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SEX ON THE MARGINS: NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER

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ABSTRACT. *Over the last forty years, the history of sexuality has developed into a vibrant historical genre. Despite the diversity of the resulting academic literature, within it is an often implicit focus on 'marginal' subjects. This historiographical review examines why this is the case, exploring the development of the history of sexuality and its theoretical underpinnings, before suggesting the ways in which this focus on the 'marginal' has limited resulting works. Finally, it suggests ways in which the historians might move forward, both by discussing some of the more provocative new texts and concepts within the field, and also by posing several questions for future study.*

In his 1976 *History of sexuality*, Michel Foucault insisted we were foolish to believe that in writing about sexuality we could liberate ourselves from a repressive past of silence. This has not stopped us. Over the last thirty years, countless books and articles have appeared, establishing the history of sexuality as a vibrant and productive genre, complete with its own dedicated journal. It is also one well aware of, and continually reflecting on, its own history. Dagmar Herzog is the most recent scholar to have traced the development of the major 'impulses' within the history of sexuality, while H. G. Cocks has reflected on the genre's relationship to modernity and the individual.[1] But they were not the first, and, as this piece itself demonstrates, they will certainly not be the last.

The sheer scope of newly published books on review here also testifies to the subject's continued resonance. Spanning four continents and two hundred years, the twenty-nine books cover topics including birth control, homosexual identity, lesbian marriage, freakery, sex education, slumming, and rock music. Having easily defined them as books on the 'history of sexuality', I became confounded by the prospect of writing a cohesive article about even a small segment of them, let alone making any useful statement about their collective relevance. On the one

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[1] Indeed, Herzog's article is so recent that it was only published while this piece was being considered for publication. I am pleased to have been given the chance to cite it here, as it contains a wonderfully rich and informative discussion. Dagmar Herzog, 'Syncopated sex: transforming European sexual cultures', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), pp. 1287–308; H. G. Cocks, 'Modernity and the self in the history of sexuality', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), pp. 1211–27. The *Journal of the History of Sexuality* was established in 1990.

hand, this ability to cast its net widely, to transcend chronological and geographical constraints, demonstrates the historian's ability to reveal a variety of hidden sexual worlds. But on the other, it reveals the difficulty, if not impossibility, of developing a widely applicable understanding of sexuality free from our own historical constraints. Instead, there is the desire to look elsewhere, or to look deeply and narrowly. Cosmopolitan this may be – but it could equally be an act of staring idly at the clouds, or burying one's head in the sand. Regardless, the resulting 'divergence in approaches' has rendered the history of sexuality a subject that is increasingly difficult to define. It is at once all encompassing and fragmented.[2]

This is not a unique criticism of a historical genre; nor, perhaps, is it a totally fair one. For, on closer inspection, what is striking about this wide-ranging literature is the way in which it does define itself, albeit implicitly. The vast majority of pieces on the history of sexuality focus on the modern, post-Enlightenment period, particularly the nineteenth century onwards, when the fixed categories of sexual identity with which we are now familiar, and which were discussed so provocatively by Foucault, came into being. More crucially, scholars of the history of sexuality are consistently engaged with issues and historical actors defined as exceptional, either by outsiders or participants. Their overwhelming focus is on those who do not fit within the 'normal' parameters of society. Although it may no longer be a marginal subject within academia, the history of sexuality is still very much a history of the margins. The fact that this may not be all that surprising makes it no less significant.

In this review, I would like to analyse and interrogate the concept of the 'margins' in relation to the study of sexuality. More specifically, I will consider the power relationships involved in creating marginalized sexualities, investigating the challenges historians face in deciding whether to offer control to individual historical actors on the one hand or structures of power, particularly the modern state, on the other. I will then discuss the interaction between 'labels' and 'identities' and their often contradictory relationships with marginality. Next, I will consider the difficulty of striking a useful balance between case studies of marginality and wider social and cultural histories. In other words, what particular problems should we be investigating, whilst not losing sight of the 'bigger question'? Finally, I will touch once again on the long-running, and often heated, debates concerning the centrality of either 'experience' or 'discourse' in historical understanding, asking what answer might most benefit future studies of sexuality. While comprising a variety of seemingly disparate topics, each of these books is entangled in one or more of these questions.

Without wishing entirely to collapse, or ignore, either geographical or chronological differences, this piece will take a self-consciously global approach. This is in contrast to most work in this area, which has tended to define itself by geography or by sub-genre, however loosely.[3] In doing so, such pieces tell us much about sexuality within those spaces and places. New scholarship has begun to move outwards; of particular note is a recent forum on transnational histories of sexuality in *The American Historical Review*. But although Margot Canaday speaks of the 'integrative' possibilities of these histories in her introductory piece, the individual articles that follow are still limited by nation or region.[4] She notes, however, that an 'exciting set of themes' emerge when the individual articles are 'read together'.[5]

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[2] H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, 'Introduction', in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, eds., *Palgrave advances in the modern history of sexuality* (London, 2006), p. 11.

This review is engaged in that act of 'reading together'. By looking globally, it aims to elucidate wider themes within the history of sexuality, using the concept of the 'margins' as a framework. One drawback of this approach is, of course, that each of the books on review focuses on a particular context with complexities too vast, and too rich, to distil fully here. But, taken together, their specific examples speak to trends within the history of sexuality itself, and illustrate general historiographical, or conceptual, problems. Regardless of how well individual books negotiate the pitfalls of this (or any other) historical genre, together they all illuminate, however faintly, useful paths forward.

I

At the most basic level, the study of 'sex on the margins' is just that: the study of sexualities or sexual preferences which are unusual, rare, or marginalized. Historians' focus on, and approach to, these issues have been shaped by the development of the academic study of sexuality itself, which came into its own in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In formulating what we would still understand to be the concept of 'sexuality', professional 'sexologists' – those involved in the scientific study of sexual interests, behaviour, and function – defined heterosexual monogamy as the basis for normal sexual behaviour. But in becoming the 'international standard' of behaviour, the 'practices and pleasures' of these 'normal', heterosexual citizens were 'spoken of less and less'. Their sexual identity was simultaneously uninteresting and the standard by which all other sexualities were defined as abnormal. As a result, 'what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children' or 'criminals', or 'the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex'.[6] Professional sexologists sought to categorize a range of deviant sexual behaviours against the 'normal', and also to predict which categories of individual would perform which types of sexual behaviour.

