

SEXUALITY

Joseph Bristow



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the NEW CRITICAL IDIOM



SEXUALITY

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Joseph Bristow is Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. His recent books include *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* (2008) and *The Wilde Archive: Traditions, Histories, Resources* (2011). He is an editor of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* (Routledge).

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SEXUALITY

Second edition

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First edition published 1997

by Routledge

This edition published 2011

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bristow, Joseph.

Sexuality / Joseph Bristow. – 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Sex. 2. Sex and history. 3. Sexology. I. Title.

HQ12.B68 2010

306.7 – dc22

2010023327

ISBN 0-203-83583-2 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN13: 978-0-415-29928-2 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-29929-9 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-83583-8 (ebk)

CONTENTS

<i>Series editor's preface</i>	vi
<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	vii
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1 Sexological types	12
Sexual classifications	12
Feminist contentions	43
Consuming passions	52
2 Psychoanalytic drives	57
Freud's complexes	57
Lacan's orders	76
Feminist interventions	89
3 Libidinal economies	105
(De)generating pleasures	105
Pornographic materials	133
4 Discursive desires	151
Foucault's bodies	151
Foucault's exclusions	169
Foucault's followers	177
5 Diverse eroticisms	197
Queer (non)identities	197
Global sexualities	215
<i>Glossary</i>	223
<i>Bibliography</i>	233
<i>Further reading</i>	241
<i>Index</i>	243

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The New Critical Idiom is a series of introductory books which seeks to extend the lexicon of literary terms, in order to address the radical changes which have taken place in the study of literature during the last decades of the twentieth century. The aim is to provide clear, well-illustrated accounts of the full range of terminology currently in use, and to evolve histories of its changing usage.

The current state of the discipline of literary studies is one where there is considerable debate concerning basic questions of terminology. This involves, among other things, the boundaries which distinguish the literary from the non-literary; the position of literature within the larger sphere of culture; the relationship between literatures of different cultures; and questions concerning the relation of literary to other cultural forms within the context of interdisciplinary studies.

It is clear that the field of literary criticism and theory is a dynamic and heterogeneous one. The present need is for individual volumes on terms which combine clarity of exposition with an adventurousness of perspective and a breadth of application. Each volume will contain as part of its apparatus some indication of the direction in which the definition of particular terms is likely to move, as well as expanding the disciplinary boundaries within which some of these terms have been traditionally contained. This will involve some re-situation of terms within the larger field of cultural representation, and will introduce examples from the area of film and the modern media in addition to examples from a variety of literary texts.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Sexuality aims to provide a clear and concise introduction to the meanings and myths attached to a key critical term. In covering a wide range of theoretical writings, I have tried to give a fair and balanced representation of contending intellectual positions. Given the strict limits on space, the discussion has been obliged to condense a great many complex points in the most direct manner possible. So that readers may gain further insights into this diverse field, parenthetical references indicate noteworthy secondary sources. Wherever possible, I have explained cultural allusions that might be unfamiliar to some readers. Dates of birth and death have been provided for the large number of historical figures mentioned in the discussion.

This book was completed while I held a Senior External Research Fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Center during 1995–96. The Director of the Center, Keith Baker, together with the administrative staff – Sue Dambrau, Gwen Lorraine and Susan Sebbard – made me feel particularly welcome during my stay. Research for this study was assisted by the help I received from the staffs of both the Cecil H. Green Library and the J. Henry Meyer Memorial Library at Stanford. Two fellows at the Center – Eric Oberle and James I. Porter – kindly pointed me in the direction of sources I would not otherwise have found. Richard W. Schoch, a Whiting Fellow at the Center, offered warm and sustaining friendship during the writing process. The Associate Director of the Center, Susan Dunn, showed great generosity in loaning me personal copies of books that were proving hard to obtain while I was drawing this project to a close. Last but by no means least, Talia Rodgers has been an extremely patient and encouraging editor, as has the series editor, John Drakakis. My thanks go to all of these colleagues.

