

## Chapter Seven

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### Resisting Orientation: Explorations in Sexual Nomadism

*I did not design this game  
I did not name the stakes  
I just happen to like apples  
and I am not afraid of snakes*

-- Ani Difranco, *Adam and Eve*

*The cycles of the sun, the moon, the seasons are all we've ever needed, same way we always had territories instead of 'owning' the land. Property's something you came up with. Raven says it's because you think in terms of boxes. Everything's got to fit in one - you even live in them.*

*Territory's a different thing. It's not permanent. We mark out what we need when we're mating, when we're feeding the kids, then let it go. Don't build anything permanent on it, don't leave much of a mark at all. Some raggedy nest, maybe, feathers, scat, nothing the rain and time won't wash away. And we never keep it just to ourselves, you know, saying that flower can't grow here, sparrow can't feed, the sun can't shine here, the wind can't blow, fox can't walk through, spider can't make its web. Makes no sense to us.*

-- Charles de Lint, *Some Place to Be Flying*

Sexual life, including identities, relationships, practices and desires, is often expected to fit within categories. Whether these categories are imagined to be 'natural' or socially constructed, they are also often imagined to be necessary. According to this imagining, categories provide the map by which people make sense of their experiences and desires, and even of their very selves. However, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the production of this map is far from democratic. Individuals and their sexual lives are contained, through shame and representation, within the borders of sexual state-forms by processes of categorisation that supposedly encompass all possibilities. Furthermore, all possibilities are

then judged in terms of those state-forms. Sexual orientation is the product of overlapping state-forms. More nuanced arguments advocating the benefits of sexual orientation categories also address their limitations, acknowledging some of the problems caused by categorisation. Much as the State is often argued to be a necessary evil, so sexual identities may be seen as the best possible strategy. Few people argue that a completely egalitarian society would not be ideal, but many question its practicality, finding it impossible to imagine. The end of sexual orientation is similarly difficult for many people to imagine. What does it mean to live without the State(-form)? In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the participants evade sexual state-forms, instead participating in the production of sexual nomadism. Not ruled by the borders of state-forms, the nomadism of these people's lives demonstrates the practice of resisting orientation. First, I examine the various ways in which people relate to sexual labels, and the tactics they develop for evading the constraints they so often entail. Second, I look at how participants manage to resist compulsory monogamy. And third, in a series of extended analyses, I document how the concepts of 'desire', 'gender' and 'sexual practice' are each potentially nomadic spaces in themselves. Furthermore, the relationship between them is not inherently tied to the formula of sexual orientation: do you desire sex with people of the same gender, the other gender or both?

## **Negotiating Labels**

Participants resisted orientation through an active negotiation of sexual orientation labels. If sexual orientation is the product of policing, of shame and violence, it is at the same time continuously produced (or not) through resistance. Participants' relationships with sexual orientation labels can be understood in three, sometimes overlapping, ways. First, as with Mark and Erica, some people (in some situations) reject sexual orientation labels entirely. Another tactic for negotiating a sexual terrain defined in terms of sexual orientation is to utilise labels as a form of resistance, particularly choosing labels which are either perceived to be more open and flexible or those which demonstrate a resistance to more normative categories. Finally, participants also used labels as a form of tactical communication in order to maintain boundaries.

## **No Logos: Rejecting Sexual Orientation Labels**

Two of the men I interviewed could easily identify as heterosexual, but resisted the emotional and political standards associated with that state-form. Laurence and Pete were both involved with women who identified as either bisexual or queer, while neither of the men identified as heterosexual or straight, despite historically only being sexually attracted to women. Both were wary of labelling themselves. When I asked Pete why he didn't label himself, he replied

Because I haven't actually thought about it enough. I don't know. Perhaps I'm afraid to put myself on one side and I don't like that, and you're in the middle. It's difficult to compromise. [You can] get along with everybody and you don't have to put [yourself] in one corner because mostly it's different groups and then [...] you don't say 'I'm part of that group'. It's much easier to communicate, I think. So it just makes life easier, I think.

Similarly, Laurence also took relativist approach, saying

I experience straight. Yeah, to a degree, I suppose but then, to an equal degree you'd probably say that I can be queer by extension to somebody who was more straight than me. It's all kind of relative ...

Both men also acknowledged the possibility of their desires changing in the future. Laurence in particular elaborated his philosophy on the validity of identity.

we have the capacity to be absolutely any sort of person at all in terms of it's all so relative to all sorts of circumstances. Just because I've never had an inclination or an attraction towards somebody of my own sex doesn't necessarily mean that I'm not homosexual. It might just mean that .. or bisexual or whatever, it just means that that sort of experience either hasn't happened, it might never happen for me but it doesn't essentially mean that I definitely am that way because it could change on its head and I could meet somebody tomorrow and make it absolutely ... kind of completely put my world upside-down. The idea of almost suppressing anything that ... my own will or my own heart, would throw up ... just for the sake of just pushing myself into a box would seem to be kind of cutting off my nose to spite my face somehow [...] There's never been that sort of crush when it's been like 'OK, these are the boats leaving. That's the heterosexual boat there and this is basically the homosexual boat there and never the twain can meet. There's never been a decisive moment where I've really sort of had to go 'yes, this is my sexuality and I'm going to stand by it.'

Pete also saw things in much more flexible and fluid terms than those promoted by a notion of 'sexual orientation'.

I think it's much [...] more a question with whom you can get in love than what your sexual preferences are. It's more like can you get in love with somebody of the same sex or with opposite sex or can you have both or just one? Yeah, that's the main issue. Many things can matter really. [...] I could actually fall in love with somebody of the same gender. On the other side, having a sexual relationship, I could imagine less than that. I think love is, for me, something more between ... something a deep understanding, a deep feeling, togetherness feeling, whereas, with sexual ... with sex there is more comes to that. There's just something also ... something more than that. But, of course, I think, after a while, when you're feeling ... you're right, when you really fall in love with somebody, I guess then you have to come together at the end. [...] On the other side, no, I'm not sure because you could really fall in love with somebody and just don't want to have sex with that person. I think that's totally possible. How to define that?

Pete asked a very important question which points out the limitations of representation. More importantly, asking it did not seem to cause him any emotional distress. This is evidence not only on intellectual questioning of sexual orientation categories, but of a profound resistance to a supposedly unquestionable truth about love, sex, gender and relationships. The resistance is profound because it evades the privatising logic of the state-form, that which encourages any who question the unquestionable to ask, 'what is wrong with me?'

This is a difficult question to ask oneself, and often results in defensive aggression. In terms of sexual orientation, this can be understood as a significant basis of anti-gay prejudice (e.g., Butler, 1993; Herek, 2004). Laurence shared a story of neatly derailing the experiences of shame and anxiety that all too often attend the questioning of one's 'sexual orientation'.

Laurence: I'd met somebody at [work] who's bisexual and when I met him and found out that he was, that in itself made me think 'ah, OK,' and the potential for what would it be like being with him, not in terms of a fantasy as such but just in terms of ... yeah, no more than that really, a 'what if?' sort of scenario.

Jamie: So kind of a non-sexual fantasy, like playing it through in your head, what would that be like?

Laurence: No, not even that far. Just more from the fact, would there be a potential for me to kind of be with that person? That, in itself, it's almost kind of assumed a prerequisite in myself that that might be an option and

so from that point of view, I think that potential was already there. [...] It was interesting because the guy who was bisexual, at [work], wasn't someone who I would be attracted to at all really and isn't but ... certainly the idea of him ... and me finding out that he was bisexual kind of made me think, from my own point of view, of could I be, in terms of it raised it as a question in my mind in terms of I certainly didn't dismiss it. I didn't sort of actually encourage it because he wasn't really somebody who I could sort of ever really picture myself with. There wasn't really any attraction in that sort of way but if there had been then ... I don't know but certainly the idea didn't bother me at all. [...] It wasn't like a big 'oh, I'm a bisexual' because it wasn't even that kind of ... it didn't even come as that much of a revelation. The idea of being with him was really kind of more finding out that he was bisexual from that point of view. Ah, right, so he's potentially interested in other guys. I wonder who he's interested in. In the same way as if I'd met a girl who I'd kind of liked then I can imagine asking myself the same question but he hadn't specifically ... there wasn't the inclination from it being somebody who I was attracted to but [...] I would normally only question that sort of thing if it was somebody that I was. [...] And it certainly wasn't something that I dwelled on for a long time or thought about for a long time. [...] There was never any substance to [our relationship]. But interesting. But certainly [...] that was the [only] time that I think my thoughts swayed towards any idea of having a relationship with another guy basically.

Of course while this questioning was very abstract, it seems very similar to the sort of processes that would trigger a very uncomfortable emotional reaction in many people that had a strong investment in a stable heterosexual identity. Laurence, on the other hand, rejects such a notion of sexuality. His resistance to orientation incorporates an anti-representationalist ethic, made clear in his comments on 'coming out'.

it shouldn't be as big a deal as it is, in terms of it shouldn't be ... there shouldn't be the fear and stigma that there seems to be, by the term 'coming out the closet' seems in some way shocking and it seems in some way coming out of hiding basically. I think people should always really have the freedom to go on their own journeys, their own voyages in terms of ... or working out themselves on what makes themselves tick. That, in itself, that journey is tricky enough without having to deal with other people's perceptions of it and having to worry about other people's attitudes to these things is really ... that's not to say that we should just be ... just let everyone do what they want and not care about anyone else [...] But it shouldn't be as big a deal as I think society thinks it is.

When I talked in terms of a common understanding of 'coming out', he became upset at this way of thinking.

Jamie: I suppose ... if people who have same sex desires talk about their sexuality, they're coming out. If people who ...

Laurence: No, not necessarily. They're talking about their desires. That's not coming out as anything. It's just talking about their desires. If, by ... if the people around them want to describe it as such ... if the people around them have been under the impression that they've been heterosexual, then it would potentially be a coming out scenario but ... sorry, I think I've got away from this.[...] It's just basically, supposedly going against the experiences that are the mindset of what [someone's] had up to that point but it's just a different one from the other experience and ... that could be totally do with the one person that they've met and been attracted to, that they could have much more of a connection with and that could transcend the gender [...] It just so happens that they happen to be a different gender than the people they've had relationships with in the past. It shouldn't really be a case of coming out. [...] the longer those terms keep getting perpetuated, the longer we keep getting ourselves bogged down in all this sort of stuff that doesn't really matter because it's like ... at the end of the day, the person will still have their desires that they'll have, however we want to categorise it. It's how they understand it really and how they process it in such a way to be happy and to be able to enjoy it and be enthusiastic about it and hopefully not ... hurt other people around them, but it's always a juggling act. It's a bit of a juggling act with these sort of different elements in your life and it's so personal for every different people, to try and define people in that sort of way. I do think it's really wrong and just the wrong way of looking at things.