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[3] Herzog's review, for example, while having a transnational focus, limits itself to Europe. Even more narrowly defined are several other recent reviews, focusing specifically on Germany: Edward R. Dickinson and Richard F. Wetzell, 'The historiography of sexuality in modern Germany', *German History*, 23 (2005), pp. 291–305; Mark Fenemore, 'The recent historiography of sexuality in twentieth-century Germany', *Historical Journal*, 52 (2009), pp. 763–79. Sean Brady, on the other hand, defines the boundaries of his piece through a focus on queer theory: Sean Brady, 'All about Eve? Queer theory and history', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (Jan. 2006), pp. 185–95. Stephen Angelides does similarly, through a focus on gay and lesbian studies: 'Historicizing (bi)sexuality: a rejoinder for gay/lesbian studies, feminism, and queer theory', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 52 (2006), pp. 125–58. Rebecca Jennings limits her interesting discussion to modern lesbian Britain in her chapter 'Sexuality in post-war Britain', in Julie-Marie Strange and Francesca Carnevali, eds., *Twentieth-century Britain: economic, cultural and social change* (London, 2007), pp. 293–307.

[4] Margot Canaday, 'Thinking sex in the transnational turn: an introduction', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), pp. 1250–7, at p. 1252.

[5] Ibid., p. 1254.

The purpose of this observation was the desire to label, and thus better understand, humans through their sexual acts. Because, although marginal sexualities, by their very definition, were 'not of central importance' to the state, their very existence threatened the efficacy of procreative, 'moral' heterosexual behaviour.[7] Only through understanding them was there the potential to control, or even eliminate, the abnormal, thereby eliminating their threat to the sexual, and social, order. Success in this area was predicated on deciding how individuals became deviant, and how to prevent it from occurring. Sexologists studied the relationship between deviants and sexuality, but also the impact of deviance on sexuality. Was the sexual deviant essentially so? Or could the ramifications of deviance lead to sexual perversion? In other words, was deviance genetic? Or was it virulent?

In her study of sexuality in American prisons, Regina Kunzel identifies the segregation of incarcerated 'perverts, feebleminded', and 'psychotics' from 'normal men' as an attempt to prevent the 'normal' criminals from being 'tempted by congenital homosexuals'.[8] Fred Fejes writes that in the '1950 film *Caged*', which was set in a female prison, 'brutal lesbians' were depicted 'bullying a new young inmate'. One of the hardened lesbian inmates warned the new arrival: '"if you stay in here too long, you don't think of guys at all. You get out of the habit".' Here, deviance was a product of proximity – and of seduction by the more experienced. On the other hand, however, another film of the same year, *Young Man with a Horn*, 'attributed the downfall of a talented young trumpet player to his marriage to a sophisticated, masculine socialite who found diversion with other women, driving her husband to drink'. In reviewing the piece, *The New York Times* described the female protagonist as hereditarily, biologically deviant. She was, in their words, the '"confused, mentally sick, wife". The film ends', Fejes notes, 'with the husband spitting on her, shouting, "you're sick. You'd better see a doctor".'[9]

The lesbian posed a particular danger because of her double sexual deviance – she was both un-female and gay. Fejes argues that 'while a man abandoning his masculine role to take on the weakness and softness of the female role was seen as comic, a woman assuming a man's role, with all its power, was regarded as threatening, explicitly raising the issue of sexual deviance and transgression. Lesbians were often portrayed as murderers and perverted seducers of innocent young women.'[10] This theme of abnormal sexualities' potential destructiveness is common. In his discussion of radical gay sexuality, Patrick Moore argues that the panic surrounding the emerging AIDS epidemic only strengthened society's connection between homosexuality, deviance, and social pollution. Indeed AIDS had the potential to be contagious and to be passed on from mother to child; this 'gay' disease thus intertwined theories of biology and contagion, and neatly identified it as one which disproportionately affected deviant populations.[11]

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[6] Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, I: *The will to knowledge* (London, 1976), p. 39.

[7] Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, www.merriam-webster.com.

[8] Regina Kunzel, *Criminal intimacy: prison and the uneven history of modern American sexuality* (Chicago, IL, 2008), p. 61.

[9] Fred Fejes, *Gay rights and moral panic: the origins of America's debate on homosexuality* (New York, NY, 2008) p. 21.

[10] Fejes, *Gay rights and moral panic*, p. 13.

Regardless of whether the deviant was understood as environmentally or hereditarily afflicted, he or she carried the risk of contagion. Marginalizing the deviant could prevent this contagion from affecting the wider social body. At their most extreme, measures to limit the spread of sexual deviance focused on minimizing the deviant's danger through the prevention of reproduction, while simultaneously encouraging the reproduction of 'normal', healthy citizens. The attempt to orchestrate an optimal population rather than simply maximizing numbers has been fundamentally a modern, largely western, phenomenon. In pre-industrial or pre-colonial societies, it was usually 'childlessness' that 'was considered a problem'. Those who did not reproduce were 'perpetual children themselves and considered a burden for the community'. But in pre-colonial Africa, at least, 'homosexuality' 'was tolerated', writes Mark Epprecht in his history of 'dissident' sexuality in Southern Africa.[12] Conversely, in 1950s Sweden, it was so 'important' to ensure that reproduction was carried out only by the most suitable of citizens, that 'the individual' could 'not be allowed to decide the matter for himself' in cases where experts deemed him or her an unsuitable prospective parent. In those cases, forced sterilization should 'be an option'. One commentator noted, 'very many of those who should be sterilized are feeble minded or mentally ill and are therefore not even able to understand what it is all about, or cannot, at least, judge the reasons'. In his analysis of the Swedish case, Ian Dowbiggin concludes that 'by the 1950s sterilization formed part of Scandinavia's broad state-run welfare system designed to improve the health and happiness of all citizens'.[13]

Simone Caron writes in her book on U.S. reproductive policy that, by the early twentieth century, it was seen as crucial to mitigate 'unemployment, child labor [sic], crime, [and] low living standards', and to promote 'eugenic reform', through which 'governments could remove those individuals and structures that promoted the perpetuation of inferior citizens'.[14] For Matti Bunzl, the queer, like the Jew, 'undermined the healthy reproduction of a nationally pure society' in twentieth-century Europe, and through 'social engineering' attempts were made to prevent their reproduction.[15] In India, birth control was about 'managing the masses', but it was also concerned with 'managing the classes', as well as protecting 'gender and caste identity' against infiltration by deviant forces, writes Sarah Hodges.[16] At the same time, notes Susan Freeman, sex education was used in the post-Second World War U.S., and elsewhere, not only to educate citizens away from deviant sexual activity, but to reinforce the importance of reproduction amongst healthy, non deviant couples.[17] Kate Fisher writes that British scientists and policy makers thought it crucial that normal heterosexual couples should reproduce. Not doing so could be damaging – the 'withdrawal' method in particular was 'castigated' 'as having severe psychological and physical effects'. It was 'disastrous', a 'great strain on the nerves' and could 'cause severe mental illness'. Uncompleted sex could be considered deviant sex.[18] If the deviant was not allowed to reproduce, the normal, desirable citizen should be compelled to do so. Dowbiggin, for one, argues that for this reason it is impossible to distinguish 'birth control and population control'.[19]

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[11] Patrick Moore, *Beyond shame: reclaiming the abandoned history of radical gay sexuality* (Boston, MA, 2004), p. 149.