Stanford University
May 1996

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this second edition of *Sexuality*, I have taken the opportunity to update references, correct errors and emend several formulations in the original version of this book, which was published in early 1997. What is more, I have added a fifth chapter entitled 'Diverse eroticisms' that takes into account noteworthy developments in thinking about the category of sexuality in relation to the emergence of queer theory and the rise of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) studies, especially in connection with challenges to 'normative' practices of desire. Since many current discussions of sexuality explore divergent types of embodiment, the fifth chapter looks at several important developments within queer thought, particularly in connection with debates about corporeality, kinship and intimacy. The concluding section of this second edition focuses attention on the ways in which scholars have recently approached the interconnections between sexuality, globalization and neoliberalism in different parts of the world, notably China, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In line with more recent titles in the New Critical Idiom series, this second edition contains a fairly comprehensive glossary of more than fifty terms that relate to the debates explored in my five chapters. While some of the terms listed in the glossary may appear self-evident (e.g. heterosexual and homosexual), these have been included so that readers can grasp their emergence, usage and etymology. Moreover, I have explained the specifically sexual use of some of these otherwise well-known terms because they might on occasion be unfamiliar to readers outside the English-speaking world. A list of further reading appears after the bibliography. The additional titles mentioned here include recent critical studies that address emergent areas of inquiry, deal with broad topics or take largely theoretical approaches to the study of sexuality in the humanities and social sciences. (In the bibliography, I have supplied two dates for some of the titles; the first

date refers to the edition I have used, while the second date identifies the original date of publication.)

Some readers of the first edition mentioned that they were surprised to see that *Sexuality* does not address pressing matters such as sexual harassment and the sexual abuse of children, both of which continue to generate urgent political debate. Such significant questions relating to public health, public policy and social welfare lie beyond the scope of the present study. Moreover, *Sexuality* does not engage with scientific inquiries into anatomy, evolutionary theory, genetics, heredity or advances in medical knowledge with regard to the mental and physiological conditions in which sexual desire is cognized, embodied or represented. Instead, as a work placed within the New Critical Idiom series, the five chapters set out to trace the historical origins, underlying assumptions and theoretical deployments of sexuality as a critical term that has enjoyed increasing prominence within the humanities and social sciences.

The opening chapters consider the emergence of sexuality as a category in the late nineteenth-century field of sexology and the near-contemporary discipline of psychoanalysis. Many of the remaining materials on sexuality discussed in this book relate to widely debated areas of critical, feminist, lesbian and gay, and queer theory that have many of their origins in the 1960s and have gained prominence in the scholarly world since the 1980s and 1990s. These theoretical inquiries, which span the Victorian *fin de siècle* and the opening decade of the twenty-first century, provide divergent frameworks for imagining what sexuality might be – whether as an unruly set of drives, forces or energies that have been subject to forms of cultural, social and psychological repression; an array of erotic identifications that involve complex psychical displacements, projections and fetishisms; a set of discursive practices that support and/or subvert dominant cultural and political ideals; a category that draws attention to the ways in which our bodies are erotically orientated in space and time; and a surplus energy that capitalism both produces and seeks to regulate or harness. As a highly manipulated critical term, sexuality can stand for some or all of these things. But regardless of the conclusions that we may draw about the

meaning of this contested word, the fact is that sexuality remains central to present-day comprehensions of the ways in which experiences and expressions of eroticism are supposed to define aspects – if not the very core – of our subjectivities.