Here, Laurence offers a nomadic alternative to the standard representationalist politics of 'coming out'. He seems to advocate a more autonomous approach, acknowledging people's capacities to live with and explore their own desires without being told what they are or what they should be.

Several other participants also rejected sexual orientation labels, at least some of the time. Melissa has never particularly used a sexual orientation label. I asked her how this happened, and she replied,

Melissa: Well [...] it wasn't a very conscious decision. I just figured out that I found women also very attractive and at the same time I explored relationships with men and sado-masochism and stuff so [...] but mainly throughout my whole life I've been mainly dating with guys so then ... so I couldn't call myself a lesbian but I'm not straight heterosexual either.

Jamie: Are there other labels that you've ever used or you sometimes use?

Melissa: No. Very rarely do you have to define yourself. [...] I don't think I ever saw my sexual orientation in a kind of public manner or I never thought of it in a very negative light. I've only thought of myself as myself and I never kind of though ... and I've never really identified myself in that because I haven't thought of it. [...] I haven't really ever defined myself into a group or my sexual orientation into some other group or resembled myself to anybody else. its just my sexual orientation has been very much something between me and my partners.

For Melissa, the popular tactic of making the stigmatised 'personal' problem political was never appropriate, because she did not feel stigmatised. She never felt the need to become part of a sexual minority group.

Finally, Douglas feels that he has never been able to relate to any sexual orientation boxes. I asked him about how he related to various labels.

Douglas: Gay is ... gay isn't anything on either. It's a shortcut. [It] tends to imply an element of commitment and certainly enjoyment and immersion in not just a gay relationship but the whole gay experience and scene and politics. So that's ... that feels a bit overwhelming. It's quite a lot to say.

Jamie: Straight?

Douglas: Straight is equally insulting as queer. Straight is old-fashioned as well. It's old-fashioned in a way that I find appealing as well. You still like to think that these ... that it's a possibility. [...] It's not valuable.

Jamie: Have you ever used a label or a kind of box or ever ...?

Douglas: For myself?

Jamie: Yeah, and is it kind of like you were in one and you fell out or you've just never really been in one, do you think?

Douglas: I think I've been in an *asexual* box for a long time. Scared, denying sexuality completely. I suppose I would like to think an idealised image of myself would be a sort of ... ambisexual or it is ... or sex is this active choice and complication is accepted and variety is accepted. So monosexual box ... I quite like the monosexual relationship with myself sometimes. I mean it's just nice to be just you and your body and your fantasies. That's comforting. It's had to be comforting for a long time. Complicated, I think, is probably what I end up saying.

Jamie: Yeah. It's a long story.

Douglas: It's a long story. [LAUGHS]

Jamie: And it's not over yet.

Douglas: It's not over yet. [... LAUGHS] take the weekend off. Cancel your plans.

In this interview, I introduced the notion of sexuality being 'a long story'. Douglas's joking suggestion did not seem to imply the telling of a single long story, but an acknowledgment that he would need a lot of time to tell me many stories. Indeed, all the participants did tell me many stories about their relationships and desires. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining the trouble people have with sexual orientation labels. If one's 'sexuality' cannot be explained in a single story, no matter how long, 'it' certainly cannot be represented with a single label. Of course, in particular contexts singular stories, like coming out stories, are used to represent sexuality as the truth of the self (Plummer, 1995). Real life is always much more complicated than any singular story. Through the course of this research I have come to think of 'sexuality' as a realm of potential topics (or aspects) of many stories.

### Being Tactical: Labels as Boundaries, not Borders

Of course, we can and should reserve the freedom to choose what stories we tell (or don't tell) to particular people at particular times in particular situations. It is this tactical approach to story telling that characterises the second category of relationship between labels and resistance. Participants described various ways in which the tactical use of labels enabled telling stories -- enabled relating to people -- in ways that felt appropriate.

Although Erica has a very strong resistance to identity categories, as we saw in Chapter Five, she finds in certain situations a tactical value in using a label.

I can't remember the last time I'd really define myself as anything. I mean sometimes ... you see sometimes it'll be somebody and they'll just go 'oh, what, are you bi, then?' And I'll just go 'yeah' because I can't be bothered to have a conversation and it's OK. For what they need to know about me at that particular time and the idea that I ... the little question that I can see on their face, it's OK, that's their answer. That's what they need to know. They just want to know what I'm into and if I don't mind that and it's somebody I know ... I remember somebody, at some stage, somebody ... a guy who I knew and we were sitting in a squat somewhere and we were chatting about anarchism and stuff that I'd got involved in, because

we were all catching up on what we were doing, and so he asked me if I was bi because he'd never really thought about it or he'd assumed I was straight or whatever, or assumed I was a lesbian or whatever. So, yeah, if you checked, that was OK. So it's more like occasionally that sort of thing happened but *I don't see that as identifying. It's more like an easy conversation.* (My emphasis.)

Meg, on the other hand, is more comfortable using labels more generally, particularly in situations where the meaning of those labels is shared.

I would now describe myself as bisexual. I sometimes want to say queer bisexual. I sometimes want to say pansexual and queer and whatever else but the significance of it all for me is that it's changed historically ... and that all my friends know that.

Anita, however, recognises that in many contexts the meaning of various labels is not shared. She uses different labels with different people, telling different stories.

Poly/dyke/switch is what I seem to identify as. To myself that's my full label, poly ... dyke ... switch, yeah. So that's non-monogamy. I'm a dyke. I don't do men and I'm into SM. I don't use that full label for everybody. My parents are still coming to grips with the whole lesbian part of it. They can't deal with dyke either so it's lesbian for them. My sister and my workmates are still coming to grips with the whole poly thing. And the SM bit, I tend to be a bit more cautious about with them, with straight people. All my dyke friends know that I'm into SM.

Finally, Phyllis spoke about the tension between being open with intimate others and acknowledging the benefits of making tactical decisions depending upon the particularities of a given relationship.

I get to that stage in a friendship where it gets to the point you just have to say something to somebody because they can't go on assuming things in that way but it tends to be somebody who's very straight will assume that I'm straight even though nothing is going on anywhere at all and then you just have to say 'look, I'm not actually straight', and they go 'oh'. But I've not had really bad reactions from anyone. I mean I hang around it in a kind of liberal group anyway so I'm unlikely to get bad reactions from people I hang out with. Difficult? There's one guy that I slept with a few times who has no idea because he's ... well he's Afro-Caribbean and I've got a good idea where the conversation would go and I just don't want to do it. [...] Yeah, I mean he's quite homophobic and so you feel kind of ... in a way I feel disloyal to friends. Obviously I've got a lot of close friends who are gay and you feel 'well, it's all right for me. I can do this and it's easy. I don't have to say anything to him'. But there's another guy I slept with for

a while and I told him and it actually made it a lot better for him, I think. He started to wake up and stop making jokes about 'going to the loos and keeping his back to the wall' and shit like that. I'd go 'what did you say that for?' So yeah, I suppose the line between judging what you think ... what might happen with that conversation, whether it might be constructive or whether you're just going to hit a stone wall when you just don't even want to go there.

For the most part, Phyllis was very confident about the importance of judging particular situations. At the same time, her feelings of disloyalty to gay friends for having the options they may not can be read in a number of ways. On one hand, it can be seen as her feeling guilty for claiming heterosexual privilege by 'passing'. This reading is supported by Phyllis later saying that she feels very uncomfortable with any public displays of affection with male partners when she knows that same-sex couples cannot do the same thing so easily. On the other hand, it can also be read as a difficulty with the tension between a tactical approach and the more strategic 'we should be out and proud' approach of advocated by many forms of identity politics. I do not advocate one reading over the other, but suggest that, combined, they demonstrate the tensions produced by sexual state-forms and the necessity of tactical resistance.

### Making space: labels as nomadic resistance

Many of the participants also valued the use of labels as a tactic of resistance. Although some supported organisations that advocate what I have called strategic identity politics, none considered reclaim labels or LGBT Pride to be the centre of their sexual politics. Sandra, for example, said

Labels are tricky. I cling to them and reject them at the same time.

Similarly, Beth said

I do like labels a wee bit but I [...] think they can get in the way slightly. I found it really difficult to come out as bisexual when I'd only ever had relationships with blokes because it was like, well, you know, how can you know? [...] You couldn't be just something different from normal. You had to ... I felt as if, when I came out, you had to know what you were and that was a bit bad but it was quite nice once I had come out because it's like 'well, now you *do* know what you are.' [...] I think labels are a kind of first stage. It's like ... I think that society has to name things to be able to

come to terms with them but I think ... what I've seen in myself and my friends, has been that you sort of ... you take a label quite strongly and then you kind of lose interest and I'd hope that that happens in general, that people kind of look at sexuality and it's like ... they hear ... they never used to hear 'lesbian' or 'gay' or 'bisexual' or whatever. Now, they hear it and they know it's there and then eventually, hopefully they'll just get used to it and the labels will go away again and people just won't bother.

Although recognising the limitations of labels, many of the participants found them useful tools in resisting compulsory sexual orientation. At times, this included the use of labels that felt spacious and flexible -- allowing for nomadism in a way in which rigid state-form categories do not.

Three women in relationships with men talked about their difficulties in maintaining their own sexual identities despite their 'apparent' heterosexuality. Sandra felt that perhaps she relied on labels a bit too much, but was not sure what else to do.

Sandra: I don't want to deny my relationship but at the same time I don't want people to assume that I'm straight because I'm with a man and I find myself clarifying that with people inappropriately as a result. That's like 'Hi, I'm Sandra. I'm bisexual.' But especially if we go out and have a drink, even if it's the first time I meet you, the chances are it might happen just because I hate the assumption that I'm straight. I mean if you're straight, that's fine, but if you're not then you're not.