[12] Mark Epprecht, *Hungochani: the history of dissident sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal, 2004), pp. 223–4.

[13] Ian Dowbiggin, *The sterilization movement and global fertility in the twentieth century* (Oxford, 2008), p. 84.

[14] Simone M. Caron, *Who chooses? American reproductive history since 1830* (Gainesville, FL 2008), p. 87.

Given many societies' obsession with controlling all aspects of both 'deviant' and, 'normal' sexuality, it is no wonder that academics find themselves studying those marginal sexualities which speak the loudest. Jonathan Ned Katz writes in his history of heterosexuality that Foucault's 'focus on normalization', which forms the basis for his arguments concerning the explosion of the 'marginal', is 'one of his most original achievements as a historian'. 'How odd then', he continues, 'that he never extends his explicit normalization to heterosexuality'. 'Given the unflagging, subversive gusto with which he tore into other cherished sexual notions and institutions', 'why did Foucault not talk in depth about heterosexuality'?[20] Historians have rarely taken up this argument. Even Katz skirts the issue, defining the creation of heterosexuality as a marker of deviance which eventually became normalized. In other words, what Katz does to destabilize our own notions about heterosexuality is to tell us that it has not always been considered normal. The historical process by which the category heterosexual moved from describing a man's deviant sexual desires to a definition which labelled an individual as containing an absence of deviance, is fascinating. Katz does well to separate the history of heterosexuality as a concept, from its mythical connotations as a marker of normality. But he still sidesteps those defined as normal in favour of those who were not.

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[15] Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of modernity: Jews and queers in late twentieth-century Vienna* (London, 1999), p. 16.

[16] Sarah Hodges, *Contraception, colonialism and commerce: birth control in South India, 1920–1940* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 50.

[17] Susan K. Freeman, *Sex goes to school: girls and sex education before the 1960s* (Chicago, IL, 2008), p. 100.

[18] Kate Fisher, *Birth control, sex and marriage in Britain, 1918–1960* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 185–6.

[19] Dowbiggin, *The sterilization movement*, p. 226.

[20] Jonathan Ned Katz, *The invention of heterosexuality* (London, 2007), p. 177.

In analyzing the history of sexuality through focusing on mechanisms of control and the labelling of deviants, there is no room to see those citizens who existed quietly at the margins of the state's view – the normal. Historians find themselves writing histories of the marginalized and of repression. But by analysing repression, they run the risk of granting the 'state' too much power, and historical agents too little. Perhaps they even go so far as to give the state the very power it may have sought – that of the omnipotent, omniscient, secular God, who imposed categories on its citizens at will, and left no possibility for dissent.

While this approach places the historian in an often bleak, repressive trajectory of increasing state control, a second offers a competing explanation of the historical development of the study of sexuality, this one located in social liberation movements. Traditionally, of course, the sex on the margins, the second sex, was woman. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote in 1949, 'if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: I am woman; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man'. In her analysis, if man was mainstream, if 'humanity was male', then woman was defined 'not in herself but as relative to him'. She is thus marginal; 'she is the other'.[21] Just as the sexual deviant is to Foucault the noisy other to a silent norm, woman is 'the sex' in an otherwise silent, self-defined (male) humanity. If the concept of woman as the second sex played a crucial role in helping to define insiders and outsiders, then feminism also played a key role in the process of reclamation. It helped to place sexuality at the centre of new historical narratives. Not only would it reclaim from the margins the voices of those history had forgotten, but it would use these voices to help free contemporary actors from the margins.

Implicit in these studies was an anticipation of 'the coming freedom' of the future. Within these analyses, women are liberated from their historical sexual and political passivity. For Havelock Ellis, the Victorian woman responded 'to the stimulation of the male at the right moment just as the tree responds to the stimulation of the warmest days in spring'. Rebecca Jennings argues in her history of lesbian Britain that historians must disavow such statements, reclaiming a history of active sexual practice for both men and women.[22] Sharon Marcus wants her readers to gain a new understanding of 'women's lives', which can only be comprehended 'if we attend to their friendships with women and their relationships to female objects of desire'. Moreover, she feels that 'lesbian lives are best studied as part of the general history of women and the family'.[23] She concludes in her project on Victorian women's relationships that 'the asexual Victorian woman able only to respond to male advances is a myth – not a Victorian myth, but our own'. Women and girls were 'far more complicated and aggressive agents of desire than they appeared to be in the medical textbooks, household management manuals, or isolated essays that have been mainstays for historians of gender and sexuality'.[24] This approach builds on the work of Martha Vicinius, who identified the existence of both platonic female love and also what she calls 'sexual sapphism'. Vicinius' project centred on investigating in what ways this new designation was a response to the increasing marginalization of women's sexual love during the second half of the eighteenth century. Thus, Vicinius, like Marcus, first identifies the process and timing of contemporary and historiographical repression, and then liberates her female historical actors from obsolescence.[25] Writing the history of women-oriented women is a project of double reclamation – of the female other, and the homosexual one.

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[21] Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex* (New York, NY, 1952), pp. xxi–xxii.

[22] Rebecca Jennings, *A lesbian history of Britain: love and sex between women since 1500* (Oxford, 2007), p. 43.

[23] Sharon Marcus, *Between women: friendship, desire and marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford, 2007), p. 8.

Intertwined within this project of rediscovering women's sexual agency in the past is another which argues for the generally progressive path of history, and its particular importance in feminists' battle for increased sexual rights and freedoms. Here, the historian plays the role of analyzer of the past *and* interpreter of the present. This is true not only for feminists. In writing his history of radical gay sexuality, for example, Moore states that the aim of his project is to reclaim an 'abandoned history' which is a 'radical' one. He argues that 'there is a way for the gay male community to continue the healthy aspects of assimilation without abandoning our history'.[26] More provocatively, he argues, in a similar fashion to separatist feminists, that normalization and assimilation can only take the gay community so far. Instead Moore advocates developing an 'identifiable community of support for the "men who have sex with men"' in both the past and the present.[27]

In identifying their own community of support, feminist historians have focused particularly on the issue of contraception rights, which are read as allowing women to be liberated from subjugation in a patriarchal, pro-natalist state. Hodges argues that birth control was 'revolutionary because it allowed women to prevent pregnancy while existing as sexual agents. The use of contraception thereby offered the potential for women to obliterate motherhood as central to their experiences or identities'.[28] Caron argues that the U.S. Supreme Court's 1972 ruling, which guaranteed an individual freedom from governmental control in deciding when to start a family, 'removed the institutionalisation of punitive sex standards regarding premarital intercourse'.[29] Women, who had borne the brunt of stigmas towards illegitimacy, were finally freed from this imposition of deviance. Moreover, they gained greater equality with men, who had historically escaped much of this stigma.