The first edition of *Sexuality* was published at the moment I moved permanently from England to the United States to take up a position at the University of California, Los Angeles. During the past fourteen years, I have benefited greatly from the intellectual resources of UCLA, especially its remarkable library system. It has been my good fortune to work closely with several graduate students who have an established interest in LGBT studies, in particular, and sexuality studies, in general. My thanks must go to Dustin Friedman, Patrick Keilty and Daniel Williford for very productive discussions about recent scholarship in the field. For many years, H.N. Lukes has generously shared thoughts about her researches on psychoanalysis and queer sexual desire. Research for this second edition was completed midway through a year-long Sawyer seminar series, 'Homosexualities, from Antiquity to the Present', which was generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Planning for this seminar, which I directed, ensured that I learned much from my colleagues on the programming committee: Lowell Gallagher, Grace Kyungwon Hong, Arthur L. Little, Amy Richlin and Juliet Williams. Robert G. Diaz, the Mellon postdoctoral fellow attached to this programme, generously shared his insights into current developments in queer thought. I am grateful, too, to Sue-Ellen Case for generously discussing her contributions to recent debates within LGBT studies and queer theory. All of these colleagues have broadened my understanding of trends, shifts and transformations in an area of inquiry that is filled with intellectual energy, as well as many sharp divisions of opinion.

Since *Sexuality* was originally presented in British English, this second edition maintains its conventions of spelling and punctuation.

My thanks must go to Emma Nugent at Routledge for the encouragement she gave me while I was completing the revision of this study.

During the past decade, my life has gone through several welcome changes that have made me rethink some of my earlier

assumptions about affection, intimacy and desire. My partner, Blaine Ashton Noblett, has taught me many things in this regard. And, last but not least, there are our long-hair dachshunds, Leo and Sabrina, who were never far from me when I completed my work on this second edition.

Los Angeles
March 2010

INTRODUCTION

What is sexuality? To this blunt question, the answer would seem clear enough. Sexuality is surely connected with sex. But if we find ourselves pressed to define what is meant by sex, then the situation becomes somewhat more complicated. In the English language, the word sex is certainly ambiguous. A sign with various connotations, sex refers not only to sexual activity (*to have sex*), it also marks the distinction between male and female anatomy (*to have a sex*). So it would perhaps be wise to think twice about the ways in which sexuality might be implicated in these distinct frameworks of understanding. Is sexuality supposed to designate sexual desire? Or does it refer instead to one's sexed being? If we find ourselves answering yes to both enquiries, then sexuality would appear to embrace ideas about pleasure *and* physiology, fantasy *and* anatomy. On reflection, then, sexuality emerges as a term that defines both internal and external phenomena, and both the realm of the psyche and the material world. Given the equivocal meaning of sex, one might suggest that sexuality occupies a place where sexed bodies (in all their shapes and sizes) and sexual desires (in all their multifariousness) intersect only to separate. Looked at from this dual perspective, there are many kinds of

sexed body and sexual desire inhabiting sexuality. Small wonder this immensely significant term has for decades generated a huge amount of discussion from conflicting critical viewpoints.

Given the diverse theoretical approaches to sexuality, this introductory guide outlines the major modern debates about eroticism, all the way from late-Victorian sexology to twenty-first-century queer theory. Each chapter in turn shows why there is still little agreement among leading theorists on the most appropriate method for interpreting sexual desire. While some commentators would argue that sexuality articulates a fundamental human need, others would recommend that we examine closely how such an assumption arose in the first place. Contending arguments have been made that sexuality needs to be understood in relation to widely varying phenomena, from physiological drives to structures of language. The fact that it remains hard to obtain consensus on what sexuality is – or, for that matter, should be – prompts a great many urgent questions. Why is it that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an unending fascination with distinctive types of erotic behaviour? What are critics seeking to discover when devising elaborate theoretical models to understand sex? And why have modern thinkers reached such contradictory conclusions about the meaning of sexuality in our everyday lives?

To get to grips with these fundamental issues, we could do well to begin by considering how, why and when sexuality originally gained legitimacy as a critical category. Sexuality is a comparatively new term. The word became common currency in late nineteenth-century Europe and America when anthropological, scientific and sociological studies of sex were flourishing as never before. In its earliest scientific usage, sexuality defined the meanings of human eroticism, and when marked by a prefix – such as ‘bi’, ‘hetero’ or ‘homo’ – the word came to describe types of person who embodied particular desires. In previous decades, however, the label sexuality was used somewhat differently, and it is worth pondering on briefly the rather unexpected contexts in which sexuality appears at these earlier times.