Jamie: So you find yourself like throwing it into conversation any way you can?

Sandra: Yeah, which I think is unfortunate. I don't think it's the healthiest way to go about it or even necessary but I hate the assumptions more than I hate being inappropriate.

Phyllis described similar difficulties, also being in a monogamous relationship with a man. Unlike Sandra, she was uncomfortable using the label bi. Queer was more valuable to her.

Phyllis: So really, when it comes down to it, I actually prefer to say 'queer'.

Jamie: And what is 'queer' to you?

Phyllis: 'Queer' can mean anything that isn't completely straight heterosexual, absolutely anything and I prefer a kind of much broader thing because partly I think it changes and partly I hate labels.

Jamie: How accurate do you feel the label 'bi' is?

Phyllis: Pretty difficult. I think it's very difficult because if you're into monogamy at all, you spend your whole time wondering whether you're really bi because whoever you're with at the time, you wonder whether you're still interested in the other. I'm not into ... although I have done, I have briefly had a ... two relationships going at the same time, which I felt bad about because one of them didn't know. Yeah, now I'm with this guy, this is really getting to me because I think I want to be with him for a long time so I feel I'm getting sucked into this kind of very straight world and I'm resisting it but I'm trying to work out in what ways I can resist it and still get on and not ... kind of resist it by not thinking I have to be sleeping with a woman in order to maintain my sexual identity. [...] But I know that I'm not straight and I can be sitting round with couple couples and I just think 'ahh, I just can't bear this' because there's no kind of ... I don't know. There isn't a shared understanding somehow of what's going on.

Jamie: So does it feel like a cultural difference or something?

Phyllis: It is really. It is, yeah, it is quite weird.

Jamie: And do you find people assuming that you're a heterosexual?

Phyllis: Obviously. Yeah, and I find that really, really difficult. I really don't like that and so I'm getting this thing like what am I going to say to people? And I know with his family, he's not going to say anything to them and so one night am I going to say 'well, I'm bi' and what's the point of saying that? Because if I'm not going to be sleeping with a woman, obviously that's not the whole of it but then what is it, when it's not that? So that's really what I'm interested in.

Although Meg was not in a monogamous relationship, she was pregnant at the time of interview. This raised issues like those described by Sandra and Phyllis.

Meg: What's useful about terms is to get a bit of critical distance from default heterosexuality and all the expectations of that, to use them as a way of challenge, yeah, inevitability, the kind of straightness of ... being pregnant. I mean it's all very heterosexualising and mostly that's fine but [...] What's important to me ... about bisexual is that I then ... it's partly that I have had and that I could have in the future, what we will have in the future, relationships with women as well as with men but ... I suppose it also keeps alive the fact that ... unlike my mother who, at my age, in the marriage, didn't expect to ever snog anyone else ever again. I don't have that expectation and I don't want to and neither does [my partner] and neither do we with each other and I suppose sexual practice ... yeah, it allows me to separate sexual practice with sexual identity as well. So we both like to keep that space. So what we do and who we do it with is separate to our commitment, whichever, so monogamy ... commitment

doesn't mean monogamy. We're quite committed but not monogamous.  
And we're very loving.

For all three of these women, resisting the representation of their lives as 'heterosexual' was very important to them. The forms of resistance advocated by strategic identity politics -- especially visibility -- were not so readily available to these women because of their partnerships with men. Sandra and Phyllis those described the awkwardness of attempting to use this strategy of visibility. For Sandra it felt socially awkward, but emotionally necessary. For Phyllis, the entire situation was an emotional dilemma. She felt 'different', but was unsure about the legitimacy of that 'difference' and also how to share those feelings with others. Meg, on the other hand, seemed most comfortable utilising a tactic of visibility through labels. Perhaps this is because her intention to have sexual relationships with women in the future is compatible with representations of queer or bisexual identity in a way in which monogamous male-female relationships are not.

Resisting compulsory heterosexuality is crucial to the resistance of compulsory sexual orientation in general. Escaping capture by the hetero-homo division is also necessary. Meg and Eva talked about how concepts and labels help them in this struggle. First, Meg talked about the importance of queer theory and politics.

It's stopped me feeling like a failed lesbian.

Similarly, Erica had a strong attachment to the word queer, without using it as an identity.

I can use queer but [...] I don't actually go to anybody and say oh, I'm coming out to you as this thing. Like I don't actually ever say I'm an anarchist, unless somebody really *asks* me and then I decide what level of conversation I have to have about that. But that's very rarely. It's like I don't feel like I need it. Queer is more like ... yeah, it's a word I like for lots of reasons and it's nice and, to me, I just sort of came across it in the phrase 'queers of all sexualities', which is the thing that pulled me in [to the queer anarchist group] in the first place [...] and it reminds me of my mates and it's a fun word [...]. But you know, it's more like that ... it's not like something that I attach to myself and I wear and that sort of thing.

Finally, Eva described her tactical use of the label bi.

It's a kind of visibility thing, really, because usually I'll say I'm bi if people are either expecting me to be straight or talking in terms of the lesbian and

gay community or something like that. So it's always for visibility that I have to jump in with that word.

For some of the participants, these labels were experienced as less binary, more spacious. Labels such as queer, bi, pansexual and dykey have for some people a greater degree of nomadic freedom than labels which have grown to solidify into rigid state-forms: gay and lesbian, heterosexual and homosexual. Metaphors of space and motion were used frequently by the participants. Meg described bisexual as 'roomy', while 'dykey, used as an adjective, could get a bit looser, a little bit broader so I could be a dykey woman even when I'm sitting with a man.' For her, queer is also useful for 'stretching the limits of what sex is or what sexual practice is and what dynamics you might have in it'. Eva said queer 'encompasses a lot of different possibilities.' Sandra likes being thought of as dykey because it helps her with 'getting away from the assumptions and the straight labels'. Diane liked the inclusivity of queer -- 'You can be straight and queer rather than having to be gay -- and that 'it's a bit unknown really as well. You can't make assumptions about queer because there are so many possibilities within it in that sense.' Phyllis described queer as a 'non-label, but in a way it's so broad. It doesn't make you one thing at one time and another thing at another time, so it allows you fluidity and it puts you in a space, which is big but it's also clear what it's not'. What is it not? For Phyllis it is not 'completely straight heterosexual'.

But what does that mean? What does queer include? Who can be dykey? How do you keep up your bisexual membership card? Although many of the participants found these labels much more flexible and spacious than others, they can still produce borders. Kev said that bi

seems to be much more of a flexible or open [identity...], although there are still stereotypes, it's still the kind of idea that if you're bi, you can't be satisfied with just one person. You have to be having sex with as many people as possible of both sexes at the same time or something.

Likewise, Phyllis said she was conscious about who she used the word queer with.

I find it's much more understood by other queer people. Whereas, if you say to a straight 'oh, I'm queer', they might ... 'well, what do you do? You're into S&M or something.' They immediately think there's something very completely odd about your sexuality or odd for them rather than just thinking 'oh, you're a different person' on the spectrum of people having relationships and doing stuff and they think you must be into some very

specific thing. Whereas, if I said I'm queer to you, you'd probably think 'oh, well, she's not straight'. So it's completely different.

Phyllis puts her finger on a key point, here. Like any word, queer is open to interpretation. Given the diverse and the often passionate interpretations of sexual labels, perhaps the tactical approach described by many of the participants in how they choose to use labels in discussions with others is also useful for identification itself. Viewing one's 'sexuality' as a series of stories rather than an essential truth of the self allows a greater flexibility in engaging with others. Overall, this appears to be the dominant approach taken by participants rather than more the strategic positions that characterise identity politics and sexual citizenship. In the simplest terms, this approach can include considering sexual labels to be adjectives rather than nouns, as descriptions rather than truths or even rather than 'necessary fictions'.

### **Resisting Compulsory Monogamy**

As I argued in Chapter Three, anarchism can be understood as the production of conditions that support and nurture the development of human potential for good relationships with themselves, each other and our living planet. For some people, at sometimes, in some relationships, these conditions may include monogamy. Saying that, if we accept the antirepresentationalist ethic of anarchism, then we must resist compulsory monogamy. Likewise, we must also reject the ways in which ideas of 'sexual liberation' have been used to coerce individuals into participating in sexual practices. Normative polyamory is no more solution to compulsory monogamy than normative lesbianism is to compulsory heterosexuality. Both involve relationships of domination. Neither nonmonogamy nor polyamory is more inherently anarchist or nomadic than monogamy.

Indeed, all of the participants demonstrated the possibility of nomadic exclusivities based on respect of each other's boundaries rather than on a border between good monogamy and bad non-monogamy. Similar to Kath Albury's (2002) possibilities for ethical heterosex as alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality, nomadic exclusivities involve actively negotiated agreements, open communication, respect and trust. Nomadic exclusivity undermines the binary division between monogamy and non-monogamy. Perhaps this definition is untenable, anyway. Murray (1995: 294) described running nonmonogamy workshops where she asked people to offer their definitions of monogamous relationships:

For some, monogamy means one can have casual sex outside the relationship, but not any emotional attachment. For others, it means love and intimacy are okay, just no sex. For some people the emphasis on monogamy applies to one's own behaviour, for others it applies to one's partner's behaviour. For some people, it means one couldn't even have lunch with or fantasies about anyone who could ever be a prospective sexual partner.

The basis for judging a relationship in terms of nomadic exclusivity can no longer be based on assumptions of the superiority of monogamy, non-monogamy or polyamory (this involves representation). Instead, we can provide support and encouragement to develop relational skills. If the poststructuralist argument that the basis of ourselves is the result of our practices with others (see e.g. May, 2001), then our capacity to develop relational skills is greatly inhibited by our participation in fixed hierarchies. Here, we practise skills of domination and submission (not the consensual kind), conformity, secrecy, and defensiveness (Schmidt, 2000). In an anarchy of nomadic exclusivity, participants in a relationship create space to discuss, define and refine their boundaries, which are always open to change. Such negotiation is much more difficult in the hierarchical relationships of the workplace and the State apparatus. Participants had a wide variety of arrangements with regards to exclusivity, including not feeling comfortable with their partner enjoying pornography, talking about attractions to others or not, and different agreements about sex with people outside the relationship. None of them took monogamy (whatever that is) for granted, but have actively negotiated their own arrangements for exclusivity. Here are some of their stories.

