

# "The Stubborn Clutter, The Undeniable Record, The Burning, Wilful Evidence": Teaching the History of Sexuality<sup>1</sup>

*Becki L. Ross*

## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the thorny issues of teaching the history of sexuality from a feminist, sex-positive, anti-racist framework. The author relates her own pedagogical strategies in an effort to claim legitimacy for "sex history," in opposition to historians who maintain that sex has no place in the construction of the Canadian nation and its citizens.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article adresse la question épineuse de l'enseignement de l'histoire de la sexualité dans le cadre prosex, antiraciste féministe. L'auteure se rapporte à ses propres théories pédagogiques pour essayer de déclarer la légitimité de "l'histoire du sexe", en opposition aux historiens qui maintiennent que le sexe n'a pas de place dans l'édification de la nation canadienne et de ses citoyens.

To the extent that sexuality is still conceived of, against all the evidence, as belonging properly to the private, to the extent that heterosexuality can hide in the open as no sexuality at all, to the extent that les/bi/gay/queer people come to represent sexuality only, then openly queer teachers are trespassers who admit sexuality where it doesn't belong: the classroom.

Ann Pellegrini (1999, 623)

## INTRODUCTION

A Grade Nine history flunky, I began to excavate archives, attics, basements, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Stockshot vaults in my mid-twenties. I was newly "out," a doctoral student in Sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, and a member of the oral history collective, Lesbians Making History. Back in the mid-1980s, I was ravenous: I yearned to know how daring, emboldened women and men communicated same-sex desire under hostile circumstances in the past. How did they find one another? How did they fight against forces determined to cure, convert, or criminalize their sexual "deviation"? How did they use and invent

language and style to secure identity, safety, pleasure, and belonging? What meanings did they attach to their gender and sexual non-conformity? How did the material conditions that structured their lives make possible and constrain the pursuit of same-sex love and family in the context of legal, medical, social, and religious prohibitions? Indeed, what happens to our understanding of social institutions like the family, workplace, arts, politics, athletics, the military, the honeymoon, Walt Disney Productions, girl guides, and boy scouts, when we raise questions about sexual identities and practices that have rubbed up against, if not ruptured, the commonplace definition of the good, law-abiding, upstanding, straight citizen?

In 2000, as a white, lesbian feminist professor at the University of British Columbia, I proudly and vigorously embrace the label of deviant historiographer - one who teaches and researches the production of deviant sexual subjects (e.g., homosexuals, onanists, cross-generationists, non-monogamists) alongside that which has been understood and propagated as the normal - monogamous, single-race, marital heterosexuality (Terry 1991, 55). Though regrettably I no longer teach courses titled "Lesbian and Gay History," my UBC courses in qualitative methods and the sociology of sexuality foreground the history of sexuality in order to historicize contemporary sexual politics and introduce students to fresh,

invigorating evidence of the multiple, complex discourses and practices of human sexuality. Today, as at other points in history, sex resides at the epicentre of politico-moral contests: witness the high-octane debates about the meaning of "family," AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, "kiddie" pornography, homosexuality, sex education, abortion, teen pregnancy, coerced sterilization, and sexual assault, among others. Stories about sex dominate the mass media - the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas case of sexual harassment, O.J. Simpson's trial, actor Hugh Grant's liaison with a prostitute, the imprisonment of Hollywood madam, Heidi Fleiss, the improprieties of televangelists, the abuse of hockey player Sheldon Kennedy, the arrest of Terri-Jean Bedford - the suburban s/m dominatrix from Don Mills, Ontario, the marketing of female condoms and Viagra, the banning of lesbian and gay children's books by the school board in Surrey, BC, and the recent, cold-blooded murders of gay man, Matthew Shepard, and transgender, Brandon Teena. News reportage of sex scandals in particular makes juicy headlines, though the obsessive quality and quantity of coverage tells us little to nothing about why sex matters in the first place, or how sexual meanings have been remade and transformed over time.

That students at the University of British Columbia seek out my sociology of sexuality course in ever-expanding numbers (female-to-male ratio of 5-1) is a testament to their deeply-held curiosity about matters of the sexed (gendered and racialized) body - its behaviours and its representations. My Foucauldian framework, blended with my feminist and anti-racist commitment to deepen our grasp of power and its "polymorphous techniques," means that my focus is much less on the nuts and bolts or anatomy of human sexual function than it is on the myriad regulations that have defined sexual normality and abnormality (Foucault 1980, 11). Drawing on Jennifer Terry's insight that "'deviance' is central to the narrative history of the normal" (1991, 71) does two things: theoretically, it highlights the relational character of the categories heterosexual and homosexual (i.e., how heterosexuality needs homosexuality to assert its supremacy); and, pragmatically, it invites straight students to feel included (and interrogated) in a course rumoured to revolve exclusively around

queerness. In fact, my insistence in Lecture One that sexual identities, desires, and practices are fluid and changing rather than rigid, biologically fixed, transcultural, and immutable, catches the majority of nineteen year-old undergraduates by surprise.

