peers.

The extent to which agency exists in relation to gender is something that arises given the varying degrees to which gender stereotypes affected participants' sexualities. Daniel, a 41-year-old social worker, told me that others often found he failed to fit in with accepted notions of masculinity. This was said to have affected the sexual identity category others assigned to him:

> *But many people don't see me as what they would consider heterosexual. Gay people try and say, "Oh, you must be gay". "No I am not". So, yeah, for me I describe myself as heterosexual[...]But then they would also talk about, how do I put this, my, not hyper masculinity, but the whole issue of sexuality and*

prowess with women and that side of my sexuality.

Daniel, 41-year-old social worker

The argument for the sociality of sexuality does not preclude individual agency. Whether participants in this study described others' opinions of them as not fitting in with traditional notions of what it means to be masculine or feminine, or named the specific choices they made in the stance they took in relationships with others, their ability to act against tradition is evident in their accounts. Jackson and Scott (2011, p. 94) argue that "the idea of the social self, originating from the work of Mead, provides a view of the self as social while allowing for agency through the emphasis on interpretive practices".

Yet what do the interpretive practices consist of? Are they internal cognitive processes that incorporate individual experiences of social interaction? Does this raise the eternal sociological conundrum of agency versus structure?

As Jackson and Scott (2011, p. 155) suggest, both social inequality and individual agency are not mutually exclusive. Mead argues that it is through individual thought processes that the "attitudes of the generalized other" are internalised—a mental representation of the attitudes and values of the wider community is necessary for individuals to be able to achieve social competence. Mead (1934, pp. 155–156) says:

> Only in so far as he [sic] takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he [sic] belongs toward the organized, co-operative social activity or set of such activities in which that group as such is engaged, does he [sic] develop a complete self … only by taking the attitudes of the generalized other toward himself [sic], in one or another of these ways, can he think at all; for only thus can thinking—or the internalised conversation of gestures which constitutes

thinking—occur.

Maxwell, a 46-year-old sexual health educator, describes the specific ways in which he is able to exercise agency through a kind of 'playing' with the degree to which he projects—or performs—a stereotypically masculine persona, noting that if he felt "uncomfortable or unsafe", this performance would be "happily put…on". Recently, Maxwell said he had begun to think about being a man and how that related to himself as a human being:

> *I think recently I have discovered that being a man springs from me being a person. And not the other way around. And so if I can choose to identify strongly as being a man, and sometimes I will take that role on, you know, really strong, if I am in a place where I feel either uncomfortable or unsafe without being a classic gender male, then I would happily put that on.*
>
> Maxwell, 46-year-old sexual health educator

In Maxwell's narrative, the ease with which he reports changing his behaviour is clearly seen. Whilst he is aware of the generalized other attitude of the "classic gender male", he does not feel the need to conform to it—only to pass at being the "classic gender male".

The notion of late modern reflexivity does not fully account for the choices relating to gender that participants reported. While it may appear that Maxwell—and others' accounts—are explained through the 'extended' (Adams 2006) late modern reflexivity thesis (see Giddens 1992) in which identity is reflected upon (for Maxwell, this involves reflecting on being a 'man') and subsequent behaviour altered as a result of the reflection ("choosing" to project the "classic gender male"), late modern theories of the self do not fully appreciate the social, or Mead's generalized other.

Participants' narratives reveal that although they have a clear conception of the social expectations around gender, they were unable to transcend these fully. As noted previously in this thesis, agency is overstated in late modern theories of detraditionalization (King 2009).

Agency has been depicted in sociological literature about late modernity as providing individuals with more choice than is realistic given the constraining influences of inequality, for example (Adkins 2003). However, scholarship in which reflexivity is depicted as transformative (McNay 2000) resonates with the findings of this research. McNay's work in which Bourdieu's habitus (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Waquant 1992) is reconsidered provides a useful starting point because it draws from an understanding of habitus and field in relationship to one another (McNay 2000).

Whilst McNay cautions against placing empirical work at the centre of deliberations relating to identity and agency as somehow more 'authentic' than theoretical work, my empirical work, critically analysed alongside scholarly interactionist theories of selfhood, provides further insight into the constitution of self-making. As examined so far in this chapter, gender inequality persists in the participants' lives and is manifest throughout their narratives. Therefore:

> … in order to avoid an absolutization of the subject, any theory of agency must be placed within the context of overarching material and symbolic constraints. However, at the same time, these deterministic tendencies need to be counterbalanced by a hermeneutic understanding of the process of self-formation (McNay 2000, p. 80).

It has been argued that an understanding of the role of cognition in self-making is

essential for understanding the ways in which individuals exercise agency. Recent work by British social theorist Margaret Archer (for example, see Archer 2003, 2007), in which differing types of reflexivity were said to have emerged through an analysis of data generated from interviews, offers a new theory on the ways in which structure and agency are said to come together.

Archer's (2003) work draws from empirical investigation in which case studies are used to understand participants' cognitive processes and biographical events alongside their interactions with others. Specifically, her work seeks to understand and theorise the relationship through which structure affects agency via 'the internal conversation'. This, she argues, is:

> ...the modality through which reflexivity towards self, society and the relationship between them is exercised. In itself it entails just such things as articulating to ourselves where we are placed, ascertaining where our interest lies and adumbrating schemes of future action (Archer 2003, p. 9).

Although Archer's work is helpful in identifying social inequalities through framing human interaction in individual and social spheres, her focus on internal cognitive processes serves to detract from the importance of social interaction to self-making; "… the result is an undersocialized picture of selfhood and agency" (Gronow 2008, p. 244). Despite this, Archer captures the importance of individual sense-making processes in her depiction of everyday life being central to the connection between social structure and individual agency. She says that it is vital to consider cognition in order to understand how these two come together. She says:

> Reflexive deliberations constitute the mediatory process between 'structure and agency'; they represent the subjective element which is always in interplay with the causal powers of objective social forms (Archer 2003, p. 130).

The insistence of the separation between agency and structure—and the subsequent shift from emphasizing the social to an emphasis on the internal processes of individuals—serves to undervalue the generative nature of sociality for selfhood, as offered by Mead. Although Archer's work bears some relevance to examining inequality, "Archer lumps Mead together with the constructionists of our day, and in this she is clearly wrong" (Gronow 2008, p. 250). The placement of "the social in the form of the generalized other" (Gronow 2008, p. 252) within Mead's theory of sociality of selfhood instead offers insight into how individual interpretations characterise self-making. Mead was a pragmatist: his personal involvement in addressing inequality, for example, points to the "inseparability of thought and action" (Bushman 1998, p. 264). This suggests that turning towards Mead's theoretical work helps in understanding the mechanisms through which inequalities are made. Although interactionist conceptualisations of the ways in which actors come to imagine the lives of others are critiqued for being overly theoretical and outside the everyday realm of experience (Shilling 1999, p. 551; Smith 1992) Mead's theory of self offers an explanation of the prevalence of inequalities in everyday life. This is because the generalized other:

> … refers to the general social process and does not say anything about its particular contents, which certainly can, in many cases, be repressive. However, there is always the creative output of the individual 'I' that reacts to the habitual and conservative 'me' (Gronow 2008, p. 251).

The ways in which participants think about themselves in relation to the generalized other come through in their accounts. Considering Edward's account, for example, I note the way he describes not only how he thinks of himself, but how he *does not* think of himself. The way he *does not think of himself* is a reference to a more generalized conception of men as "purely … male driven sexual being[s]"; an image he sees in

opposition to himself:

> *[…] now I don't think of myself as purely a male driven sexual being.* ***And I just think of myself as a person.*** *And sexuality is connected to that but it's not the* ***driving force.***
>
> Edward, 57-year-old working in education

Yet importantly, Edward's account demonstrates reflexive awareness of selfhood. It shows not only that he has reflected upon what it means in broader society to be a man, but also that he has been able to negotiate how he wishes to express himself individually in light of this notion of a man. Reflexive awareness of selfhood is an important signifier for agency. As Archer says:

> Reflexivity tends to be so taken for granted that its implications are rarely reflected upon themselves. The ability to know ourselves to be ourselves is simply presumed whenever reference is made to social agents, just as it is pre-supposed that these agents are also embodied, intelligent and open to social influences ... [however] reflexivity is no longer a discrete attribute, but a generative ability for internal deliberation upon external reality, which cannot be assumed to be inconsequential (Archer 2003, pp. 19–20).

Giddens argues that the reflexive conditions in social life in which temporal and spatial reorganization and 'disembedding mechanisms' occur are mirrored through individual reflexivity and, although he describes these processes as "transforming day-to-day life" (Giddens 1991, p. 2), it is only consideration of the empirical evidence in this study that enables a better understanding of how individuals make their sexual selves.

Additionally, whilst much is made of the fact that reflexivity characterises late modern social life (Bauman 2000; Giddens, 1991, 1992; Lash 1994, 2003; Urry 2003), the key to understanding reflexivity is to understand it as agential and connected with social

structure (Archer 2007, 2003).

Margaret Archer's empirical work takes into account the role of reflexivity in its research design and seeks to understand the internal repertoire as it is "... the modality through which reflexivity towards self, society and the relationship between them is exercised" (Archer 2003, p. 9).

Archer's work represents a move toward gaining an understanding about how structure is made sense of in subjective life, however it fails to take into account the constraints to focusing on cognition brought about by the attitudes of the generalized other (Gronow 2008). Archer maintains that reflexive deliberations of this kind enable individuals to actively participate in internal mechanisms of the self as well as to pre-empt social and personal action. We have seen this in this present study with participants engaging in imaginative accounts in which they imagine how their (opposite sex) partner views and makes sense of the world around them. For Archer, this internal process represents an agential process. Specifically, Archer argues that:

> ... our personal powers are exercised through reflexive interior dialogue and are causally accountable for the delineation of our concerns, the definition of our projects, the diagnosis of our circumstances and, ultimately, the determination of our practices in society (Archer 2003, p. 130).

Yet to quote a popular maxim, 'thinking does not make it so'. The degree to which agency can be exercised in relation to sexual self-making must be tempered by understanding the strength of socially accepted notions. Monique, a 64-year-old company manager, told me that she had opted out of traditionally defined sexual categories. She describes herself as "asexual" but continues to engage in sexual activity.

Despite being an example of a participant exercising agency in defining her sexual identity outside the attitudes of Mead's generalized other, Monique demonstrated how communication—the key component to social processes—becomes difficult without socially defined categories:

> *Well over, over my life I think my sexuality has, has changed. So, and now at this age, while I am still sexually active I really see myself as asexual, as I did when I was a child. I like girly things, I like to do those things but I don't really see myself as sexually female. But I see myself spiritually as female. So, and for me it's quite interesting because it's how I felt as a child.*
>
> Monique, 64-year-old company manager

Although Monique's employment of the term 'asexual' is at odds with her description of herself as sexually active, ultimately the shared understanding of term asexual as meaning not engaging in sexual activity held by broader society would prevail.

Religion, Inequality and Agency

The question of agency is also relevant to narratives in which institutionalised religion, and in particular, the interactions that occurred in childhood were reported to have influenced sexual self-making. In particular, religious discourse was depicted as being an important source for normative scripts about gender and sexuality.

For example, Edward, a 57-year-old working in education described his experience of being taught about gender roles through participation in religion classes. Edward reported that his beliefs about women were shaped through these interactions, but that subsequent engagement in the 'blunt sexual environment of school' further challenged these ideas. He said that it was not until he reflexively traced back those ideas to religious dogma that he could challenge and transform his traditionally held views that

women were to be 'put on a pedestal'. Edward reported feeling able to think through gender roles through the disparate experiences from:

> *... my schooling and religious teaching.* ***Although I could never actually marry the two in terms of what I was taught in my religion was that women were, not necessarily equal but, in fact they were quite the opposite, I think they were to be put on a pedestal. And so, going into this sort of blunt sexual environment was, it stripped that away from me. But I would never really go back to the religious stuff. I never really understood why women should be put in a pedestal anyway, as a kid.***
>
> Edward, 57-year-old worker in education

There are two points to be made about Edward's account. Firstly, his engagement with the utility of religiously-influenced ideas about gender reflects the broadly late modern preoccupation with religion's meaningfulness in all aspects of everyday life (Carol 2007). Secondly, Edward's reflection upon the religiously held traditional role of the woman being at odds with other aspects of society (school) highlights the tensions between religious and secular society. The rise of fundamentalism can be linked to the need for clearly defined roles in an increasingly complex and disordered world (Bauman 2000) yet is it problematic to assume that the secular world is differentiated from the religious order. This is because cultural scripts relating the subordination of women continue to flourish in the secular landscape and this is manifest in everyday life.

Charlotte's account, for example, demonstrates how the interactions which took place at her church shaped her sexual self. Here she tells the story about a young man who had been found to have been watching pornographic movies. The evangelical tradition Charlotte said she was brought up in dealt with such matters very publically. Charlotte said that at the time she thought "you dirty… man". Whereas now she enjoys watching

pornography, this is sometimes punctuated with feelings of guilt.

> *... I remember in particular one guy was brought up to the front of the church, and everyone found out that he was into pornographic movies and it was almost: lay your hands on this man, get the devil out of you! I mean I only, I didn't really get what that was at the time, all I remember thinking was: you dirty, disgusting man, get the devil out of you. And now I look back and I think, and there are occasions when I think: I'm the devil, because I like it! [laughs].*
>
> Charlotte, 36-year-old PhD candidate

Like Edward's account, Charlotte's story helps to better understand the ways in which religious engagement shapes the sexual self. Recalling the interactions that occurred in participants' past was a way to convey both the exercising of agency as well as the constraints to complete gender re-imagining. Agency is exercised through the rejection of religiously-defined gender roles; yet their very presence and subsequent manifestation in later life provide evidence of the prevalence of cultural scripts relating to gender. Distinguishing cultural scripts from religious ones is increasingly of interest to scholars of gender and religion "although much literature in feminist geography recognises the dialectical relationship between gender, identity and space, relatively little attention has been given in this regard to religious spheres" (Bhimji 2009, p. 377). In this study, it is clear that the impact of interactions through participation in religious settings limited the possibilities for sexual self-making and sexual behaviour.

The ways in which institutionalised religion obfuscated other ideas about sexuality was evident for Jane, a 53-year-old counsellor. Jane described not 'having available' to her the examples of women being in intimate and loving relationships with one another and wondered whether having this 'available' might have shaped her sexual behaviour at a particular point in her biography when she was attracted to other women. Her

engagement with Catholicism was cited as affecting her decisions about sexual partners. Had Catholicism not been 'available', Jane said this might have altered her current sexual identity.

> *You know if I had available to me different ideas of um same sex attraction as a younger person as a child or teenager or I think that um I would have explored those attractions which I clearly had. Um in my life for other women, very deep, you know, love and attraction to other women. Yeah, I didn't didn't have available to me any of those frameworks, you know, that were available perhaps to other people but they certainly weren't to me at that stage in in my life, having grown up in my life in a very protected sort of arena, you know in the Catholic church and the sort of family I was in…*
>
> Jane, 53-year-old counsellor

Jane's account resonates with the view that "heterosexuality has its grave expectations. They are not articulated all at once—some are never openly articulated—but we all know that a lack of articulation of norms doesn't mean they don't exist" (Schwartz 2007, p. 81). Similarly, institutionalised religion in late modernity has clearly limited women's choices and impacted upon their interactions, sexual and otherwise, in everyday life. Two broad examples are in relation to birth control and choice about terminations/ abortions. Yet the distinction between agency and religion has been challenged as more complexly related to the framing of agency. Sarah White's (2010) work on Muslim women's agency, for example, seeks to disrupt the differentiation between religion and the other, complexly intertwining factors which include temporality, spatiality and individual and cultural contexts. She argues that:

> It is now clearly established that the West has no privileged claim over modernity, and that there are many possible trajectories. From the stance of many of the people whose worlds this paper describes, a modernity where women's economic and political empowerment is accompanied by their

> pervasive sexualisation is at least as 'paradoxical' as one in which religion is valued (White 2010, p. 342).

White's argument resonates with the assertion that divergent and competing discourses thrive in the complex landscape that the sexual self is made within (Jackson 2007) and helps to better understand Louisa's account. Despite the constraints to agency engagement in religion imposed, for Louisa, religion provided an opportunity to disengage from sexual self-making. A 53-year-old nurse, Louisa said that rejecting religion enabled her to move beyond heterosexual assumptions made by Christianity and more towards a process whereby her own sexual identity as a lesbian could be explored. Appreciating the complex landscape within which the sexual self is constituted helps to contextualise Louisa's account alongside the other accounts that position religion as clearly constraining or limiting sexual choices and identity. Whilst Louisa acknowledges that being 'caught up with a lot of Christians' is less than ideal to expressions of sexuality, the 'no sex before marriage' edict protected her 'lesbianism'.

