CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUALIZING SEXUALITY: FROM KINSEY TO QUEER AND BEYOND

The explicit sociological theorizing of sexuality has a relatively short history, dating back to the late 1960s. It is not that sociologists had nothing to say about sexuality before that time: there had been some attention to the social ordering of sexual relations and a few empirical studies of sexual behaviour. Sexuality itself, however, was rarely questioned; indeed, it was treated largely as a given, something that could be regulated by social institutions and conventions, but was itself a pre-social fact. Radical stances on sexuality, which challenged prevailing cultural mores, tended to pose that challenge in terms of freeing our supposedly natural sexuality from socially imposed repression. Many sexual radicals framed their arguments in terms of the one coherent body of ideas that did exist: psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalysis not only had a presence within academic circles, but also impacted on commonsense thinking. Concepts such as repression, sexual drives and the libido filtered into everyday language, and continue to reinforce the taken-for-granted assumption that sexuality is a natural force, albeit one constrained by social norms. Sociological theorizing, therefore, had to contend with the influence of psychoanalysis.

Rethinking sexuality as a social rather than a natural or psychological phenomenon emerged in the 1960s from social constructionist perspectives with their roots in phenomenological and interactionist sociology. One focus here was the sociology of deviance, where a generation of scholars began to question the ways in which the boundaries between deviant and conforming behaviour were drawn. Once illicit and dissident forms of sexuality were understood as a matter of social definition, it was but a short step to thinking of sexuality itself as socially constructed. The first fully developed theory of the social construction of sexuality, from John Gagnon and William Simon ([1973] 1974), shared this interactionist
orientation, but was concerned with ordinary everyday sexuality rather than the deviant or the transgressive.

The confluence of these new ideas with the emergent feminist and gay movements in the West created a climate in which social theories of sexuality became politically significant. The idea that sexuality was socially constructed undercut much of the ideology that legitimized women's subordination and defined homosexuality as illness or perversion. Many of the younger scholars who began to develop the sociology of sexuality in the 1970s – ourselves included – aligned themselves with these social movements. The radicalization of approaches to sexuality created a climate in which new theories could flourish and, over the succeeding decades, a number of competing perspectives emerged. Significant among these were new forms of psychoanalytic theory and Foucault's genealogical approach to the history of sexuality. Both of these were associated with the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism which, by the 1990s, found expression in new form of social constructionism: queer theory.

In this opening chapter we will map out these developments and outline the perspective that informs the arguments to be developed throughout the book. Beginning from some of the early pre-theoretical work on sexuality, moving on to the Freudian tradition, we will then elucidate the ways in which it was challenged by the earlier social constructionists before evaluating the contribution of Foucault and queer theory. In the course of these discussions we will begin to establish our own position.

Cataloguing sexual behaviour

While sexology dates back to the late nineteenth century, located within the medical and emerging psychological paradigms of the time, the debates with which we are engaging here have their origins in the mid-twentieth century when researchers began to map the social distribution of and variation in sexual practices. The landmark studies marking this new departure were those of Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues: Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male (1948) and Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female (1953). Kinsey's background was in biology rather than in social science, but these were in many ways sociological studies based on interviews with 12,000 men and women – though only data from white men (around 5300) and women (5940) were analysed in the original studies (Kinsey et al. 1948: 7; 1953: 31). Kinsey's work was in many respects more radical than that of many of his contemporaries in that he emphasized the diversity of sexual practices and argued that much of what is seen as abnormal in human sexuality is actually quite common and therefore cannot, in scientific terms, reasonably be seen as deviant. Perhaps the best-known example of this is the 'Kinsey Scale', which suggested that heterosexuality and homosexuality are located on a continuum rather than being binary opposites. This understanding grew out of findings which
indicated that ‘at least 37%’ of men had had a ‘homosexual’ experience culminating in orgasm since the onset of adolescence (Kinsey et al. 1948: 623). Although Kinsey’s team challenged the assumption that homosexuals constituted a discrete identifiable category, the volume on male sexuality remains, in many respects, wedded to the notion that sexuality was natural. This bias, as John Gagnon points out, suited Kinsey’s ideological project ‘to justify disapproved patterns of sexual conduct by an appeal to biological origins, to the power and wisdom of nature’ (Gagnon, 2004: 92). However, the evidence for biology was not there since the ‘facts’ that Kinsey’s team collected were sociological ones, concerning the influence of class, age, religion and marital status.

By the time the volume on women was written, Kinsey’s ‘sense of scientific and moral correctness’ had become more muted (Gagnon 2004: 92). In recanting his previous assertions on the ‘natural’ differences between female and male sexuality, Kinsey gave more credence to social factors.

We have perpetuated the age-old traditions concerning the slower response[s]… of the female … the idea that there are basic differences in the nature of orgasm among females and males, the greater emotional content of the female’s sexual response and still other areas which are not based on scientifically accumulated data – and all of which now appear to be incorrect. … It now appears that the very techniques which have been suggested in marriage manuals, both ancient and modern, have given rise to some of the differences that we have thought were inherent in females and males.