In this short paper I reflect on my approach to explaining how the twentieth century in North America spawned the proliferation of sexual discourses, the categorization of sexual (ab)normality, and the outbreak of moral panics. I begin by commenting on ideological and material developments within and outside the university that have coalesced to make privileged space for me to do what I do without being burned at the stake, arrested for gross indecency, or hauled off kicking and screaming to the loony bin.

### QUEERING THE ACADEMY

Years ago, I learned a frustrating, angering lesson: the work of uncovering, theorizing, and reconstructing queer lives is accomplished on the fringes of mainstream history and historical sociology. Even putatively non-queer, sex-related topics, e.g., reproduction, masturbation, sexual violence, nymphomania, and transsexuality, remain neglected within the research community, cast by many as illegitimate diversions. Gatekeepers of Canadian "national history" such as Jack Granatstein and Michael Bliss have dismissed sexuality as a "private, personal affair" unsuitable and inappropriate for serious historical scholarship (Bliss 1991; Granatstein 1998). Private lives and relationships, they haughtily snort, are of little consequence to analysis of the national institutions: the military, the economy, the constitution, questions of national identity and citizenship, Québec sovereignty, and parliamentary politics. Gay historian Steven Maynard recently counter-punched by arguing that "Sex is a national issue and nations and their histories - their national games and pastimes, symbols and institutions - depend on sex" (1999, 2).

Two brief examples suggest the basis for Maynard's point. First, residential schools and orphanages run by churches and the Canadian state were sites of sexual surveillance and punishment of First Nations youth throughout the twentieth century: campaigns to "civilize the red heathens" strove as much to strip Aboriginal people of

identity, language, and community, as they did to pathologize Aboriginal traditions of sexual permissiveness, gender equality, and two-spirit cultures (Jacobs 1997; Million 1999). Second, after World War II, the Canadian federal government and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) collaborated to purge the civil service (especially National Defense and External Affairs) of all alleged and confirmed homosexuals whose "character weakness" (and vulnerability to blackmail) purportedly made them "national security risks" (Kinsman 1995, 1998). Between 1958 and 1964, hundreds of men and women lost their jobs and their reputations as a result of the wide-reaching criminal investigations into gay/lesbian social networks and spaces that extended beyond government offices. In both of these examples, sex and nation are profoundly imbricated (Maynard 1999, 3); yet efforts to deny or downplay this fact serve to postpone indubitably illuminating inquiry into the shifting, historically contingent relationship between sex and citizenship.

It is sobering that academic jobs in the field of sex history in Canada are non-existent, research funding remains uneven, university and college courses on sex are customarily buried under the rubric of Special Topics, and new developments in the field are infrequently integrated into undergraduate textbooks, let alone high school curricula (Maynard 1994). In 2000, however, the scene is not uniformly bleak. For almost ten years, *Centre/fold*, the newsletter of the Toronto Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies (The Centre), published updates on conferences, work in progress, and course offerings across the country. The Centre continues to thrive: it publishes *Centre/fold* periodically and sponsors "Queer Exchange" - a yearly slate of non-credit courses; it disperses prizes for research and community service; and organizes an annual Speakers Series. In addition, the Lesbian and Gay Studies Association is a national scholarly body responsible for coordinating presentations at the annual Congress of Learned Societies in Canada (Ristock and Taylor 1998, x). The Subcommittee on the History of Sexuality publishes a lively, twice-yearly newsletter, *Sex & History*, and it programs panels during meetings of its "mother" organization - the Canadian Historical Association. And conferences such as Wilde '82 (Toronto 1992), Sex and the State (Toronto 1985), La Ville En Rose

(Montréal 1992), Queer Sites (Toronto 1993), Out of the Archives (Toronto 1994), The Queer Nation? (Toronto 1997), Queering the Nation (Toronto 1998), Outing Pacific Northwest History (Tacoma 1998), and Performing Unnatural Acts (Berkeley 1999), offer stimulating venues for unveiling new findings, debating standpoints, and nurturing networks of co-conspirators. As the newly appointed editor of a Sexuality Studies Series at the University of British Columbia Press - the first in Canada - I am particularly busy at conferences where I am expected to attract the best scholarly talent to the Press.

I have been especially fortunate: I stand proudly on the shoulders of numerous, skilled activists, archivists, and teachers who have taught me to produce scholarship that is both relevant and meaningful. In addition, as social history has achieved some legitimacy in the 1980s and 1990s, my feminist/queer research has consistently received state support. Funding has enabled me to attend conferences in Canada, Sweden, and the United States, and to stay abreast of rapid advances in feminist, post-colonial, and queer theory and methodology. Tenure (in July 1999) permits me the opportunity to take even greater pedagogical risks, though I am always and acutely mindful of how my admittance of sexuality where it does not belong, i.e., the classroom, may continue to stir up all sorts of trouble (Pellegrini 1999, 623). Clearly, the inherent erotics of pedagogy is conspicuously intensified in a classroom organized around the specifics of sex and gender (Khayatt 1999). Though I refrain from publicly announcing my lesbianism to students (à la Alcoholics Anonymous tradition of self-declaration), my conscious non-identification with heterosexuality instantly ensures students' perception of my queer identity, though my high-femme aesthetic (read: lipstick, nail polish, eye makeup, mini skirts, 4-inch heels, etc.) makes the game of "box the teacher" more demanding.