> *... I was actually caught up with quite a lot of Christians back then. And I, well I am an absolute atheist now and have come to terms with that in the last two years probably. I guess that I have always thought that being Christian, having been baptised as an adult and gone through some various churches and spent some time in, spent a year in Israel actually, I think that, so I had decisions that I wasn't going to have sex before marriage. And I think well, well it's probably just my lesbianism saying why would you want to do that.*
>
> Louisa, 53-year-old nurse

For another participant, the coming together of complex social and biographical contexts drew together spirituality and sexuality through the ageing process. The rise of novel religions (see Melton 2007) including an interest in the pursuit of spirituality (as opposed to engagement in institutionalised religions) can be explained through the

"culture of individualism" (Elliott & Lemert, 2006, p. 7) in which spirituality is able to accommodate individual needs and desires. In an account where we can see the ways in which various roles in social life converge, Charlie describes how his unique spiritual beliefs need to 'fit' with his embodied self as well as his sexual self. Further, in advancing in age, Charlie has seen a diminishing of the need for immediacy of sexual behaviour: he speaks now of a need for a more spiritual connection through intimacy that takes the form of cuddling, kissing and hugging. In the following account we can track the shifting priorities Charlie affords to spirituality or intellect, his 'physical' sexual 'needs', his body, and his age as well as their complex, unique interplay.

> *... perhaps the physical side of it has sort of started to wane a little bit. But at the same time, as it's waned I find that perhaps the intellectual side or the spiritual side of my sexuality has sort of started to take precedent. It has probably always been there and always been evident but I, prior to that, but the physical, while my body has sort of been, what would you call it, yeah, I suppose, while I was younger, just the physical side of it overshadowed everything else. It's only now that, and I find I am not so interested in physical sex so much as like I said, the spiritual side, just having someone sort of put their arms around you and say you are a beautiful person, give you a kiss and a hug or something like that, would be very nice.*
>
> Charlie, 49-year-old earthmoving contractor

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the relationship between gender and sexuality in light of the claims made by late modern theories depicting identity as detraditionalized (see Giddens, 1992). Participants reported that gender influenced their sexual selves and they reflected upon traditional gender roles as being present in their everyday experiences, which is contrary to claims made by theorists of late modernity (see Giddens, 1992). These traditional gender roles were reported as both constraining one's world view (this

was particularly the case for women) as well as providing opportunities to imagine the 'other' in order to make sense of life events. Margaret Archer's work was examined and argued to contribute to providing empirical insights into the ways in which agency can be seen to have helped individuals shape their experiences, which contributes to the ongoing process of the making of the sexual self.

Participant accounts in which an engagement in institutionalised religion was cited as constraining sexual expression were considered alongside agency and gender. I argued that like other analyses of everyday sexuality in this thesis thus far, understanding agency and choice about religious participation needs to be tempered with an appreciation for the increasingly complex social world in which competing and contradictory discourses co-exist. This means that whilst agency can be expressed in the choices participants made relating to religion, agency must be understood as ultimately constrained by broader scripts. Religious discourse was cited by participants as providing limited scripts about gender and sexuality.

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated how important gender is in making the sexual self. Social attitudes, or the generalized other, as well as person-to-person and imagined interactions have been argued to come together to enable individual responses to personal experiences. I now move on to examine the ways in which the sexual self is made in relation to everyday interactions related to paid work and familial relationships.

Chapter Six: Professional and Familial Roles in Late Modern Social Life

Introduction

Earlier in this thesis, I began to examine the relationships between paid and non-paid employment and sexual self-making. In Chapter Three, for example, I examined the data by focusing on Ruth's depiction of professional life. In doing so I began to better understand how sociality constitutes sexual self-making and specific ways in which this was achieved in participants' everyday lives. Similar to Ruth, Erin and Charlotte spoke about their experiences of unpaid caring roles as mothers. My analysis of their narratives alongside relevant interactionist literature enabled me to develop a better understanding of the tensions and complexities involved in making the sexual self. In Chapter Four, I continued examining the relationships between paid and non-paid employment and sexual self-making, exploring Rowan's employment at a ski resort. This employment immersed Rowan in a sexualised environment. His experimentation with alternative sexual behaviours was reported to have given him the opportunity to engage in new ways of sexual self-making.

The analysis of participant accounts throughout this thesis so far has revealed that specific events in people's lives have enabled new opportunities for sexual self-making, which concurs with the claim that late modern life provides more opportunities to engage with diverse sexual expression (Jackson & Scott 2011, p. 163).

In this chapter, I examine in greater detail the participant data related to employment and sexual self-making, and critically investigate them in relation to relevant literature.

The key foci in this chapter are professional and familial relationships in relation to the sexual self. I also consider the following: if a given social interaction is significant for one person because of their own unique biography, why do common themes emerge from the data? The answer to this question is that although individual biographies are unique, the make-up of late modern day-to-day life is heavily influenced by its cultural script (Gagnon & Simon [1973] 2011).

Participants describe engagement in employment, or work, as both enabling new possibilities in sexual self-making as well as promoting an understanding of a self that is in constant interaction with its environment. Crucially, participants say that the sexual self is heavily influenced through interactions that occur in the workplace and the work environment is often contrasted with an earlier, relatively conservative or unjust biographical event.

I begin the discussion in this chapter by examining data in which participants describe their sexual selves alongside narratives of work or paid employment. I then go on to examine narratives about sexual identity with regard to the family. Participant accounts are brought together to make sense of how new ways of sexual self-making are passed on through interactions with significant others. Social encounters made possible through employment and family were significant for the participants in this study. The meanings of these were depending upon a complex interplay between biography and place as well as the nature of relations with others. The broader issue of employment as a common theme in the data is examined through critical analysis of scholarship relevant to considering sexual self-making in late modern life.

Professional life and the Sexual Self

Interpersonal relations include communication between strangers, for example words and gestures may be exchanged between two people in order to successfully negotiate a crowded footpath. Verbal and physical interactions also occur between lovers. Whilst these might be characterised as interpersonal exchanges, they are both examples of social interactions whose importance in relation to one's broader biography is determined by each individual.

Henry is a 45-year-old married company director who told me that "if sexuality was a fabric… [he] would be grey flannel". Throughout our interview, Henry made a great number of references to sexuality and gender differences. According to Henry, men do not speak to other men about sexuality as much as to other women. Broadly speaking, his account drew upon stereotypical gendered assumptions at some times while at other times he reported his reflection on his sexual self in clear relationship with his age and his activities at that given point in his biography. For example, Henry reported feeling that sexual activity was his motivator at age 17 but that at his present age he had a better appreciation of the "quality" of sexual encounters with his wife. He told me:

> *So in a teenager and in your twenties it's soft drink and in your thirties and forties it's a wine and, or a just straight whisky, you know, you just wet your tongue on it and it's so much nicer.*
>
> Henry, 45-year-old company manager

Although Henry's narrative appears to fit with medical accounts that differentiate sexual desire and behaviour based on so called biologically driven sex differences (see, for example, Zilbergeld 1999) as opposed to social accounts of gender, throughout his account he emphasised the importance of interactions with others within a work setting.

These were positioned as having helped him to better understand his sexual self as well as providing opportunities for new ways of conceptualizing the sexual self. Conversations with colleagues and clients were specifically named as transformative:

> *I am a little bit uncommon, I think, in that almost for a living I discuss sexuality. So it isn't, well now that I don't work in operations it almost never happens. But in my late teens, my twenties and certainly my thirties, sexuality was a topic of discussion almost daily, either with staff or with clients…so it's forever at the front of my mind and, like many people find it, a subject that you never quite end. You know, that conversation can go on forever…*
>
> Henry, 45-year-old company manager

Henry's account was not uncommon amongst participants. Given the large role that work plays in participants' everyday existences in late modern life, it is perhaps not surprising that narratives about work featured heavily in people's accounts of their sexual selves. We discussed Erin's narrative in Chapter Three of this thesis. Erin, a 32-year-old graphic designer, told me about the struggles she has with unifying all of her 'roles' in life. In this way, she positioned work as being a welcome escape from the pressures of raising young children. Work, for Erin, enabled her to think about other things besides the welfare of her children. Thus, professional life gave her an alternative way to interact. Working as a graphic designer from home was described as enabling her to engage with creative work as opposed to the caring work she undertook through parenting. Erin described the difficulties in transitioning between these roles, or ways of relating, in the following account:

> *But, yeah, so it's hard to take the mother away… Yeah, so that's one area where I have had, I find it difficult to, yeah, there is probably no situation where I am not thinking of the children. But sometimes when I am doing my work I can divorce myself a bit.*
>
> Erin, 32-year-old graphic designer

Whilst our public identities and private identities are often seen as separate, as evidenced in popular cultural references to work/life balance, for example (see White *et al.* 2003), in reality they are merely differing sites of social interaction. The increased presence of formerly taboo sexual behaviours in social life (Mulholland 2011) or "transgressive practices" (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 163) in all aspects of late modern social life may help to explain why participants reported overt discussions about sex within the workplace unprobelmatically.

The interaction between differing spheres of social life is not only of interest to scholars such as Mead. The work of Christopher Bollas (1995, p. 6), for example, seeks to theorise the "ordinary flow of unconsciousness in everyday life, especially that of what we call dissemination, when we creatively fragment along the lines of thought inspired by an intense experience". Whilst Bollas' work falls into the decidedly non-interactionist category of psychoanalytic theory, his calls for a radical reimagining of Freud's unconscious signifies a shift in the way selfhood is perceived in theorizing about late modern social life. Bollas' reimagining entails an understanding of the 'dissemination' or coming together of everyday experiences through the dream state (Bollas 1995).

Other studies focus on the impact of the blending of economy and culture on the professional self (see du Gay 1993, 1996), or the blurring between 'work' and 'life' roles (see Reed *et al*. 2005; White *et al.* 2003). Such scholarship helps an understanding of the complex ways that interaction occurs in late modern social life, while participant accounts in this study provide specific examples of the significant events in working life that help make and remake the sexual self.

Scholarly examinations of the increasingly complex social world in late modernity and the subsequent tensions between traditional roles can be seen mostly within, but not limited to, sociology in which culture is analysed (see, for example, du Gay 1993; Rojek 1993; Tiryakian 1985). These examinations range from the "… observable de-differentiation between the religious and consumption of popular culture" (Neumann 2006, p. 81) to investigations into leisure and an interest in better understanding "… how the formation of modern individual identities, times and spaces is incompatible with freedom, choice, self determination and spontaneity" (Rojek 1993, p. 15). Thus, scholarship that seeks to understand the 'slippage' (Geertz 1973 [1966]) or 'folding in' (du Gay 1993) of tradition is clearly relevant when considering the sexual self in the so called 'liquid' (Bauman 2000) or 'plastic' (Giddens 1992) conditions that feature in late modern social life. As demonstrated in previous chapters of this thesis, Giddens' account of what constitutes tradition is an oversimplification (Alexander 1995, p. 4). However, the presence of employment within participant narratives and the depiction of work as a site for sexual self-making highlights the importance of interactions between people in somewhat 'traditional' settings. British sociologist, Paul du Gay, for example, examines the blurring of economy and culture, and investigates the retail sphere in particular. Notwithstanding the linguistic need for definitional categories, du Gay (1993, p. 583) argues that there has been a decreased need for divisional categories of public and private life. He concludes that:

> … [i]n contemporary British retailing there is no longer any room for the base/ superstructure dichotomy. As the 'economic' folds seamlessly into the 'cultural', distinctions between 'production', 'consumption' and 'everyday life' become less clear cut.

What is important to recognise in participant accounts of work is that we can see the

"self as the moving centre" (du Gay 1996, p. 30), with work only being significant if it interacts meaningfully within one's broader biography. For example, the following dialogue with Charlie illustrates the way in which work experiences can help individuals to reconstitute their sexual self. Charlie is a 49-year-old earthmoving contractor who has been married to a woman for 26 years. His account of gender was discussed in Chapter Five. Unlike Henry's frank discussions with colleagues and clients about sexuality, Charlie reported work as being a space where non-sexual incidents could become significant for sexual self-making.

Charlie describes how his experiences as a farmer, noticing the behaviours of rams that would, he says, move away from sexually disinterested ewes, helped him make sense of the interactions between him and his wife. Charlie used this experience to reflexively alter his behaviour to cope with the rejection of his sexual advances in his relationship with his wife. Thus, Charlie's behaviour draws from his work knowledge and sees him removing himself from the company of his wife on the occasions where his sexual advances have been turned down.

Charlie:

I used to be a farmer, that's my first job… rams…aren't going to hang around if the ewes aren't interested in them. To have all these women and none of them want anything to do with them well it's far better that they just go off and get away rather than just sort of hang around all the time. So I take great comfort from that sort of little episode sort of…

Priscilla:

It's interesting, yeah, yeah.

Charlie:

So, if I am not getting any attention at home, the best thing is to remove myself from the situation and I won't feel so bad about it I think.

Interaction can be argued as needing to occur between humans for an event to constitute sociality, however "[a]ll living organisms are bound up in a general social environment or situation, in a complex of social interrelations and interactions upon which their continued existence depends" (Mead 1934, p. 228). Charlie's comparison between the rams and himself demonstrates that he recognises the connection between all social creatures. His experience gained through work is described as significant because it was an event he described as helping him to negotiate his interactions with his wife (whom he depicted as having little interest in engaging in sexual or intimate behaviour with him).

The work environment also highlighted the disjuncture between acceptable standards of professional dress. Ruth, a 39-year-old executive director recalled being told by a colleague that she should not wear knee-length leather boots in the workplace because the boots were 'fuck-off boots' with a sexual connotation. Here is Ruth's description of this event:

> *Yeah, because I think there are a lot of pitfalls for women um in business ... like the boots that I've got on today. I remember, I've had these boots for about six years. The first time I ever wore them I remember someone saying to me, "Oh you can't wear those in this environment". "Why not?" "Well they're fuck off boots, aren't they? You know", and I'm like, "No, they're my boots and I like them and I'm going to wear them". You know, there is no flesh showing, but yes, they are leather boots that come all the way up to my knees. And I like them!*
>
> Ruth, 39-years-old executive director

As Mead (1934) argues, the relationships between biography and cultural settings affect social interactions and the meaning of the social interaction also affects self-making. Ruth's colleague's comments may have held a different meaning were they articulated

by her lover or boss. The nuances between individuals, manifest in their communicative and gestural interactions, are complex in late modern life. As already discussed in this thesis, the paradoxes evident in contemporary life make understanding the sexual self a somewhat complex task. Ruth's executive position as a woman in a male environment, on the surface, is a socially sanctioned reality. Wearing 'fuck off boots', however, is frowned upon and policed by colleagues. The 'transformative' nature of late modern life is made more complex by the continued existence of inequality and social injustice. In reality, continued injustices pervade much of the social world at the same time as liberatory discourses about sex (see Jackson 2007, p. 12).

Another study participant, Claire, links professional life to sexual self-making in terms of productivity at work. Claire is a 48-year-old working in the area of child protection. Claire described herself as being "comfortable" in neither being in a relationship nor having children despite being raised to expect this through her "traditional upbringing". She described her situation as feeling "quite powerful". In her interview, we discussed how her relationship status has influenced her working life over the years. Claire provided a very practical insight into the 'costs' of being in relationships and raising children in relation to one's productivity. She said:

> *Only, you know relationships influence your working life because if they are going well or going badly, you know, that always has an influence. So probably the most productive times in working life have been when I have been single and quite comfortable with ...[laughs] Yeah, you can spend as long as you like in the office.*
>
> Claire, 48-year-old working in child protection

Claire's account says something about the broader environment within which women are in paid employment. She makes the point that it is beneficial to productivity to be a

single woman, yet her "traditional upbringing" meant that she "always expected" that she would marry and have children. Her account, like others, highlights the complex landscape of work and sexual self-making in late modern social life. Cross-cultural variations, culture and broader social structures form a symbiotic alliance with one another (du Gay 1997, 2002, p. 498).