Melissa's interview illustrates the practice of nomadic exclusivity. She and her partner have had many discussions about boundaries in their relationship. They have agreed not to have sex with other people, unless they are both having sex with a third person. Melissa talked about the importance of respecting her partner's feelings.

If I would be with somebody else it would obviously screw up the whole relationship. I think he would feel so hurt about it. I'm not taking that chance because he's so nice and we have it so good and I like him so much that I wouldn't do it to him.

Their discussions included the possibility of a long-term triad relationship. Specifically, they discussed the possibility of a relationship with a mutual friend.

Melissa: ... because my friend's girlfriend was abroad and they were kind of breaking up but because it wasn't ... because they decided to go back together, it didn't happen and I was quite open to the fact that it would happen but then they got back together. We discussed ... I discussed this with my partner but I didn't dare to suggest it to her at that point yet because I wasn't ... I wanted to also respect her girlfriend. [But . . .] we talked about it and I think that would have been quite cool.

Jamie: He was open to the idea as well?

Melissa: Uh-mm, yeah. That would have been cool. It would have been quite interesting for the both of us.

I asked her if she would like to be in a triad with a man and a woman simultaneously.

Melissa: Well if it makes things difficult then not but if, yes, it should. I think it should be very nice but sometimes I'm not sure if people's emotions are strong enough to handle this kind of thing. Like people think they own their partner but they don't and it's not nothing away from them unless it's really actually tying them to it but on an emotional level, [...] it could be something more. But then again, like I don't think there is a rule. [...] I mean for me to have another woman in the relationship and to respect a woman that much, then I would take a woman into a relationship with the guy and she [...] would have to be really strong and in contact with her emotions and a very balanced person. So and preferably a really, really good friend. So it's kind of ... the criteria are quite high. [...] I'm quite picky.

Jamie: So do you happen to see a three-way relationship as being potentially a really nice thing but not necessarily very likely?

Melissa: Yeah. I mean not very likely in the sense that ... because it's so untraditional and most people don't have the social skills to go through that. Probably that's why. But we're so conditioned into the relationship within two people and it's difficult to think that the intensity that's there with two people can exist between more or that you could have a satisfying relationship but none of the relationship would be that intense, like more liberty and freedom kind of thing. But, yeah, like you said, it's less likely because it has more risks probably.

This exchange about triads illustrates elements of nomadic exclusivity. The borders that define a 'normal relationship' are denied and very non-traditional alternatives are openly discussed. Furthermore, these discussions include an emphasis on respect for herself and her partner (and prospective partners). Boundaries are constructed through a process of open and caring discussion rather than the domination inherent in the borders.

I happened to meet Melissa several months after the interview, where I got an insight into the ongoing process of boundary production and change. Melissa told me how her partner had had an experience where he was very tempted to have sex with someone else. She told me how this had encouraged him to rethink his position of seeing monogamy as a morally superior position. This has further opened discussion between them about possibilities for their own exclusivity arrangements. Melissa is very happy about this, because she does not want to be in a monogamous heterosexual relationship for the rest of her life, but is very happy with her partner. Since then, they had a great threesome with another woman, an experience they are both open to repeating. Melissa is excited about the increasing openness of their discussions and is looking forward to future possibilities of the threesome with another man or having multiple partnerships, though she's very careful not to push these boundaries. Maintaining a good relationship, especially long-distance, is difficult enough, she said, without pushing.

Anne also wants to have a more open relationship, but is aware of her own insecurities.

I feel constrained by the norm, by the monogamy but I dunno whether that's to do with being heterosexual or being part of a pair. I know it's, I know heterosexuality, Christianity go hand in hand but I'm wondering whether the monogamy thing is to do with brought up in a Christian type culture. [...] So, yeah, so that, but then at the same time as I've said, I think I'd feel quite threatened if [he] and I did actually have an open relationship. So I want *me* to have an open relationship and him to not have. [laughter]

Here the emphasis is on respecting her own limits and not pushing herself too much. She talked more about her anxieties.

I'm definitely attracted to the idea of, you know, having an open relationship at some point and, you know, perhaps doing threesome-y things in the future when we're more kind of stable, or when we live together and stuff so it wouldn't necessarily freak me out. I think it would be my natural anxiety which is kind of quite prone to anxiety about stuff like that.

She spoke specifically about her anxieties around threesomes. First, she was concerned about balancing the emotional needs of all three people involved. Second, she talks about her anxieties about her partner's sexuality.

I think I would have problems of, like, jealousy, if, cos in order not to be exploitative, you know, both, both partners have to be incredibly physically and emotionally attentive to the third party and I don't know how I'd feel about [him] paying that much attention to another woman in my, or man, in my presence. [...] So, yeah, I don't think, I don't think I am open to it at the moment.

Yeah. But I think he probably, I think he's vaguely freaked out about the idea of em, yeah, being sexually active with another man in bed. And funnily enough I feel more threatened by the idea of him going with another guy than I do with him going with a woman. [...] Cos of that, that thing about you know, him getting something that I can't offer, you know, a man being able to offer him something that I couldn't and him suddenly going oh my God, all along, I've just, I've been a closet case but I didn't even realise it. [laughs] Anne, I'm leaving you.

These two examples further demonstrate that sexual nomadism does not represent an achievement of complete comfort with sexuality and relationships, but an ongoing process of questioning and undermining the rigid borders of sexual state-forms while acknowledging one's own and others emotional needs for boundaries. This also includes recognising that people make mistakes. Anne had a fling with someone outside of the relationship, which broke her exclusivity agreement with her partner. She spoke a bit about how this affected their relationship.

Jamie: Do you and your partner talk about other people you find attractive?

Anne: Hm mm. A bit. A bit. Ever since that whole thing where [he] found out about that guy [...], and me being in touch with him still, it's been a bit of a moot point between us generally discussing any attraction at all outside each other. I think *we're still trying to reconstruct a sort of safe space in the relationship* but yeah, joking references to pop stars and movie stars and stuff but yeh, no, no not massively. (My emphasis.)

Good relationships, like any form of anarchy, depend very much on trust: trusting each other to maintain boundaries and not hurt each other. Unlike the punishment that comes from breaking the borders of state-forms, whether by the State apparatus or by decentralised forms of policing described in the previous chapter, the breaking of boundaries of trust demands making choices. In this case, Anne and her partner have chosen to reconstruct the safety that boundaries provide. Of course, a crucial aspect of the anarchist tradition is the importance of people choosing their own relationships, referred to as voluntary association (in opposition to

the compulsory association of State and capitalism). Voluntary disassociation (including splitting up or 'trial separation') always remains an option if necessary.

A few people talked about the possibility of their relationships ending in their interviews. Sandra and her partner have openly acknowledged that it may not be 'until death do us part'.

We also, along with our monogamy agreement, we also have made it very plain ... well I've made it very plain and I think he has as well, that I love you, I want to be with you ... if we broke up I would be very upset and cry a lot and things like that but I can live without you and I know that and you know that. So I suppose that kind of tempers any over-emotionalism that goes with feeling jealous or if he was to find somebody else ... I'd be upset no matter who it was but, at the same time, I know I would go on. I've been round the bend before and I'm probably not going to go as far round the bend if it happens with this relationship as I have in the past.

While this may seem a pessimistic approach to relationships, I think it is better to acknowledge the potential for a relationship to end or change than to pretend that it is a fixed and permanent object. As I argue further in the next chapter, resistance depends upon a sense of empowerment, which, in turn, depend upon the intellectual and emotional capacities to recognise choices and feel capable of making the ones we want. If someone feels like they are in a relationship because they have no choice, their sense of empowerment will be diminished.

Of course freedom is meaningless unless it includes the freedom to say no. A segment of my interview with Douglas illustrates this well.

I said 'look, maybe we should just pack it in. Maybe we should just live separately and see each other and be friends and ...'. She said 'no, I don't want that.' I said 'but I want to have relationships. I feel bad that I'm exploring this bit of me that's been on ice for a long time and you're not.' She said 'I don't need it. That's not what I'm looking for'. And she's very straightforward about that. So I have to accept that. But we've tried the mutual release bit [...] saying 'look, would we do this again? We'd certainly do it once but would we do it twice?' I think, in wisdom, if ever I was doing it again, I would probably want to live with somebody rather than get married or ... live with a woman or have lived with men first ... do you know what I mean? It's worked out the way it's worked out. This is where we are now. [...] we're lucky that we've got what we've got.

This example might seem very unusual in comparison to many people's relationships. But, I suggest such open discussion about future possibilities may make explicit what happens implicitly. Partnerships, like any form of social organisation, are not fixed objects but ongoing processes. They are continuously produced and negotiated. Acknowledging this process allows for more active participation and nomadism. Like any other anarchy, a good relationship is based on participatory democracy. If we fail to recognise our capacity to change our relationships, whether with friends, partners or 'authorities', we are doomed to remain trapped within the borders of state-forms. This nomadism shares a certain similarity to Giddens' (1992) concept of the 'pure relationship' which he also suggests should not necessarily last until death. This is comparable to the superficial similarities between capitalism and anarchism, in that both advocate versions of individual freedom. Giddens' individualistic contractual understanding of relationships -- 'What holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, "until further notice", that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile' (p 63) -- is entirely compatible with capitalism. Nomadic relationships, on the other hand, are held together by an ethic of mutual aid which may not be permanent, but cannot be ended so callously as giving notice as one might to a landlord or boss.

While we do have the capacity to change our relationships and choose how we would live our lives, this is not necessarily an easy process. Resisting borders requires a great deal of effort. The examples of policing from the previous chapter are not easily overcome, but doing so brings its rewards. In the next chapter, I come back to discuss in greater depth what it is that enables people to continue to effectively resist orientation.

## **Complexities of Desire**

According to the state-form of sexual orientation, our sexual desires for other people can be categorised according to gender. This definition assumes that sexual practice, sexual desire and gender are all easily contained concepts that can be understood simply in relation to each other. Of course, real-life is more complicated than this. In the participants' narratives, concepts of desire, sex and gender were all contested, and the relationships between them complex.

Beth and Melissa described how sexual attraction is in some ways similar to attraction to people they like or love, but with whom they do not want to have sex.