(Kinsey et al. 1953, quoted in Gagnon 2004: 93)

Thus Kinsey’s approach in this second volume can be read as being ‘located within a framework in which sexual behaviour and sexual convention are treated as malleable, as the products of culture and history and circumstance’ (Stanley 1995: 37). While Kinsey still held to the conviction that sexuality was at root natural, part of our mammalian heritage, he was closer to a social constructionist perspective than many of his contemporaries – most of the work on sexuality undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s continued to endorse a biologistic and/or psychologistic approach seeing it as an innate human proclivity. This was the case with most British empirical work on sexuality before 1970 (see e.g. Chesser 1949, 1965; Slater and Woodside 1951; Gorer 1971; Schofield 1965, 1973) as well as the Mass Observation ‘Little Kinsey’ (see Stanley 1995). This work was either apparently atheoretical or informed by psychoanalysis. Liz Stanley (1995) identifies a number of common assumptions underpinning this work:
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- The definition of ‘sex’ is treated as quite unproblematic and equated with vaginal penetration; even those studies that record a variety of sexual practices, such as Schofield (1965, 1973), group everything other than intercourse as ‘petting’, which is then distinguished from ‘sex’.

- ‘Sex’ is unproblematically defined as heterosexual, and that even when evidence of other forms of desire or practice is discovered, it is ignored.

- Sex is regarded as entirely natural and men and women regarded as ‘naturally’ different in their sexual desires and capacities – with men treated as the norm.

- A drive reduction model is assumed in which sex is an innate need or drive which must find an outlet. Social experience may shape or channel such drives, but the drives themselves are given by biology.

These assumptions, as Stanley (1995) points out, amount to an implicit theorization of sexuality even where it was not explicitly linked to a psychoanalytic framework. In some cases they persisted despite evidence that might have undermined them. For example, the report of the Mass Observation Study of 1949, because of its draw on qualitative data, actually reveals considerable complexity and diversity in people’s sexual lives, which was explained away. Thus women’s dissatisfaction with heterosex, often articulated as discontent with narrowly genital sexual activity, devoid of sensuality or tenderness, could have brought the definition of ‘sex as intercourse’ into question, but instead is presented as a product of ‘sexual conservatism’ rather than of the social organization of sexuality (Stanley 1995).

This biologistic, drive reduction model of sexuality also informed more explicitly theoretical accounts of sexuality. One example is Kingsley Davis’s functionalist account of prostitution, published somewhat earlier. Davis (1937) assumes that the demand for prostitution is ‘the result of a simple biological appetite’ by which he clearly means men’s appetite. He goes on: ‘When all other sources of gratification fail due to the defects of person or circumstance, prostitution can be relied upon to furnish relief’ (Davis 1937: 753). He suggests that prostitution also provides for the gratification of perverse desires, which might be denied in marriage. While he does acknowledge the possibility of women seeking sexual gratification, in the final analysis it is male sexual needs, taken as given, which determine the functional necessity of prostitution:

Enabling a small number of women to take care of the needs of a large number of men, it is the most convenient sexual outlet for an
army, and for the legions of strangers, perverts, and physically repulsive in our midst. It performs a function, apparently, which no other institution fully performs.

(Davis 1937: 755)

Here, as Mary McIntosh (1978) notes, no institutional arrangements are deemed necessary to satisfy any needs that women may have. Although most social scientists failed to challenge the assumption that sexuality was part of human nature until the 1960s, anthropologists had for some time been gathering a wealth of evidence on the wide variety of sexual beliefs, attitudes and practices existing in diverse cultural settings. This was brought together by Ford and Beach (1952), who catalogued variations in, among other things, how human sexuality was understood, what was considered erotic in different cultures and how sexual acts were initiated and performed. They also drew attention to major differences in gendered patterns of sexual conduct, from societies in which men were sexual predators to those in which they were sexually timid; from societies where women were active initiators of and participants in sexual encounters, and where they regularly achieved orgasm, to those where they were sexually submissive and did not seem to experience orgasm. Ford and Beach's (1952) synthesis of the anthropological literature thus linked women's sexual satisfaction to their sexual and social autonomy. They also suggested that these differences were the product of culture rather than nature, that human sexuality was learned rather than innate behaviour. Anthropology thus provided empirical ammunition for later social constructionists, enabling them to counter both biological explanations and the universalizing claims of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis

Much of the research on sexuality up to the 1960s was either implicitly or explicitly informed by psychoanalysis. While a number of competing schools of thought developed within psychoanalysis, the dominant reading of Freud until the 1970s was a literal one – a reading later to be challenged by Lacan (1977) and others. Since the post-Lacanian versions of Freud are now more widely known than the original, it is worth briefly summarizing Freud's central ideas on gender and sexuality as expressed in some of his most influential works (Freud 1905, 1925, 1931, 1933). The impression gained from these writings is of a tension between the biological and the cultural:3 on the one hand, we have a narrative premised on innate sexual drives and the anatomical distinction between the sexes; on the other hand, sexual development is located in a particular social context, that of the family. Freud's use of such terms as repression and
inhibition are ambiguous too, sometimes denoting forces external to the individual while at other times being characterized as inbuilt in our psyches. For example he conceptualizes inhibitions as ‘dams … restricting the flow … of sexual development’ and goes on to say:

One gets the impression from civilised children that the construction of these dams is the product of education, and no doubt education has much to do with it. But in reality this development is organically determined and fixed by heredity. … Education [is] following the lines already laid down organically and … impressing them somewhat more clearly and deeply.

(Freud 1905: 117–118)

At the same time, Freud did not envisage the sexual instinct, drive or libido as innately oriented towards procreative, genital heterosexuality, but rather towards polymorphous pleasures – and this is what is often now seen as a potentially radical view. A constant theme in his work is the tension between this pre-social sexuality and the requirements of civilization: our drives must be contained and channelled for civilization to exist, but this entails costs in the form of unhappiness and neurosis (see especially Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, 1930). This conception of what is necessary for civilization underpins his account of what must happen to a child to transform him or her into a functioning adult member of society.