Yet how do individuals fare in this complex landscape? Data from this study suggest that individuals' biographies determine the significance of these social interactions to sexual self-making. For example, Edward is a 57-year-old working in education. Edward, from the beginning of our interview, emphasised how important his social interactions had been in producing 'learning' about his sexual self. At the beginning of our interview, he told me: "I think I have learnt my sexuality socially, culturally". Edward also spoke about the "maturation process" that he feels he has gone through—this is a process of learning and changing both how he saw himself as well as how he felt he came across to others. Edward cited some frustration about what Gagnon and Simon (1973 [2011]) would say are limited 'scripts' in relation to sexual behaviours. Edward's account of this was framed in gendered terms, for example he told me that he "gets really upset" about the coding of intercourse as "penetration" because it frames women "as the receiver". Despite his current awareness of gendered inequalities, he told me that he had changed his values because of the nature of the other professionals with whom he has worked during his career. Therefore, whilst Edward's experience of his sexual self is acknowledged as being embedded in social and cultural norms and 'scripts', various interactions with colleagues throughout his career have helped him make choices about his sexual self. The influence of others on his sexual self-making can be seen in the following account:

So, that was, that particular period of time was spent all day with males. And there was, yeah, I mean, a complete sort of, what's the word I want? Sexual references and sexual connotations were made continuously. And not only about women but about other men as well. And so that was always prominent in my thoughts. That was always how I thought of myself, first as a male and as a male the male part was driving the sexual part. […] And that's been an interesting adjustment for me to have that as like a moulding background and then move into different sorts of work where I worked as equals with women and my thoughts had to change considerably about that, you know. […] And in that process, yeah, I felt that I was actually shaving off some of my sexuality, some of my learned sexuality. Yeah. And yeah, I think for some time there I wasn't sure how to behave. How to be.

Edward, 57-year-old worker in education

One of the benefits of examining everyday life is that it provides us with the opportunity to better understand inequalities (Jackson & Scott 2010a, p. 162). Throughout this thesis, I have examined the personal impacts of social inequality for participants in the study. In Chapter Five, in which gender was critically examined alongside the notion of agency, I argued that participants' accounts provided clear examples of the ways in which specific biographical events were shaped through individual sense-making of broader social interactions. However, it was also clear that such agential processes were confined to the choosing of particular, clearly defined 'scripts'. This is reinforced here by Edward, who noted that the fixed meanings associated with intercourse were a source of frustration for him. Further, when Edward described his ongoing self-making and the subsequent changes work interactions produced, he felt de-stabilised to the point where he reported wondering "how to be". Edward's question of "how to be" resonates with Giddens' (1991, p. 70) claim that late modernity prompts us to constantly ask ourselves, "What to do? How to act? Who to be?" Yet Edward is concerned with the

how of being, which denotes a problem with the performative aspect of identity. His question relates to changing how he assimilates new knowledge gained through work interactions into his biography. Edward's account provides a clear example of the complexities involved in the assimilation of new knowledge. This leads to the question, 'How can we better understand the ways in which participants made sense of the past?'

Making Sense of the Past

The past was important to participants because it allowed them to articulate the changes and ongoing nature of identity making and remaking. Yet it is true to say that the past held some purchase on current sexual self-making. As discussed in Chapter One, psychoanalytic theorizing has dominated the meaning of the past in scholarly literature and provides a stark contrast to interactionist literature about the self. The notion of the self, which exists outside the social, is an intrinsic assumption for psychoanalytic theorists. Debates about the role of the unconscious in sexuality continue to pervade the literature and as noted in Chapter One there has been some recent attention to gendered inequalities inherent in psychoanalytic theory. In Chapter One, Mead's theory of the self was argued to provide a substantive and complex account of the ways in which selfhood is constituted through social interaction. Though preferable to psychoanalytic theory, Meadian sociality shares its appreciation for the ways in which actors interact and communicate. In Chapter Three, I argued that Mead's theory of the self and psychoanalytic theory, including for example, Lacan's (1966) notion of desire, shared an interest in the ways in which imaginative accounts of others are central to the self. Though the ways in which these are made sense of differ with each approach, ultimately Mead's (1934) depiction of the generalized other (in which the imaginative figure takes the form of social values and norms) better accounts for the everyday sexual self.

Lacan (1966) sees language as foundational to the formation of the unconscious as a structure (McNay 2000, p. 123) and, as argued in Chapter One of this thesis, his work has given rise to a major theoretical and ontological debate in the area of desire and the notion of the unconscious (Giddens 1979a, p. 38). Language has also been of a concern to others in this tradition. Theorists such as Kristeva (1991), Irigaray (1985) and Cixous (1981) in particular have highlighted the importance that language, the subjective, power and culture all play in constituting the contemporary sexual self. Given the dominance of therapeutic culture in the popular cultural sphere, (Furedi 2004; Lasch 1979; Reiff, 1966), is it any wonder that participants in this study made reference to their past in describing their sexual selves? Turning to Ruth's account of her past gives a better appreciation of the role it plays in sexual self-making.

In this narrative, Ruth describes the "self-doubt" she and her sister reportedly experience. She told me that her father had exercised his male power by limiting her choices of self. Unlike the domestic sphere, Ruth said that her father had depicted work identity as being one unconstrained by limits. She recalled that her father's view was that "in your work life you can be whoever you want to be", whereas "personally love … you're a bit of a low life". Here is Ruth's account:

> *I mean my father took us out marching for good causes from a very, very young age […] So I've always been you know keen, um because myself and my sister are both still racked with self-doubt around absurd things and when you track it back, it is about how you're bought up and it is about those things that are sort of channelled into your head when you're young um not intentionally but you know to constantly question yourself, "Am I good? I'm not good enough, I'm not good enough, I'm not good enough". And my father used to tell us. A lot. But that was his way of control and power and what have you and so it was quite interesting while still so being told that you could do anything you wanted to so it was really bizarre, it was almost like in your work life you can be whoever you*

want to be. Personally, you're you know, a bit of a low life love, you know, but work hard and if you're lucky some bloke will take pity on you.

Ruth, 39-year-old executive director

Using a therapeutic lens to view Ruth's narrative would involve placing the role of her father at the fore and arguing that his depiction of women—and the subsequent limits to their agency—continues to shape her sense of self. In this tradition, until Ruth reconciles this tension between her past and her present, she will be burdened with an unconscious laden with the scars of the past. However, using a Meadian notion of self helps to better account for broader social inequalities, which in turn frames Ruth's self-making as an ongoing process constituted by social interaction. Although Mead's work is argued to privilege the social to the detriment of including an analysis of "affect and cultural systems" (Gould 2009, p. 435), Ruth's account is primarily about inequality. Her emotive account entails a description of the day-to-day experience of the injustice of the gender script her father presented her with. Specifically, this involved Ruth being told that she had little power to exercise over her day-to-day life but if she could find "some bloke" to "take pity" on her she had some potential to thrive. Ruth recounts how her father had presented a depiction of work as being much more liberatory than one's domestic life, and the narrative of her being on marches from a young age was highlighted as an example of her father's work role and subsequent identity. Ruth's emphasis is on her interactions with her father and she relates these to explain the increased possibilities she has had since that time, for sexual self-making. The meaning of the past is part of the process of self-constitution: it is ongoing and relates to the present. This positions "continual reconstruction as a chronicle to serve the purposes of present interpretation" (Mead 1932, p. 48).

Yet childhood in Ruth's account is also depicted as an important time in formation of her self. As noted earlier in this chapter, psychoanalytic theories underline the centrality to identity of this life stage. In fact, so pervasive is therapeutic culture that childhood has been elevated to unlimited importance in the lifespan. Similarly, Mead's theory of self denotes childhood as foundational, not least because it is during these years that infants begin to communicate—first through gestures, then speech sounds and finally through language. Mead's sociality of self-making in childhood has influenced developmental psychology and theories of learning (see, for example, Bandura 1986; Vygotsky 1962, 1978), and the role of language as a means through which others' roles and attitudes towards others may be increasingly understood in relation to the growing self is central to understanding communication (Mead 1934, pp. 369–378). Crucially, according to Mead, self-making and communication only occur within social contexts:

> The society which determines these situations [of communication] will, of course, determine not only his [sic] direct replies but also those adult responses within himself [sic] which his [sic] replies arouse. In so far as he [sic] gives expression to these, at first in voice and later in play, he [sic] is taking many roles and addressing himself [sic] in all of them. He is of course fitting himself in his play to take up the adult activities later… (Mead 1934, p. 369).

Childhood is a protracted site for socialization, with caregivers' roles central to self-making and, like adulthood, the self is achieved through "social conduct" (Mead 1934, pp. 375–378). In Ruth's account, her imaginative narrative of her father's cognitions (she imagines him saying to her, "You're a bit of a low-life, love") and the way she sees him seeing her is evident, and stands as an example of what Mead (1934, p. 17) meant when he described "taking the role of others". Where Mead emphasises the social context within which the self is constituted—which resonates with participant accounts of formation of the sexual self in this study—less is made of the subsequent inequalities

that characterise relationships in everyday life. Thus, Ruth's account is an example of gender inequality and what might be termed 'emotional abuse' in today's lexicon. Although many male participants highlighted frustration with socially prescribed sexual roles in contemporary life, it was women participants who reported having survived child sexual abuse and rape (see Chapter Five).

Mead's (1934) theory of childhood offers better potential to understand inequality than psychoanalytic accounts because of its placement of the social at the fore of everyday life. The structure-agency dualism is less prevalent in Mead's theory of self because of the interrelationship between actors' selves and the social (Martin 2005, p. 232). However it is important that a Meadian conception of the self adequately accounts for social inequality. Specifically, participants in this study cited the constraining effects of social inequality on expressions of agency. For example, one participant account highlighted the danger associated with being a gay man in Adelaide. Jeffrey, a 61-year-old accountant made reference in his interview to the constant threat of homophobic violence. He reported being 'bashed' in an area notorious for violence in central Adelaide.

> *Somebody tried to break into my car and I took offence to that. The next thing I know I got a whack on the head, whack on the back of the head, kick in the groin a few other bits and pieces and the car was covered in blood and I was running up the street trying to get away from this person. Landed in hospital for three days, scared the crap out of me. […] And the place where it was happened was there was a murder, gay murder there three weeks before hand.*
>
> Jeffrey, 61-year-old accountant

Jeffrey's account is a reminder that expressions of agency must be considered alongside a broader understanding of the social and political landscapes. Notwithstanding this,

participants also provided specific examples of the ways in which the conditions of late modern life have enabled greater physical movement and additional resources, enabling new ways of sexual self-making (as discussed in Chapter Four).

As discussed in Chapter One, late modern sexuality entails the contradictory presence of inequality and emancipation (see Jackson 2007, p. 12). This is replicated in participant accounts. Inequality is manifest for the participants in everyday life (see Jamieson 1998 in relation to gender and class inequality) but alongside the inequalities and injustices (see Chapter Five in relation to gender and agency) participants noted how they had managed to survive this reality and, at the same time, exercise agency in sexual self-making. Recent research into heterosexual relationships (Meah, Hockey & Robinson 2011) has similarly found that despite clear inequalities manifest in intimate relationships, older women were found to have exercised agency. Such studies challenge existing theories of women's subordination (Holmes, Beasley & Brook 2011, p. 3).

It is perhaps not surprising, given this complex social landscape, that the workplace—a male domain and area out of bounds to women until relatively recently—would bring these issues to the fore for participants. This highlights the need to employ critical traditions that theorise inequality alongside Mead's interactionist perspective (see Burkitt 1991, p. 29; Jackson & Scott 2007, p. 96). Nor is it surprising that the past served as a reference point in the biography of self-hood for participants in this study. Discussions of liberation from sexual self-making used the past as a reference point in terms of 'how far' they 'had come'. However, unlike psychoanalytic depictions of childhood, which highlight current pathology with unresolved issues brought about by past experiences, understanding the role of the past in sexual self-making requires an

interactionist lens as well as an understanding of inequality. This entails seeing childhood as a time for playful learning and engagement in interaction with key caregivers (Mead 1934, p. 375–378). Such a view helps to frame this time in actors' lives as meaningful but assigns greater levels of agency to actors. The following account shows how agency is experienced in everyday life in relation to gender inequality.

Fernando is a 35-year-old who works in sexual health as an educator. He is currently single and is a father to two children. Throughout our interview, Fernando referred to having reflected a lot on sexuality, given his work. At one point, Fernando joked that it would be nice to have a "nine-to-five" job so the work could be "left behind" at the end of each day. Overall, however, Fernando described his life as a series of events, with each prompting a transformation of the ways in which he interacts with others. Coming from a working class background in the suburbs of Adelaide, Fernando described being surrounded by contrasting lifestyles and values. For example, whilst his father was a religious minister, his best friend's mother was a drug dealer who escaped domestic violence.

Early in our interview, Fernando disclosed having "a history of sexual abuse … where the perpetrator was male". The male culture around him—which was characterized by violence, abuse and homophobia—was cited as contributing to seeing himself as "stringently heterosexual" at that time. Once Fernando began working, however, his experiences of this culture were challenged, and it was through his relationships with his colleagues that he began to make sense of the inequality he had seen in his everyday life. Here is Fernando's account of this process:

> *But the first worker that sort of talked about power and how power sits within*

the gender, within age, within socio economic stuff like, yeah, it just blew me away. Like there is all these feelings and all these experiences that I have had lots of conversations with mates around but just didn't much get past "Ooh, it's fucked up". *So okay, this is why it's fucked and this is how it can change and we can have agency and this and all that sort of very empowering stuff. And that definitely shifted my sense of sexuality, or my sex of, it's that narrative therapy sort of stuff. Like I was writing my own story, not having the story written for me.*

Fernando, 35-year-old sexual health worker

Fernando's account highlights the potential for agency brought about by interactions in the workplace. Unlike his childhood setting, his workplace was highlighted as being a place where different people came together. The shared professional and organizational values underpinned Fernando's colleagues' views about power. Conversely, those in less 'professional' settings, such as employers of young people in low-skilled workplaces, were reported as being less inspiring.

Another participant, Emile, is a 32-year-old primary carer for his son, looked to the past to compare the sexual interactions between workers in the casino where he had worked to his time at school. Emile highlighted the similarities of the "young people" as well as the sheer number of employees, which reached over four hundred. Emile highlighted the insular nature of the social interactions that took place in his casual workplace. Such a culture was reflected upon as being unhelpful for meaningful interactions, sexual or otherwise. He told me:

And back to that school idea where it is kind of a social phenomenon, being overtly sexual, in my twenties I worked at the Casino which is where I met my wife and it was just like going back to school. Because you had, I think there was three or four hundred employees all of similar ages, a lot of them were

single and it was just like being back at school. It was just ridiculous.

Emile, 32-year-old primary carer for his son

Isabella, a 44-year-old lesbian woman working in education and training, like Emile, reflected on her previous workplace to make sense of her past. She said that the 'transformative' nature of the workplace was a less than positive experience. Despite being "a good person, an honest person, a hard-working person", Isabella told me:

> ... *[I] actually lost my job. Because I was gay ... fifteen years, a career ... was destroyed because in the end I got a manager who was a homophobic, bigoted, nasty little man.*
>
> Isabella, 44-year-old woman working in education and training

What can be learnt about sexual self-making through the shared experiences of the workplace? There is some resonance with late modern theorists' claims that contemporary social life has brought greater levels of mobility and complexity (see, for example, Giddens 1991; Lash and Urry 1994). In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, for example, Giddens (1991) argues that individuals are increasingly 'mobile' in contemporary day-to-day life. This freedom is argued to have shaped late modern life in such a way that traditional roles—say those defined by gender and/or class—no longer limit possibilities:

> Besides its institutional reflexivity, modern social life is characterized by profound processes of the reorganization of time and space, coupled to the expansion of disembedding mechanisms—mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganization of time and space, plus the disembedding mechanisms, radicalize and globalize pre-established institutional traits of modernity; and they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life (Giddens 1991, p. 2).

The disembedding mechanisms to which Giddens refers have been critiqued for their over-reliance on agency (Lash 1994). Social theorists agree—too unproblematically—that due to structural changes, contemporary subjective life has become increasingly reflexive (see, for example, Bauman 1998, 2004, 2000; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Lash & Urry 1994). Importantly, not only is the broader social landscape supposedly liberated by the joint processes of detradtionalization and disembedding, but day-to-day life is argued to be transformed (Giddens 1990, 1984, 1991, 1992, 1966). As discussed in Chapter One alongside other features of late-modernity, Giddens' reflexivity is a concept that is developed fully in his earlier works and "... should be understood not merely as 'self-consciousness' but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life" (Giddens 1984, p. 3). Yet Giddens' late modern 'freedoms' fail to take into account two factors: firstly, mobility—or the freedom to live in alternative ways to those traditionally prescribed according to one's gender or class—is neither equally nor universally experienced; and secondly, since agency continues to be constrained by broader social factors such as inequalities based on gender, race, class and sexual identity for example, it is crucial to understand the biographical and cultural contexts within which interaction takes place.