If you dip into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, you will see that the first recorded use of sexuality appears in 1836. The word

turns up in an edition of the collected works of eighteenth-century English poet, William Cowper (1731–1800). Cowper's editor notes that this eminent writer 'built his poem' titled 'The Lives of Plants' upon 'their sexuality'. The *OED* suggests in this editorial commentary that sexuality means 'the quality of being sexual or having sex'. Yet 'having sex' in this particular instance refers primarily to botany. This example alone plainly shows that sexuality has not always belonged to an exclusively human domain.

A slightly later usage of sexuality may also strike us as a little surprising. The *OED* lists its third definition of the word in a quite familiar manner, as 'recognition of or preoccupation with what is sexual'. Yet here, too, the example employed to support this definition presents 'what is sexual' in an uncommon way. The example in question comes from the authorial Preface to *Yeast: A Problem* (1851), a polemical Condition-of-England novel by English writer, Charles Kingsley (1819–75): 'Paradise and hell ... as grossly material as Mahomet's, without the honest thorough-going sexuality, which you thought made his notion logical and consistent'. This sentence may well encourage us to ask why Kingsley should associate sexuality with argumentative rationality. Rarely, if ever, in the post-Victorian era has sex been thought to underpin the cognitive powers of the mind. To the contrary, some theorists are convinced that sexuality opposes reason because it exerts a hydraulic force which threatens to rise up and subvert the logical intellect.

If these two examples from the *OED* have any value, then it is to confirm that the contemporary perspectives from which we view sexuality have for the most part arisen in the past century – although there are one or two exceptions to the rule. The *Supplement* to the *OED*, for example, notes that the English poet and essayist Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) employed the term bisexuality as early as 1804, in *Aids to Reflection*, where he comments on 'the very old tradition of the *homo androgynous*, that is, that original man ... was bi-sexual'. To Coleridge, 'bisexual' evidently means containing both sexes in one body. Although this usage is not completely outmoded today, it is definitely not the same as the modern view that bisexuality means attraction to both men and women. Only by the 1890s had sexuality and its

variant prefixed forms become associated with types of sexual person and kinds of erotic attraction. The *Supplement* to the *OED* records that both the words heterosexuality and homosexuality first entered the English language in an 1892 translation of the well-known study, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, by the Austrian sex researcher, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902). One of Krafft-Ebing's earliest and most attentive readers, John Addington Symonds (1840–93), observed in 1891 that 'the adjective *homosexual*, though ill-compounded of a Greek and a Latin word, is useful, and has been adopted by medical writers on this topic' (though, notably, he thought perhaps that the epithet '*Unisexual*' would have been better) (Symonds 1896 [1891]: 44). Thereafter, it took some time before the etymological hybrids, hetero- and homosexuality, circulated widely among the population; it is clear that when they were generally acknowledged they were perceived as the only sexual options. (It is important to note that bisexuality tended to disappear from public view, since it was consigned to specialist medical textbooks and psychoanalytic writings.) This fact becomes plain in a frequently cited episode in *My Father and Myself* (1992 [1968]) by English novelist J.R. Ackerley (1896–1967). In this distinguished memoir, Ackerley recalls his bafflement at being asked by a friend shortly after the First World War (1914–18): 'Are you a homo or a hetero?' 'I had', writes Ackerley, 'never heard either term before' (Ackerley 1992: 117). But, as Ackerley quickly points out, for him 'there seemed only one answer' to this question. Even if he 'did not care for the word "homosexual" or any label', Ackerley claims that the term now enabled him to discern exactly where he stood on 'the sexual map'. As a result, he remained 'proud' of 'his place on it' (Ackerley 1992: 118).