Freud traces the vicissitudes of the libido through various stages that condition the form of our adult sexualities, subsuming our gender and effectively determining our psychic functioning. All this occurs in the context of family relationships, which, in psychoanalysis, are invested with profound emotional and erotic significance. In infancy, according to Freud, the ‘sexual drives’ are polymorphous and have, as yet, had no order imposed upon them: the infant is bisexual, or more accurately of neither sex. Infant pleasures progressively become ordered, though maternal care, around the oral, anal and genital organs. The last of these phases prepares the child for the castration complex, which is the point at which the paths of female and male development diverge.

Until that time children of both sexes are primarily oriented towards the mother: she is their primary (sexual) object. For both ‘sexes’ the discovery of anatomical sexual difference, that girls ‘lack’ a penis (as does the mother), is traumatic. For both it disrupts their relationship with their mother but with very different consequences; the boy sees the girl’s missing organ as castration and fears that this punishment (from his father) will befall him as a consequence of desiring his mother. As Parveen Adams dramatically puts it, ‘with the sword of Damocles hanging over his genitals, the boy has to make up his mind in a hurry’ (Adams 1989: 248).
He gives up, represses his desire for his mother and identifies with his erstwhile castrator, his father, but in so doing retains women as his primary object choice. This resolution of the Oedipus complex is not available to girls. The little girl, on seeing the penis, wants one for herself, sees her own puny clitoris as inadequate, blames her mother for her ‘lack’ and transfers her object choice to her father. This penis envy marks her for life (for example, it is seen as the source of female vanity) and can be displaced only by desire for a child, particularly a male child who brings with him the penis for which she longs (Freud 1925, 1931, 1933). Because she is never forced to abandon her Oedipal desires for her father, a woman lacks the strong super-ego developed by the male as a consequence of Oedipal resolution and hence she is without the sense of justice possessed by the male. For both boys and girls, the genital trauma leads to a period of latency during which sexual desires are buried deep. At puberty boys experience an ‘accession of the libido’ which will be directed towards active heterosexual genital sexuality, while girls experience ‘a fresh wave of repression’ (Freud 1905: 220; see also Freud 1931, 1933) which leads to clitoral vaginal transference and an abandonment of active masculine sexuality in favour of passive feminine sexuality.

This account of Freud may seem overly bald and crude to those more used to the later Lacanian interpretation, but it is based on what Freud actually wrote. This was also how Freud was read up to the 1970s, although there were numerous modifications and revisions in circulation among psychoanalysts by this time. In addition, Freud was given a new twist by ‘radical’ writers such as Reich (1951) and Marcuse (1956, 1964). Where Freud saw repression as a prerequisite for civilization, the ‘sexual radicals’ saw it a product of capitalism, shackling us to the work ethic. Freeing human sexuality from repression was therefore seen as part of the political struggle against capitalist exploitation. This view nevertheless relied on a drive reduction model and failed to offer any real challenge to the Freudian framework. With the development of second wave feminism, Freud was subjected to far more critical scrutiny. Feminists objected to the obvious male bias in the over-valorization of the penis, the male-defined view of female sexuality and the conceptualization of the libido itself as a masculine force (see e.g. Millet 1971; Jackson 1978a). Alongside these critiques, however, the feminist rehabilitation of Freud was also underway (see Mitchell 1975). We will return to these alternative readings of Freud, briefly, later in this chapter and in the next, but for now we want to highlight the sociological alternative to psychoanalysis that developed in the 1960s and which, in our view, provides a far more satisfactory basis for theorizing sexuality.

The emergence of social constructionism

The sociological perspectives that were later grouped together under the heading of social constructionism derive from two distinct theoretical
sources: the North American tradition of pragmatist philosophy and its sociological elaboration as symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969) and the European tradition of social phenomenology associated with the work of Alfred Schutz (1972). These traditions were famously brought together by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), one of the earliest explicit uses of the term social construction. Notably Berger and Luckmann (1966: 67) use sexuality to demonstrate the plasticity of human conduct and culture, to suggest that 'man [sic] constructs his own nature'. Drawing on anthropological evidence of diverse patterns of sexual conduct in different cultures they argue that the 'empirical relativity of these configurations, their immense variety and luxurious inventiveness, indicate that they are the product of man's [sic] own socio-cultural formations rather than of a biologically fixed human nature' (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 67).

Interactionism and phenomenology provided the theoretical foundations for the 'new deviancy theories' that emerged in the 1960s, in which deviance as seen as a matter of social definition rather than a quality of particular acts or actors. Becoming and being deviant were conceived as interactional processes, an outcome of labelling (Becker 1963; Matza 1969). One early example of work on sexuality deriving, in part, from this approach is Mary McIntosh's (1968) analysis of the 'homosexual role'.

McIntosh draws on labelling theory to call into question 'the conception of homosexuality as a condition' (McIntosh 1968: 183) and to argue that although homosexual behaviour may occur in a variety of historical and cultural contexts, the modern Western idea of 'the homosexual', a role that can be inhabited, is historically and culturally specific. Other writers who came to play a significant part in the development of the sociology of sexuality, such as Ken Plummer (1975, 2003), were also influenced by these ideas, but more significantly by the pioneering work of Gagnon and Simon ([1973] 1974).