I am honoured to be among a handful of scholars in Canada paid to recruit students to practices of reading and critical thinking about sexuality intended to overturn complacencies of the (sexual) self (Pellegrini 1999, 623). I sincerely appreciate Sally Munt's observation that "A lesbian lecturer is an object of scrutiny, a spectacle, a freak, a stranger, and a loner" (1997, 94), and I am not immune to such objectifications and dismissals.<sup>2</sup>

Like countless Women's Studies instructors who were routinely discredited in the 1970s, I accept that I must work doubly, if not triply hard to earn legitimation and respect within the academy. However, most of the time I return to my office after class feeling rewarded, not punished, lonely, or freakified. When students and I collaborate to unpack the centuries-old social invention of patriarchal sexual repression, sexual taboos, and sexual guilt, the potency of "freak" is radically diminished. Moreover, historicizing perversions, or "crimes against nature" associated with pornography, striptease, transsexuality, bisexuality, masturbation, and prostitution, works in our sex course to expose "the apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex" (Foucault 1980, 23). Significant pleasure/s, not least of all humour, can be extracted from these subversions; some days I actually believe what Munt calls "that romantic precept" that education can change minds and conquer prejudice (Munt 1997, 98).

Contrary to some colleagues who face admonitions from academic elders, I feel supported to exhibit the kind of agency I have discovered in sexual subjects who populate the past: the cross-dressing female soldier, the abortion provider, the fairy, the birth control educator, the s/m practitioner, the swinger, the porn model, the drag queen, the femme burlesque dancer. I have never assumed a dispassionate stance in the classroom: rather, my unbridled enthusiasm for the subject matter is rooted in, and motored by, my invaluable training in community activism, my dedication to reading, research, and dialogue, and my own steadfast, personal preoccupation with human sexual practices, predicaments, and possibilities. Putting my passion for sex history on promiscuous display is a deliberate ploy both to snare students' attention and to invite them to stretch their sociological imaginations in directions unanticipated by the revered C. Wright Mills.

### TEACHER'S TRICKS

Like historical sociologist Philip Abrams, I do not tackle sociological questions without rooting them in explorations of the past (Abrams 1982, 2). To quote Abrams, "Doing justice to the reality of history is not a matter of noting the way in

which the past provides a background to the present; it is a matter of treating what people do in the present as a struggle to create a future out of the past, of seeing that the past is not just the womb of the present but the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed" (Abrams 1982, 8). As such, I maintain that current forms of sexual expression, repression, and oppression cannot be fully understood without concerted examination of how and why they assume the forms they do in the present. For example, the lineaments of early anti-homosexual laws, religious doctrines, and medical truths stretch forward to buttress the ideology and practices of heterosexual dominance today. Obscenity legislation that currently targets and criminalizes lesbian and gay erotica has its genesis in the 1892 Criminal Code (subsection 179) which prohibited the sale of salacious, immoral material, as well as the sale or advertisement of abortifacients (McLaren and McLaren 1997, 9). In the 1860s, the British Contagious Diseases Acts produced the female prostitute body as the site of disease, pollution, and corruption: the Acts established prostitution as a distinct legal category (Bell 1994, 55). Today, more than a century later, prostitutes are still labelled victims and immoral social outcasts, and are subject to myriad public, media, and police/state regulations designed to control and make invisible the work they do (Brock 1998, 3-24). At the same time, since the early 1970s, sex worker activists around the globe have organized an international movement to end the "whore stigma," improve working conditions, and gain the same rights and responsibilities as other political subjects (Chapkis 1997; Nagle 1997; Tracey 1997).

A significant component of my sex course in Sociology attends to the late nineteenth century classification of the homosexual as a "species" complete with a past, a case history, and a childhood (Foucault 1980, 43). I explain how, as in other fields of social history - First Nations, African Canadian, and women's/gender history - historians of homosexuality first considered the experience of the élite, the so-called "worthies," before grappling with the lives of ordinary queer people and practices. When I began my self-education (never having had the opportunity to enrol in a queer history course), I learned something about "great homosexuals" in the past: a Homo Hall of Fame