Ackerley's remarks certainly point to a curious tension between sexual naming and sexual being, revealing the power of the term homosexual to grant a coherent place in the cultural order, while at the same time expressing some discontent at having one's erotic preference attached to a specific classification. This tension suggests that there is always likely to be a conspicuous gap between the experience of eroticism and the category used to designate that experience.

This issue has been explored by several influential historians of sexuality. Having devoted much of his research to examining the recent emergence of the word sexuality in its current sense, Jeffrey Weeks remarks that it is vital not to forget that ‘what we define as “sexuality” is an historical construction’ (Weeks 1986: 15). By warning us against the belief that sexuality refers to an essentially human quality known through all time, Weeks claims that sexuality is a “‘fictional unity”, that once did not exist, and at some time in the future may not exist again’. In other words, the term sexuality is historically contingent, coming to prominence at a time when detailed attention was increasingly turned to classifying, determining and even producing assorted sexual desires. Consequently, he questions whether sexuality is an entirely suitable expression for discussing the erotic lives of cultures that preceded the late-Victorian moment when sexuality earned its current name.

In a similar spirit, David M. Halperin sounds a warning note against employing the term homosexuality to describe erotic activity between men in Ancient Greece. Observing that homosexuality is a distinctly modern construction, Halperin declares: ‘It may well be that homosexuality has no history of its own outside the West or much before the beginning of our century’ (Halperin 1990: 18). Like many cultural historians, Halperin is highly sensitive to the critical hazards involved in using such a loaded modern idiom. Since homosexuality has often been seen as the dissident antithesis to normative heterosexual desire, the term may not be altogether germane to understanding how past societies conceptualized erotic relations between persons of the same sex. Like Weeks, Halperin advances the view that sexuality needs to be understood first and foremost in its own specific historical context because the word itself might only have limited analytical reach if applied to sexual arrangements before the twentieth century.

In order to illustrate the rise of sexuality as a peculiarly modern phenomenon, Chapter 1 examines the development of sexology, in particular from the 1860s through to the early twentieth century. Sexology was the science that sought to know the name and nature of diverse desires and sexual types, and the comprehensive vocabulary it created retains its influence to this day. Not only

did sexology bring the figures of the bisexual, homosexual and heterosexual to public attention, it also investigated perverse behaviours, including sadism and masochism. Sexological writings often went to inordinate lengths to classify sexual perversions, compiling case histories that featured men and women making frank and startling disclosures about their erotic desires. Countless volumes of this kind provided an imposing, if at times inflexible, system of terms for describing a broad range of sexual types and practices. But such works did not always celebrate the phenomena they investigated. Since early sexology often leant heavily on medical science, it had a marked tendency to codify certain sexual behaviours as categories of disease. It would take many decades before sexology decisively shifted its emphasis away from pathologizing styles of sexual conduct. By comparison, modern scientific inquiries in the sexological tradition often try to refrain from presenting dissident desires as illnesses. Yet despite their liberal-minded gestures, books of this kind still tend to follow a pattern of research established by their Victorian ancestors. Time and again, they seek to typologize an astounding range of erotic phenomena, often taking pains to identify norms against which sexual performance can be measured. The same is largely true of popular works that offer sexual advice. Authors of contemporary guides on sex often focus on developing tried and tested techniques that will lead to orgasm: an event that sexologists almost always concur is the ultimate aim of sexuality. Chapter 1 explains that, no matter how non-judgemental current sexological research might have become, the span of works that fall within its scope seldom does more than quantify forms of sexual stimulation and classify sorts of sexual desire. Despite its taxonomic zeal to expand our knowledge of eroticism, sexology unfortunately has limited explanatory power when investigating all the different sexual identities and behaviours it seeks to evaluate.