Beth: Well, I mean, I guess I'm attracted to people's faces and their looks, mostly their faces and I'm attracted to people who are confident but I don't know, I can't really separate sexual attraction from liking people.

Melissa: And what's attraction anyway? Like I've felt attracted to my sister and my brother and both of my sisters but just ... but I wouldn't do anything and I wouldn't get arousal from that. I just think that they're really nice people and they're beautiful and intellectual and interesting but I'm not sure if that counts as a desire.

At the same time, sexual attraction can be different from other experiences of physical attraction. In the first example, Anne describes how her male partner fancies some men without wanting to have sex with them. In the second, Diane talks about sexual attraction to a man she does not 'fancy'.

Anne: Yeah, yeah. He does, he kind of fancies some men but ... I think he fancies Brad Pitt and George Clooney and, but he doesn't, but he, he wouldn't want to kiss them. We have this whole conversation about what do you mean, you fancy them? What does that mean? Would you want to kiss them. Oh no. Would you want to be naked with them? No. I just think they're really good looking. And I think they're really attractive. So I suppose he's like the idea of the kind of model unhung-up straight guy [...]. [Laughter]

Diane: He's not somebody that I fancy but there's a sexual attraction. I mean I think a lot of the attraction comes through the quite deep emotional connection we have there because I feel so close with him. It's quite easy. It's quite comfortable and it's quite good fun to express that closeness sexually as well. [...] I can acknowledge, act upon a sexual attraction, sexual interaction, a sexual dynamic with somebody but they might not be somebody that I overtly fancy [...]. I consider him attractive but I don't necessarily actively fancy him myself but I can tell there's a sexual something in the way we interact and pursue that.

It is also possible to have very different experiences of desire. Douglas, who described his sexual desires primarily in terms of men, talked about the possibilities of desiring women.

I find myself on the verge of falling in love with women and thinking about what they're like to be in bed with and thinking about enjoying their bodies but not enough to ever ... I mean it's quite a different quality. It's quite different from what happens when I'm thinking about men but it's ... I find them seductive. [...] a woman who was absolutely charming could keep

me entertained all day. I could cope with that for quite a long time.  
[LAUGHS]

Furthermore, as several people noted, physical attractiveness is greatly modified by one's perception of another's personality, intellect, emotions, etc. Kev described this sort of experience.

I know there have been times that I've just been talking ... or being in a pub, there'd be someone sitting across from you, maybe a group of friends where you don't know the person [...] and you get introduced and find you don't think about them particularly but later in the evening you start talking to them and they're talking about something really interesting and you get on really well with them and suddenly, when you look at them, you begin thinking 'oh, they've got really nice eyes' or they've got a really nice body, something you looked at to start with but it just didn't register for some reason and suddenly it's like, how could I not see how attractive you are? It could be partly the alcohol, given the time. I suppose it happens in non-pub situations sometimes. Even at work here, you can be talking to someone who's maybe visiting your work and when you first meet them, there's nothing ... you know, you might not be able to remember them next day and yet when you talk to them, you get on really well and suddenly [...] they've got beautiful eyes or whatever.

Finally, Laurence had this to say about the nature of desire.

Attraction's attraction. It comes from a place that you can't really understand and that's one of the most attractive things. It's the most exciting thing. You can't really try and rationalise or try and analyse too much why you find what you find attractive or desire because if you do, you tend to cease to find it desirable. If you pick apart a comedian and ask is that line funny? Let's go through it 1000 times and work out the timing of it and then it'll cease to be funny. But this should be just taken for what they have and kind of enjoy it or revel but ... I do unfortunately think that, for a large chunk of society, it would be stupid to ignore the fact that there is still an awful lot of fear and persecution against different sexualities.

Laurence's analysis of attraction addresses key issues: attraction is something we can't understand completely; it should be really nice, but is the source of much anxiety. Desire is nomadic, it evades categorisation as these examples demonstrate. To better understand the important human experiences understood as attraction or desire, I turn now that which is desired rather than the 'nature' of desire itself.

That which was desired in participants' stories could be described as 'erotic intimacy'. By this I mean a warm connection between human beings that includes a sense of sharing that 'spark' associated with sex, but also sometimes found in other intense or deep connections with other people. The first element for developing any sense of erotic intimacy is sufficient trust to lower barriers. Douglas described this as 'being allowed. When someone allows you into their physical space, it's a lovely, lovely feeling'. For him, his 'most immediate sexual fantasy is about being in physical contact with another man, just having hands-on with another man. It doesn't need to elaborate or ... it's just about connection and comfort'. This sense of comfort or security must also allow space for the shifting of boundaries, for radical change, for exciting possibilities, for elements of chaos.

Security and possibilities of radical and exciting changes are often presented as antithetical. Safety is boring, and risk is exciting. Security means exercising as much control as possible. This rhetoric fits neatly with the state-form. Governments respond to risk and danger with legislation. The state-form is a process of containment, of control. Anarchy, the state of no one being in control, is presented as absolute chaos. Participants descriptions of erotic intimacy suggests that security and openness to change are deeply intertwined. Together, they are enabled by a nomadic resistance to representation, including a respect for boundaries.

Boundaries, unlike borders, are continuously developed in relation to individuals' needs in a particular context. For Alasdair, intimacy with men outside his marriage has strict boundaries. His desire for men, he said, is 'a physical urge. I don't really have the strong emotional urge to relate to a guy. I think if it was placing my marriage under threat I would put the marriage first.' And Erica emphasised the importance of respecting her boundaries, including a nice example of casual respectful intimacy.

It's more like when people don't have attitudes that put me off because there are some attitudes. People who like to be really pushy and get really, really flirty straight away sometimes really turn me off unless I'm in a situation where everybody's just coming on to everybody else because it's like that sort of situation and it feels safe and then it's fine. [...] Like I can get really pissed off getting comments in the street, but some comments are really nice. One guy once walked past me and just said 'your tattoo's the coolest thing I've seen all day', and then just walked off and that sort of thing is really nice, that sort of interaction. It was like 'yeah, I really like you and it was really nice to see in the street' but that's OK. I'm not

expecting you to give me your phone number or something. Yeah, kind of like, yeah, I'm here. You're nice. You're there and I like you or whatever and that's it. Just laid back.

Several participants mentioned the appeal of characteristics such as confident, comfortable and laid back. These characteristics provide a sense of security precisely because they allow for change. Anita and Kev described what they found appealing about an ex-girlfriend and a current partner respectively.

Anita: Physical things but self-confidence as well actually. When I first met my first girlfriend, I met her at work and she was ... she had long hair, which was rainbow coloured. She had all ... loads of different stripes all different colours and she was wearing fuck off big Doc Marten boots and blue overalls and things and she was ... she just didn't give a shit what anybody else thought and I was very, very shy at the time and it took me a long time before I could even dye my hair a different colour without thinking everybody would be staring at me. That was in those days. And so her self-confidence in those ways were what attracted me to her and that she was very wild and different herself, very non-judgemental about anybody else.

Kev: The first thing I remember noticing was he was in a social situation and he sort of came in and sat down as if he'd known everyone for a long time even though he didn't know any of them and just chatted to them and he was very at ease and it was kind of ... he tended to stand out from the rest of the people because no one else was like that. So I think he was the centre of attention but he was very much ... he made everyone aware of him but not in a bad way. And a cheeky grin. ... I can be more outgoing when he's around because he's outgoing so it makes me feel more relaxed but I also tend to maybe talk about stuff I wouldn't talk about without him. With him, I talk about stuff I wouldn't normally have talked about with someone else even if I'd been close to them, just because he's so open about everything.

If it is true both that people are works in progress and that identity develops through relationships, then relationships with people who are confident, open and non-judgmental (i.e. who avoid representation), provides security because they allow for change. These characteristics enable change for all participants in the relationship, creating the conditions for both security and stimulation.

The experiences of erotic intimacy described by participants included a desire for stimulation, for having boundaries safely and respectfully stretched. Phyllis, Mark, Melissa and Laurence each described this in different ways, talking about what was important in a

sexual partner to them.

Phyllis: Right, just for sex. Somebody who was sensitive and ... physically sensitive I mean, would react to what I did, and somebody who could also swap roles quite nicely so there's not always somebody who's in charge and somebody who isn't. Somebody who could do that stuff and somebody who's prepared to be rough and can push quite hard as well, not always just to be nice and cute. I want someone who can play and knows where the boundaries are but can push quite hard. Someone I'd like to kiss. That would be important. Someone who's willing to experiment as well, who's willing to do things and not be completely shocked. If I'd be in bed with a bloke and I said 'I want to stick something up your arse', and if they went 'get off me' I'd be out of there like a shot. If somebody said 'oh, well, that sounds quite interesting. Let's try that sometime', I'd think that'll be interesting. Yes, I'd want somebody who was really open-minded and just going away and just see what happened without being fanatical about it.

Mark: ... 'willingness to experiment' I suppose or something like that.

Melissa: ... playful, open minded as in attracted to other things and experimental, understanding in the sense that respectful to my ideas.

Laurence: Personality wise, mostly enthusiasm, enthusiasm and passion for interests really and a sense of just trying to take as much as they can from life. [...] I can look back and see, running through them all, there was a kind of a passion and enthusiasm, never moreso than [my current partner]. So I think that's probably the main element that I would find because it kind of reassures me about the things that I'm passionate about and things that I can get inspired by and somebody who's interested and interesting and interested in their own things.

The eroticism in these descriptions is respectful, but not staid. It is unlike the rationality of bureaucracy, whether State or corporate run. Indeed, a revolutionary question is why eroticism is perceived as only possible in sex. 'Eroticism is exciting, life would be a drab routine without at least that spark. That's the point. Why has all the joy and excitement been concentrated, driven into that one narrow, difficult-to-find alley of human experience, and all the rest laid to waste? There's plenty to go around within the spectrum of our lives' (Firestone, 1970 cited in Notes from Nowhere, 2003:175). Of course, another revolutionary question is why sex is constructed as such a 'narrow and difficult-to-find alley'. Erotic intimacy may also provides an insight into political debates over sameness versus difference. As folk singer, Ani DiFranco (1994) sings,

'cause i know there is strength  
in the differences between us

and i know there is comfort  
where we overlap

Politics of sameness, which conceal or ignore difference, are interdependent with the representationalist ethic of the state-form. Like erotic intimacy, nomadic forms of political organisation recognise the value in a difference and having overlap. As Chaia Heller envisions, 'an erotic democracy [...] decentralizes power and allows for direct, passionate participation in the decisions that determine our lives' (1993:240). Both erotic intimacy and erotic democracy are clearly incompatible with the shame and violence that both support and are supported by the state-form.