John Gagnon and William Simon had both been educated at the University of Chicago, the home of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Although this was not the dominant perspective at Chicago at the time they were students, Gagnon has made it clear in an interview that figures such as G.H. Mead, Howard Becker and Erving Goffman had a major impact on their sociology of sexuality (see Gagnon 2004). Gagnon emphasizes the significance of viewing non-occupational aspects of life as 'careers' (cf. Becker 1963; Goffman 1963a), which 'offered a processual and contingent perspective on how people assimilated new ways of living, how they enacted them, and how life choices changed the self' (Gagnon 2004: 272). They were also influenced by Kenneth Burke (1945), whose work on 'the grammar of motives' enabled them to ask new questions about the framing of human sexual conduct and whose emphasis on symbolic action and dramaturgical methodology parallels ideas emerging from the interactionism. Gagnon and Simon began to apply these ideas to sexuality while...
working at the Kinsey Institute, continuing in the tradition, begun by Kinsey himself, of exploring the social sources of human sexual conduct. They published a number of articles in the 1960s, brought together in the path-breaking text, *Sexual Conduct*, first published in the USA in 1973 and in Britain a year later.

Gagnon and Simon ‘were truly the first sociologists to radically question the biologism, the naturalism and the essentialism that pervaded most existing research and study’ (Plummer 2001: 131). They did more than simply assert the pre-eminence of the social over the innate: in questioning the concept of repression they allowed for a positive conceptualization of the social – as producing sexuality rather than negatively moulding or modifying inborn drives. Here their argument not only presaged Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis, but also directly addressed the social construction of desire and of the sexual self. From our perspective as feminists this has distinct advantages: female sexuality cannot be seen as a repressed version of male sexuality and neither male sexuality nor heterosexuality can be taken as the norm of human sexual being.

Gagnon and Simon explicitly set up their argument against the received Freudian wisdom of 1960s sexology. While William Simon later effected a partial rapprochement with psychoanalysis, he continued to reiterate some of the key points of the original critique (Simon 1996). Gagnon and Simon (1974) challenged psychoanalysis on four main grounds. First, they questioned the notion of an innate sexual drive; second, and relatedly, they contested the idea of sexuality as an overwhelming force, instead insisting on locating it in the mundane actualities of everyday life; third, they argued against the psychoanalytic emphasis on infancy and childhood in the development of human sexuality; finally, they made an analytic distinction between gender and sexuality, in contradistinction to their conflation in psychoanalytic theory.

Gagnon and Simon challenge all forms of biological determinism, arguing that human sexual conduct is a social product rather than the result of civilization’s repression of primordial drives. Contrary to the commonsense assumption that sexuality is the most natural of human proclivities, they see it as representing ‘humanity at its most social’ (Simon 1996: 154). ‘The sexual area may be precisely that realm wherein the superordinate position of the sociocultural over the biological level is most complete’ (Gagnon and Simon 1974: 15). They argue that psychoanalysts’ ‘unproven assumption’ of a powerful, innate sexual drive is a major obstacle to understanding human sexuality (Gagnon and Simon 1974: 15). There is little evidence, they contend, that such a drive exists or that it finds expression in particular sexual acts: the empirical variability of human sexuality cannot be explained by the repression or modification of some innate natural urge, but must be understood as meaningful conduct. For Gagnon and Simon (1974), acts, feelings and body parts are not sexual
themselves, but become so only through the application of sociocultural scripts that imbue them with sexual significance.

Sexual conduct and the sexual self are fully social, embedded in wider patterns of sociality. One of Gagnon and Simon's most important critical insights was and is their emphasis on the everydayness of sexuality, forcing us to reflect on the importance accorded to sexuality in late modern societies, to question the idea of the sexual as a high intensity drive, to be aware that sexual conduct can be guided by non-sexual motives, that it occurs in the context of ordinary lives and is shaped by wider social relations. This view of sex is radical in that it runs counter to much commonsense thinking. Sex is usually seen as special, outside and apart from routine sociality, uniquely exciting and transforming, raising us above the mundane quotidian – or alternatively as a dangerous force with the power to undermine ‘civilization’ and reduce us to barbarism. We share Gagnon and Simon's opposition to 'traditions that stressed the power of the sexual for purposes of social change or appealing to sexuality as a source of political and personal redemption' (Gagnon 2004: 280). We have always been suspicious of inflated claims made about sexuality and continue to ask: 'What is so special about sex?' (Jackson and Scott 2004).