Participant accounts in which working environments have opened up new opportunities for sexual self-making were clear about the limits to these new ways of thinking and interacting. The broader work environment or 'culture' was depicted as important in supporting transformative environments for its staff. Ruth's account of gender and sexual self-making, for example, were reflected to have taken place in a broader male-driven culture. Her interactions with male colleagues and the broader culture had real implications for the possibilities for her self-making. This resonates with Mead's

emphasis on the importance of the cultural environment to self-making (Jackson 2010b). Similarly, whilst Fernando's new appreciation of power was positioned as helping him to identify the violence and sexual abuse that had taken place in his past, his insights cannot detract from the realities of the injustices he experienced. Ruth's experiences of gender inequality are similarly tangible. Therefore, agency, whilst reported, ought not be overstated, particularly without recourse to a broader understanding of inequality. As Plummer (2008, p. 17) notes, "the social always invades the personal. But … the economic and material do too".

Recent Australian research into the claims made through the 'girl power' era have highlighted the overemphasis of agency both from, and on behalf of, young women (see Baker 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). What is required instead is an understanding that agency, whilst reported by participants through 'transformative' accounts, takes place in a shifting, and complex, social environment. Here, the work of Urry (1999) is helpful in framing late modern life and the external world. He argues that rather than sociology's historical concern with reconciling the structure/agency debate, energies are best directed at understanding the complex (human and non-human) environment because "the emergent global order is one of constant disorder and disequilibrium" (Urry 1999, p. 360).

In this section, we have examined the opportunities for sexual self-making that participants reported as having increased due to alternative perspectives within professional working environments.

Given the time spent in employment in late modernity, and the important relationship

one's occupation has to broader identity in social life, employment is an important site for providing greater opportunities to engage in alternative sexual self-making. One of the continuing themes in this thesis is that of inequality. Although participants highlighted being 'freed' from limiting sexual-self-making, gender in particular was highlighted as a basis for social inequality that manifested in everyday life through interactions with others.

In the next section, I examine participant accounts relating to familial relationships and analyse these alongside relevant literature. As will be shown, familial interactions gave participants some purchase on their learning and transformations.

The Sexual Self and Familial Relationality

The participants in this study into everyday sexual self in late modern life invariably reflected upon their relationships with others in their family. Having examined the meaning of the past earlier in this chapter in relation to present roles expressed in workplace interactions, considered the 'transformatory' descriptions of the workplace in relation to broader issues of inequality and argued that the workplace offered participants in this study new opportunities for sexual self-making, I now examine the ways in which familial interactions were placed in participant accounts of the sexual self.

The use of the term 'familial' is intended to capture this important theme in the data rather than suggesting that the family, as a site of heteronormative privilege, (see Roseneil & Budgeon 2004) is intrinsically of interest in studies of sexual self-making. As will become evident, it is the interactions between family members that participants

cite as providing some sense of there being a legacy for the learning around the sexual self that has occurred during their lifespan.

Harriet is a 46-year-old public servant with a 27-year-old daughter. When I asked Harriet if she could describe her sexual self, she said that she is a lesbian but that identity is "defined from the outside". She explained that it was "the way that people react to your sexuality" that defines your sexual self and that this was very much "imposed" upon her rather than defined by herself and projected outwards. Throughout our interview, Harriet identified some of the social issues in late modern social life that impact upon sexual identity, and yet she reported that she felt "very comfortable with lesbian because … that's what I am in terms of my society … but I don't think it defines me".

In the following account, Harriet's view of the ways in which social roles come together through varied interactions is articulated. She talks about the difficulty with separating out her values from her roles as a parent and a worker. Importantly, she identifies her work as a parent as being influenced by her sexual self, which has a relationship to her work self. In this way, Harriet's account resonates with the discussion about employment earlier in this chapter, where it was argued that not only did work provide new opportunities for sexual self-making, but it provided participants with a space for interactions with others in which their sexual self was constituted. Harriet told me:

> *You know, because you are a product of your upbringing and the pressures that you've had in time you know. Just like, you know, sedimentary rock sort of ends up, you know, looking like something that has everything else come to bear on it. You can't isolate those things. I don't think I can isolate myself as a parent from my sexuality from you know, sort of, my work, what I think is right and wrong, what you know, people see and expect of me and what I respond to on that level,*

> *I don't think you could separate those things out. I don't think I could in all honesty work in isolation in any of those things. Just like we're social animals, I don't think we actually separate out from our social you know, sort of group, either which is why I think we're really a product of a whole lot of things rather than ...*
>
> Harriet, 46-year-old public servant

It was Harriet's role as a parent that was reflected upon as a vehicle for her views about the world to be carried forth into the next generation. She added:

> *I think that we have a responsibility that we teach our kids that people are okay and people can choose their sexuality on whatever scale and you know like not doing any damage or harm to others is the most important thing.*
>
> Harriet, 46-year-old public servant

Harriet's account demonstrates her personal values and knowledge about sexuality (that it is socially made) but, importantly, what she is 'doing' with her knowledge is passing it on through her parenting relationship with her daughter. By conceptualizing the choices participants make in shaping their narratives about sexuality, and tempering these with the realities and complexities of inequalities in everyday life, it is possible to begin to appreciate the role that interactions within familial environments serve. In considering the role of the professional self, I have argued that some agency could be exercised in the freeing up of traditionally held beliefs about sexuality. This argument, however, was underpinned by the broader knowledge that social inequalities continue to persist in late modern life (Adkins 2003; McNay 2000; Skeggs 1997). Participants described familial roles as interactions that could draw upon new appreciations of sexuality gained through interactions in employment and other roles in day-to-day life. Fernando's narrative, for example, was discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to his experience of social injustice as a child growing up in the poorer suburbs in Australia.

He described how he had 'transformed' his ways of thinking about gender and sexuality through his interactions with colleagues in his sexual health work. This knowledge was able to be transferred into his role as a father. He told me:

> *I was just taken back to, you know, when I became a father and how that changed me and therefore my sexuality, like that responsibility of here we were in this pretty rough neighbourhood and I had this family to protect, to care for and also to nurture. And yeah, yeah, not replicate, yeah, old ways of being a guy.*
>
> Fernando, 35-year-old sexual health worker

Similarly, Stephen, a 47-year-old full time parent, reported finding interactions with his children in his parenting role as providing an opportunity to effect change in response to broader social inequalities. He told me that the experience of raising children prompted him to reflect upon his own experiences and make sense of how those experiences had shaped his present values. Stephen talked about having to feel separate from his children so that he could offer the best role modelling and 'get a grip of yourself'. Stephen also highlighted how important it was to understand the context of one's own life experiences and how attitudes shaped one's parenting. He said that:

> *[...] you have to confront through your children certain things that you find uncomfortable. Experiences that you might have had at school that you really found disturbing. So, you know, you have got to detach yourself from your own experience and put yourself in your child's environment. And by doing that, you get to understand certain processes that you weren't quite aware of probably at the time. And how you can handle it may be a little bit better. So I think children are great in that sense that you get a real grip of yourself. Because, you know, things that you kind of push away and don't want to deal with anymore, they tend to come out because your children go through those sorts of things. So you tend to get a bit of a perspective, well me anyway.*
>
> Stephen, 47-year-old full time parent

Stephen's notion of "perspective" resonates with the insights participants recalled gaining in relation to their work interactions, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. Whilst the past was depicted as a way to highlight how far participants had come in their sexual self-making—and presented in direct contrast to the present sexual self—the focus on familial relationships highlighted the 'future' generations of sexual selves. This future generation was depicted as not having to make the same mistakes as their parents.

The tensions between broader inequalities and interpersonal, day-to-day experiences have been examined throughout this thesis. They have been argued as being manifest as part of a broadly contradictory social landscape in which narratives of agency persist amongst continued inequality. If individuals 'make' their sexual selves and liberate themselves from more constraining or negative ways of relating, why does social inequality persist?

Such a question is really a question about individuals and social interactions, and has been framed in sociology as being about the micro/macro split. Here Gagnon and Simon's ([1973] 2011) theory of sexual scripting is helpful in framing these findings because participant narratives detailing their day-to-day interactions cannot be removed from the social—or cultural—spheres in which they take place. Similarly, the ways in which participants make sense of their experiences is shaped in ways pertinent to a range of factors in their biography and social worlds, as seen throughout this thesis. The tripartite model of the ongoing scripting at interpersonal, intrapsychic and cultural (Gagnon & Simon [1973] 2011) levels helps to reject the micro/macro debate in favour of a theoretical base which seeks to draw from both Meadian notions of self-making as

well as a broadly social constructionist understanding of the social world in all its complexity. In Gagnon and Simon's ([1973] 2011) tradition, "human agency does not disappear entirely under the influence of a discursive determinism, but plays out in an active engagement with the surrounding culture" (Bricknell 2006, p. 95). Thus, understanding agency in sexual self-making entails taking into account participant biographies and their subsequent unique meanings to participants, as well as their interactions with others in everyday life and the broader culture within which this ongoing interaction takes place. The meaning of age and generation similarly provoke the need to better understand agency in sexual self-making.

The following account illustrates the legacy of Claire's knowledge about sexuality and equality, and how this plays out within interactions between her relatives:

> *And then, it's lovely now with the nieces and nephews about, helping them to explore […] you don't talk about sexuality but it comes up […] they will make disparaging comments about gay people and they just know that, my sister and I sort of jump on them. And then you realise you have been baited all along and they don't mean it. And they are just sitting there smiling because they know. [laughing] But the nice thing is that they also feel comfortable with whatever, or seem to, as far as I can tell, quite comfortable with whatever sexuality.*
>
> Claire, 48-year-old working in child protection

Francis, a 52-year-old woman project manager, thought it was important to show her children not that she had worked through previously negative ways of thinking about sexuality and gender, but that she present these shifts in cognition and values as ongoing processes. Francis, whose account of her travels and new ways of thinking that opened up through the experience of travel, was discussed in Chapter Four in relation to sexual self-making and travel, described her thinking about her approach to her parenting:

> *I was very conscious that the boys would experience me as a multi-faceted person not as a mother […] I think it's a danger to simplify and separate. Sometimes it's useful in a conversation or useful to, as a temporary thing, but as a being thing I don't think it's useful at all because it's kind of like people that have to put on a, a front. Because who and what they are is full of insecurities and the bigger the gap that gets it all falls down. Whereas I think if you can grapple with who and what you are and that's who and what you present to the world I think it, my experience tells me it works better.*
>
> Francis, a 52-year-old project manager

Participants reported that their acquired wisdom and values about their sexual selves were expressed through their relationships with family members. This action was presented as agential. Participants reported handing down a legacy of acquired knowledge and values about the sexual self to younger generations. This data which relates to familial relationality is in accord with recent theorising by Ken Plummer.

In Chapter One, I outlined Plummer's interactionist appreciation of temporality and the sexual self. Plummer's perspective involves thinking about time and the sexual self in two specific ways. Thus, Plummer notes that sexuality can be approached as situated in its historical epoch (diachronic age) as well as at varying points in actors' biographies (synchronic age) (Plummer 2010, p. 168). The difficulty for the sex researcher is teasing out ways in which to make sense of data, and Plummer argues that given the flux of time and the ongoing and complex nature of self-formation constituted through social interactions, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the enormity of researching the sexual self and making sense of the ways in which age is played out in the data. This is because the temporal dimension to human experience is in constant flux. He explains:

> The sexual lives I was studying were lived both diachronically and synchronically and were always emergent. Trying to capture a sexual life, I soon

> found the almost impossibility of this. For here was a stream of ever-changing experience getting ritualised and habitualised in certain directions with certain people, with selves and identities being worked on and out and up, and meanings ever negotiated. Sexualities were flows with histories and moments, careers, changes, and contexts…it became clearer and clearer that just as we live out sexual lives through moments with others in the here and now, and tell our stories at this juncture, we do this also across a series of life stages and historical moments that we then carry through life with us…we live with the perpetually reconstructed life others, life memories, life stories, life accounts, life selves—drawing continuously on our own imagined pasts…I learned that my sexual life stories could never be told in any simple way (and much of this study remains unpublished precisely because of this radical doubt)… Human sexual life is constantly on the go, and it is hard to grasp (Plummer 2011, p. 168).

Plummer argues that sex researchers must see conversations that occur through empirically-based work into the sexual self as taking place only as one small 'snapshot' in the rich, varied, ever-shifting and unique biographies. This thesis has examined the sexual self through the distinct identification of themes however it should be noted that these themes which emerge from the data overlap with one another and intersect. Thus the narratives that relate to what I have termed as familial relationality must be seen as part of not only the participants' unique social experiences and relationships but also as part of broader conversations that constituted the interview for the study. Notably, participants described the 'passing down' of wisdom about sexuality towards the end of the interview, having spent the interview prior to this laying out the backdrop of their sexual self through recounting stories and interactions that were seen as significant in their biographies. The ways in which temporality is experienced in everyday life was contrasted by the ordinary events which characterised day to day life compared to those experiences that fell outside of routine. In Chapter Three I explored routine sexual self-making and argued that an application of the notion of play to intimate relationships

helped to provide a theoretical explanation for the ways in which the sexual self was positioned as transforming as a result of ongoing interactions with significant others. Yet these experiences were placed in contrast with two key life events: travel and illness. In Chapter Four I examined the ways in which these experiences helped to frame the sexual self somewhat outside the day-to-day experiences whilst at the same time shifting previously held conceptions of the sexual self. Travel and illness were depicted as punctuating one's lifespan and cited by participants as both disrupting the everyday as well as providing increased opportunities for new ways of imagining the sexual self. These are relevant to considerations of temporality and biography because they are examples of the ways in which life events and significant interactions are depicted as foundational for present ways of conceptualising the sexual self and interaction with others in everyday life, both in intimate and more broad social contexts.

Secondly, participants in the present study noted the ways in which their synchronic age and the diachronic age in which their sexual self may be located intersected with one another. There is some overlap between Plummer's notion of diachronic age and the work of scholars for whom the sexual self is theorised as having less agency in day-to-day life due to the influence of broader social and historical movements. Plummer notes the work of queer theory and others (Plummer 2011, p. 170) but neglects Giddens' work which clearly locates the sexual self through periodization (see Giddens 1992). This research is concerned with the contemporary sexual self and has understood participant narratives in relation to routine sexual self-making and increased opportunities which are linked to late modern social life. These can only be considered in relation to the ways in which participants themselves reflected upon the interaction between their own biographies (which are influenced by gender, class, experiences of oppression,

interactions with others across the lifespan) and key biographical events and interactions with others alongside broader social contexts which are historically significant. Yet although biographies are lived out in the social contexts of time and space and it is difficult to 'notice' the broader historical epoch (Hall 2009, p. 6) within which one interacts and lives their everyday life. Here sociologists' identification and theorisation of the ever-increasing rise of technologies, mobilities (see Beck *et al*. 1994; Giddens 1991; Lash & Urry 1994; Urry 1997) and 'blurring' of previously differentiated areas of social life (see du Gay 1993) such as work and personal life help to frame participants reporting interactions through work, travel, intimate relationships, family and broader social inequalities as all being idiosyncratic to the current era. Although Giddens' claim that relationships are detraditionalized (Giddens 1991) helps to draw attention to the ways in which the social world influences individual experiences, the nexus between biography and the self alongside these broader social shifts is crucial to recognise. For example, travel is an opportunity to make the sexual self in new ways (as discussed in Chapter Four) however the emphasis needs to remain on the ways in which actors make sense of that experience in reference to their biographies, their wider social relations and intimate and familial relationships: "…the new petit bourgeoisie are best conceived as ego-tourists, who search for a style of travel which is both reflective of an 'alternative' lifestyle and which is capable of maintaining and enhancing their cultural capital" (Munt 1994, p. 108).