included Michelangelo, Sappho, Socrates, Shakespeare, and Joan of Arc, as well as Jean Genet, Gladys Bentley, and Elsa Gidlow. (Now, years later, I take time to trouble the presentist ascription of homosexual identity to Michelangelo and others who pre-date the medico-moral invention of the category itself.) I also discovered the complexity and richness of histories of homoeroticism "from below" through grass-roots archival and oral history projects. These innovative initiatives confirm that there is no singular, transcultural, monolithic, twentieth-century gay identity or gay community. For instance, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993) richly chronicle the lives of African American and white lesbians in the working class, butch/femme bar cultures of Buffalo, NY, from 1940 to 1970. George Chauncey (1994) recovers the surprisingly public and racially/ethnically diverse character of gay (male) life - trade, wolves, and fairies - in New York City prior to World War II, and Line Chamberland (1996) probes the nubbly texture of francophone and, to a lesser extent, anglophone lesbian culture in Montréal in the 1950s and 1960s. Angela Y. Davis's new book, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998) magnificently expands on earlier research into three irreverent, non-conformist artists - Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, and Billie Holiday. Davis's inquiry probes the gender, sexual, and racial politics woven by these singers into the working-class cultural form of the blues during New York's Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Acknowledgement of differences of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, dis/ability, region, and language among those who pursued same-sex relations at different times and across different spaces in history has emerged as a central tenet of queer historiography, informed by postmodern theories of identity-making (Butler 1993; Jagose 1996). Translating this development into the classroom is imperative to the goal of inclusion. At every pedagogical turn I endeavour to complicate "sexual stories" (Plummer 1995) with critical attention to historically contingent constructions of masculinity and femininity, processes of racialization, and the hierarchical structuring of class relations. For example, I introduce students to Josephine Baker (1906-1979)

- a poor African-American born in St. Louis, Missouri, who climbed to fame and fortune as a comedian, dancer, and movie star all the while exploiting, and being exploited by, white voyeurism in France and across Europe between World War I and II. Details of Baker's life offer a window onto larger questions of the sexist, racist, and colonialist association of black female (and male) bodies with hypersexual animalism, as well as the "culture of dissemblance" deployed by some black women reformers in the early twentieth century to "achieve a self-imposed invisibility" from the glare of pathologizing gender and sexual stereotypes (Hammonds 1997, 171; Hine 1989, 915).

In a film clip from the docu-drama, "The Josephine Baker Story" (1991), Baker angrily denounces the racist expectations of white management immediately before she dances for an all-white crowd in a jungle-bunny costume of feathers and banana skirt - the epitome of the "primitive, exotic jezebel." I subsequently encourage students to evaluate how contemporary black female performers such as Tina Turner, the Braxtons, Tracy Chapman, L'il Kim, and Mary J. Blige similarly accommodate and subvert the symbolic power of the immoral, maimed, and uncontrollable black woman.

In the same class, I introduce Billy Tipton (1914-1989), a white, working class woman (born Dorothy) who assumed the identity of a man, played jazz piano across the American mid-west in the 1930s and 1940s, was "married" three times, helped raise three adopted sons, and volunteered with the PTA and Boy Scouts. In her new biography of Tipton, *Suits Me* (1998), Diane Middlebrook raises questions about Billy's gender and sexual masquerade: "How did he deceive [Betty] and the other women with whom he was sexually intimate? Did he conceal a dildo in his jockstrap? How little we know! Like a magician, Billy rehearsed so long and so well that his legerdemain was completely successful. Only the pleasure was real, and only one question can be answered now: did Betty know? No, she says today. Never." (147-8). Students are completely captivated by the nuances of Billy's career as a jazz entertainer, a perpetual improviser and a flirtatious, flamboyant lover of women who spent a lifetime drenched in the fear of disclosure. A tantalizing ten-minute mini-documentary on Tipton, part of the "Women: A True Story" series

(narrated by Susan Sarandon in 1996), sparks a flurry of classroom discussion about issues of transgenderism, performativity, gender inequality, mid-century lesbianism and homophobia, and practices of subterfuge.

Since 1989, when I first taught twentieth century lesbian and gay history to Women's Studies and Sociology students, I have confronted assumptions about queer life prior to the Stonewall riots of June 1969 in New York City - the incendiary catalyst of lesbian and gay liberation in the west. These assumptions range from "lesbians and gay men did not exist" to "they were completely closeted and invisible" to "they lived a shadowy, underground existence in a state of self-loathing, secrecy, and shame." Not surprisingly, students young and old, queer and straight, female and male, white and of colour, middle class and working class, have rarely heard of Oscar Wilde, James Baldwin, Radclyffe Hall, Magnus Hirschfeld, Ricky Tick, Gladys Bentley, or Sarah Ellen Dunlop. They have never seen early periodicals like *The Ladder*, *Backchat*, *Web of Crones*, or *The Body Politic*; they do not know what a rounder, an uptowner, a physique magazine, or a pulp novel is; they do not know James Egan, Canada's first gay activist, or the Pearson Hotel - a gay haunt in the 1930s on Toronto's Centre Island. Students I have taught are not acquainted with the history of *Aboutface*, the newsletter of the now defunct Community Homophile Association of Newfoundland (CHAN). They do not know that gay women rented rooms at the Heinzmann Piano studio in Toronto in the early 1950s to listen to music, have a few whiskeys and hot kisses in private; they have not heard of Vancouver's downtown Hogan's Alley where some African Canadian lesbians grew up until the community (like Africville, NS) was bulldozed in the late 1960s.<sup>3</sup> They have not read the first novel of lesbian fiction published in Canada - Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964) or the first book of Canadian lesbian poetry by Elsa Gidlow, *On a Grey Thread* (1925). They are unaware of Maurice Leznoff's academic study of homosexual men in Montreal in the 1950s.