How men responded to this changed sexual scene has been the focus of new studies of reclamation which focus on masculinity, particularly the so-called masculine ideals of 'self-control, restraint, and distance', discussed by Jim Reichert and John Potvin, among others.[30] In her study of birth control in Britain, Fisher contends that 'material produced by social and cultural historians on masculinity is also remarkably silent on men's reproductive roles', perhaps because of this historical masculine ideal of silent dignity about such matters. Even 'studies of sexuality or fatherhood frequently leave birth control out of the analysis.'[31] She argues that both men and women were involved in discussions surrounding contraception, and presses for the reclamation of men's role in such debates, both public and private.[32] For both men and women, then, the history of birth control and family planning can be told as a story of increased openness and emancipation. Here, these liberation histories are directly at odds with histories which would instead see contraception as repressive – as symbolizing part of a widening of state interference in private life. Dowbiggin's work on the use of sterilization as a method of (enforced) contraception, is a particularly good example.

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[24] Ibid., p. 259.

[25] Martha Vicinius, *Intimate friends: women who loved women, 1778–1928* (Chicago, IL, 2004), pp. xvi–xx.

[26] Moore, *Beyond shame*, p. 14.

[27] Ibid., p. 159.

[28] Hodges, *Contraception, colonialism, and commerce*, p. 85.

[29] Caron, *Who chooses?*, p. 5.

A not inconsiderable amount of discussion within the history of sexuality has centred on this debate of whether to read the history of sexuality as a trajectory of repression or emancipation. An entangled debate focuses on where moments of liberation might be located. So, for example, Adrian Bingham argues in his book on gender and the modern press that, contrary to what many historians before him have written, the idea of female emancipation in post-First World War Britain was illusory. Instead 'glamourous images of women on photo pages and in adverts, coupled with greater coverage of "beauty aids" and slimming techniques, put new pressures on women to maintain an attractive appearance and reinforced the assumption that women were to be judged in aesthetic terms'. Worse, he continues: 'the sexual objectification of women that would reach its full expression in the Sun's Page Three Girl was already emerging in the 1930s and this was a tendency that inevitably made it harder for women to be treated equally in public life'.[33] Freeman sets out to argue in her book on sex education in American schools that the United States became truly open in its discussion of sex and sexual behaviour only after the Second World War, although some progress was made in the 1930s.[34] In his book on gay rights and moral panics, Fejes contends that, during the same post-war era, 'the dominant media frame of homosexuality' was actually 'one of sickness, crime and perversion'.[35] In his book on youth dissent in East Germany, Mark Fenemore, too, argues that Germans living in the immediate post-Second World War period would have experienced their state as repressive. It was against this repressive backdrop that liberation movements emerged later, in the 1960s and 70s, he continues.[36] But Bingham, perhaps most pessimistically, denies the emergence of a 'permissive' discussion about and approach to sexuality even during these later decades.

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[30] Jim Reichert, *In the company of men: representations of male–male sexuality in Meiji literature* (Stanford, CA, 2006), pp. 137–62; quote: John Potvin, *Material and visual cultures beyond male bonding, 1870–1914: bodies, borders and intimacy* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 2.

[31] Fisher, *Birth control, sex, and marriage*, p. 11.

[32] Ibid., esp. p. 65. For more on masculinity, see, for example: David S. Parker, 'Gentlemanly responsibility and insults of a woman: dueling and the unwritten rules of public life in Uruguay, 1860–1920', in William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss, eds., *Gender, sexuality, and power in Latin America since independence* (New York, NY, 2007), pp. 109–32.

[33] Adrian Bingham, *Gender, modernity, and the popular press in inter-war Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 248.

[34] Freeman, *Sex goes to school*, esp. pp. 45–68.

[35] Fejes, *Gay rights and moral panic*, p. 19.

Regardless of what side of the argument they come down on, historians from both groups treat the deviant as emblematic of a society's openness or repression. Deviants thus become only of symbolic importance; ironically, then, even in discussing them, historians run the risk of perpetuating their marginalization as historical actors. Moreover, the fact that different scholars find the same regimes both 'good' and 'bad', is taken as a point of argumentation, rather than as a starting point for more nuanced analyses.

These arguments are circular; they also frequently turn in on themselves. We are left wondering what the wider purpose of the history of sexuality actually is. Foucault suggested, hopefully with some irony, given the subject matter of his own volumes, that the production of texts about the history of sexuality occurred purely for the 'speaker's benefit'. It is, to be sure, 'gratifying' to speak the unspeakable; to describe one's work and notice the listener's slight pause, the quiet raising of an eyebrow. To write a history of sexuality does have the air of a 'deliberate transgression', and brings with it an ability to place oneself on the margins, albeit perhaps fleetingly. Like the voyeurs of the sexual underworld described so aptly by Scott Herring, we too can 'slum it' for a moment.[37] We can play the role of the 'sexual flaneur', touring 'spots' of so-called deviant activity, analyzing them and writing their histories.[38] This can be a titillating project; indeed, reading Marcus's book on female relationships is, at times, remarkably so. But hopefully this is not all that we are doing. Kunzel has noted that we 'have produced a rich and sophisticated body of scholarship dedicated to proving that sexuality has a history'.[39] So what? Surely there must be a bigger question.[40]

On the other hand, it seems equally suspicious to suggest, as H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook have done, that historians of sexuality have written 'a total history of modern western culture'.[41] Or, as Bunzl argues, that we can understand everything about the development from a 'modern' nationalistic society to a 'post-modern', transnational one (whatever that might be), through examining the present position of Jews and queers in European society.[42] This does not seem advisable, and is certainly not achievable.

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[36] Mark Fenemore, *Sex, thugs and rock 'n' roll: teenage rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (Oxford, 2007), esp. pp. 19–68.

[37] Scott Herring, *Queering the underworld: slumming, literature, and the undoing of lesbian and gay history* (London, 2007).

[38] Moore, *Beyond shame*, p. 107.

[39] Kunzel, *Criminal intimacy*, pp. 3–4.

[40] What this question might be, will be returned to later in the piece.

[41] Cocks and Houlbrook, 'Introduction', p. 3.