In addition, a broader application of the notion of temporality is relevant when considering the middle age group of participants in this study. The age range of 30 years to 65 years encompasses a wide age group but what participants had in common was the ways in which they reported 'helping' future generations (as discussed previously in this

chapter). Plummer notes the ways in which a developmental or lifespan approach helps to frame differences in the ways in which actors make sense of their sexual selves (2010) and participant narratives provide evidence of this.

Chapter Summary

Giddens (1991) argues that in late modern social life the presence of globalizing forces has resulted in a more self-conscious 'project' in which actors exercise agency in the choices they make about who they want to be. Giddens' account rests more on actor agency than other social theorists of late modernity such as Bauman (1998, 2000). I have argued, conversely, that participants in this study gave examples gained through their professional working lives when they were able to expand their repertoire in relation to sexual self-making. This was reported by participants as being 'transformatory', which resonates with some of the claims made by social theorists of late modernity, in particular Giddens (1991). However, throughout participant accounts, the manifestation of social inequalities in everyday interactions was highly evident. For example, women's narratives of the workplace were characterised by gendered inequalities from male-dominated work cultures (in Ruth's account, for example) or sexual violence in childhood (as described by Fernando).

I have argued that the presence of employment within participant narratives demonstrates its importance in late modern social life as a site for sexual self-making, and this placement of employment at the fore of social interactions is an example of the blurring of the private and public spheres (du Gay1993, p. 583). Increased opportunities for sexual self-making brought about by employment are argued to have provided participants with some agency to choose newer and better ways of thinking about their

sexual selves.

The past was described through engagement with biography and events that featured the 'non-enlightened' sexual self in contrast to the present-day liberated sexual self. However, like other accounts of the sexual self, claims of agency were argued to need to be placed, along with biographies, within the broader cultural scripts (Gagnon & Simon ([1973] 2011) that orchestrate how sexual self-making occurs.

Familial relationships were argued to have provided participants with the means to continue to constitute sexual self-making in light of their revised sexual selves and, in contrast to the past, were framed by participants as signifying a new order.

Having examined participant accounts and critiqued these alongside relevant literature, I now come to the concluding chapter of this thesis, which summarises the constitution of the sexual self in late modernity, as expressed in the preceding chapters, acknowledges the limitations of the study and suggests the findings' implications for further research.

Chapter Seven: Sexual Self-making—Biography, Spatiality, Temporality, Significance and Play

Introduction

Sexuality is exoticised in late modern social life. The symbol of sex is present in mainstream popular culture where it is portrayed as a type of self-representation to which actors must aspire. The key to acquiring this kind of sexuality is through a conscious, reflexive deliberation upon one's broader identity, and this activity becomes a project for life (Giddens 1992). However, this perspective—that the self is an ongoing reflexive task in late modernity—fails to account for sociality, which is the constitutive ingredient to self-making (Mead 1934).

The research reported in this thesis sought to better understand everyday sexuality in late modern social life. Thirty interviews with 'ordinary' people aged 30–65 years yielded rich data that were critically analysed in relation to relevant literature. The finding of this research—that the sexual self is constituted through social processes—concurs with recent scholarship in which sexual self-making is placed within a Meadian framework (see Jackson & Scott 2010a). In this concluding chapter, I broadly consider the research findings, examine the study's limitations and highlight how the knowledge acquired through the study may contribute to wider scholarship in the sociology of sexual self-making.

In Chapter One, I examined Giddens' claims about the sexual self in late modern social life. I argued that the application of globalization theories to everyday life did little to advance knowledge about day-to-day sexuality. Further, such theories were argued to

have failed to provide a satisfactory account of how the sexual self is 'made' in late modern life. Giddens' placement of reflexivity as the driving force behind the continued fashioning of the self has been overemphasised to the detriment of an appreciation of the everyday. George Herbert Mead's theory that the self is constituted through social interactions was argued to provide a robust framework upon which the sexual self may be theorised. Mead's explanation of 'reflectiveness', in contrast to Giddens' centre-stage placement, was shown to be merely part of a broader process in which the self is made.

Chapter One served to lay the theoretical foundation upon which this research rests. It highlighted how Mead's theory of the self has been applied to the sexual self through the work of Jackson (2007, 2008, 2010a, 2010b) and Jackson and Scott (2010a, 2010b) as well as others (for example, Gagnon and Simon 1973/2010, 1999; Plummer 1975, 2011). I have argued throughout this thesis that this research into the sexual self in late modernity resonates with the claims made by these theorists. In Chapter One I argued that Meadian interaction provides a counterpoint for psychoanalytic interpretations of sexual selfhood and the former's focus on sociality allows researchers to better understand everyday sexuality. The 'knowable mind' in Mead's version of self-constitution is preferable to the "unknowable unconscious" in psychoanalytic theory (Jackson 2007, p. 4). Since this research has been concerned with the sexual self in its late modern setting, Chapter One examined the claims made by theorists of late modernity. I argued that though such theorists highlight the shifting ways in which intimate relationships are lived out in contemporary life (Giddens 1992, pp. 178–181), they fail to account for the ways in which broader social inequalities are manifest in everyday life which shape the sexual self. Rather, I argued that Mead's theory of

sociality can be applied to communication in late modern life including interaction that occurs through technologies. This application entailed extending Meadian social interaction to include interaction that occurs through internet enabled devices rather than person to person contact. In Chapter One I argued that this application was in line with Mead's depiction of the social world as being significant according to one's biography and interactions: "you cannot build up a society out of elements that lie outside of the individual's life-processes" (Mead, 1934, p. 257). In Chapter One the significance of sociality, temporality and reflexivity were also highlighted as important concepts that are transferable to the examination of sexual self-making in late modernity. In the subsequent chapters, I investigated Mead's interactionist tradition more fully as it related to the data from this study.

The methodological approach taken in this study was outlined in Chapter Two. I argued that the Schutzian phenomenological approach was an appropriate methodology to yield rich data about the sexual self in late modernity. Schutzian phenomenology was also argued to complement the Meadian interactionist theoretical stance taken in this thesis. The unstructured interviews with the non-representative sample were argued to have provided the means through which rich data were generated. The limitations of the data analysis software, NVivo, were identified along with how these were overcome.

Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six constitute the bulk of the thesis and use data from this study as their starting point. In these chapters, I presented themes that emerged from data analysis and discussed them through detailed exploration of participant narratives. Rigorous interrogation of relevant literature was incorporated into this discussion. In Chapter Three, I examined the ways in which the sexual self is constituted in late

modern life. Specifically this entailed understanding how routine sexual self-making occurred in contemporary settings. Drawing from participant narratives about the role of others in sexual self-constitution I argued that data were able to be theoretically understood through applying Mead's theory of self-making. Specifically I argued that Mead's notion of play ought to be extended to apply to the ways in which participants were reported to have interacted in intimate relationships. Although Mead conceptualises play as an important medium through which the perspectives of others may be learned in childhood (Mead 1934, pp. 364–365) I argued that extending this concept into adulthood enabled for a theoretical explanation about how engagement in understanding the sexual self could occur through risk-taking and playfulness in relationships. In Chapter One the data helped to establish the specific ways in which biography—or the experiences unique to individuals—intersected with specific events and the interactions that occurred in everyday life which produce the sexual self. The constitution of the sexual self in late modern life was reported by participants to occur through a complex interaction between individuals and structures. Despite the claims made by theorists of late modernity about the increasing level of reflexive engagement in a project of self-constitution (Giddens 1991), Mead argues that actors understand that we "…recognise the lines of cleavage that run through us" (Mead 1943, p. 143) and this was argued to better account for the complexity that participants reported in describing the ways in which the sexual self was made through various interactions and roles in social life.

Chapter Four focused on data which highlighted the ways in which disruption to the everyday enabled for shifts in the sexual self. Specifically this chapter examined participant accounts relating to travel as well as the body in relation to illness.

Participants reported the changes to their values that occurred through the experience of international travel. The late modern notion of mobility was highlighted as relevant to better understanding the new opportunities for sexual self-making provided through contemporary lifestyles. I argued that Mead's conceptualisation of play in relation to learning was relevant when providing a theoretical framework to understand the data in relation to travel. Play as the "activity of socialization" (Lever 1976, p. 478) was examined with regard to middle childhood and Lever's seminal study (1976) into gender roles and childhood play. In the same way that Mead's 'action' of play is theorised to enable for the learning of others (Crossley 2001, p. 146), play, in all its liminality (see Masters 2008; Turner 1982; West *et al.* 2011) applied to sexual self making in relation to international travel helped to better understand how new interactions influenced the sexual self. Participant accounts of illness highlighted the ways in which the body and the sexual self were interrelated. Cultural scripts relating to the sexualised body were highlighted as important when understanding these accounts. Through an interrogation of poststructural accounts of the body, the role of agency was examined as it related to participants' sense-making about their illnesses. Ultimately I argued that in order to appreciate the specific ways in which illness was reported to have impacted upon the varied social interactions, a Meadian understanding of biography and self-making was crucial.

In Chapter Five, I examined agency in response to narratives detailing inequalities experienced in everyday life. Specifically this entailed better understanding the ways in which gender related to participants' narratives about their sexual selves was also considered in relation to the reported constraints brought about through engagement with established religions. The role of agency was therefore critically examined. Despite

respondents' stories of transformation, it was argued that agency needed to be understood in the context of broader 'scripts' in which inequality and injustice prevailed. I argued that although participants reported exercising agency, their expressions of agency were ultimately constrained by broader social inequalities and this finding was argued to be in accord with Mead's theory of sociality.

In Chapter Six, the centrality of the work environment was highlighted as being reported by participants in this study as another vehicle for embracing new ways of thinking about one's sexual self. Interactions within the workplace were highlighted, and, like the travel described in Chapter Four, were seen as transformative for the sexual self. Again, agency was argued to be constrained by broader social patterns of inequality, which was illustrated through participant accounts of injustice in their lived experiences. In this chapter the theoretical work of Mead and others such as du Gay (2007, 2002) and Simon and Gagnon (1973 [2011]) were argued to provide an account of the ways in which professional life has 'bled' (see du Gay 2007) into other roles in social life. Thus the significance of work interactions were argued to symbolise a more complex and less clearly defined social setting in which the sexual self was produced. Chapter Six concluded by examining data in which familial roles were reported as being important to handing down a legacy of the learning that participants felt that they had undertaken. Bringing recent theorising by Plummer (2010) together with Mead's notion of temporality helped to understand that these accounts highlight the complexity and intersectional nature of social life and sexual self constitution. In this concluding chapter, it is important to provide an overarching synthesis of some of the key arguments made throughout this thesis. I now revisit the key arguments.

The Constitution of the Sexual Self in Late Modernity

The overall finding of this study is that the sexual self in late modernity is 'made' through social processes. Data from this study clearly show that it interactions in social life enable participants to make their sexual selves. During the interviews, participants recalled specific events that demonstrated this process. Data were analysed for emergent themes, which have been systematically examined throughout this thesis in relation to relevant literature. Critical analyses of scholarly work in the area of self-constitution were threaded throughout the discussion. As noted above, it is important to summarise the arguments and to synthesise them in relation to appropriate scholarly work. The key finding from this study—that the sexual self is socially made—concurs with the Meadian articulation of the "sociality of sexuality" (Jackson &Scott 2010a).

What does it mean to say that the sexual self is socially constituted and how can this be related to late modern social life? Some of the claims made by scholars of late modernity have been the focus of some contention, however there is a general consensus that contemporary social life is marked by shifts brought about by new technologies. For example, the widespread increases in communicative technologies have changed the social landscape because of the emergence of alternative ways of communicating, which has led to an increase in exchange between cultural settings (for example, see Bauman 1998, 2000; Beck *et al*. 1994; Giddens 1991; Lash & Urry 1994). As discussed in Chapter Four, the increase of affordable travel in contemporary times has led to a marked rise in global movements and earned the description for this new social world as "borderless" (Urry 1997). Yet travellers do not disembed from their lived experiences once they are away from their homeplace, "unmarked by the traces of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and geography" (Cresswell 1997, p. 377). People's

lived experiences of the broader categories of class, gender, culture, sexual identity and geography do not disappear with travel. Similarly, people's life events in which inequalities brought about by the categories identified were not simply discarded in favour of newer, more positive experiences.

I have argued, instead, that it is important to see the traveller in the same way that interactionists view individuals; with one's biography or the "self as the moving centre" (du Gay 1996, p. 30). Travel was highlighted as providing participants with the means through which their existing sexual selves were presented with a different way of being because with travel came an immersion in a culture different from their own, which provided another opportunity for sexual self-making. Yet immersion was not sufficient to provoke shifts in the sexual self. Participants recounted active engagement with newer ways of relating and making sense of the world around them. Thus, I have argued in Chapter Four that this kind of engagement with a new cultural setting requires playfulness; and that 'play' in this context meant to engage in learning about the views of others (Crossley 2001). Drawing from Mead's notion of play, I argue that the liminal state of being outside a cultural setting in one sense, but physically and socially engaged with it in another sense (see Masters 2008; Turner 1982), challenged participants' views of their sexual selves. Their description of the ways in which they engaged in new ways of sexual self-making required a sense of adventure because it meant engaging in new ways of thinking and relating about the sexual self. Erin's narrative, for example, in which she recalled feeling liberated by new ways of thinking about beauty, resonated with other accounts in which novel sexual self-making eventuated from travel experiences.

The central placement of work in late modern life was evident in participant accounts in this study and these were examined initially in Chapter Three and in more depth in Chapter Six. Participants highlighted the liberation they felt from previously held values and views about sexuality, noting that these shifts came about because of interactions with colleagues (and for one participant, clients). Alongside these accounts were references to 'older' ways of being that required reconstructing the past and contrasting it to existing events as well as the personal interpretation of such events. In Chapter Six, I have argued that the past, as it related to participants' biographies, was important to view through a Meadian lens rather than one informed by psychoanalytic theory. This was because of Mead's placement of the social at the fore of everyday life. The structure-agency debate becomes less dichotomous in Mead's theory of self because of the placement of sociality to social life (Martin 2005, p. 232). Participants in this study cited the constraining effects of social inequality on expressions of agency; important issues in descriptions of their past. Understanding the past could only be achieved through engaging with participant accounts and applying a Meadian articulation of childhood as a time of learning about the generalizable other. The results of this type of analysis provided insight into the specific ways in which inequalities in participants' pasts had shaped their sexual self-making and provoked a desire to embrace new ways of making sense of injustice. Fernanado, for example, detailed the impacts of surviving child sexual abuse and witnessing domestic violence as a child. He contrasted these with newer ways of thinking about power and violence that he encountered through interactions with colleagues. I argue that rather than childhood being seen as constraining future behaviours (such as in therapeutic theories of selfhood), it requires being understood in relation to broader biography; that is, with the understanding that communicative patterns and learning about the generalized other take place in

childhood (Mead 1932).

Whilst work and travel were highlighted as key themes in sexual self-making in late modern life, so too were relationships with significant others, such as lovers, friends and relatives. In Chapter Six, the newly 'liberated' sexual self participants were argued to have benefitted from their relationships with younger relatives because it meant they could pass on some of their learning/ wisdom through these interactions.

Tensions between agency and inequality have prevailed throughout the examination of the findings of this thesis. I have been tentative in my assessment of agency because of the reports of broader inequalities shaping participants' day-to-day lives. That, along with the knowledge that social inequality continues to broadly define late modern life has meant that additional sociological theories have been argued to apply to the findings of this study. For example, in Chapter Five, gender and agency were critically explored in relation to participants' accounts about their sexual selves.

Many claims are made about the new social landscape in late modernity. One of the key claims in social theory relates to the relatively recent shifts in gender roles. Giddens and others argue, for example, that we are no longer defined by 'traditional' roles. The theory of detraditionalization sees globalization as a major force in setting actors free from lifestyles that would have historically been fixed to traditions such as the gender roles set through marriage, which reinforced women's subordination in the home environment. Similarly, scholars such as John Urry argue that our contemporary world has become so complex that it is no longer relevant to think about society as such, but rather, one needs to understand the interlaced "scapes and flows" that characterise our

new ‘mobile’ lives (see Urry 2000, p. 13); in this scheme, “‘everyday life’ become[s] less clear cut” (du Gay 1993, p. 583).