Interactionism has the edge over psychoanalysis, then, in conceptualizing sexuality as interwoven with the everyday social fabric of our past and present lives. Psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the unknowable unconscious, says little about everyday sexuality and assumes that our sexual subjectivity is set on an irreversible course by the traumas of infancy so that adult sexual desires are unconsciously determined by a past inaccessible to consciousness. Gagnon and Simon directly contest this overemphasis on both early life and the unconscious, arguing that sexuality is constantly, reflexively, modified throughout our lives. Psychoanalytic reasoning rests on interpreting childhood experience through the filter of adult sexual understandings. Since nothing is sexual in itself, children do not begin to construct a sense of themselves as sexual beings until they have gained access to sexual scripts. Echoing G.H. Mead's *Philosophy of the Present* (1932), Gagnon and Simon suggest that rather than the past determining the present, 'the present significantly reshapes the past as we reconstruct our biographies to bring them into greater congruence with our current identities, roles, situations and available vocabularies' (Gagnon and Simon 1974: 13). Thus in place of the unconscious as the foundation of the psyche, we have the intrapsychic, 'a socially based form of mental life' (Gagnon 2004: 276). Gagnon and Simon's approach thus allows for agency and change in the constitution of the sexual self. Its changeability is not a consequence of unpredictable eruptions of the unconscious but is envisaged as an ongoing reflexive process. Sexual conduct entails actively 'doing sex', not only in terms of sexual acts, but also as making and modifying sexual meaning.
The way in which Gagnon and Simon theorized the construction of sexual selfhood has particular relevance for us as feminists. Rather than viewing sexuality and gender as inextricably interrelated, with sexual or affective desires and identifications determining gender, as is the case in psychoanalysis, they argue that the sexual self is developed on the basis of the prior construction of a gendered self. In refusing to abstract the sexual from its wider social context, they avoided the conflation of gender and sexuality thus providing a means of making an analytical distinction between them while exploring their interrelationship. How gender and sexuality are interrelated becomes, then, a matter for exploration rather than being decided in advance.

The concept of ‘sexual scripts’, so central to Gagnon and Simon’s work can, unfortunately, too easily be interpreted as suggesting fixed, socially determined lines of conduct. Gagnon and Simon themselves note this potential limitation: while the dramaturgical analogy is appropriate for understanding human sexuality – we act sexually – ‘the conventional dramatic form’ is ‘more often than not … inappropriate’ (Gagnon and Simon 1974: 23). As they point out, even the most conventional of erotic sequences ‘derives from a complicated set of layered symbolic meanings’ which might not be the same even for participants in the same sexual ‘drama’ (1974: 23). Scripts are, therefore, fluid improvisations involving ongoing processes of interpretation and negotiation.

In *Sexual Conduct*, Gagnon and Simon focused on the interacting individual and, while they made generalizations about the processes of becoming and being sexual, did not attend to the wider cultural contexts in which sexual scripts were located. This left them open to the criticism of failing to address where scripts come from (see e.g. Walby 1990). Much of the discussion, moreover, was framed within the language of the socialization paradigm and thus too easily misread as a deterministic account (especially in relation to gender). These problems were overcome in later work when, separately and together, they introduced the idea of three analytically distinct but interrelated dimensions of scripting: the intrapsychic, the interpersonal and the cultural (Simon and Gagnon 1986; Laumann et al. 1994; Laumann and Gagnon 1995; Simon 1996), enabling distinctions between ‘the agentic individual, the interactional situation, and the surrounding sociocultural order’ (Gagnon 2004: 276). This permits a more nuanced analysis of how sexual scripts emerge, evolve and change and are sustained culturally, interpersonally and subjectively, and allows for individual agency and variation without assuming voluntarism.

Cultural scenarios are the ‘cultural narratives’ constructed around sexuality, ‘what the intersubjective culture treats as sexuality’ (Laumann et al. 1994: 6) and that also provide ‘instructional guides’ for sexual conduct (Simon 1996: 40). Cultural scenarios, the stuff of media representations, public debate and commonsense knowledge, provide a shared, or at least generally available, stock of cultural knowledge about sexuality. Cultural
scenarios or scripts do not determine sexual conduct, but are resources that enable us to make sense of the sexual. In late modern societies, moreover, there are competing sexual scenarios available, and therefore multiple scripts on which social actors can draw.

Interpersonal scripting emerges from and is deployed within everyday interaction, not only in negotiating sexual activities but also in talking about sex with others. In negotiating sexual relationships and activities, wider cultural scenarios are interactively shaped ‘into scripts for behaviour in specific contexts’ (Simon 1996: 41). This is far from an automatic process since sexual partners may be mobilizing or drawing on different variants or forms of cultural scenarios; hence the co-construction of scripts within a given relationship entails active interpretation and negotiation as well as potential conflict. In heterosexual relationships this leaves room for unequal participation in any mutually agreed script: his definition of sexual reality may take precedence over hers. In practice, though, many such instances of everyday interpersonal scripting might involve little more than predictable variations on common cultural themes (see Simon 1996: 41), but they are, nonetheless, locally, interactionally produced by the actors involved.

Intraspsychic scripting occurs at the level of our individual desires and thoughts, the internal reflexive processes of the self. Unlike the psychoanalytic psyche, where desires originate largely in our unconscious, intrapsychic scripting is a process through which we reflexively interpret material from cultural scenarios and interpersonal experience through internal conversations with ourselves. William Simon (1996) directly contests the Freudian notion of the ‘id’ as the ‘embodiment of the sexual’ therefore belonging in the realm of ‘nature’ held in check only by the civilized ego and super-ego. He argues that ‘the problem of desire is not that of a conflict between nature and civilization: rather, it is a problem of the emergence of the intrapsychic as an autonomous domain following the experience of living in modern civilizations’ (Simon 1996: 44). Intrapsychic scripting is the means by which we make sense of desires and practices and informs, and is informed by, our engagement with interpersonal scripting. It is through our inner, intrapsychic life that we experience desire, construct fantasies and reflect upon sexual experiences. This should not be taken to imply that the sexual self is stable and orderly, but rather that instability and disorder are social in origin rather than the consequence of ‘primal chaos’: it is ‘the disorder of social life that creates the chaos of inner life’ (Simon 1996: 44).