[42] Bunzl, *Symptoms of modernity*, esp. 'Conclusion: symptoms of post-modernity', pp. 213–24.

More serious than why we are writing this history, and what we aim to do with it, is whether we should be doing it at all. Foucault suggested that this very act of writing, our 'will to knowledge', would not so much free us from the existing power structure, as place us firmly within it. Using the very same categories created by the state to control and define citizens in order to reclaim their histories was impossible, he argued. Not only were historical actors powerless, so too were historians. The best escape from this paradox was *not* to speak about sexuality, particularly not about alternative sexualities. Doing so only reinforced their taboo-value, and strengthened the state's power to define and oppress those considered deviants. This clearly poses a problem for historians, whether those liberationists who wish to own and reclaim identities and assert their importance in the historical record; or those focused on the repression in historical societies.

Post-structuralism proved a highly useful way out of this paradox. It has allowed historians to 'speak the unspeakable' without imposing oppressive definitions on either historical or contemporary actors. Rebecca Jennings has noted that 'in queer history, the political concept of defining "queer" sexuality in direct opposition to normative, or socially accepted, sexuality has been translated into a move away from the positive, affirmative model of lesbian and gay history, which sought to reclaim a heroic past of community-building and resistance to oppression'. Instead, 'queer histories analyse systems of knowledge about sexuality, exploring different ways in which sexuality has been thought about and described in different periods.'[43] Other studies, including Alfred Thomas's on the Cezch Bohemian body, and Hugh B. Urban's research on sexuality and western esotericism, purport to write a history of sex and bodies using only cultural productions, such as literature and film, as their sources. Thus, their work focuses on 'gendered symbols', 'subjectivity', 'male constructs,' and 'subjective-social oppositions' in order to place this 'literature', and the discourses surrounding it, into its 'larger social and political contexts'.[44]

Although this decision to focus on systems of knowledge about sexuality has enabled scholars to escape Foucault's trap, it has raised other problems. Historians have used the category of 'sexuality' at times inappropriately. Prostitution is a case in point. In the new Palgrave edited collection *The modern history of sexuality*, there is a chapter about prostitution.[45] Herzog, in her historiographical review, takes prostitution and its study as her starting point.[46] Obviously, when writing about sexuality, it would be difficult to omit something as central and polarizing. But there is a fundamental problem here. If you were to ask a prostitute what she felt her sexuality to be, you might, I imagine, get a variety of answers. I doubt 'prostitute' would be one of them. Prostitute is not a sexuality, it is not a sexual identity. The prostitute engages in sex for money, but this is entirely separate from how she might define her sexual self. In including it within this collection the author and editors conflate the act with the identity.[47]

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[43] Jennings, *A lesbian history of Britain*, p. xviii.

[44] Alfred Thomas, *The Bohemian body: gender and sexuality in modern Czech culture* (London, 2007), p. 7; Hugh B. Urban, *Magia sexualis: sex, magic, and liberation in modern western esotericism* (London, 2006), p. 5.

[45] Elizabeth Clement, 'Prostitution', in Cocks and Houlbrook, eds., *The modern history of sexuality*, pp. 206–30.

[46] Herzog, 'Syncopated sex', p. 1288.

More bizarrely, in eschewing experience in favour of discourse, sex has become all but absent from discussions of sexuality. In writing primarily about discourses surrounding sexuality, historians have succeeded in marginalizing the act of sex completely. This is despite the fact that these discourses ultimately occur only because at their centre there is the existence, or at least imagination, of a sexual act.

II

Where, then, does the history of sexuality go from here? First, and perhaps most obviously, we must better problematize the issue of repression and permissiveness in the historical contexts we explore. In this way, we can better uncover the most interesting aspect of this divide – the ways in which societies and governments are simultaneously progressive and repressive.[48] As Foucault himself wrote: 'pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement'.[49] It is possible to understand the explosion of discourse about sexuality as representing an era of new-openness about sexuality, one in which there existed an 'unprecedented willingness to discuss sex openly', while recognizing that a not inconsiderable amount of the motivation for those discourses was concerned with controlling, or even repressing, certain forms of sexuality.[50]

In order to express their disdain for an activity considered harmful to the moral fibre of the individual or collective psyche, citizens and governments can be forced to speak of it with new frankness and openness. Indeed, a society's ability to experience a moral panic is predicated on a relatively progressive public sphere. In exploring these contradictions, we can identify internal inconsistencies within societies' moral codes and taboos. We can analyse the triggers of repression, and consider the not uncomplicated ways in which they relate, or don't relate, to visible incidences of 'deviance'. We would do well to remember, as Scott Gunther has done so successfully in his work on the history of homosexuality in France, that it is impossible to understand histories like these as 'a simple telescopic progression toward ever greater freedom … beginning in the mid-twentieth century and continuing up to the present'. But neither should we focus only on the ways in which developments have 'limited the freedoms' of 'homosexuals' and other groups. Instead, we must view the period as one comprising a 'complicated series of strategies adapted to each time period'.[51]

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[47] Of course, the situation within the sex trade itself is far more complicated, as prostitutes are not the only players within it. Thus, it might be that a prostitute's client would define his or her sexuality through the use of prostitutes. However, since studies of prostitution rarely discuss these individuals in a three-dimensional fashion, if they discuss them at all, this does not excuse the labelling of prostitutes in this way. Although I use the female gender here, this is not to ignore or forget the important, and under-recognized, point, that men also work as prostitutes.

[48] Dagmar Herzog speaks eloquently about this problem in modern-day America. See: Dagmar Herzog, *Sex in crisis* (New York, NY, 2008).

[49] Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, p. 49.

[50] Dowbiggin, *The sterilization movement*, p. 151.

In doing this, we can make unexpected conclusions about societies' and states' relationships towards gender, sexuality, and deviance. Doing so demonstrates the power and impotence of both states and citizens. It also reveals the disconnection between the two. Even in the most representative of democracies 'society's laws do not represent a mere codification of citizens' general will'; conversely, authoritarian regimes do not act without any consideration of what its citizenry will tolerate.[52] Both are constrained by necessities, be they political, economic, and so forth. The most successful chapters of Fenemore's book on East German deviant culture are those which focus on the way in which the regime was forced to 'sex up its socialism', 'manufacturing consent' by attending to the sexual (and other) needs and desires of its captive citizenry.[53]