If, since the turn of the twentieth century, one field of knowledge has more than any other taken our understanding of sexuality well beyond sexology, then it is surely psychoanalysis. That is why Chapter 2 first considers the researches of Sigmund Freud (1859–1939) into the unconscious, revealing how hard he strived (and sometimes failed) to divorce his analytic methods from those

of nineteenth-century hereditarian science, the field of inquiry that fascinated the earlier generation of sexologists. Once I have explained the powerful influence of Freud's Oedipus and castration complexes, my discussion turns to the intricate range of critical terms devised by his successor, Jacques Lacan (1901–81). By locating desire within the field of signification, Lacan's work at last disengaged psychoanalysis from its scientific heritage. In many respects, Lacan's work completes one of the main tasks begun by Freud: to dissociate eroticism from biological mechanisms. Psychoanalysis was the first body of theory to produce a detailed account of why sexuality must be understood separately from reproduction. In one of the clearest guides to psychoanalytic thought, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis examine why sexual desire does not conform to a biological instinct that drives human beings towards perpetuating the species:

If one sets out with the commonly held view that defines sexuality as instinct, in the sense of a pre-determined behaviour typifying the species and having a relatively fixed *object* (partner of the opposite sex) and *aim* (union of the genital organs in coitus), it soon becomes apparent that this approach can only provide a very inadequate account of the facts that emerge as much from direct observation as from analysis.

(Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 419)

By forcing attention on why sexuality is not necessarily geared to reproductive ends, psychoanalysis develops models that trace the origins of erotic pleasure back to infancy. In theorizing how human beings establish specific sexual identifications, Freud and, subsequently, Lacan reveal that the organization of the sexual drives starts the moment we enter the world. According to psychoanalysis, the early development of the erogenous zones bears a psychic imprint that persists throughout adulthood. Such is the initial impression made by sexuality that psychoanalysis believes it can sometimes prove hard for adults to manage their earliest and thus most insistent unconscious desires.

In the name of upholding these leading ideas, Freud identified the two interdependent structures he called the Oedipus and

castration complexes. Similarly, Lacan argued that sexuality was structured around the primary symbol of cultural authority he named the phallus. Both writers have gained notoriety for developing what undeniably are paradigms that take the centrality of the anatomical penis, the psychology of penis-envy, and the symbolic power of the phallus entirely for granted. Psychoanalytic phallocentrism would become the subject of intense debate among feminists, both in the late 1920s and early 1930s and again from the late 1960s onwards. The closing section of Chapter 2 considers a range of differing feminist standpoints on the penis and the phallus that absorb respectively Freudian and Lacanian theory. Whereas some feminists claim that this complex body of research is largely a symptom of patriarchal dominance, others argue that psychoanalysis provides significant clues about both the cultural and psychic mechanisms that assist in perpetuating sexual inequality in the West.

One of the main lessons of psychoanalysis is that sexuality comprises turbulent, if not destructive, drives whose early formation can at times prove impossible to eradicate in adult life. Freud's belief that the conflicted libido was caught in a life-and-death struggle would shape much subsequent discussion about the volatile condition of eroticism. Beginning with Freud's powerful theory of the death drive, Chapter 3 draws together two notable debates that focus on sexuality as a seemingly boundless source of impulsive energy caught within a dynamic of creation and destruction. The first part of the discussion looks at the work of several avant-garde theorists – including Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Gilles Deleuze (1930–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–92) – who have tried to unravel why sexuality violently oscillates between life and death. The second part of Chapter 3 reveals how this fraught discussion about the life-giving and death-dealing aspects of desire appear most vividly in modern feminist debates about pornography. Undoubtedly, pornography continues to divide feminist opinion about the injurious or emancipating effects of erotic desire. On the one hand, many radical feminist campaigners against pornography claim that it leads time and again to violent sexual crimes, and should therefore be legally called to account for the serious damage it causes. On the other

hand, libertarian feminists eager to combat punitive state censorship argue that there are affirmative aspects to pornography. They believe that some types of graphic sexual representation provide the possibility for women to explore and emancipate desires otherwise suppressed in a patriarchal society.