Students I have taught are not already apprised of the depth and scope of fear and hatred directed at people who risked losing employment, their friends and families, and sometimes their lives, in search of homo-love and relationships. The

daunting task is to emphasize the persecution and the agency, the subordination and the creativity of queer peoples over the past century in North America. In the midst of unprecedented queer visibility in North America at the turn of the twenty-first century manifest via gay-friendly legal reforms, half a million people at Lesbian and Gay Pride marches, queer characters in the mass media, and the mushrooming of queer websites on the internet, I find it crucial to remind students of how homosexuality has been equated with sin, sickness, and criminality throughout the twentieth century. One of the ways I do this is to screen a short clip from "Heavenly Creatures" (1994), a film which tells the story of two teenage girls - Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme - who kill Pauline's mother in New Zealand in the mid-1950s in order that they could remain together. In a chilling scene, Pauline's working class mother, Honora, is warned by a local doctor (modelled after the real Dr. Francis Bennett) of her daughter's HOMO-SEX-UALITY - a dangerous, evil, and unnatural condition that must be overcome. The film director's tight framing of the doctor's lips as he stutters and stammers over the dreaded category stages Foucault's keen recognition of the "institutional incitement to speak about sex...and a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about" (18). This scene, combined with accounts from the girls' 1954 murder trial reprinted in *Parker & Hulme: A Lesbian View* (1991), also offers a splendid illustration of Foucault's notion of how the medicalization of sexuality "set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments" (44).

I like to include some of my own published work in the sex course I teach. Typically I assign my articles on Street Haven, a drop-in that opened in Toronto in 1965 to service street-involved women, the majority of whom were gay, drug-users, and prostitutes (1997; 1998). Students are intrigued by the pressure exerted on the gay women at the Haven to submit to painful, disfiguring surgical removal of tattoos in light of today's emphasis, thirty-five years later, on tattooing as a highly marketable fashion accessory. In addition, mention of my recent archival and oral history project on burlesque and striptease, paired with a short clip from a recent documentary on stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, entices students to deconstruct their own

assumptions and experiences of strip clubs. From preliminary findings, I report that Vancouver clubs in the 1940s and 1950s were subject to the intense disciplinary power of police, liquor inspectors, clergy, and women's groups (which totalled 78 in 1941). In addition, I reveal that nightclubs and cabarets in the immediate post- World War II period offered some female dancers and their girlfriends, gay choreographers, costume designers, pianists, DJs, and bartenders, a place to negotiate and strategize their queer presence in an otherwise straight milieu. In fact, I underline how queering and racializing histories of striptease encourages the writing of a very different kind of bar culture than the one recorded to date by lesbian and gay historians (Churchill 1993; Fernie and Weissman 1992).

#### "THE MULTIPLE IMPLANTATION OF PERVERSIONS"<sup>4</sup>

One of the most compelling stories I teach - in part because it ruptures the received wisdom of bio-medical science - is that of the iconic, almost mythic figure of American entomologist, Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey. A major player in the history of sexology, Kinsey studied the sexual practices and fantasies of almost 11,000 (all-white) Americans in the 1930s and 1940s before his funding from the Rockefeller Foundation was unceremoniously yanked. Typically in the classroom, I show a smartly visual, informative introduction to Kinsey from David Halberstam's seven-part documentary series, "The Fifties" (1997), and assign critical re-readings of the Kinsey Reports (Irvine 1991, Jones 1997, McLaren 1999). Close to fifty years after Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour and the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953), his (much ballyhooed and reviled) revelations of adult homosexual activity (37 percent in men, 28 percent in women), and his classification of the vast spectrum of sexual acts (without moral judgment), vividly capture students' imaginations. Kinsey confounded experts by asserting that so-called "abnormal" sexual behaviour was found in 60-75 percent of the population. Kinsey's discovery of very few "pure" heterosexuals and very few "pure" homosexuals (on a scale of 0-6) arouses marked excitement, though many students are visibly unnerved by the empirical substantiation of

sexual diversity in concert with the realization that their own and others' sexual identity may be less stable than presumed. (This personal realization combined with knowledge of the performative, contingent character of identity specified by Judith Butler, Diana Fuss, and Eve Sedgwick, is especially explosive.) Even biographer James Jones' (1997) sensational (and troublesome) claim that Kinsey (the father and husband) was a homosexual, in part because he allegedly had male lovers and engaged in underground s/m sex play, only adds to the man's mystique. Those students who instantly conclude (as does Jones) that the recently uncloseted secret of Kinsey's sexual tastes taints and possibly invalidates his findings, a) forget that no science is ever objective or value-free, and b) maintain a stubborn uneasiness towards evidence that disrupts the common sense or taken-for-granted naturalness (and moral goodness) of heterosexuality.