Secondly, we can use these findings to apply the history of sexuality more widely, without trying, and failing, to write entire cultural histories. By investigating the more subtle ways in which societies sought both to emancipate and control certain groups, sometimes, even, the same groups in different ways, we can learn much about their struggles with concepts of citizenship. Fenemore, for example, considers how the East German state attempted to construct an attitude towards sexuality that was distinctly anti-capitalist. Implicit in these discussions are issues far bigger than their attitude towards sex. In constructing communist sexuality as non-capitalist, East German leaders were formulating the very nature of their state. By defining behaviours such as listening to rock-and-roll music, wearing western clothes, imitating western male-female relationships, and so forth, as unacceptable, the government was defining what it meant to be East German. And, thus, what it meant to be East Germany. Likewise, in her study of private life and communist morality in Russia, Deborah Field has much implicit information on what Russia considered acceptable 'public' life to be.[54]

Conversely, the U.S. government's often contradictory desire to protect individuality and also to shape a consistent, 'traditional', non-radical, non-communist sexual culture, demonstrates their preoccupation with shaping young people into non-communist Americans. Indeed, one of the relatively few consistencies of sex education programmes, writes Freeman, was their 'anti fascist and anticommunist posturing', and their 'ideology of the superiority of "American" – that is, white, Christian, middle-class, and nuclear – families'.[55] In examining Hong Kong's queer culture in the post-colonial period, Helen Leung also wrestles with Hong Kong's 'coming out' as an independent state. In doing so, it defined itself both against some of its deviant citizens and also against its colonial masters and mainland China. It opposed 'the Communist state's emphasis on the reproductive nuclear family as the foundation of social life; while creating new 'erotic sites' and excluding others.[56] In all these examples, the state defines itself through defining what must remain outside of it.

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[51] Scott Gunther, *The elastic closet: a history of homosexuality in France, 1942–present* (London, 2009), p. 3.

[52] Ibid., p. 7.

[53] Fenemore, *Sex, thugs and rock 'n' roll*, pp. 100–17, 156–83.

[54] Deborah A. Field, *Private life and communist morality in Krushchev's Russia* (New York, NY, 2007).

[55] Freeman, *Sex goes to school*, quote, p. xiv.

Posing these larger questions to studies of sexual deviance allows us finally to see and discuss the unspoken 'normal', as well as integrate sexual histories into wider discourses about citizenship, belonging, and the negotiation of control and power. We can, as Katz has suggested, ask about 'the normal implantation', in the same way we have asked about 'the perverse implantation'.[57] In doing so, we can refocus studies of sexuality and its relationship with deviance onto the margins themselves. In other words, we can define the margins as a political, economic, and social space, and investigate how societies defined them, as well as how these marginal spaces changed over time. We can explore how individual citizens, the societies of which they were a part, and their governmental organizations, representative or otherwise, struggled to define what was unacceptable, marginal, or acceptable. The margins offer a way of investigating 'what denaturalises, disrupts, or resignifies' conventional relations, as well as gender, 'erotic desire and sexual identities'.[58] We can also examine how different parts of society may have viewed the margins differently, or perhaps located it in an entirely different space. Through doing all of this, we can better recognize in what ways certain groups have been, at times, disproportionately singled out for 'deviantization', such as the lower classes, minority populations, and women, for example. We can explore 'intertwined histories of criminalised race and class and criminalised sexuality' and ask what role sexuality plays within those histories.[59]

Institutional histories are one particular framework for exploring the margins. The prison, for example, allows us to see the interplay amongst 'sex, gender, and power'. Studying the interactions of prisoners, and between prisoners and their guards, allows the historian to analyse how acceptable behaviour was negotiated. Observers, writes Pablo Piccato, were 'obsessed' with relations in prison because 'they were the most visible evidence of criminals' challenge to social norms outside the prison'.[60] Conversely, these spaces of explicit marginalization also allow us to see the ways in which bureaucrats attempted to normalize their detainees' behaviour. Kunzel notes that some 'sociologists interpreted women's life in prison as mirroring not subverting' traditional gender and sexual norms. Interracial relationships between women in particular were explained away through 'heterosexualizing them'. The white-American woman was attracted to the black-American woman not because of her femininity, but because of the otherness represented in her blackness. She was thus more like a man than another woman. This interpretation calmed fears of both race mixing and lesbianism. 'Rather than signalling a rejection of dominant notions of femininity and heterosexuality', in this interpretation, 'prison lesbianism' was 'a mirror image of the most traditional form of heterosexual femininity'.[61]

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[56] Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Undercurrents: queer culture and postcolonial Hong King* (Vancouver, 2008), p. 41.

[57] Katz, *The invention of heterosexuality*, p. 173.

[58] Leung, *Undercurrents*, p. 2.

[59] Kunzel, *Criminal intimacy*, p. 6.

[60] Pablo Piccato, '"Such a strong need": sexuality and violence in Belem prison', in French and Bliss, eds., *Gender, sexuality, and power*, pp. 87–108, quote p. 101.

While the prison is a particularly evocative site for these discussions, it is not the only one. The 'margins', after all, permeate the physical space of nations, cities, and neighbourhoods. Nor should we view the space on the margins as being concerned only with 'pathology and deviance'. It is the space on both the right and wrong side of the tracks, so to speak. In other words, if the margins can be defined as that space just on the 'bad' side of the divide between normality and deviance, it must also be understood as the space just on the 'good' side as well. If we look at those who are 'marginally' deviant, we must also examine those who are 'marginally' normal. By focusing on the margins in this way, we can see both 'normal' and 'abnormal' citizens simultaneously. The 'normal' citizen becomes valuable in his or her own right, rather than merely representing an absence of deviance. 'Regular sexuality' can thus stop being only 'a reflux movement, originating in … peripheral sexualities'.[62]

This focus on the deviant has not only caused us to ignore the 'normal'. It has also marginalized certain groups that were not categorized under the law, through government policy, or overt social stigma. Marcus indicates that this 'disproportionate' focus on visible deviants has led to certain other groups being 'neglected'. In her study she notes that because 'women were not included in the legal definition of sodomy and were less likely than men to be arrested for public sex acts', sexually deviant women who were not criminals have 'faded from view'.[63] For histories of homosexuality, investigating the margins, or queer spaces, instead of criminals has 'highlighted the importance to exploring same-sex desire in the context of wider attitudes towards gender and sexuality'.[64] In taking this approach, we can consider how changes in the normal are reflected in and affected by changes in a variety of 'others', including those who have a different sexual desire, different sex, different race, etc.