**Foucault and the reorientation of social constructionism**

For Gagnon and Simon the sexual is a matter of social definition, but they do not investigate how the idea of sexuality itself arose; this, however, was central to Foucault’s project. In embarking on the history of sexuality he
signalled a problematization of the concept of sexuality (Halperin 1995). He was not investigating a pre-given object but rather the historical emergence of the construct of sexuality. Sexuality came into being as an object of discourse, as an apparatus that ordered bodies and pleasures into what we know as ‘sex’. Central to this endeavour and its starting point was Foucault’s critique of the ‘repressive hypothesis’. Like Gagnon and Simon, Foucault questioned the idea that sexuality was a pre-given object shaped by repressive forces, but he did so from a different perspective. In line with his previous elaboration of the idea that discourse produces its own objects (Foucault 1972) and his understanding of power as productive (Foucault 1979), Foucault sees sexuality as an effect of power: ‘sexuality is not, in relation to power, an exterior domain to which power is applied … on the contrary it is a result and an instrument of power’s designs’ (Foucault [1978] 1981: 152).

Foucault begins the first volume of The History of Sexuality by bringing into question the repressive hypothesis that had hitherto informed received wisdom about sexuality’s past and present. In a brilliantly ironic tone Foucault sets out the familiar story of the Victorian age as one in which sexuality was repressed and silenced and reveals the ideological investments in this narrative: Marxists annexe it to ‘the ceremonial history of the modes of production’ (Foucault 1980: 5), sexual radicals can pride themselves on ‘being subversive’ (1980: 6) and psychoanalysts can profit from it. ‘Ours is, after all, the only civilization in which officials are paid to listen to all and sundry impart the secrets of their sex’ (Foucault 1981: 7). It is, then, this idea of repression that Foucault sets out to investigate:

The question I would like to pose is not, why are we repressed? But rather, why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed? … What led us to show, ostentatiously, that sex is something we hide, to say it is something we silence? … What paths have brought us to the point where we are ‘at fault’ with respect to our own sex? And how have we come to be a civilization so peculiar as to tell itself that, through an abuse of power which has not ended, it has long ‘sinned’ against sex?

(Foucault 1981: 8–9)

Foucault raises three doubts about the repressive hypothesis, which he proceeds to address in the remainder of the volume. The first is whether the supposed repression beginning in the seventeenth century and culminating in the Victorian era is historically verifiable. The second doubt is whether power works primarily through repression. The third and final doubt is whether the critique of repression actually opposes the operation of power or is part of the very discourse it purports to oppose. He argues
that historically we have not witnessed increasing repression from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, but rather an incitement to discourse about sex from the Catholic confessional of the Counter-Reformation to the nineteenth-century science of sex and beyond. The operation of power through the deployment of these sexual discourses, far from repressing a pre-given sexuality, created new sexual subjects and new possibilities for subjectivity. A key example here is homosexuality. Rather than being a form of sexuality constant throughout history it is, for Foucault, a product of the nineteenth-century construction of the homosexual as a ‘personage’, which made it possible to be a homosexual:

It was consubstantial with him less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature … Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault 1981: 43)

The third doubt directly contests the position of those sexual radicals who sought to liberate us from the effects of repression. The idea that freeing ourselves from repression would also free us from domination, as expressed, for example, by Reich (1951), ‘unfolded within the deployment of sexuality, and not outside or against it’ (Foucault 1981: 131); it represented simply a tactical shift within the deployment and could not be expected to dismantle it. This anti-repressive struggle depended on the language of psychoanalysis which is also, for Foucault, a product of the historical deployment of sexuality, a particular regime of truth arising in particular circumstances.

There can be no notion of sex as an already existing sphere of human activities and attributes; rather sex is ‘a complex idea which was formed inside the deployment of sexuality’ (Foucault 1980: 152). Foucault argues that rather than sexuality being grafted onto sex, sexuality produced sex; thus both sex and sexuality are of relatively recent historical origin, speaking of how he came to see this he says:

... couldn't it be that sex – which seems to be an instance having its own laws and constraints, on the basis of which the masculine and feminine sexes are defined – be something which on the contrary is produced by the apparatus of sexuality? What this discourse of sexuality was initially applied to wasn't sex but the body, the sexual organs, pleasures, kinship relations, interpersonal relations. (Foucault 1980: 210, emphasis in original)

This ‘heterogeneous ensemble’, he maintains, was eventually ‘completely overlaid by the apparatus of sexuality’, which ‘produced, as the keystone of
its discourse and perhaps of its very functioning, the idea of sex' (Foucault 1980: 210). Thus Foucault's terminology does not permit a distinction between sex as erotic acts and sensations and sex as sex difference – what we would call gender. Both are subsumed under 'sex'; both are products of the apparatus of sexuality. The conflation of gender and sexuality, which Gagnon and Simon (1974) argued against, reappears with Foucault but as an effect of discourse and power rather than, as in psychoanalysis, as ontologically entwined in the human psyche.

We would prefer to maintain, along with Gagnon and Simon, the distinction between gender and sexuality while acknowledging, with Foucault, that they are commonly discursively conflated. Gagnon and Simon were motivated to make the gender–sexuality distinction in part because they sought to explain sexual selfhood and how we come to be sexual and, in so doing, to contest biological accounts of sexual being. Although Foucault does suggest that particular sexual subjectivities are discursive constructions, he was not particularly interested either in the question of where sexual desires come from or in contesting biological arguments about the origins of individual sexualities. When asked in an interview for his opinion on whether homosexuality was an innate predisposition or social in origin, he replied 'On this question I have absolutely nothing to say. “No comment”' (cited in Halperin 1995: 4).