In Chapter Five, I have argued that while scholars of late modernity highlight some of the key shifts present in contemporary life, their claims are somewhat overstated and dichotomise tradition and post-tradition to the detriment of a deeper understanding of these concepts (see Alexander 1996). Take Giddens’ treatment of gender, for example. He argues that feminism has invariably shaped our contemporary understanding of our identities and prompted women to question how to “liberate themselves from the home” (Giddens 1991, p. 216). However, his assumption that self-identity is exempt from class or gender (see Adkins 2003; Skeggs 1997) fails to take into account the prevailing inequalities evident in late modern life. Important contributions to gender include the analysis of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987), which helps frame nation-based notions of masculinity including the imbuing of sport-based violence with masculinity (for example, see Newburn & Stanko 1994). However, just as hegemonic masculinity has been recently reconceived in light of global and social shifts (Beasley 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), it is important to recognise the continuing presence of traditional gender roles in late modern life.

If traditional roles continue to manifest in everyday life, how can agency be conceived of using a Meadian framework to understand the sexual self? As I have argued throughout this thesis, agency, as applied to the sexual self, involves participants shaping their perceptions of sexuality firstly in light of their own biography, secondly in light of the broader social and cultural environment within which they are immersed, and thirdly by exploring their sexuality through the meaningful, or what I have referred

to as ‘significant’, relationships with others (such as friends, colleagues, family members) as well as through broader social interaction. Further, I have argued that agency related to the playfulness with which participants approached novel situations facilitated increased opportunities for sexual self-making. Yet ultimately, agency was shaped by the patterns of inequality evident in the contemporary world. To this end, the sexual self is constrained by social and cultural scripts within which social interactions occur.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

In this section, I consider the limitations of this research into the everyday sexual self, particularly as these limitations relate to the research design and subsequent claims. I then move on to consider the broader implications of this research in relation to future empirical work in the area of everyday sexuality in late modernity.

The sample used in this study was not representative of the population. My employment of the snowball method of sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) entailed using ‘word-of-mouth’ to recruit participants. This meant that I had little control over the range of demographic variables that characterised my sample, other than the variables stipulated at the outset of the research (such as having ‘non-problematic sexuality’ and being aged between 30 and 65 years of age). It is important in any consideration of the limits of research to look critically at the data upon which the study is based. In the following section I address some of the key issues inherent in the study’s design that have limited this research.

I have presented frequency tables and distribution diagrams in Chapter Two in an

attempt to visually represent the key variables in the range of quantitative measures used. These are useful in providing a 'snapshot' of some of the definitional or categorical ways of classifying or 'shorthanding' subjective life.

The tables indicate that over half the participants reported completing undergraduate studies through tertiary education. Although this measure may seem high, the Australian Bureau of Statistics notes a steady increase in participation in higher or further education in Australia between 1998 and 2008, when "the proportion of 25–64 year olds with a non-school qualification ... rose from 47% to 61%, continuing a trend seen for many decades" (ABS, 2009b). Given that the participants for this study cited the influence of education or, more specifically, the formal ideas provided through participation in education, this underlines the importance of this activity for the processes related to sexual self-making.

To some extent, participants' educational qualifications are not problematic because it was never intended that the sample be representational of the broader population. However, it is important to consider that the stories of those who are tertiary educated may differ from those for whom formal ideas have not been as readily accessible. How might these differences manifest? In educational settings, broadly speaking, there is an exposure to broader, more formal theories about the world, whether this is the social world or the concrete 'world' of the pure sciences. I have illustrated elsewhere in this thesis how education has influenced thinking about the sexual self for participants, and how the formal ideas presented during scholarly studies enabled people to ruminate about, and take action regarding, their broader identities as well as those that manifest through intimate relationships. Whether this thinking can be extended this in an

oppositional way is not known. It appears to be an oversimplification to propose that those who have not been exposed to formal ideas through education have not had the same opportunities for reflexive action.

However, given that educational opportunities are related to class, age, gender and other diversities, it is important to note that people's experiences of, and ability to access, power will mean that they have different access to resources. The discussion of travel in Chapter Four, for example, highlighted the importance of being outside one's native culture for increasing opportunities for sexual self-making. Despite the general acceptance that travel in late modern life is 'cheap' and faster than ever, international travel from Australia remains unreachable for many because of its high cost. Participants in this study could be perceived as somewhat middle class in this respect, with reports of travel to all continents. It is one of the limitations of this study that we do not know whether a sample of people who had never travelled would report similar opportunities for increased sexual self-making through other means than international travel.

Similarly, the participants' ages ought to be taken into account when considering potential limitations of the data. The mean age for men was 44.8 years and the mean age for women was 43.7 years, which equates to a total mean age for the study to 44.3 years. Although this average is the research population I intended to recruit, interviews with people who are younger or older than this may bring about differing narratives relating to their sexual selves and their approach to identity in general. It was beyond the scope of this research project to take a longitudinal approach, however such a research design would, no doubt, shed more light on the impacts of life and perceived

life-stage on sexual self-making. Participants in this study reported a shift in their perceptions of their sexual selves at different ages, but these were reflected upon rather than reported while in the life stage under consideration. A longitudinal design in future research could both complement and augment the findings from this study, as well as highlight the ongoing constitution of the sexual self through social processes over the lifespan.

My treatment of sexual identity in the study's research design was informed by the need for sexuality to be considered as a category of identity that is similar to culture (see, for example, Brown & Dunk-West 2011; Dunk 2007; Dunk-West 2011; Dunk-West & Hafford-Letchfield 2011; Dunk-West, Hafford-Letchfield & Quinney 2009). That is to say, I wanted participants to explore their sexualities through making reference to whatever experiences or categories assisted them in doing so. If I had recorded participants' sexual identity along with other variables such as age, occupation and education level, it would have immediately conveyed the fact that I, as a researcher, felt that one's sexual self could be easily categorised. On the other hand, this is a potential area of criticism of this research. It could, for example, be argued that people identifying as a minority sexual identity such as lesbian, bisexual or gay have had to engage in increased instances of reflexive thought relating to their identity because of the heteronormative (see Wittig 1992) social milieu in which they are immersed. It should be pointed out, however, that this possible discrepancy between people who were heterosexual-identifying compared with people who identified using a sexual minority identity was not something that emerged through data analysis.

The final area to consider when examining the possible limitations of this research is the

fact that data were collected in Adelaide. As noted in Chapter Two, Adelaide, as with other cities and regional centres, has a unique demographic make-up. Being one of the smaller cities in Australia, it may attract a differing population than a city such as London in the United Kingdom. Cross cultural and international research in the area of everyday sexuality would assist in providing additional information so that a rich and better-informed comparison might be made based on geographical information. This is particularly relevant given European scholars' claims of changes said to have been brought about by late modern conditions (see Bauman; 1998, 2000, 2004; Beck 1992, 1999, 2002, 1994; Beck-Gernsheim 1999; Giddens 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994; Lash 1988, 1994, 2001, 2003, 1994; Urry 2003, 2005). Whether Adelaidians are more or less articulate about sexual self-making than individuals living in a 'global' city is not known and could be an area for future research. Additionally, quantitative research using both demographic and subjective experiences and behaviours could provide further areas for future theorizing about everyday sexuality. This could take the form of secondary analyses of census data or could draw from existing national surveys into sexual behaviours, for example 'The Australian National Sex Surveys' carried out by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), which operates from La Trobe University in Melbourne. The benefits of comparing longitudinal surveys regarding sexual behaviour with empirical and theoretical work about the everyday sexual self from a sociological perspective might enable clearer theorizing about the links between identity and behaviour.

Further, this study's examination of everyday sexuality through the lens of the self opens up possibilities for replicating studies that follow its methodological and epistemological standpoints. For example, an examination of contemporary self-making

as it relates to professional life could make use of the same research design to examine the sexual self. This could, for example, extend and build upon existing sociological scholarship in the associated area of work-based identity construction in which the appreciation of the generative function of social interaction plays a part in the overall analysis of the sector (see, for example, work in the area of organizational identity by du Gay 1993, 1996, 1997, 2002).

Having considered some of the contributions and limitations of the study as they relate to participant variables, I now consider some of the broader implications and limitations of the theoretical scaffolding I have constructed in order to make sense of the data. Specifically, I explore three areas: firstly, I consider the role of reflexivity in the overall design of the research; secondly, I explore more broadly the qualitative nature of this inquiry into the everyday sexual self; and thirdly, I wish to briefly explore the role that the sexual self plays in late modernity.

As I have argued in Chapter Two, my research intended to understand participants' meaning-making processes and mechanisms through which they attempted to reflect upon and communicate their sexual selves. Thus, my aim was, to paraphrase Bauman, to 'grasp the actor's meaning' (Bauman 1996, p. 222). I have argued, therefore that the most appropriate way to gain an understanding of how individuals make sense of their sexual selves is through unstructured interviews. This type of interview is argued to have been appropriate to my research question because of its ability to allow for clarification and probing (May 1995), as well as providing a conversational space where individuals can talk about an issue, namely, sexuality, that is considered personal (Denscombe 1998).

All participants in the study reported enjoying the process of being interviewed. I use the example of Edward to illustrate this. Here, he describes how what he refers to as 'a reflective state' normally takes the form of 'lone' thinking. He told me he really enjoyed being interviewed and gained a sense of 'learning' about himself during the process. The interview was seen as an important opportunity because he reported that he does not often get the chance to articulate his thinking. He explains:

> *... I think one of the things that I was interested in doing was actually coming to this interview and thinking about it because there is not a lot of, I don't yeah, I really don't give it specific time and thought. It happens erratically through some other reactions with other people. Or, yeah, I may be reflective after I have read a particular book that's touched me in some particular way and think about how does that apply to my life, you know. But that's usually, it's a lone thing. Like, I just do it within my own head. So to do it with somebody else I think is really wonderfully, it's really useful too. Yeah. And I think, you know, we, we really don't have the opportunities to do that and we could learn so much more about ourselves and others if we did do it, you know. And maybe some of the battles we fight in our own head wouldn't be there.*
>
> Edward, male, 57 years

Such accounts hint at a broader importance to the research than one of a simple exercise whereby data are gathered and analysed. Participants all articulated a sense of enjoyment of the interview and, as evidenced in this thesis, felt that, generally, the opportunity to talk about one's sexual self was not one that was socially sanctioned.

Thus, by using unstructured interviews as a research method, I gained rich data in a way that allowed for contextual meaning (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2006, p. 205). However, one of the limitations of this approach is that it requires participants to reflect and report on their thoughts and experiences in the immediacy of the interview. This means there is

little time to formally reflect upon the subject matter. As I noted in Chapter Two, participants reported having thought about the interview prior to coming, but it is not possible to know how or whether this period of time for thinking prior to the interview would have altered the data.

The empirical work of sociologist David Gauntlett, for example, seeks rich data and contextual meaning, which he achieves through the deployment of a 'creative' research method. This involves inviting participants to construct and then comment on their identities using a self-constructed representational model using Lego™ (Gauntlett 2007). Given the theoretical and epistemological importance I have afforded self-making, sociality and agency, such an approach could be employed in future empirical work relating to the sexual self. The benefit of this type of research method in which participants build metaphorical models to represent their identities is that it provides more time for participants to reflect on the research question (Gauntlett 2007, pp. 2–3). Using creative empirical research approaches such as the metaphorical models used by Gauntlett also signals a shift away from the sole reliance upon language to convey meaning, something that may be beneficial for individuals when attempting to convey the complex interactions between varying aspects of their subjective and social experiences, and how these relate to the sexual self. Having a concrete reference point may assist in explaining intensely abstract concepts and arrangements relating to identity.

Considering the heavy reliance upon language in interviews, a visual research method may yield differing data. Thus, using data generated through 'creative' methods, such as those advanced by Gauntlett, may give further understandings of the particular ways in

which the sexual self is made through social processes in late modern life. Were such a method employed to examine how individuals make sense of their sexual selves, it could, at the very least, shed further light on the mechanisms that people use to depict their sexual selves. Popular social—and highly visual—networking sites such as Facebook potentially provide further opportunities whereby the sexual self, technology and identity construction and maintenance may be investigated empirically. Scholars have been interested in internet relationships since the advent of chat rooms and bulletin boards (see Clark 1998; Zhao *et al*. 2008, p. 1816). Also, along with the rapid rise of technological change, how the shaping of identity and subsequently the sexual self might have adapted to such change is a future area of empirical and theoretical inquiry.

We shall now consider more broadly the qualitative nature of this research into everyday sexuality along with the limitations of this approach. As a researcher, one can put in place methodological frameworks in order to facilitate a space whereby participants are encouraged to engage in the research process. However, the role of the researcher is one bound up with notions of responsibility when seeking to understand diverse stories and narratives, or to share in frames of reference. This is because understanding involves not only listening—active listening and engaging with participants—but providing a fair representation of data in relation to existing theories. Thus, incorporating the themes from the data with sociological literature involves putting the two together and gauging resonations. My role, as the researcher in this process, remains central (as argued by Schutz 1954, p. 493) throughout the design, implementation and analysis phases of the research. Additionally, throughout these processes, my role involved being clear about, and faithful to, my epistemological and methodological approach (Diamond 2006). As noted, although I have married stories

from the everyday and helped to make sense of these by critically interrogating the scholarly literature, I do not claim that my research follows the positivistic notion of being 'generalizable'. Instead, I argue that in seeking to understand everyday sexuality, I have consulted with a number of individuals who have explored with me how they make their sexual selves. I have sought to understand the sense-making mechanisms in which these individuals have engaged that relate to their sexual selves, and framed these within the interactionist tradition set by George Herbert Mead to provide a theoretical explanation for my findings.

Earlier in this chapter, I made reference to the ARCSHS who undertake a number of studies into sexuality. These include research projects in which survey data are collected and analysed along with other projects such as longitudinal studies. The 'Sex in Australia Survey', for example, recruited almost 20,000 participants who were interviewed on the telephone about a range of issues relating to sexuality, including sexual behaviour, attitudes and relationships. Applying statistical weighting using Census data, the results are generalizable to the general population (Harvey *et al.* 2003 p. 143), in contrast to my study. These sorts of empirical investigations provide opportunities for gaining further information, both contextual and specific to the sexual self. Adding questions to survey instruments regarding the sexual self is an example of how a broader context for this study could be created. As I have stated previously, basing an analysis of the sexual self in late modern social life on Mead's theory of sociality has limitations, including the lack of weight given to inequality, an issue about which I have discussed the specific implications in Chapter Five in particular, and throughout the thesis in general.

Chapter Summary

This final chapter has provided an overarching synthesis of the key arguments made throughout this thesis. The overall finding of this study is that the sexual self in late modernity is 'made' through social processes. Data from this study clearly showed that it was the interactions in social life that enabled participants to make their sexual selves. Specific life events, such as travel and work, which demonstrated these constitutive processes, were recalled during the interviews. Data were analysed for emergent themes and these themes have been systematically examined throughout the thesis in relation to relevant literature.

The constraints to sexual self-making have been examined throughout this thesis. I have argued that the constitution of the sexual self needs to be understood as occurring in a landscape characterised by contradictory discourses, material inequalities and social injustices. Sexual scripting theory applied to Meadian self-making helps to better account for this. The notion of play is similarly useful to understanding sexual self-making in that its application to Meadian sociality explains data from this study in which participants described engaging in new forms of social interaction and self-making. The everyday life worlds of participants has been analysed in relation to relevant literature throughout this thesis. In addition, the meaning of day-to-day life was examined through understanding how routine action was differentiated from events that interrupted the flow of everyday life. Travel and illness were examples of this and I argued that these could be seen as both routine and out of the ordinary. Relationships with others are central to sexual self-making and participants' key life events involving significant others were demonstrated to have prompted rapid change and new opportunities for sexual self-making. This accorded particular relationships as being of

greater relevance to sexual self-making than other interactions in social life.

This chapter has outlined the key limitations of this study and noted the need for more empirical work in the area of the everyday sexual self in late modernity. Thus I have made suggestions for potential areas for future research and demonstrated the ways in which this research provides a modest addition to the interactionist tradition within which the sexual self is theorised.

George Herbert Mead's scholarship relating to the self provides a clear foundation upon which the data from this empirical project may be better understood and theorised. Participants noted the importance of experiences gained through engagement in work, travel and significant relationships as central to their sexual self-making. To understand the everyday sexual self in late modernity requires the use of Mead's theory of social exchange as constitutive of the self and applied to late modern social life through: the extension of sociality to include 'technological' interactions; the extension of Meadian understandings of play into adulthood and intimate relationships; the application of sexual scripting theory to understand inequality and to understand biography though interactionist conceptions of temporality and spatiality.