### Gender and Desire

Another aspect of the state-form of sexual orientation is the production of the idea that gender and desire are neatly related to each other. Do you fancy men, women or both? Supposedly, this is an easy question to which everyone should have a simple answer. As the examples from the previous sections demonstrate, even the question of what it means to fancy someone is difficult enough, before we begin to acknowledge the complexities of gender. Participants relationships to gender and desire was not straightforward.

Not only is desire supposedly to be represented in terms of 'men' and 'women', but what constitutes a desirable man or woman is also produced through representation, most obviously in the corporate media. Many of the participants clearly rejected dominant representations of desirable gender. Neither hyper-femininity nor hyper-masculinity were considered attractive in the participants' descriptions. Many of the participants expressed a preference for people who exhibit a mix of gendered characteristics. In the following four examples, Beth, Sandra, Eva and Kev talked about their desires for people who do not conform to gender standards.

Beth: I'm just not gendered. I don't ... it's fine in other people but I don't like it in myself. I don't like it in my relationships. I think that ... with my partner, we've been ... yeah, and I think that definitely influences my sexuality. I think that's the kind of ... you know, you're asking 'do you think sexuality is a big part of you?' No, but I think being not of a specific gender is quite a big part of me. And I think that kind of comes out of that. I think I'm quite lucky with the partner that I've got because he's not

particularly gendered either although ... I don't know if he would say that in so many words but he's quite sort of ... he's quite sort of flexible in what he does. [...] I think he's kind of ... he fairly sort of in-between and he does lots of things like Scottish people consider to be quite feminine like he eats loads of chocolate and he likes shopping and he watches *ER* and *Sex in the City* and stuff but like physically and his past experience, he quite stereotypically masculine because he was a handball player and he did his military service and stuff like that. Yeah, he's a bit of a mixture.

Sandra: Androgyny. I like not butch women but kind of dykey, kind of androgynous, kind of together. I don't know what label to use for that kind of women, and I like softer men. Androgyny.

Eva: I think with boys I basically just appreciate any that aren't stereotypical generic straight males. Anyone that can just go beyond the norm a bit I greatly appreciate and I love camp straight boys.

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Kev: Purely on physical stuff, I tend to be attracted to more men than women but I'm not sure how much that is the idea that it's a man or a woman or the looks, especially at the moment, the current looks for women, I don't find attractive. It's the too skinny, too made up, too artificial look. Whereas, I suppose if you put me in a place where there were lots of much better built, muscular women then I'd be much ... more likely to look at the women than the men. I don't fancy the wee skimpy frail waif-like women that I'm surrounded by. I don't know. I'm not really sure. Again, I do get ... I am more attracted to men but I'm not sure how much that is put on mannerisms as opposed to the actual essential attributes as it were. If I think about it, the women I'm attracted to, they are more what you tend to call 'masculine' in some ways but not in the sort of big, butch, hairy ways.

Jamie: In what ways?

Kev: The kind of build. The more solid build. I don't like women who look like you might snap them in half if you're having sex with them. And the same with men. I don't like really skinny men either. I don't like ... I'm not usually attracted to women with very large breasts. I like small breasts. But I don't go for boyish looking women. I just go for sort of like a substantial solidness and then again like women with some degree of muscles, I find much more attractive. Whereas I'm not so ... I'm probably not so much worried about that with men because men tend to be on the whole more solid even if they are less muscley. Whereas I think a lot of women look better with muscle. Yeah. [...] when I say I like solid women, I think it's a personality thing too. I don't like the sort of helpless femme. I like self-confident-but-not-pushy femme as well. So a similar attitude in many women I find attractive. [...] Thinking back in the 90's, [...] there seemed to be more muscley, well-built women around. I had a flat mate, in the place I shared, for 3 months and she was ... she played sports a lot.

She wasn't ... didn't look like a body builder or anything big. She just was always very active and her look was very ... it was sort of like a nicer version of Sporty Spice. It's that kind of crop top, slightly muscled arms and there was a lot of that about. That was great. There were so many women I found attractive then. But that seems to have gone away again. It's gone back to being the stick insect look. So I don't think my preferences have changed...

These examples provide further support for an argument that desire must be understood in relative and contextual terms, rather than the absolutes presented by the idea of sexual orientation. Kev, for example, may be understood to have become 'more gay,' in terms of a Kinsey scale, but it might make more sense to place emphasis on the changing social context and body ideals for women. 'Fancying' 'women' is not a singular fixed reality, but a complex historical construction. Likewise, Beth's, Eva's and Sandra's preferences for not-particularly-gendered, camp and androgynous people depends upon particular social conditions that produce those gendered possibilities. At the same, these desires are nomadic in that they resist categorisation. Although Eva's desire for camp straight boys, for example, is intelligible only because of shared cultural understandings gender and sexuality, there is no state-form, no 'oh, she's one of those! You know what they are like!'

Participants' descriptions of the relationship between gender and desire for them was not limited to preferences for strong women or gentle men. A few people described how they found other people playing with gender to be very appealing.

Erica: I really like it when I see people who are quite to play with their gender. If I know ... if I see a man, who I know to be quite straight or at least have relationships with women but turns up at a party in a dress or something [...] oh, just like there was one time, there was this Basque woman used to cut my hair back when I had money for haircuts and the first time she cut my hair, she just had the sort of long dark hair and the makeup and she was very beautiful and very kind of ... you know, what hairdressers are like, all trendy and stuff, and the next time I had a haircut, she'd shaved her hair off. I thought 'wow! That is just so sexy.' Not just because she looked gorgeous but also because she'd done it. She had all that Mediterranean girly image and she just gave it up. She was fed up, and I thought 'yes!' I really like that. That's gorgeous. But then there are lots of people that I find sexy are not like that.

Phyllis: I think it's great when men dress up as women. I really like that and it is quite exciting as well. [...] I like ... it's the whole fluidity thing about people taking on different roles and identities and that being completely OK and normal and people should be doing it. If you want to

wear a skirt, wear a skirt. You know, I wear trousers. Who cares? If you want to wear a flowery hat, wear your flowery hat. It shouldn't matter. But when you're talking about desire ... yeah, it's nice. I like seeing ... there's nothing like a nice skirt on a bloke. [...] you kind of lose something about ... you lose something about the groin and all that stuff. And the woman with the square clothes, you see the curves inside all the more. [...] And men in drag as opposed to kind of wearing a skirt, which I think is different, is not a turn-on for me at all. I mean it's fun and it's interesting but it's not like a sexy thing for me at all. I mean *Priscilla* was fantastic but no, I didn't want to sleep with any of them, no.

Other possible relationships between gender and desire include attractions to transgender expressions. Meg described a number of experiences and fantasy scenarios that nomadic evade binary gender.

Meg: I mean I have been out with a bloke who had hormone treatment as a kid and well, in fact, actually, there's was another lover who ... there was another lover I found myself with who didn't talk about it but obviously had had some gender ambiguities. [...] Yeah, or fantasy stuff like either threesomes or where I've got any bits or I can feel through the end of my dick, [...] and sometimes ... I mean when it's actual dream, I just do have that or I'll sort of be a bloke in a dream or whatever. That's not a problem.

Jamie: Are there any particular gender ambiguities or combinations that are more appealing than others or ...?

Meg: Everything. Everything please! Everything please, with chocolate sauce!

In other narratives, gender difference was seen as very significant in participants' experiences of desire. For Alasdair, desire for certain sexual practices differed depending on the gender of the partner.

I can enjoy being dominated by a man in a way that I wouldn't expect to [enjoy being dominated] by a woman.

Meanwhile, Pete talked about how he can imagine particular types of intimacy with men, but not others.

...but falling in love, yeah, I could actually fall in love with somebody of the same gender. On the other side, having a sexual relationship, I could imagine less than that. I think love is, for me, something more between ... something a deep understanding, a deep feeling, togetherness feeling, whereas, with sexual ... with sex there is more comes to that. [...] I'm not

sure because you could really fall in love with somebody and be just don't want to have sex with that person. I think that's totally possible. How to define that? Mostly heterosexual, they are different by sexual orientation. I don't put ... I don't mix this sex together with love. For me it's something separate.

For Anita, gender in the sense of butch/femme is entirely irrelevant to her, while at the same time she has only ever been sexually attracted to women.

It's interesting because I'm so not into the whole butch/femme thing that I don't quite understand how it works but for me, but for male/female ... I think part of it's politics as well, to be honest, because [...] I have quite a lot of gay male friends and I'm really, really close to some of them but they still don't carry that same experience of oppression I guess and I think that much as things are a lot different now than what they used to be, there's still that experience like you know a wife becoming the property of the guy, for example. It's still there. Woman can't get high up in the church. It's still there. All the leaders are all white men. It's still there. And about a couple of years ago, Pride was about the right to marry, the right for queer people to be married and it was like, yeah, all the guy's thought it was really good, we totally had the right to marry and I'd marry my boyfriend and I was like, how could you ... because marriage is all about male power over women. How could you be into that? And so I think the politics in terms of gender politics is quite important as well, which is also I think why there's a difference for me between male/female and butch/femme.

Finally, Sandra and Meg described how their relationships were somewhat exceptional in terms of usual patterns of gender and desire. Sandra, who prefers women's bodies is in a relationship with a man, and Meg is a relationship with a man who, apart from her, has only ever been sexually attracted to men.

Sandra: I respond to women's bodies. I don't respond to men's bodies. I think men's bodies are weird. No offence but they are kind of weird.

Jamie: I won't take it personally.

Sandra: My partner knows this too. I've said 'that is pretty damn weird.' And he goes 'yeah, it is kind of.'

Jamie: Does it seem like you're in a mixed relationship?

Sandra: Yeah. Guys are different. Guys are definitely different. Yeah. I don't understand how it can work. It just seems too unnatural to me. I just don't understand how it can work.

Jamie: But it has been for a while.