Yet this widespread emphasis on how sexuality either represses or frees sexual desire strikes French social theorist Michel Foucault (1926–84) as nothing more than a means through which power has been organized in Western society. In his influential introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* (1976–84), Foucault prompts us to contemplate the historical circumstances that shape some of the leading claims made by psychoanalysts and philosophers about the explosive condition of eroticism. Chapter 4 examines the distinctive methods Foucault employs to demystify sexuality as a critical category. By concentrating on how power-laden discourses construct desire, he scrutinizes the conceptual regimes that have led many thinkers, from Freud to contemporary feminists, to much the same conclusion: namely, that tempestuous sexual desires are inevitably trapped within a system of suppression and liberation. Repeatedly, Foucault explores the cultural dynamics that have persuaded the modern epoch to believe that sex ‘has become more important than our soul, more important almost than our life’ (Foucault 1977c: 156). So powerful is this idea, he states, that one is led to think that we should ‘exchange life in its entirety for sex’. What was it, Foucault asks, that brought many twentieth-century intellectuals to agree that ‘[s]ex is worth dying for’?

Acutely conscious of how powerful concepts such as sexuality come to dominate our lives, Foucault examines the political fabrication of influential beliefs which profess that erotic behaviours, identities and styles are fundamental to human existence. In the process, Foucault constantly looks at how sexuality emerged as an intelligible category whose widespread acceptance has played a crucial role in regulating the social order. Although on occasion strongly criticized for treating eroticism as if it were separate from gender, Foucault has none the less inspired a later generation of feminist and queer theorists to confront the cultural interests served by the meanings ascribed to sexual desire. In this regard,

critics such as Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009) have paid close attention to the troublesome ways in which modern society has been remarkably willing to accept essentialist definitions of what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual. Their work stands at the forefront of a vibrant series of critical explorations that reveal why we need to denaturalize the essentialist presumptions about desire that have governed modern approaches to erotic identities and practices.

The final chapter, 'Diverse eroticisms', opens by exploring the uneven manner in which the connected, but at times distinctive, fields of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) studies and queer theory alternately uphold or destabilize concepts of sexual identity. I pay attention to the development of distinctive bisexual and transgender accounts of sexuality, particularly in relation to contending understandings of sexual embodiment, identification and orientation. I look, too, at the uncompromising manner in which queer thought has contested what has been increasingly described as heteronormative culture, especially the belief that intimacy should solely involve privatized monogamy in the name of outlawing alternative forms of sexual sociability in public spaces. This chapter dwells on some of the competing queer viewpoints on the pros and cons of same-sex marriage, which has become one of the most politicized issues in the public discussion of sexuality in parts of the West. Among theorists of sexuality, one of the main questions arising from the controversies attending same-sex marriage is whether it involves capitulation to heteronormative values or holds out the promise of transforming the institution of marriage itself.

The final section of Chapter 5, which expands beyond the Western context where sexuality originated as a categorical term, considers a number of locations, including China and Indonesia, where we can see the complicated ways in which modern ideas of sexual identity have circulated in contradictory ways through processes of globalization. Anthropological research, in particular, has proved highly attentive to the transformations that occur when local and national communities outside the West interact with the modern sexual identities that they encounter through

international mass media. In each instance, we see the manner in which types of sexuality – most notably, same-sex desire – is understood in these divergent Asian contexts. As their horizons continue to broaden around the world, terms such as ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ continue to undergo considerable changes in meaning, in ways that combine local and global elements. This body of research therefore shows that processes of globalization do not necessarily involve the duplication or imposition of Western expressions of sexuality in a colonizing manner.