Appendices

Appendix A: Information Sheet for Participants

INFORMATION SHEET

PhD Project:
"The Reflexive Sexual Self: An Exploration into Everyday Sexuality"

This project aims to examine how individuals describe and make sense of their sexuality. Sexuality is defined as comprising one's sexual values, behaviours and beliefs. The research project requires interviewees who regard their sexuality as non-problematic and who are willing to be interviewed about their sexuality.

Research aims for the project are to:

- explore the various meanings individuals have about their lived experience of their sexuality;
- empirically document how people have been able to gain positive understandings about their sexuality;
- investigate the multiple and shared ways in which various types of sexuality are described and reflected upon.

If you are aged between thirty (30) and sixty-five (65) years of age and are interested in being interviewed for the project, please contact the researcher, Priscilla Dunk on 8201 2275 or priscilla.dunk@flinders.edu.au. Priscilla will discuss the project with you and, if appropriate, arrange a time and location for the interview.

Appendix B: Consent Form for Research Participants

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
(by interview)

I ….....

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate, as requested in the introductory letter, in the research project "The Reflexive Sexual Self: An Exploration into Everyday Sexuality". I have read the information provided.

1. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
2. I agree to my information and participation being recorded on tape/videotape
3. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
4. I understand that:
   - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
   - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
   - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
   - I may withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage.
   - I may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
5. I agree/do not agree* to the tape/transcript* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed. ** delete as appropriate*

Participant's signature……Date……...

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name Priscilla Dunk

Researcher's signature……..Date…….

6. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature……Date……...

Appendix C: Letter of Introduction for Potential Research Participants

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear

This letter is to introduce Priscilla Dunk who is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Flinders University. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Priscilla is conducting research for her PhD thesis under my supervision. Her research addresses the subject of "The Reflexive Sexual Self: an exploration into everyday sexuality". Her thesis aims to explore how people describe and make sense of their sexuality. Sexuality is defined as comprising of one's sexual values, behaviours and beliefs. The purpose of this letter is to ask you whether you would be interested in participating in this study.

We would be most grateful if you were prepared to volunteer to assist in this project, by granting an interview. The interview would enable you to talk about how you describe and regard your sexuality. No more than one to two hours on one occasion would be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are also entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time.

Since Priscilla intends to make a tape recording of the interview, she will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on (+61 8) 8201 3538, fax (+61 8) 8201 3521 or e-mail anthony.elliott@flinders.edu.au.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. The Secretary of this Committee can be contacted on 8201 5962, fax 8201 2035, e-mail sandy.huxtable@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anthony Elliott
Chair in Sociology
Department of Sociology

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Interview Guide/ Themes to Cover in Interview

- Brief biographical information: gender, age, education, occupation/field
- How do they describe/define their sexuality?
- What has helped them to see it in this way?
- Has their sexuality changed over time?
- Views about social conceptions/expectations of 'sexuality' compared with their own?
- Relationship of sexual identity to other elements of self? (e.g. other identities such as parent; embodied experiences, e.g. health, age, gender)
- Sexuality and relationship status?
- What helps to counter negative messages about sexuality?

Appendix E: Ethics Application

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY ADELAIDE • AUSTRALIA
Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee*

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF SOCIAL OR BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

*Research that is clinical in nature or that involves staff or patients of the Flinders Medical Centre is subject to approval by the Joint Flinders Clinical Research Ethics Committee, the Secretary of which may be contacted at 8204 4507.

Instructions for Applicants

1. Before completing this application, you should refer to the statement of Ethical Guidelines for Social and Behavioural Research, which is available from the website (http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/office/ethics/index.html/) or the SBREC Secretary, Office of Research (8201 5962). In particular, researchers should be mindful of Ch.1, *Principles of Ethical Conduct*, that are intended to apply to the interpretation and the use of all other parts of the Statement.
2. This application form and any supporting documentation must be completed electronically or typewritten. As the application kit may be periodically revised, please check that you are using the most current versions of this form and the associated templates – letter of introduction, consent forms etc., which are available electronically from the University's website or by e-mail from the Secretary.
3. As this form is designed for electronic completion, the space indicated for each question on the hard copy version does NOT necessarily indicate the suggested length of responses. Please ensure that an appropriate response is made to each item – do not leave any item blank.
4. Applications from student researchers that have not been signed by the responsible staff member will not be considered.
5. Roughly amended versions of templates provided in the application kit will not be accepted. The Committee will only consider applications that include the version of letters and consent forms that will actually be forwarded to participants. In the case of the Letter of Introduction, this should include the signature of the Supervisor/researcher and an appropriate University letterhead.
6. Researchers and SUPERVISORS, in the case of student projects, are asked to carefully check the entire application for errors, especially clumsy expression and spelling errors contained in Letters, Information Statements, Questionnaires and Consent Forms that will be sent to participants. It is not the Committee's role to correct errors of this kind, yet the Committee is mindful that research participants should receive documents that are informative, clear and properly written. Applications containing significant errors will be returned for editing and re-submission.
7. If it is necessary to arrange translations of material, it is the responsibility of the researcher and/or Supervisor to ensure that the translations accurately reflect the English version translations approved by the Committee.
8. The Committee does not wish to receive copies of lengthy research proposals and lists of references, or documents prepared for other Ethics Committees, with the instruction 'see attached'. If you do not complete the form electronically and respond to questions with 'see attachment', please use the numeric codes and headings present in the application form and give page and paragraph references where the specific information can be found in the attachments.
9. The Committee's concerns are specific to the duties of researchers to their participants, and to other persons that may be affected by the research. It is those matters that must be addressed by researchers in completing the form and accompanying documents prepared for forwarding to participants. It should be borne in mind that details of procedures and researcher activities, which may not necessarily be important to research design, could be significant from the viewpoint of the Research Ethics Committee.

10. Researchers with questions about these or other matters related to preparing applications for ethical approval are invited to contact the Secretary of the Committee or the Chairperson, A/Prof Phillip Slee, telephone 8201 3243.
11. Please forward ONE copy of the completed application and attachments, single sided and fastened with clips, not staples, to the Committee Secretary, Sandy Huxtable, Room 105, Registry Building, to arrive no later than 14 days prior to the meeting. Applications received after the closing date will be held over to the following meeting.

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY ADELAIDE • AUSTRALIA **Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee**	**Office Use Only** **Project Number:**

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS INTENDING TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS.

If you are intending to conduct research in a South Australian school you are required to have undergone a Police check and have been cleared for entry into schools. A set of procedures has been agreed between the University, the Department of Education and Children's Services, Catholic Education Office and Independent Schools Board. For specific information about these procedures please refer to the following web page:
http://www.flinders.edu.au/about/police.html

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) has directed that Flinders' Human Research Ethics Committees obtain confirmation from researchers who intend to undertake research activities in SA schools that current Police clearances are in place before the application is considered by the Committee. Accordingly, if your application involves activities in a South Australian school, please complete and sign the certification below.

Does your proposed research involve you, or any member of your research team, in undertaking any activities with SA schools?

Yes		No	X

If Yes, please confirm by ticking the following box that you, and/or any member(s) of the research team who will be conducting these activities in schools, have applied for and been notified that you and/or they have cleared a police check, and that this clearance is current for the life of the proposed study.

Yes I, and/or all personnel on this project who will be conducting these activities in schools, have a current Police clearance.	

Signed…….. Date……

PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE A COPY OF YOUR CLEARANCE

NB: ***If you have*** *ticked 'Yes' in the first box and not in the second, your*

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY ADELAIDE • AUSTRALIA Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee	Office Use Only Project Number:

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF SOCIAL OR BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

RESEARCHER INFORMATION

A1. Name(s): ***List principal researcher first (Title, first name, last name)***	**Status: eg** ***(Staff, Student, Associate)***	**School / Department / Organisation**
Ms Priscilla Dunk	student	Department of Sociology

A2. Students Only:

Student Record Number (SRN)	**Supervisor(s)**	**Supervisor's School / Department / Organisation**
900703	Professor Anthony Elliott	Department of Sociology
Degree enrolled for		
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)		

A3. Contact Details: Researchers, Associates, Supervisors

Name	**Daytime phone number**	**Fax**	**Email**
Ms Priscilla Dunk	0422 792 428	8232 8476	Priscilla.dunk@flinders.edu.au
	Postal Address:	Department of Sociology Flinders University GPO Box 2100 Adelaide 5001 Australia	
Name	**Daytime phone number**	**Fax**	**Email**
Prof Anthony Elliott	8201 3538	8201 3521	Anthony.elliott@flinders.edu.au
	Postal Address:	Department of Sociology Flinders University GPO Box 2100 Adelaide 5001 Australia	

PROJECT TITLE & TIMEFRAME

B1. Project Working Title: The Reflexive Sexual Self: an exploration into everyday sexuality.

B2. Plain language, or lay, title: This thesis examines how individual actors describe and make sense of their sexuality. Sexuality is defined as comprising of one's sexual values, behaviours and beliefs. Using interview data, everyday sexuality is compared with a range of theoretical debates about the self in post modernity.

B3. Period for which approval is sought. ***Note that approval is valid for a maximum of 3 years.***

Date data collection is to commence: 1 April 2007

Date data collection is expected to be completed: April 2008

Date project is expected to be completed: July 2009

C. PROJECT DETAILS

C1. Brief Outline of (**a) project; (b) significance; (c) your research objectives.**

a) In-depth interviews will be conducted with men and women aged between thirty (30) to sixty five (65) years to examine how everyday people construct their sexual self. The empirical component to the thesis will serve to investigate individual, everyday, constructions of non-problematic sexuality.

Non problematic sexuality means sexuality that is sanctioned by society and legislation as being non harmful to others and the self. Examples of sexual identities that fit with this definition include people who define themselves as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, 'queer' and transgender.

b) Historically sexuality research has focused on medicalised and/or deviant sexualities. By contrast, this thesis examines everyday people's understandings of their sexuality. Grounded in the social sciences and informed using narrative and feminist methodologies it seeks to uncover neglected dimensions of the private sphere.

Theories about sexuality have tended start at the macro level. For example, it has been argued that shifts in the globalised marketplace inform the nature and duration of intimate relationships. One of the problems with this perspective is that it downplays agency and social diversity. This research will instead use individual narratives to build a multidimensional understanding of sexuality in contemporary society.

This research thesis also provides a platform whereby the link between theories of sexuality and everyday narratives about sexuality can be established.

c) Research objectives are to:

- Explore the various meanings individuals have about their lived experience of their sexuality
- Empirically document how people have been able to gain positive understandings about their sexuality
- Investigate the multiple and shared ways in which various types of sexuality are described reflected upon

C2. Medical or health research involving the ***Privacy Act 1988*** **(s95 and s95A Guidelines)**

Is your research related to medical or health matters? *No*

If you answered 'No', please go to item C4.

If, 'Yes',

(a) Will personal information be sought from the records of a **Commonwealth Agency?** No

If Yes, please also complete Part A of the Appendix 'Privacy legislation matters' that relates to compliance with the Guidelines under Section 95 of the Privacy Act 1988.

(b) Will health information be sought from a **Private Sector Organisation or a health service provider funded by the SA Department of Health**? No

If Yes, please also complete Part B of the Appendix 'Privacy legislation matters' that relates to compliance with the Guidelines approved under Section 95A of the Privacy Act 1988.

The Appendix 'Privacy legislation matters' is available from the SBREC web page, www.flinders.edu.au/research/office/ethics/socialbehavioural.html

If you answered 'No' to both (a) and (b) please continue to C3…

C3. Does your project comprise **<u>health</u> research involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples**? If so, please read the NHMRC *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*, available from the NHMRC web site www.nhmrc.gov.au

N/A

C4. **Data** *Please tick more than one box if appropriate*

Are data to be obtained primarily quantitative ☐ qualitative ☑
(please tick)

Is information to be sought by questionnaire ☐ interview ☑
experiment ☐ computer ☐
focus group ☐ other (please state) ……..

Will participants be video- or tape-recorded? Yes video ☐ tape ☑

C5. Outline of the **research method**, including what participants will be asked to do.

In depth, face-to-face interviews will be conducted by myself in Adelaide with selected individuals aged between thirty (30) years and sixty-five (65) years of age.

It is hypothesised that approximately 30 interviews will need to be undertaken. Feminist and narrative methodologies privilege small numbers of individual, rich descriptions of lived experiences over larger samples as found in positivist research design. The number of interviews is also consistent with the thesis's aim to examine sexuality amongst a wide number of ordinary, everyday citizens. Whilst this broad sample will encompass differences in terms of age, gender, social status and cultural background, it is not intended to be representative.

All interviewees will be assigned a pseudonym at the face-to-face interview. The interviews will be audio-tape recorded, with the permission of the informant, and transcribed in full. The desire for the complete account of the recording reflects the constructionist interview approach where responses, even those that are designed to elicit simple factual details, are thought of as rich and symbolic discourse. The principal themes within the interviews will be initially identified through immersion in the transcripts. The interviews will then be coded along these themes and then again examined in depth, following Strauss and Corbin (1990), by a process of examination, comparison, conceptualisation and categorisation.

The interviews will be conducted in mutually agreed upon locations such as an office at Flinders University. Informants will be sourced using snowball sampling, which is a well documented research method for 'sensitive' research about the private sphere (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). Snowballing will enable potential research subjects to be contacted through word of mouth. Research subjects will not include people who are within my immediate social network (that is, people considered as friends) or family. People who make contact with me will be told about the project and will be screened for suitability as well as given an information sheet about the project.

Research subjects will have given permission and been made fully aware of the project. In the interviews all informants will remain anonymous and will not be asked questions relating to or that will reveal or record their personal identity.

C6. Briefly describe how the information requested from participants **addresses research objectives**.

In depth interviews will be conducted to elicit responses that address the research objectives which include exploring the various meanings individuals have about their lived experience of their sexuality and how they have been able to gain positive understandings about their sexuality. Data will then be utilised to investigate the multiple and shared ways in which various types of sexuality are described reflected upon.

D. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

If the research involves or impacts upon indigenous Australians, staff of Yunggorendi must be consulted and their written advice about the appropriateness of the project in relation to ethical principles for research involving or impacting upon indigenous Australians must be included with this application.

D1. (a) **Who** are the participants? What is the **basis for their recruitment** to the study?

Participants are men and women aged between thirty (30) and sixty five (65) years of age who encompass the following sexual identities: heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer. This list is not exhaustive however and it is acknowledged that other sexual identity categories are emerging (for example, the label 'fluid', which includes people who believe that sexual attraction to each gender changes in intensity throughout life). Though it is argued in some spheres that paedophilia is a 'sexuality', this research does not accept that position and will not include any participants who engage in harmful sexual activities. Participants must not identify with any potential or actual harmful sexual activity or ideation.

(b) **How many** people will be approached? Please specify number (or an approximation if exact number is unknown) and the size of the population pool from which participants will be drawn.

It is hypothesised that approximately 30 interviews will need to be undertaken.

(c) From what **source**?

Personal and professional networks will be utilised to contact potential participants for the study who meet study requirements.

(d) What (if any) is the **researcher's role** with, or relation to, the source organisation? Comment on potential for conflict of interest.

There is no potential for conflict in the selection of the participants as I will not have any personal or professional relationship with those selected as participants.

(e) If **under 18** years, what is the age range? Has the information been presented in a manner and format appropriate to the age group of participants?

There are no participants under 18 years of age and all information has been presented in an easy to read and understandable format.

(f) Do participants have the **ability to give informed consent**?

Yes. Participants will be advised that the information will be used in my PhD thesis and have the opportunity to advise me of how they want the information to be used. Participants can also withdraw permission to contribute to the study at any time before or during the interview. They can also contact me after interview to discuss concerns, and may also withdraw consent at this stage.

D2. Indicate whether the participant group comprises a specific **cultural / religious background**, for example Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, Indonesian, Catholic, Muslim etc…, or, if any such categories are likely to form a significant proportion of the population to be sampled. If the answer is yes and the group/sub-group is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, **a copy of this application must be submitted to the Director of Yunggorendi for advice and comment.**

The participant group does not comprise of any specific cultural or religious groups.

D3. Are there particular issues with **language**? Do the forms or information need to be presented in a language other than English? If so, how will this be managed? If people other than the researcher will be involved in translating participants' responses, how will anonymity / confidentiality matters be managed?

There are no language issues as all those to be contacted are known to speak English. No interpretation needs to be given and participants can contact me at any stage with queries.