Sandra: For us it has, yeah. I mean ... but I think he's different even. One night we were in the kitchen and I was ... I had him in my arms and I said 'you are such a beautiful woman. Ohhh, shit.' And I was like ... and he said 'I know how you feel about women. Thank you.' I was like 'whoa! Whoa!' Because I was like 'I didn't mean that. You're not a woman. I don't think of you ... I respect your masculinity. I know you're a man. I don't want you to be anybody but who you are.' He was like 'It's OK.' I said 'are you sure? I didn't mean it. I wasn't thinking of anybody but you.'

Jamie: But he was fine?

Sandra: Yeah, that's not typical.

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Meg: Well, it's very flattering to be told 'I don't really fancy women but I fancy you'. Very flattering [...] I might be putting words in his mouth slightly there. It was very romantic. It's very ... it gives me a special little place.

As we can see from these diverse examples, there is no particular fixed pattern to the relationship between gender and desire. Nor is any particular pattern more nomadic than any other. These examples are all equally nomadic because they defy categorisation. Nor would I suggest that these individuals' desires are more nomadic than other people's, but simply that their nomadism is more obvious. No one's life really fits into the boxes produced through representation, but the shame and violence described in the previous chapter encourages us to work to maintain the illusion they do. Furthermore, these diverse examples of nomadism demonstrate the possibility of resisting heteronormativity without recourse to homosexual identity, and homonormativities without necessarily having to claim queer or bisexual identity. It is possible to resist orientation through an infinite variety of nomadic possibilities. Fictions may be necessary, but there are no particular necessary fictions.

## **The Relational Construction of 'Sex'**

Participants' nomadism was not limited to identities, relationships and desires. Even the notion of 'sex' was open to negotiation. In particular, participant narratives addressed were constituted sex for them in relation to BDSM and the gendered dimensions of sexual practice.

The issue of S/M play came up in several of the interviews as an example of how what constitutes 'sex' or 'sexual' is produced between people. Playing devil's advocate, I encouraged Anita to explore her understanding of S/M as part of her sexuality.

Anita: Sexuality doesn't have to be based on sex as such. [...] you don't have to get off with someone to be sexual.

Jamie: You mean orgasmic getting off?

Anita: Yeah, orgasmic getting off. And so, for me, S/M is part of my sexuality and that it is a sexual thing but I can also do S/M without having sex and without it actually being particularly sexual but that's still part of my sexuality in that I do get off on S/M but the two are not necessarily happening at the same time.

Jamie: Is there an orgasmic getting off?

Anita: Totally. It's like an endorphin rush rather than an orgasmic thing, an orgasm, endorphin rush, sometimes you get both at the same time. Sometimes they're separate. I do a lot of things where there's no actual genital stuff going on at all. I still have my sexuality but it's not overtly sexual but I'm getting a huge rush from it all the same and it's still intense in that way that sexual stuff is intense.

Jamie: Is it sexually arousing?

Anita: It can be. It doesn't have to be.

Jamie: So it's arousing or thrilling?

Anita: Thrilling, I guess. I mean thrilling is sort of ... that sounds different. Arousing as in a sexually arousing sort of way, but thrilling in an endorphin rush sort of way, yeah.

Jamie: An endorphin rush you can get from skydiving, but people wouldn't consider that part of their sexuality probably.

Anita: No, it's the same thing, isn't it? An endorphin rush. [...] But I think there's a difference there in that skydiving, for example, you get the endorphin rush with doing something really scary but you're doing it all within yourself. You're not getting the endorphin transfer from another person. I think that's what the difference is. It makes it more sexually oriented rather than skydiving. You're getting that from another person like you would if you were having sex with them. Whereas skydiving, you're just jumping out of a plane.

For Anita, S/M constitutes a part of her sexuality; despite debates about whether or not pain

and sensation play can be considered 'sex', it clearly falls within the realms of erotic intimacy. The endorphin rush and potential for orgasm Anita described is the erotic spark, but, unlike skydiving, S/M involves intimacy. Anita refers to S/M as part of her sexuality because it constitutes a particularly valued and desired form of erotic intimacy for her.

However, for two other participants who had been sexually abused as children, bondage, restraint and domination play stirred up painful emotions. What constitutes the erotic intimacy for some crosses an important boundary for others.

Erica: I'm not into S&M in a big way. I'm not into bondage and that sort of fetish stuff and anything that involves any violence, like objects really freak me out. For a long time I wasn't into sex toys at all because using objects really freaked me out. Less so now. [...] But, yeah, mostly sort of violent domination stuff. I can really understand that some people are into it but I'm really not at all.

Sandra: [Childhood sexual abuse] reared its ugly little head the first time I had a relationship with a man, actually, because I think I blocked it out for a lot of years, to tell you the truth. [...] It is possible to do that and I did ... because I did and it didn't come up. [...] It came up because I was in situations where I'd be in bed with my male partner and he would just like have me pinned down or something, like in fun, holding my wrists down and ... and I would go into 'survive' mode like fight back, 'I'm going to kill you' mode and he's like 'what's going on?' Which, of course, he would. [...] And so I would comfort him because 'I don't want you to be scared of me. I'm sorry. Because I knew that you weren't doing anything to me. I knew that we were just playing. We were just rolling around or having a laugh or whatever and then something happened and I don't know what that was but I'm sorry for that.' And so I would comfort him and little by little it was like 'Ahhh, now I remember that. Oh.' And so ... I mean now I know some stuff like that, like 'don't pin my arms down or I'll kill you.' And so, in relationships since then, I've said 'look, I've got certain rules here. Don't do that to me or I'm gonna ... I can't be responsible. I will fight back. It doesn't matter what you mean by it. It will be seen as an act of aggression so don't do it.' When you're in a relationship with somebody, you learn what their vulnerabilities are and you don't play on them. It's part of being in a relationship.

For Erica and Sandra, these boundaries are important for protecting and their vulnerabilities, as Sandra puts it. While I have argued that boundaries are flexible and negotiable in contrast to borders, this example requires a qualification. If the poststructuralist argument on the potential fluidity of the self is accurate, it is possible that Erica and Sandra could explore these boundaries and redefine the meaning of power play, like Erica described her efforts with

a partner to redefine the meaning of sex and virginity with her partner (see Chapter Five). However, individuals have limited energy with which to negotiate the the difficulties of hierarchical social life and must protect themselves. So, just because boundaries are potentially flexible and negotiable does not mean that they should always be changed. There is no great pressing need for Erica or Sandra to enjoy S/M.

Phyllis, on the other hand, does seem to have such a need. With a great sense shame, Phyllis described a strong sexual attraction to (fantasy) violence.

Phyllis: I mean I think I probably get more violent in my fantasies than I would ever, ever feel comfortable with in real life and so that's kind of scary, I suppose, because I think where am I going to go with that? How far am I going to take it?

Jamie: And by violence, do you mean like S&M or consensual S&M or do you mean kind of violent ...?

Phyllis: No, more kind of rape, kind of violent things, yeah, which I just know ... I know because I've also been sexually attacked a couple of times. I just know they're not a turn-on. [...] But then reading things like ... is it *My Mother's Garden*?<sup>11</sup> that actually made me feel a lot better about them. I thought, well this is completely normal. It doesn't lead anywhere. It doesn't mean that you're going to go out and rape somebody, you know, so why not? [...]

Jamie: What kind of stories or images you find particularly sexy.

Phyllis: Again, I think ones that involve violence. I think that's why it's quite shocking when you read something and it's about somebody suffering some form of sexual violence. You think well, it's on the page. It's not doing anyone any harm. Go with it.

The intensity of Phyllis's emotions -- shame and desire -- for her violent sexual fantasies indicated a need to explore further. Fortunately, her partner was very open to exploration.

He's got some handcuffs and some foot cuffs and stuff so we've been playing around with them but very gently at the moment, I think, because we don't actually know what's going to work and what isn't going to work. So we're going quite gently. But, again, that's a nice surprise for me because I think I'm actually ... in a way I'm kind of getting near what some of my fantasies are but in a really safe place, which I've never even started to do before. So, yeah, that's good.

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11 A collection of women's sexual fantasies edited by Nancy Friday.

Unlike Erica and Sandra, whose boundaries around S/M were very firm for good reasons, Phyllis and her partner have been gently stretching boundaries and exploring areas of shame and desire.

Although S/M is often considered at the fringes of sex, it highlights the elements at the core of erotic intimacy: pleasure and danger, vulnerability and trust, shame and desire. Perhaps these are even at the core of what it means to be human, as sex writer Simon Sheppard argues:

For me, power-based play is a great way to find out who I am, who other people are, and to have a damn good time while I'm doing it. And, yes, it scary to be vulnerable. Vulnerable to restraints, signal whips, the pleas of a bottom, the demands of a top. Vulnerable to desire, to love, to life. But without vulnerability you might as well be dead. One way or another, we're all gonna get hurt. Because life is dangerous. (Sheppard, 2000: xiii)

## Sex & Gender

As feminist theorists have long pointed out, sexual orientation is a crucial nexus of gender oppression. In particular, through the concept of the heterosexual matrix, Judith Butler (1990, 1993) argues that the oppositional and hierarchical binarisms of 'sex' and 'gender' (in itself a false dichotomy) are made intelligible through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. Nomadic constructions of sex that evade heterogendered borders disrupt the heterosexual matrix and the state-forms of sexual orientation.

Phallogocentric definitions of sex helped to produce, and are produced by, the gender order. The pleasures of sex between women demonstrates alternatives to placing a man's cock at the centre of any definition of sex. This has been one important source of inspiration for nomadic explorations of sexual possibilities. In Sandra's experience, bodily differences allowed for different sexual possibilities.

Sandra: ... to tell you the truth. I mean if people say 'oh it's ridiculous. What can women do with each other?' Then I'll say 'well, what do people do with each other? Like are you so unimaginative that you can't imagine like just being together being a turn on or whatever.' Lesbians are renowned to have hours and hours and hours and hours of kissing. I've been there. Five hours later you're unable to walk and it's like 'what's that about?' I don't know if gay men do it. I don't know if straight couple do it. I've never done it with anybody but a woman. I mean guys have stubble.

Diane's experience of negotiating sex with men after coming out of a lesbian identity further demonstrates the hyper-significance attached to sex between men and women.