Thirdly, in viewing the spaces of the margins, and how these margins might change, we can think about the ways in which both labels and identities are themselves historically constructed. Jonathan Katz notes in his book *The invention of heterosexuality* that 'the earliest use of the word *heterosexual* in the United States occurred in 'May 1892. *Heterosexual* was not equated here with normal sex, but with perversion – a definitional tradition that lasted in middle-class culture into the 1920s.' It is the development of the concept of heterosexuality from one describing perversity to one denoting normality – in other words the concept's process of normalization – that is the central focus of Katz's work.[65] Fejes points to another moment of definitional change, referring to a *Time Magazine*, October 1969 cover story called 'The homosexual: newly visible, newly understood'. He writes that 'with the tone of an anthropologist's report describing a newly discovered tribe, it presented capsule descriptions of what it termed the major homosexual types … . Care was taken to note that many homosexuals were well-adjusted, successful professionals'. The article concluded: 'While homosexuality is a serious and sometimes crippling maladjustment, research has made clear that it is no longer necessary or morally justifiable to treat all inverts as outcasts. The challenge to American society is simultaneously to devise civilized ways of discouraging the condition and to alleviate the anguish of those who cannot be helped, or do not wish to be helped'.[66] Cornelie Usborne argues that even acts are not 'timeless', but relevant to gender, class, age, occupation and educational background. Using the case of abortion, she argues that 'women's reproductive behaviour is not biologically but rather historically determined; in other words, that there is a close connection between women's choice to reproduce or not to reproduce and their social, political, and cultural situation'.[67]

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[61] Kunzel, *Criminal intimacy*, p. 129.

[62] Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, p. 39.

[63] Marcus, *Between women*, p. 14.

[64] Jennings, *A lesbian history of Britain*, p. xviii.

[65] Katz, *The invention of heterosexuality*, p. 20.

We can take this further, suggesting it is also historically constructed for the very reason that it was only labelled or understood to be abortion at certain times in history. In 1873, the American Comstock Law forbade 'importation, mailing, and interstate transportation of articles and literature concerning both contraception and abortion. By the end of the century every state in the Union except Kentucky had outlawed abortion'.[68] This timing was not unique to the United States; indeed abortion was outlawed at similar points across the western world. This was not because American attitudes to interrupting pregnancy had changed; but instead because the concept of interrupting or terminating a pregnancy had been relatively recently defined. Usborne shows that, with the development of modern, medical abortions in the early twentieth century, and their resulting criminalization, women who had traditionally understood themselves to be attempting to resume menstrual regularity began to be charged with a crime. Their actions had not changed; instead the state's definition of what they were doing had. What is most interesting in her book is women's repeated refusal to accept being labelled an 'aborter'. Other groups also chose to reject an imposed identity. Caron aptly describes the way in which some members of the black community saw illegitimacy in a different light. 'Many black teens did not consider pregnancy as ruining their life chances; they already lived in poverty and felt trapped there.'[69] Kunzel shows us women involved in lesbian, interracial relationships while in prison, but who would define themselves as both straight and racist.[70]

These individuals' desires resist traditional categorization. In other words, as Erica Windler shows in her discussion of cross-dressing in Brazil, there are sexual beings and identities for which existing definitions are of little use.[71] In discussing them in the context of Hong Kong's sexual cultures, Leung says she had to 'duly abandon "gay and lesbian" as a rubric'.[72] Some such individuals were defined as 'freaks' because they confounded obvious gender, sexual, and even racial, identities. The 'hairy Belle' both appalled and titillated audiences in Victorian Britain, argues Nadja Durbach, because she had hair where normal women didn't – a bearded, hairy woman, she transgressed gender boundaries, as well as evoking publicly visible 'pubic' hair, something unacceptable to see or discuss in 'normal' populations. Her racial difference added another layer of confusion for contemporary audiences.[73]

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[66] Fejes, *Gay rights and moral panic*, p. 35.

[67] Cornelie Usborne, *Cultures of abortion in Weimar Germany* (Oxford, 2007), p. 11.

[68] Caron, *Who chooses?*, p. 3.

[69] Ibid., p. 161.

[70] Kunzel, *Criminal intimacy*, p. 29.

Cross-dressing and transgender activities are another particularly good example of this problem of fitting 'personal identities' to fixed categories created by the state, as well as the problems historians have trying to utilize these categories themselves. 'As modernity has progressed' writes Alison Oram 'the ambiguous female husband gave way to the lesbian, the molly to the homosexual, while the passing woman became the transvestite, and the hermaphrodite or intersex suffered the reassignment of gender through often arbitrary medical decisions'. Furthermore, 'those unhappy in their own sexed bodies were, in the medical gaze, held to suffer from a medical syndrome known as gender dysphoria'.[74] But before lesbian identity was created, for example, passing as a man, or acting as a female husband, was a recognized means for expressing desire. Oram questions what this 'reaction to cross-dressing' tells 'us about how gender and sexuality is understood by contemporaries in particular historical periods'.[75]

Discerning the difference between more flexible, personal identities, and more rigid social labels allows for an investigation into the activities and identities of actors such as these 'passing women', for whom categories we recognize may not have existed. Historians such as Caroll Smith-Rosenburg and Lillian Faderman have argued that sexual relationships between women did not occur before the moment the label 'lesbian' was invented, because even those Victorian women widely documented to live in female marriages, would not have understood what it meant to be actively sexual, so repressed were they by concepts of passive femininity. Here, these authors are trying to suggest that an act cannot occur without a label. If we take this argument, lesbianism existed in Britain only after 1921, when it was made a criminal offence.[76] This is true in so far as it exists as a

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[71] Erica M. Windler, 'Madame Durocher's performance: cross-dressing, midwifery, and authority in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, Brazil', in French and Bliss, eds. *Gender, sexuality, and power*, pp. 52–70.

[72] Leung, *Undercurrents*, p. 1.

[73] Nadja Durbach, 'The missing link and the Hairy Belle: Krao and the Victorian discourses of evolution, imperialism, and primitive sexuality', in Marlene Tromp, ed., *Victorian freaks: the social context of freakery in Britain* (Columbus, OH, 2008), pp. 134–54, here, esp. p. 148.

[74] Alison Oram, 'Cross-dressing and transgender', in Cocks and Houlbrook, eds., *The modern history of sexuality*, pp. 256–285, here p. 280.

[75] Ibid., p. 259.

[76] Matt Cook, 'Law', in Cocks and Houlbrook, eds., *The modern history of sexuality*, pp. 64–86, here, p. 74.