D4. How are participants to be **contacted and recruited**? *If by advertisement, please provide a copy of the ad. If contact is made through an organisation, the Committee expects that the organisation will not provide researchers with contact details of potential participants. The organisation may make the initial approach and invite potential participants to contact the researcher.*

Participants will be contacted via email and word of mouth.

D5. What **information** will be given **to participants**? *Refer to statement of Guidelines and suggested templates for introduction letter, consent forms etc. included in the application kit. Copies of relevant documents, questionnaires or list of interview questions, if applicable, must be attached. The objectives of the research and information about any relevant procedures, expected time commitment etc. should be clearly stated for participants in language suitable for the lay person.*

Participants will be provided with an introductory letter from my supervisor, an introductory letter from myself, a consent form and the information sheet, all attached to this application.

D6. Indicate **confidentiality and anonymity assurances** to be given and procedures for obtaining the free and informed consent of participants. *Refer to Guidelines and suggested templates for introduction letter, consent forms etc. included in the application kit. Copies of relevant documents must be attached. If anonymity is not able to be guaranteed due to the nature of the participant group, or because a participant may be identifiable in relation to their professional capacity or association with an organisation, there should be a clear statement to this effect for the participant.*

Participants are informed via the Letter of Introduction that no information that identifies an individual will be published in my thesis and that the confidentiality of any information provided by them will be respected. All interview transcripts will be securely retained and will not be made available for general view. Participants can withdraw from the study prior to, during, or after the interview.

Informed consent will be achieved by clearly stating that participation is voluntary, and by having potential participants take the initiative in contacting the researcher. Consent will be informed, because the Letter of Introduction and Consent Form state the purpose of the research, the requirements of participation and the right to refrain from to participation if they wish. Consent for interview will be gained in the form of a consent form (attached). This will be emailed or given prior to interview and the completed form collected at the time of the face-to-face interview. I will undertake initial conversations with potential participants and if any cause for concern emerges about the suitability of the participant for the project, or their ability to provide informed consent, the interview will not take place. Examples of reasons for concern include diminished ability to give consent, including severe psychiatric illness or diminished cognitive functioning (such as dementia). Having worked for a number of years as a statutory social worker, I am familiar with making such assessments in relation to the ability of individuals to give informed consent.

D7. Indicate any **permissions** required from or involvement of other people (employers, school principals, teachers, parents, guardians, carers, etc.) and attach letters or other relevant documentation as applicable. There are no other permissions that need to be gained. Potential participants will be functioning adults.
D8. Indicate any involvement of **incidental people** (eg in certain professional observation studies you might need to consider how you will inform such people about the research and gain their consent for their incidental involvement. An oral statement to the group incidental to the observation immediately prior to the commencement of the observation may be sufficient). There will be no known incidental people involved.
D9. Indicate the expected **time commitment** by participants, and proposed location, if being interviewed or required to complete a survey (include this information in the Letter of Introduction to participants) The duration of interviews is estimated to be approximately one to two hours and at a mutually agreed location in Adelaide, eg an interview room at Flinders or the participant's office.

E. SPECIFIC ETHICAL MATTERS

E1. Outline the **value and benefits** of the project (eg to the participants, your discipline, the community etc…)

It is anticipated that in contributing their stories, participants will feel positive about the experience as the process whereby participants are able to be reflective and descriptive in telling their stories is potentially powerful.

Sexuality within the social sciences, particularly from a non-dysfunctional, 'ordinary' standpoint is an under researched area. This research is therefore important as it will provide new information and analysis in this neglected area of scholarly research. In addition, it will also serve to highlight any potential for further research in related areas.

E2. Notwithstanding the value and benefits of the project, outline any **burdens and/or risks** of the project to your research participants and/or other people (eg issues of legal or moral responsibility; conflicts of interest; cultural sensitivities; power differentials; invasion of privacy; physical/mental stress; possible embarrassment).

It is not anticipated that there will be any adverse effects on the participants as a result of the interview.

It is estimated that one in three women and one in four men are survivors of sexual abuse. Whilst it is acknowledged that self-reference to this may occur during the interview, it is not something that would, of itself, be necessarily be traumatic for the participant. One of the ways in which potential research subjects will be screened for suitability will be that they need to identify as having a 'non problematic sexuality'. This infers that any issues with their sexuality have been resolved. Feminist stances about sexual abuse see the abuse as a misuse of power rather than a sexual act and this is my position as a researcher also.

Participants will be told about the study through word of mouth and the documentation outlining the project. They will contact me to express an interest in participating, thus, they have control over participation. Throughout the interview, they are able to cease participation and withdraw consent at any stage.

E3. If any issues are raised in item E2, detail how the researcher will respond to such risks. If deemed necessary, researchers should be prepared to offer encouragement, advice and information about appropriate professional counselling that is available and/or to encourage participants to report negative experiences to appropriate authorities. *If it is envisaged that professional counselling may be recommended, please nominate specific services.*

I will respond to signs of distress or embarrassment by checking with the participant and assessing their level of wellbeing. At the first sign of distress, the interview would be terminated and I would provide information to the participant about professional counselling services. The following agencies provide government funded, professional, free counselling:

- Lifeline (24 hours)
- Community Health Centres (various locations throughout Adelaide)
- Respond SA (sexual abuse counselling)

E4. Describe any **feedback or debriefing** to be provided to participants that may be relevant to the research.

Participants will be thanked for their participation at the end of the interview. I will also ask them for any feedback.

E5. If participants are required to complete a **questionnaire**, indicate the arrangements for ensuring the secure and confidential return of the questionnaire to the researcher (eg sealable, addressed envelope; personal collection by the researcher; other). Also indicate how participants will be informed of the arrangement (eg verbal instruction; written instruction in Letter of Introduction or at the end of the questionnaire; other). If information is to be provided via electronic or web-based technology, participants should be reminded in the written documentation and in on-line material that this is not a secure medium.

N/A

E6. Indicate any relevant **data transcription** issues. *If interview tapes are to be transcribed by persons other than the researcher, an assurance that such persons will be subject to the same requirements to respect and maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the participant should be included in the Letter of Introduction to the participant.*

The interviews will be audio-tape recorded and transcribed with the permission of the participants. The transcription will be undertaken by the researcher (myself). Confidentiality will be maintained and at the interview, participants will be assigned a pseudonym. The tape recordings and transcripts of the interview when not in the direct possession of the researcher will be kept in a secure locked space.

E7. Indicate any issues of **participant control of data use** (a) in the immediate reporting, and (b) in future use of the data; eg will participants have an opportunity to view transcripts of their interview and/or the final report for comment/amendment?

If anyone has questions about the use of the information, these will be addressed before submission of the thesis. Due to the need to provide anonymity to participants only a limited amount of feedback will be given. Informants will be given the option, by either providing the researcher with contact details or by getting in touch with the researcher's institution, to proof transcripts of their interview responses and be provided with copies of publications to emerge from the research.

E8. DATA STORAGE AND RETENTION

Note that data should be retained in accordance with the Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (available at the website http://www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/research/general/nhmrcavc.htm) which indicates storage of data in the department or research unit where it originated for at least 5 years after publication (15 years may be appropriate for clinical research).

Please tick all boxes that apply to your research.

On completion of the project, data will be stored:

In writing Y On computer disk Y

On audio tape N On video tape N

Other (please indicate) **All information will be stored on CD**.

Data will be stored in a de-identified form Yes

If ***No***, explain (a) why and (b) how anonymity and confidentiality of participants will be ensured

Original questionnaires will be de-identified and will not be made available to anyone other than my Supervisors in order to protect the identities of the participants. Summaries of the results will be stored at the university and by myself both in written form and on CD.

Data will be stored in the Department/School of Flinders University Yes

Data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years. Yes

If you have not answered ***Yes*** to both the above two questions, please clarify …

F. REMAINING MATTERS

F1. Indicate any other centres involved in the research and **other Ethics Committee(s)** being approached for approval of this project (if applicable), including the approval status at each. You must forward details of any amendments required by other Ethics Committees and copies of final approval letters received.

None

F2. Indicate amounts and sources/potential sources of **funding** for the research. You must also declare any affiliation or financial interest.

There are no sources of finance for this research. Any costs incurred will be covered through personal funds.

F3. Identification Card Requirements for Research Assistants.

Indicate how many accredited interviewer cards will be required for this project (additional to current student or staff identification cards):

Number = 0

Note that enrolled students of the University should use their student identity cards supported by a Letter of Introduction from the responsible staff member/supervisor.

F4. Document Checklist.
Copies of the following supporting documents, if applicable, must be attached to this application. Some sample template documents are included in the application kit. *Please mark the relevant circle*.

	Attached	Not applicable
Letter of Introduction on University letterhead from the staff member (from the Supervisor in the case of undergraduate and postgraduate research projects)	O	
Questionnaire or survey instruments		O
List of interview questions or description of topics/issues to be discussed, as appropriate		O
Information sheets for participants at any stage of the project		O
Consent Form(s) for Participation in Research – by Interview	O	
– by Focus Group		O
– by Experiment		O
– other		O
Consent Form for Observation of Professional Activity		O
Advice from Yunggorendi for research involving or impacting upon indigenous Australians		O
Advertisement for recruitment of participants		O
Debriefing material		O
Appendix: Privacy legislation matters		O

F5. Research involving or impacting on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples: N/A

	Yes	No
Has a copy of this application been forwarded to the Director of Yunggorendi?		O

G. CERTIFICATION & SIGNATURES

The Researcher and Supervisor whose signatures appear below certify that they have read *the Ethical Guidelines for Social and Behavioural Research*, and guidelines of any other relevant authority referred to therein, and accept responsibility for the conduct of this research in respect of those guidelines and any other conditions specified by the University's Ethics Committees.

As a condition of subsequent approval of this protocol, I/we, whose signature(s) appear(s) below, undertake to

(i) inform the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, giving reasons, if the research project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

(ii) report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval of the protocol, including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;
- proposed changes in the protocol; and
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

(iii) provide progress reports, annually, and/or a final report on completion of the study outlining

- progress to date, or outcome in the case of completed research;
- maintenance and security of data;
- compliance with approved protocol; and
- compliance with any conditions of approval.

Principal Researcher's **Signature:**		**Date:**
Supervisor's Signature: *(for undergraduate and postgraduate student projects)*		**Date:**

GPO Box 2100
Adelaide 5001 Australia

Telephone: (+61 8) 8201 3538
Fax: (+61 8) 8201 3521
Email: anthony.elliott@flinders.edu.au

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Name

This letter is to introduce Priscilla Dunk who is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Flinders University. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Priscilla is conducting research for her PhD thesis under my supervision. Her research addresses the subject of "The Reflexive Sexual Self: an exploration into everyday sexuality". Her thesis aims to explore how people describe and make sense of their sexuality. Sexuality is defined as comprising of one's sexual values, behaviours and beliefs. The purpose of this letter is to ask you whether you would be interested in participating in this study.

We would be most grateful if you were prepared to volunteer to assist in this project, by granting an interview. The interview would enable you to talk about how you describe and regard your sexuality. No more than one to two hours on one occasion would be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are also entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time.

Since Priscilla intends to make a tape recording of the interview, she will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on (+61 8) 8201 3538, fax (+61 8) 8201 3521 or e-mail anthony.elliott@flinders.edu.au.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. The Secretary of this Committee can be contacted on 8201 5962, fax 8201 2035, e-mail sandy.huxtable@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anthony Elliott
Chair in Sociology
Department of Sociology

INFORMATION SHEET

PhD Project:
"The Reflexive Sexual Self: An Exploration into Everyday Sexuality"

This project aims to examine how individuals describe and make sense of their sexuality. Sexuality is defined as comprising one's sexual values, behaviours and beliefs. The research project requires interviewees who regard their sexuality as non-problemmatic and who are willing to be interviewed about their sexuality.

Research aims for the project are to:

- explore the various meanings individuals have about their lived experience of their sexuality;
- empirically document how people have been able to gain positive understandings about their sexuality;
- investigate the multiple and shared ways in which various types of sexuality are described and reflected upon.

If you are aged between thirty (30) and sixty-five (65) years of age and are interested in being interviewed for the project, please contact the researcher, Priscilla Dunk on 8201 2598 or priscilla.dunk@flinders.edu.au. Priscilla will discuss the project with you and, if appropriate, arrange a time and location for the interview.

OPENING EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear NAME

My name is Priscilla Dunk and I am a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Flinders University in South Australia. I am currently researching how people describe and make sense of their sexuality and would appreciate it if you could assist me by participating in an interview.

Please find attached four documents:

- *a Letter of Introduction from my Supervisor;*
- *an information sheet outlining the project;*
- *a consent form for a subsequent interview.*

If you have any questions please contact me on priscilla.dunk@flinders.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Priscilla Dunk

PhD candidate

Department of Sociology

Flinders University

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
(by interview)

I ….....

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate, as requested in the introductory letter, in the research project "The Reflexive Sexual Self: An Exploration into Everyday Sexuality". I have read the information provided.

7. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
8. I agree to my information and participation being recorded on tape/videotape
9. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
10. I understand that:
    - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
    - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
    - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
    - I may withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage.
    - I may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
11. I agree/do not agree* to the tape/transcript* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed. ** delete as appropriate*

Participant's signature……Date……...

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name Priscilla Dunk

Researcher's signature……..Date…….

12. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature……Date……...

29 March 2007

Sandy Huxtable
Secretary
Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee
Office of Research
Flinders University

Dear Ms Huxtable,

Project 3790 The Reflexive Sexual Self: an exploration into everyday sexuality

Thank you for your letter dated 27 March 2007 (ref SBRE 3790) where you wrote to advise that I had been given conditional approval for my PhD research project. Please find my responses which provide clarification, as requested, below:

(i) Explanation of how potential participants will be 'screened for suitability' (item C5) and (ii) Clarification of where participants are from, where sampling begins and how email addresses are obtained (item D1)

Potential participants will hear about the project through a snowballing method. I will tell friends and colleagues about the project. I will ask such people to use their own networks to contact people (ie friends/ colleagues of theirs) and if those people are interested in participating, I will provide them with written information about the project. I will do this either in person or via email. The written information will include the Letter of Introduction, the Information Sheet, the Opening Email to Potential Participants and a Consent form for a Subsequent Interview (these documents were attached to my original submission to the committee). Because potential participants will contact me after hearing about the project, it is an 'opt in' approach therefore they will provide their email address and contact details to me.

I will then discuss with the potential participant their suitability for interview based on the following criteria:

- Participants need to be aged between 30-65 years of age.
- They must be willing and able to give informed consent to be interviewed.
- They must 'have' a non-problematic sexuality. That is, they must not engage in harmful sexual activities or identify with any potential or actual harmful sexual activity.

(iii) Consideration of the final sentence in the second paragraph of the response to item E2 as participants may have a different view to that of the researcher and wish to talk about sexual abuse

Having worked as a sexual health counsellor for a number of years, I concur that people make sense of sexual abuse in many different ways. My reason for noting feminist stances about sexual abuse was to propose, firstly that it is not necessarily the case that if a survivor of sexual abuse is talking about their sexuality that they will connect the abuse with their sexuality nor that they would necessarily become upset if they make reference to the abuse. It may be the case that participants will, in fact, make reference to sexual abuse. I am clear however that my role is as a researcher and in the unlikely event that a participant were to become distressed, I would refer them to an appropriate counselling service.

(iv) Replacement of the words 'individual actors' with 'individuals' in the first line of the information sheet

This has been undertaken.

(v) Provision of a list of questions/ topics being addressed in the interviews

Because the purpose of the research is to elicit people's stories or narratives about their sexuality, there are no formal, standardized questions as such. I will ask questions of clarification as they emerge, however it is planned that questions along the lines of the following will feature at the beginning of the interview:
How might you describe your sexuality?
What has helped you see your sexuality in this way?

This approach enables participants' narratives to emerge, and is in line with constructionist research epistemologies.

(vi) Confirmation that data will be de-identified before storage (item E8)

Data will be de-identified before storage. Participants will be given a pseudonym at interview (prior to being recorded).

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. I am happy to elaborate on any of the above if you require additional clarification and I look forward to hearing from you.

Priscilla Dunk
PhD candidate
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
Flinders University

Cc: Professor Anthony Elliott, Department of Sociology

Appendix F: Published Work during Candidature 2006–2011

LEAKER, M. & DUNK-WEST, P. (2011) 'Sociocultural risk and female Street-based sex workers: Reporting on a qualitative study', *Sociological Research Online*, 16(4) <socresonline.org.uk/16/4/9.html>

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