Diane: With guys it's been kissing, touching, sort of dick, cunt, fucking, going down on each other. [...] Whereas with women there's been a lot more to it in the sense that I've had a lot more sexual experience with women and so, yeah, kissing and touching and oral sex, I guess. Women ... fucking in all sorts of ways because it's so different. Finger fucking, fucking with objects, dildoes, whatever, strap-on fucking as well as by hand, fisting, both ways. I like fisting. [...] Anal sex as well although I don't find many women that are into it although I'm quite into it so I'm more likely to get fucked than they are and that's either with fingers or toys. There's a little bit of sucking off in a kind of strapped on kind of way. So, yeah, 69 kind of sex. In terms of ... there's just much more things that I've done ...

Jamie: Because of particular people or trust issues or ...?

Diane: Some of it's to do with the length of time I've been involved with women as opposed to guys. Some of it's to do with, I suppose how well I know somebody. Some of it's to do with trust to some extent in terms of the whole kind of larger male/female dynamic in society does come in to it [...] some of it's that kind of confidence/trust thing. But some of it's just opportunity as to what's come up between us and stuff. I mean the stuff I've done with the guy, it's not that I'm restricting it to that. It's just that I haven't found myself in a situation where we've done anything else really.

Jamie: Do you find male/female dynamic ... That broader things affect the specific relationship heavily?

Diane: Yes and no. I mean I find that it affects my feelings about it. I have to be much more careful about getting into a relationship with a guy because of the larger dynamic and it could so easily just fall in ... because as well it's the male-female thing you can easily fall into this straight blueprint that I don't want to it to go into. So the fact that I'm queer comes first and then as to whether anything else is going to happen ... that it's not just like 'I'm a girl and he's a boy kind of thing and we're going to get it on.' It's like 'OK, I'm a dyke and he's a boy and we're going to get it on' but get it on within that context with him. So it does affect it. [...] I'm much more confident with women than I am with guys because I've had more sex with women than guys so I feel I know what I'm doing although it doesn't seem that difficult really. It's just like another person in that sense and always when you get to know an individual and what does it for them and what they're into it and you build a dynamic between you so it's treating it like that, it's just the same in a way.

Jamie: And do you find that guys have trouble having non-heterosexual, male/female sex?

Diane: No. What? In the sense of ... yeah ... no, in the sense of interacting with me in the context that I'm queer is fine. It seems to work out fine. Whatever we do seems to work out fine. It's not sort of [...] the fucking thing didn't come into it 'til quite a bit later kind of thing. It was a lot more kind of exploratory and a lot more like lesbian sex sort of thing in a way. So the male/female fucking thing would come into it later.

Jamie: And is that ... is it especially significant or is it just ...?

Diane: No, it wasn't except I suddenly thought 'oh my goodness, does that mean I'm not a virgin anymore?' It was like 'oh'. The significance was there was that thought afterwards, 'am I going to tarnish my perfect lesbian career?' And birth control. That was the biggest issue around it. So I've got to think about contraception. I hadn't had to think about this for months. I thought about it when first starting out as a teenager or whatever and so you get to think about it a bit then and then I just hadn't had to. Safe sex has always been a consideration but contraception ....? I've often wondered whether that's why I'm more into women than men because it's easier in that respect. There's not that fear that goes with it. You don't have to worry about pregnancy.

Diane has had to negotiate a number of new issues in having sex with men. While the risk of pregnancy associated with one particular sexual practice can be understood as largely ahistorical, notions of virginity and a 'perfect lesbian career' are clearly aspects of sexual state-forms. Diane and her male partners have worked to nomadically evade the overcoding of their sexual practices as heterosexual. Understanding their experiences as dyke & boy sex rather than in terms of a 'straight blueprint' seems to have proved a successful tactic for queering apparently 'heterosexual' practices.

The possibility of queer or nomadic sexual practice within male-female relationships was important to many of the participants. Erica and Phyllis described how they valued evading the 'straight blueprint' as Diane put it, though for Phyllis these negotiations are limited by a long-distance relationship that often only allowed weekends together. Negotiating and practising nomadic sex requires more time than following sexual scripts.

Jamie: Do you think your sex life with your lover would be different if you were both straight?

Erica: Yeah. It would be boring.

Jamie: How's that?

Erica: A lot of the fun that we have is actually about how our sexuality

has evolved in lots of different ways, not just the sort boy/girl kind of thing. So ... we went through a small thing that I sort of studied something about male and female anatomy and I kept talking about how genitals start off as something, not necessarily male or female and sort kept identifying bits of our genitals that actually corresponded to each other and stuff and ... yeah, I sort of clicked [and we started] talking about rubbing our clits together. That's the sort of thing that I really liked that I know that I couldn't have if we were straight. I won't say straight people have boring sex lives (but I think some do actually from what I hear) but it's more like I think, for us, it probably would be quite boring because a lot of things that we really enjoy, we wouldn't do and ... yeah. So it's good.

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Phyllis: When we first started seeing each other, I didn't have any contraception because we couldn't deal with condoms at all and because I've been pregnant before, I'm really pretty careful. Then I had the coil put in and a bloody nightmare, and the emphasis on the 'blood'. It was a bloody nightmare and so we couldn't actually have penetrative sex for ages. [...] so we spent a lot of time just doing non-penetrative things, which was really good because I think we really got to know each other. So now, if we're not doing penetrative for any reason, then we're completely unfazed by it. We just carry on just saying well, we know other things to do and it's not like 'oh, we're doing second best here' or 'oh, we better think of something now'. We do all kinds of things and that happens to be one of them and what was weird for me as well was the penetrative sex wasn't actually completely different from all the other stuff that we'd been doing. It was just another thing that we were doing to communicate, which was completely weird for me as well because before, again, with straight men or with my husband as well, it's like 'I want to get it in there and then I'm going to bang away and then I'm going to come'. And this guy is just doing all kinds of different things and that's one of them and if it doesn't work, OK, you're doing something else or it does work and that's great. So it's a range of things and then sometimes we've got more time but weekends aren't brilliant for it. We're doing more games and we're doing massaging, we're trying each other up or whatever it is and I can see that's going to go a whole load further but we don't have time to do it ...

Similarly, Anita has never had sex with a man and is not sure she ever will. Thinking through the possibility, she felt she could only do so within a nomadic context.

Anita: Yeah, I mean I couldn't imagine going out and picking up some guy in a straight club or something and ... It would be too weird but I could imagine it happening in an S/M context, for example.

Jamie: And that would be easier than ...

Anita: Yeah, because I think the boundaries seem to be more clearly defined and the whole principles of negotiation tend to be more ... it is

more accepted that you're going to negotiate what's going to happen, whether that's sex or S/M not involving sex ... or whatever.

Jamie: Whereas they would just have an assumption about what sex is?

Anita: Yeah, and what it would mean and that sort of stuff. I can't imagine doing that. Oooohhh. But, yeah, in terms of queer sex, that would be different because in the end it's all an argument about what sex is anyway and all that sort of thing.

Although gendered meanings are heavily embedded in the social construction of sex, from participants' accounts it appears to be possible to produce relational meanings of sex and gender which evade dominant constructions. For Sandra, this was experiencing the powerful erotic possibilities of intensive (and extensive) kissing with a woman as a valued sexual practice. Diane, Erica and Phyllis managed to subvert dominant understandings of heterosexuality through negotiation, exploration and reinterpreting the gendered significance of genitalia. Finally, Anita emphasised how sex within a particular social context emphasising negotiation enables a more local and specific relational construction of what sex is and its significance.

### Constructing Sex through Nomadic Boundaries & Exploration

Focusing on BDSM and renegotiating gendered constructions of sex as nomadic is not to advocate these practices as revolutionary. Indeed, like Glick (2000), I do not believe 'we can fuck our way to freedom'. It is not the particularity of the sexual practices describes that makes them nomadic, but the active questioning of normative constructions of sex, negotiation of boundaries and acceptance of difference. Nor, do individual nomadic practices necessarily change wider social relationships, especially if no one else knows of these practices. So, while individual sexual practices may empower individuals to relate to the world differently, 'politically' it is more important to advocate an anarchist ethic of sexual practice emphasising equality, negotiation and difference and rejecting representation, gendered or otherwise.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the force of sexual state-forms, enacted through violence and shame, participants expressed diverse forms of nomadic creativity. Discontent with compulsory

sexual orientation, compulsory monogamy and formulaic constructions of gender, sexual practice and desire, as well as relationships between them, the participants were actively involved in the ongoing development of identities, relationships and 'sexualities' without borders. Eschewing the rigidity of borders and state-forms, the narratives highlighted in this chapter were produced through negotiation and respect for difference. These stories provide inspiration for a tactical politics of sexuality, where representation is resisted in relationships with others. These micropolitical practices evade the limitations of identity politics and intimate citizenship that depend upon strategic approaches, such as lobbying for rights. In negotiating directly with others, whether showing narratives of sexuality, discussing boundaries for sexual practices with others or exploring relationships between gender and desire, participants expressed autonomy. In the liberal sense of the term, this refers to a rational, masculine individualism, such that Giddens, for example, can write that 'achieving a balance between autonomy and dependence is problematic' (1992: 140). This version of autonomy, of freedom, is more consistent with the 'free market' than with the freedom to choose how we live our lives. Recent feminist efforts to reclaim the concept of autonomy while recognising its inherently relational, rather than 'independent', character (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Roseneil, 2000) are more appropriate for understanding the narratives in this chapter. A relational understanding of autonomy is also consistent with a history of radical movements developing alternatives to State and Market. This can even be found in the libertarian elements of Marx's work. 'Only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions: only in community, therefore, is personal freedom possible' (Marx and Engels, 1976:86). Commenting on contemporary global anticapitalist movements and the indigenous, anarchist and libertarian Marxist histories that have inspired them, editorial collective Notes from Nowhere write:

Our understanding of autonomy includes community owned and run healthcare, education, and social support; direct democracy in zones liberated by the people living in them -- not as enclaves or places to withdraw to, but as outward looking and connected communities of affinity, engaged in mutual cooperation, collective learning, and unmediated interaction (2003:108-109).

While the practices examined in participants' narratives are not on the scale of healthcare systems, they are nonetheless consistent with the ideals of radical, relational autonomy. Rather than accepting the truths of sex and relationships, they engaged in relationships and networks of affinity, living, learning and loving according to rules they have worked out for themselves.