Though Kinsey did not use the term bisexual to describe the vast majority between 0 and 6 on the scale (and did not designate identity-categories at all), the contemporary social movement of bisexual activists is one of the most intriguing topics of the thirteen-week sex course (Almaguer 1991; Ault 1996; Namaste 1998). Not only does evidence of bisexual attraction in the past and present further verify fissures in the heterosexual norm, it permits those who currently identify as bisexual to lay claim to famous foremothers and forefathers - Virginia Woolf, Harold Nicholson, James Baldwin, Gypsy Rose Lee, Langston Hughes, Ma Rainey, Vita Sackville-West - in spite of the fact that none of them openly self-named as bisexual. Too, the study of bisexuality informs students that relations between homosexuals and bisexuals over the past thirty years have never been rosy or conflict-free. In conjunction with assigning readings on skirmishes between lesbian and bisexual feminists by Amber Ault (1996), I screen the brilliant and sobering scene of shunning in Rose Troché's film, "Go Fish" (1994). Here, card-carrying lesbians encircle and taunt a "turncoat" - a (former) lesbian who falls from grace upon having sex with a man. Learning that bisexuals have been scapegoated as fence-sitters (Queen 1997) in much gay/lesbian discourse, and as wayard perverts in much conservative Christian discourse, affords students valuable comprehension of the tenacity of

monosexism - the "implicit privileging of specific monosexual identities (heterosexual or gay/lesbian) over alternative positions (bisexual, transsexual, polysexual, asexual)" (Namaste 1998, 119-20).

Though not explicitly coded queer, the topic of masturbation, both past and present, rouses enormous enthusiasm among students. Canvassing the classroom reveals that no one was ever taught to view, practice, or celebrate masturbation as a healthy, joyous form of self-pleasuring. Once the nervous laughter subsides, I introduce Lesley Hall's British study (1992), "Forbidden by God, Despised by Men, 1850-1950." Hall explores how religious, medical, and commercial interests fueled male sexual anxieties by defining "self-abuse" as the dirty, shameful cause of insanity, paralysis, venereal disease, and impotence. "Self-pollution," experts warned, was "depleting to health," eroding of self-control, and best tackled by remedies such as metal rings with screws, ice-cold baths, hard beds, and "Pulvermacher's World Famed Galvanic Belts" (369). Hall also notes the racism undergirding Lord Baden-Powell's eugenics-influenced claim in his popular *Rovering to Success* that "the Germ [sperm] is a Sacred Trust for carrying on the race," and must never be wasted (1922, 104).

In class, I subsequently show a short clip from the award-winning episode of the TV sit-com, "Seinfeld," entitled "Master of One's Own Domain" (1992). The episode revolves around a contest to see who, of the four main characters (Jerry, Kramer, George, Elaine) can refrain the longest from "caving in to the urge." Not only does the story cleverly revisit age-old gendered expectations such as girls/women don't "do it"; the very taboos and negative attitudes documented by Hall are rehearsed and smartly parodied, scene by scene. Though the word masturbation is never voiced, the "endlessly accumulated detail" about a stigmatized activity and the fantasies that trigger it supply students with further proof that talk of sex has not been repressed and silenced: to the contrary, it has veritably exploded (Foucault 1980, 17-18). In my view, the episode makes Hall's work fabulously fresh and relevant. During the seminar presentation last year, one group disseminated a list of synonyms for masturbation from the Internet. The female presenters were quick to point out that all two hundred and fifty terms refer to male genitalia, which occasioned the after-class exercise of drafting

similar terms for women!

## CONCLUSION

One of my objectives in the sex course is to offer students some space to articulate their thoughts, work through their anxieties and mis/perceptions, and try out analysis of gender and sexuality as social and historical inventions. I have witnessed discomfort and exhilaration, uncertainty and bravado, shame and pride, as students grapple with ideas that unsettle received sex and gender norms. Perhaps there is no greater example of unhinging than a classroom full of students encountering (for the first time) and debating pornographic magazines catering to every conceivable sexual taste, reading about the exploits of feminist porn star, Nina Hartley, learning about racist pornography from sociologist Patricia Hill Collins and viewing (on video) the fire and brimstone of anti-porn critic, Andrea Dworkin. Postmodern vexations, indeed.