'deviant' label only after this point; however, to argue that until or around this point, female-oriented women would not have conceived of female-female lesbian acts seems unlikely. There was just no label for it that we would understand. Marcus takes up this point, suggesting that while 'historians of women and lesbians have studied' many of these periods before, 'they have almost always assumed the dominance of heterosexuality whose evidence stems from the fact that it is all we have been trained to see'. Instead, she continues, recognizing spaces between our own identity categories, 'allows us to use these sources to make new distinctions – for example between how women wrote about friends and lovers. It also establishes new connections – for example, between femininity and homoeroticism, or between female marriages and marriages between men and women'.[77] Again, it is not merely the myth of an asexual past for women we must reject, but our own myth of fixed, ahistorical categories.[78]

Not only must we extend our understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour without resorting to historically constructed labels, but we must also consider the ways in which we impose our labels on cultures or peoples unfairly. Epprecht, for example, argues in his history of dissident sexuality in Southern Africa, that 'dogmatic revulsion against same-sex behaviours, acts, relationships, and thoughts (that is, homophobia) was introduced into the region by European colonialists and preachers'. It was an unknown category beforehand. Interestingly, while the imposition of homophobia sometimes 'came in the form of explicit propaganda and draconian punishment', more often 'it was inculcated through fairly subtle discourses, clothing, and the reorganization of living spaces that combined to fetishize certain parts of the body and to imply the need for defence against sexual temptations that were hitherto unimagined as sexual'.[79] Reichert discusses the 'institutionalization of compulsory male heterosexuality' within modern Japanese society.[80] This was 'conceived as an extension of the larger project to civilize Japanese culture and leave behind practices from the Edo past that were judged to be backward'.[81] Accepting western norms of sexuality was part of the 'civilizing' project. Again, part of the appeal of freak shows, beyond the voyeuristic appreciation of the other, was in witnessing the civilization of the freak through their participation in western culture. In the case of the Hairy Belle, entrepreneurs attempted to capitalize on Belle's good manners, proficiency in English, as well as her 'simean', ape-like features. A deviant sexual identity was imposed upon her that both excited and justified her audience.[82]

We can see quite clearly that the history of the last two hundred years has resulted in an explosion of available identities and labels. We must evaluate what this development of labelling actually means, and how as historians we might best use these labels to foster understanding of our historical subjects. In viewing deviant categories as fluid historical creations, we can, in some cases, de-tabooize them. But we must also consider when using these labels is unhelpful or inappropriate. Otherwise, we run the risk of becoming trapped in our own historical context. Exploring 'the role played by sexologists in the development of the history of sexuality' as well as 'the ways in which early sexologists and sexual reformers wrote themselves into the historical narratives they offered' enables us to escape the negative effects of sexologists' 'self congratulatory posturing' on historical writing.[83] Writing about the ways historical actors developed and assigned categories and labels, and the ways in which other individuals chose to reject or reclaim those labels, does not place us within the power structure. Instead, it allows us to critique that structure.

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[77] Marcus, *Between women*, p. 15.

[78] Ibid., p. 259.

[79] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p. 225.

[80] Reichert, *In the company of men*, pp. 69–98.

[81] Ibid., p. 70.

[82] Durbach, 'The missing link and the Hairy Belle', pp. 135, 146.

But revealing the historicity of labels and identities comes with its own risks. Once we identify the ways in which categories of sexual identity are fluid and relative, how do we study them? They do not actually exist, after all. Post-structuralism may have presented an attractive exit, but it only gets us so far. In his book, Herring aims to reveal 'how U.S. writers used the conventions of slumming literature … to undermine slumming's intentions'. He 'undoes underworld knowledge-productions'; his is a 'polemic against contemporary studies of subculture'.[84] While this is deconstruction at its very finest (and I mean that seriously, as well as ironically), it, quite naturally, does not actually get us anywhere. We can expand Herring's central point about the non-usefulness and non-existence of sexual 'subculture' to the study of sexuality more generally. How can we talk about 'discourses of sexuality' once we realize, as Foucault himself did, that the very concept of sexuality is also a modern construct?

We would be best served to discard it. Instead we must refocus on the acts of sex – those divisions of reproductive functions, the acts of intercourse – that take place at the centre of sexualities – the ways in which people experience the erotic and express themselves as human beings. For while Foucault demonstrated that we cannot effectively measure sexuality, his elastic responses, and his seeming refusal to discuss the relationships between discourses, leave us with the power simultaneously to explain everything and nothing.[85] While the sexology movement came with its own attendant problems, its central aim – to study 'sex and the relations between the sexes' – seems an eminently sensible one.[86] Of course we must not eschew theory altogether, in favour of colourless empirical data. Instead, we could borrow from the frameworks utilized in histories of emotion and intimacy. While both focus on the experiential body, they have much to say about social discourses and their meanings.[87] We can use the 'stuff of everyday life' – 'letters, diaries, memoirs, and biographies', as well as 'novels, magazines, children's literature', to name a few examples, to write a history that refocuses on the historical actors operating at the centre of sexual encounters and relationships.[88] We can also look to 'material culture' more widely, using, as John Potvin has done, photographs, decorative art, and popular illustrations to enrich our analyses of social attitudes towards and relationships with sexuality. Through these sources we can explore multiple aspects of both marginal and mainstream behaviours.

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[83] Chris Waters, 'Sexology', in Cocks and Houlbrook, eds., *The modern history of sexuality*, pp. 41–63, here, pp. 52–3.

[84] Herring, *Queering the underworld*, p. 4.

[85] For more on this criticism, see: Jeffrey Weeks, *Making sexual history* (London, 2000), p. 107.

[86] Oxford English Dictionary, 'sexology'.

[87] See Potvin, *Material and visual cultures*, for example.

Moreover, through focusing on the 'very real bodily differences that can affect individual lives' we can explore 'experience and the formation of identity in the home, the community, and at work, often questioning the conventional boundaries between' these identities, while at the same time embracing a 'plurality of multiple interpretations'.[89] Willem Floor does this particularly well in his study of Iran, by focusing on 'sexual relations' and the various forms of sexual relationships between men and women and their consequences.[90] Placing our discussions of sexuality upon a sexed body will allow us appropriately to incorporate issues such as prostitution into this genre, as well as other issues clearly related to sex, but not, perhaps, to sexuality.

In conclusion, we can understand 'sex on the margins' to be marginalized sexualities; we can also think of it as *the* sex on the margins, in other words as women, or even as other, even more oppressed genders. We can and should think of the ways the study of 'sex' and 'sexuality' is marginalized in historical writing. This occurs both by outsiders who may not take it seriously and also often by those engaged in writing it, as a result of their excessively narrow or comprehensive focus. But, finally, and most importantly, we must reflect on the ways in which 'sex' itself has become marginalized in our discussions of sexuality. Given that all studies of sexuality, and perhaps also gender, are to a certain degree preoccupied with sex in various forms, it is high time actually to start talking about it.

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[88] Marcus, *Between women*, p. 14.

[89] Marlene Tromp, 'Introduction: toward situating the Victorian freak', in Tromp, ed., *Victorian freaks*, pp. 1–18, here, p. 4; Usborne, *Cultures of abortion*, p. 17.

[90] Willem Floor, *A social history of sexual relations in Iran* (Washington, DC, 2008), p. xiv.