1

SEXOLOGICAL TYPES

SEXUAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Enter any major bookstore in the industrialized world and you are likely to find several shelves (if not more) devoted to studies of sexual behaviour. Such books might be found in the psychology section but the chances are they will be grouped together under a more specialized heading: sexology. Here you will discover a range of works, including updated editions of Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (1972), that give popular advice on sexual techniques for same-sex and other-sex partnerships. Especially in the 1960s, the number of 'how to' manuals offering guidance on sexual practices and the improvement of sexual pleasure proliferated as never before. Such writings have been popular since at least the time of *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* (1918) by Marie Stopes (1880–1958). This best-selling book was among the first to broaden common knowledge of human sexual potential, and it remains an open question whether such works are ultimately liberating or oppressive in their repeated insistence that sexual satisfaction is a fundamental human need. Similar kinds of guidance on sexual matters circulate

perpetually in the mass media, from advice columns in magazines aimed at young people to live 'adult' radio talk-shows. Given the ample opportunities that now exist to obtain information about many aspects of eroticism, it is perhaps hard to appreciate how dangerous this kind of knowledge was often thought to be when sexology – the science of sexuality – first made its appearance in the late nineteenth century.

According to Janice Irvine, sexology currently serves as 'an umbrella term denoting the activity of a multidisciplinary group of researchers, clinicians, and educators concerned with sexuality' (Irvine 1990: 2). These days, conferences devoted to sexology bring together a vast range of people with very different skills, from promoters of safer sex to medical doctors working in genitourological clinics. But this was not always the case. Sexology was first associated with the controversial work of scientists examining aspects of sexual disease. Known in German as *Sexualwissenschaft*, the word sexology is attributed to the German physician, historian and sex researcher Iwan Bloch (1872–1922), among whose works is a rather zany but none the less fascinating study of the sexual habits of the English (published 1901–3). Sexology initially designated a science that developed an elaborate descriptive system to classify a striking range of sexual types of person (bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual and their variants) and forms of sexual desire (fetishism, masochism, sadism, among them). Bloch's *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (1908) is one of several prominent works that sought to provide a distinctly scientific explanation of various sexual phenomena. Yet, like many such studies that drew on scientific authority to uphold its claims, his work met with considerable hostility in many quarters of society. So great was the mismatch between the scientific intent and the moralistic reception of many sexological texts from the 1880s through to the 1920s, it would be fair to claim these weighty tomes drove at the centre of a major anxiety in Western culture. For there was a constant struggle among those who saw themselves as respectable people to hide what sexology, in all its scientific authority, was determined to uncover.

It was certainly for this reason that copies of one of the most detailed sexological studies, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), written by

Havelock Ellis (1859–1939) in cooperation with critic and poet John Addington Symonds, led to the arrest of a London bookseller who sold a copy to an undercover policeman in 1898. This was hardly an auspicious time to bring before the world an array of case studies that revealed complex patterns of same-sex desire. It was, after all, only three years after the Irish author Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) had been notoriously vilified in the press, and subsequently sent to serve a prison sentence of two years for committing ‘gross indecency’ with other men. Such ‘gross’ homosexual acts were outlawed – both in public and in private – by the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. Never since the day of its seizure has Ellis’s liberal-minded exploration of homosexuality ever been published again in Britain – a sign, I think, of the severe prohibition on serious public debate about same-sex desire in a country that only partly decriminalized male homosexuality, first in 1967 and again in 1994. (In the United Kingdom, it remains the case there is still not full legal equality for lesbians and gay men. Although the Civil Partners Act [2004] grants same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual married partners, it still does not recognize same-sex couples as married. By 2006, however, the provisions of the Equality Act have meant that it is illegal to withhold the provision of goods, facilities, services, education and public functions on the basis of a person’s sexual orientation.)

Sexological writings have been renowned for making discoveries about sexual behaviour that many of the more conservative sections of modern society would prefer not to hear. In the mid-century, for example, the first Kinsey Report, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948), brought together an imposing mass of statistical detail to show that 37 per cent of the adult male population in the United States had achieved orgasm through homosexual contact. Such data flew in the face of what had by that time become a virulently homophobic American culture. Several decades later, the appearance of *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* (1976) caused a sensation when it divulged that most American women did not reach orgasm through heterosexual intercourse – a point many earlier sexological works that did not become bestsellers also took pains