In this paper, I have concentrated on how I utilize knowledge from the fledgling interdisciplinary field of sex history to expose and undermine heterosexual hegemony - the presumed naturalness and normalness of heterosexuality. As I expand the course beyond the confines of North American culture, I will probe how colonial legal constraints and social mores have affected gender and sexuality - the scholarship of Anne McClintock (1995) and Laura Ann Stoler (1995) will assist me here. I will ask students: what can we learn about sexual identities and desires in diverse geo-political locations? How have nation-states structured their exclusions around gender and sexuality? (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xxiv). And to quote Geeta Patel, "how does one begin to theorize the intersection of sexuality and diaspora" (173)?

In a recent issue of *Canadian Historical Review*, A.B. McKillop recognizes, as have feminist and queer scholars for decades, that "specialized research on the realms of both the private and the social is a prerequisite...before a genuine commitment can be established between an individual and the public realm" (272). Indeed, courses like mine point up the denial of genuine, full citizenship to "sex deviants" in and outside of North America, particularly those whose vulnerability to persecution has been heightened by

their gendered, racialized, class-specific, and geographical locations. Discourses of moral regulation have ensured the scapegoating of the sexual other; practices of self-surveillance have kept individuals from transgressions of the flesh (Corrigan and Sayer 1985, 4; Foucault 1980, 116 & 120). At the same time, the disenfranchised have always fought, hammer and tongs, to contest the intricate, mobile workings of power. A pedagogical framework built around asking how, where, why, and when sex and gender norms are administered and countered, succeeds in legitimizing heretofore illegitimate subject matter. One can no longer ignore or downplay the messy, historically-specific interplay between human sexuality and the multiple axes of difference that shape who we are and where we come from. The hard part, still, is informing students that you, as teacher, don't have all the right answers, and never will.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Linda Kealey and Margaret Conrad for editing this special issue of *Atlantis*. I am pleased to have wrestled over issues of critical pedagogy with Dianne Newell at UBC's Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations. Thanks to three anonymous reviewers for reading my work so carefully. And I am grateful for the astute feedback and loving support of Tracy Porteous.

#### ENDNOTES

1. The first half of this title is borrowed, with much respect and fondness, from lesbian poet Brenda Brooks' collection, *Somebody Should Kiss You* (1990) p. 47.
2. For a chilling account of hateful, homophobic mail and threatening phone calls received by a British lesbian geographer and university teacher, see Gill Valentine (1998).
3. I recommend the superb video, "Hogan's Alley" (1994), co-directed by Andrea Fatona and Cornelia Wyngarden, distributed by Vancouver's "Video-In."
4. This line is borrowed from Michel Foucault, p. 37.

#### REFERENCES

- Abrams, Philip. "Introduction: Sociology as History." In P. Abrams *Historical Sociology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 1-17.
- Alexander, Jacqui M, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, and Movements." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. ed. Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. New York and London: Routledge, 1997, pp. xiii-xlii.
- Almaguer, Thomas. "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behaviour." *differences: a feminist journal of cultural studies* 3.2 (1991): 75-100.
- Alpert, Rebecca. *Like Bread on the Sedar Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Ault, Amber. "Ambiguous Identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The Case of Bisexual Women." *Sociological Quarterly* 37.3 (1996): 449-463.
- Baden-Powell, Lord. *Rovering to Success: A Book of Life-Sport for Young Men*. London, 1922.
- Bell, Shannon. "The Making of the Modern Prostitute Body." In S. Bell, *Reading, Writing and Re-Writing the Prostitute Body*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp.40-72.
- Bliss, Michael. "Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada." *Journal of*

- Canadian Studies* 26.4 (Winter, 1991-92): 5-17.
- Brock, Deborah. *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Brooks, Brenda. *Somebody Should Kiss You*. Charlottetown: Gynergy Books, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. "Critically Queer." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (1993): 17-32.
- Chamberland, Line. *Memoires lesbiennes: le lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1972*. Montréal: Rémue Ménage, 1996.
- Chapkis, Wendy. *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labour*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Churchill, David. *Coming out in a Cold Climate: a History of Gay Men in Toronto During the 1950s*. MA Thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1993.
- Corrigan, Philip and Derek Sayer. *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1985.
- Davis, Angela. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.
- Elwin, Rosamund, ed. *Tongues on Fire: Caribbean Lesbian Lives and Stories*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1997.
- Fernie, Lynne and Aerlyn Weissman, dir. "Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives." National Film Board, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- Francis, Margot. "On the Myth of Sexual Orientation: Field Notes from the Personal, Pedagogical, and Historical Discourses of Identity." In *Inside the Academy and Out: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies and Social Action*. Janice Ristock and Catherine Taylor, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp.72-96.
- Glamuzina, Julie and Alison Laurie. *Parker & Hulme: A Lesbian View*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1991.
- Granatstein, Jack. *Who Killed Canadian History?* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Hall, Lesley A. "Forbidden by God, Despised by Men: Masturbation, Medical Warnings, Moral Panic, and Manhood in Great Britain, 1850-1950." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2.3 (1992): 365-87.
- Hammonds, Evelyn. "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, eds. New York: Routledge, 1997, pp.170-82.
- Hine, Darlene Clark, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance." *Signs* 14.4 (1989): 915-20.
- Irvine, Janice. "Toward a 'Value Free' Science of Sex: the Kinsey Reports." In *Disorders of Desire*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, pp.31-66.
- Jacobs, Sue-Ellen, ed. *Two-Spirits: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Jones, James. *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.
- Kelly-Gadol, Joan. "The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History." In Sandra Harding, ed., *Feminism and Methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp.15-28.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky and Madeline Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community, 1940-1960*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Khayatt, Didi. "Sex and Pedagogy: Performing Sexualities in the Classroom." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5.1 (1999): 107-13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Beyond the Classroom Assignment of In and Out. In *Inside the Academy and Out: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies and Social Action*. Janice Ristock and Catherine Taylor, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998: pp.31-48.
- Kinsey, Alfred et al. *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*. Philadelphia and London: W.B. Saunders, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953.
- Kinsman, Gary. (1995). "'Character Weaknesses' and 'Fruit Machines': Towards an Analysis of the Anti-Homosexual Security Campaign in the Canadian Civil Service. *Labour/le travail* 35 (Spring 1995): 133-66
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities in Canada*. 2nd ed. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996.
- Kinsman, Gary and Patrizia Gentile with Heidi McDonnell and Mary Mahood-Greer. *"In the Interests of the State": The Anti-Gay, Anti-Lesbian National Security Campaign in Canada - a Preliminary Report*. Sudbury: Laurentian University, April 1998.