Thus while he is usually read as a social constructionist, what is being constructed, for Foucault, is not individual sexual subjectivity. His contribution has been to sensitize us to the discursive constitution of sexuality itself. Where Gagnon and Simon contested the inflated importance of sexuality in contemporary society, Foucault provides us with an account of how we came to understand sexuality as a fundamental ‘truth’ of our being.

**Queer theory**

Foucault's influence on studies of sexuality has arguably had its greatest impact through the development of queer theory, which has set much of the theoretical agenda in the field since the 1990s (see e.g. Gamson and Moon 2004). Queer theory is not a unified perspective and not easy to define since most of its founding canonical texts do not identify themselves as queer (see e.g. Butler 1990a; Dollimore 1991; Fuss 1991; Sedgwick 1991). It emerged as an approach to dissident sexualities framed within deconstructionist, poststructuralist or postmodern perspectives. Some have already declared its demise. Theresa de Lauretis, among those credited with originating the idea of queer theory, claimed that it had become ‘a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry’ (de Lauretis 1994: 297). Queer theory, however, has refused to die; indeed, in some circles it has come to stand in for the entirety of critical studies of sexuality and has extended its influence to discussions of the broader
sphere of intimate relations (Stacey 1996, 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). There are signs that it might outlive its postmodern parent, now arguably in decline (Matthewman and Hoey 2006).

Queer theory departs from earlier gay affirmative scholarship in that it seeks to destabilize all identities, challenging ‘the assumption of a unified homosexual identity’ (Seidman 1997: 93). Lesbian and gay identities can still be mobilized politically, but only on the understanding that they are provisional and contingent. As Judith Butler (1991) puts it:

Identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression. This is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies.

(Butler 1991: 13–14, our emphasis)

Queer theory de-essentializes identity (Halperin 1995) and destabilizes the binary divide of heterosexuality and homosexuality – and sometimes the gender binary. While Foucault may be a major theoretical influence, queer arguments also make use of Derridian deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis. This appropriation of psychoanalysis may seem particularly inappropriate given Foucault’s critique of its regulatory regime. What makes this even remotely possible is Lacan’s rereading of Freud through structural linguistics, which, through its focus on the symbolic, is held to divest it of both essentialism and misogyny and to alert us to the precariousness of sexed identities (see Chapter 2). Foucault is kinder to this variant of psychoanalysis than to the cruder form lampooned in the opening chapter of The History of Sexuality. As he notes, more recent psychoanalytic theory does not assume a pre-existing desire held down by repression, but rather ‘that the law is what constitutes both desire and the lack on which it is predicated’ (Foucault 1981: 81), so that power is implicated in bringing desire into being. Nonetheless, Foucault argues, the idea of the law as constitutive of desire still locates power as essentially negative and prescriptive, concerned with prohibition and censorship. We would add that, in addition, Lacanian psychoanalysis is as universalistic and ahistorical as more literal readings of Freud and makes claims to uncover the truth of our being, which sits uneasily alongside Foucault.

Many theorists of sexuality, however, draw on both Freud and Foucault while seeming to be oblivious to the contradictions inherent in so doing. A few, however, do justify this move, notably Judith Butler. Butler’s (1990a) deconstruction of ‘the compulsory order of sex/gender/desire’ that constitutes the ‘heterosexual matrix’ established her as one of the key theorists within both feminism and queer. In her earlier work Butler was
critical of the ways in which psychoanalysis normalizes heterosexuality, whereby to be one sex is to necessarily desire the other (Butler 1990b). In discussing the feminist appropriation of Lacanian theory, she argues that it produces a ‘false coherence in the form of a storyline about infantile development where it ought to investigate genealogically the exclusionary practices which condition that particular narrative of identity formation’ (Butler 1990b: 332). Here Butler is clearly mobilizing Foucauldian methodology against psychoanalysis. Yet she was soon, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), to argue for a ‘Foucauldian redescription’ of psychoanalysis, suggesting that it was possible to ‘challenge the structural stasis of the heterosexualizing norm within the psychoanalytic account without dispensing with what is clearly valuable in psychoanalytic perspectives’ (Butler 1993: 22). For Butler, the symbolic law that enforces sexual differentiation is not a universal fixed structure, rather it is a product of normative heterosexual reiteration. The reason why she sees psychoanalysis as ‘valuable’ is that she takes it to account for ‘how certain regulatory norms form a “sexed” subject in terms that establish the indistinguishability of psychic and bodily formation’ (Butler 1993: 22). She suggests that psychoanalysis is necessary to explain how subjectivity comes to be unthinkable without sexed subjectivity and to explain the ‘identificatory processes [which] are crucial to the forming of sexed materiality’ (Butler 1993: 17). For this reason she finds it necessary to recover the idea of the unconscious and to ameliorate Foucault’s critique of repression to take account of the ways in which repression ‘operates as a modality of productive power’ (Butler 1993: 22).