- Leznoff, Maurice. "The Homosexual in Urban Society." MA thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1954.
- Maynard, Steven. "In Search of 'Sodom North': The Writing of Lesbian and Gay History in English Canada, 1970-1990." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* (March-June 1994): 117-32.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Maple Leaf (Gardens) Forever: Sex, Canadian Historians, and National History." Paper presented to the Conference, "What Difference Does Nation Make?" Harvard University, April 1999, pp.1-22.
- McKillop, A.B. "Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches." *Canadian Historical Review* 80.2 (June 1999): 269-99.
- McLaren, Angus. "Surveying Sex: From Alfred C. Kinsey to Hugh Hefner." In *Twentieth Century Sexuality: A History*, Angus McLaren, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, pp.143-65.
- McLaren, Angus and Arlene Tigar McLaren. *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1997*, 2nd ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1998.
- Million, Dian. "Telling Secrets: Sex, Power and Narratives in the Social Construction of Indian Residential School Histories." A paper presented to the Conference, "What Difference Does Nation Make?" Harvard University, April 1999, pp.1-30.
- Munt, Sally. "'I Teach Therefore I Am': Lesbian Studies in the Liberal Academy." *Feminist Review* 56 (Summer 1997): 85-99.
- Nagle, Jill, ed. *Whores and Other Feminists*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.
- Namaste, Ki. "The Everyday Bisexual as Problematic: Research Methods Beyond Monosexism." In *Inside the Academy and Out: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies and Social Action*. Janice Ristock and Catherine Taylor, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp.111-36.
- Patel, Geeta. "Transactions: Teaching Cross-Cultural Sexuality." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 3/4 (1998): 167-80.
- Pellegrini, Ann. "Pedagogy's Turn: Observations on Students, Teachers, and Transference-Love." *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Spring 1999): 617-25.
- Penn, Donna. "Queer: Theorizing Politics and History." *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 24-42.
- Plummer, Kenneth. *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Queen, Carol. "Don't Fence Me In." *Real Live Nude Girl*. Pittsburgh, Pa: Cleis Press, 1997, pp.39-47.
- Ristock, Janice and Catherine Taylor, "Preface." In *Inside the Academy and Out: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies and Social Action*. Janice Ristock and Catherine Taylor, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp.ix-xi.
- Ross, Becki. "Destaining the (Tattooed) Delinquent Body: Moral Regulatory Practices at Toronto's Street Haven, 1965-1969." *The Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7.4 (April 1997): 561-95.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Down at the Whorehouse? Reflections on Christian Community Service and Female Sex Deviance at Toronto's Street Haven, 1965-1969." *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 23.1 (Fall 1998): 48-59.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Loin Cloths, Feather Boas and Floor Shows: Exploring Erotic Entertainment in Vancouver's Postwar Cabaret Scene." A paper presented at the Conference, "What Difference Does Nation Make?" Harvard University, April 1999, pp.1-25.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Terry, Jennifer. "Theorizing Deviant Historiography." *differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies* 3.2 (1991): 55-73.
- Thorpe, Rochella. "'A House Where Queers Go': African American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975." In *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*, B. Beemyn and eds, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, pp.40-61.
- Tracey, Lindalee. *Growing Up Naked: My Years in Bump-and-Grind*. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997.
- Valentine, Gill. "'Sticks and Stones Will Break My Bones': A Personal Geography of Harassment." *Antipode* 30.4 (1998): 305-32.