Despite its apparent incompatibility with Foucauldian ideas, psychoanalysis is appealed to as if it were the only means of theorizing subjectivity – an assumption that we will contest more fully in Chapter 6. One of the curious effects of this queer coupling of psychoanalysis and Foucault is that it exacerbates the latent functionalism that has been noted in Foucault’s work (Poulantzas 1978; Weeks 1981, 1989), in particular through his reintroduction of the concept of the normative. Where this is married up with the Lacanian idea of a symbolic law to which we are all subject, even if it is not a universal law, the result is close to the old functionalist sociology of social systems, where norms were assumed to be external to the individual and constraining, but were then internalized and so postulated ‘as being constitutive, rather than merely regulative, of the self’ (Dawe 1970: 210, emphasis in original). This is particularly clear in Butler’s discussion of performativity as being more than mere performance since the former ‘consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer’ (Butler 1993: 234).

This concern with the normative remains an ongoing theme in Butler’s work, where it continues to echo some earlier conservative sociology: ‘the norm appears to have a status and effect independent of the actions governed by the norm’ (Butler 2004: 42). More generally the term
heteronormativity has become common currency under the influence of queer theory (see Gamson and Moon 2004) and is used loosely and casually without regard to the limitations of its scope (Jackson 2006a). We can discern no critical awareness, within queer theory, of the chequered history of the norm in social theory or of the critiques to which the ‘normative paradigm’ has long been subjected (Dawe 1970; T. Wilson 1971). As in its sociological variant, the queer usage of the norm renders theorization of agency difficult. As in much poststructuralist theory, agency is explained either by the unpredictable eruptions of the unconscious or by recourse to an unexplained voluntarism (see McNay 2000, 2003).

Queer theory recycles other long-established sociological ideas, which are more in keeping with our own perspective. Among the unacknowledged antecedents of Butler’s ideas about performance and performativity are Goffman (1969) and Garfinkel (1967), as well as earlier radically anti-essentialist theorizations of gender Kessler and McKenna (1978) and Delphy (1984). Moreover, the queer concern with the fluidity, contingency and multiplicity of subjectivity and identity resonates with interactionist ideas of the self as always in process. There are also, within queer, traces of interactionist theories of deviance. One of the central themes of queer theory is that heterosexuality and homosexuality are necessarily co-constituted. As Diana Fuss puts it:

The language and law that regulate the establishment of heterosexuality … is the language and law of defence and protection: heterosexuality secures its self identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality.

(Fuss 1991: 2)

This personification reifies heterosexuality, but it also echoes earlier sociological accounts where one of the functions of deviance was said to be to maintain the boundaries of the normal. In her use of the inside/out trope, through which Fuss sees heterosexuality as being defined in and through its rejected outside, we are reminded of Becker's *Outsiders* (1963), in which deviance is a social construct that only makes sense in terms of an equally constructed normality.

We do not make these points merely to lament a lack of awareness of the sociological antecedents of current theorizations of sexuality, but in order to illustrate the problems consequent upon this forgetting. On the one hand this makes it impossible to ascertain what is innovatory and useful in queer and other purportedly new ideas (see Brickell 2006) while on the other it leaves us with attenuated critical skills through which to evaluate current theory. In particular, we want to emphasize the continued relevance of the interactionist tradition, which is more in keeping with our
emphasis on the everydayness of sexuality and our scepticism of abstract
theory that fails to illuminate ordinary lives. Thus, while we have noted
some affinities between queer and interactionist perspectives, our pre-
fere
ce is for the latter which, unlike queer, ‘does not wish to lose its grip on
the “obdurate empirical world”’ (Plummer 2003: 520). This does not,
however, signal a total rejection of poststructuralist or queer theories and
we will draw on these where we find them fruitful.
The theoretical developments that we have discussed here owe a great
deal to the existence of feminist, gay and queer political movements; of
these, it is feminism, including lesbian feminism, which has most informed
our own thinking. So far we have alluded to feminism but not yet fully
engaged with it: we will go on to do so in Chapter 2.

Notes
1 Of course mid-twentieth-century thinking on sexuality was influenced by
the sociology and sexology of earlier periods, but this work falls outwith the
scope of this book. Morrow (2008) argues that sociologists are guilty of
perpetuating their own ‘repressive hypothesis’ (Foucault [1978] 1981) by
ignoring the work of early sociologists and dating the emergence of interest
in sexuality to the late twentieth century, as a product of supposedly more
‘liberal’ times. We think Morrow rather overstates his case. We would not
deny the existence of this early work, but maintain that what was innovative
in the post-1960s work on sexuality was the sustained critique of essential-
ism. It is the origins of this development that we seek to explore here. Those
interested in early sexology should consult the collections of historical
(2008) considers what early sociologists, including the ‘founding fathers’, had
to say about sexuality. A more detailed study of mid-twentieth-century work
can be found in Stanley (1995).
2 Kinsey et al. (1948) constructed a seven-point scale from 0, ‘exclusively
heterosexual’, to 6, ‘exclusively homosexual’ (1948: 638ff.)
3 This is one of the sources of disagreement about how Freud’s work should be
interpreted.
4 She later pointed out, however, that she had used labelling theory only in a
limited and ‘mechanical’ way in this article (see Weeks et al. 1981: 45).
5 It may have been Kenneth Burke’s influence, as much as Goffman’s, that
inspired Gagnon and Simon’s concept of sexual scripts; certainly the idea of
scripts as governing self-reflection as well as interaction is closer to Burke
and to Mead than it is to Goffman (see Burke 1945, 1950). Burke, as a
public intellectual rather an academic, was not strictly part of symbolic
interactionism but did, in 1982, win the G.H. Mead Prize (see Denzin
6 For further explanation see Chapter 2.