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Ladelle McWhorter

*University of Richmond, lmcwhort@richmond.edu*

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## Beyond Pluralism: Foucault's Strategic Counter to Heterosexist Categories



*Ladelle McWhorter*

Most nonheterosexuals want to be guaranteed civil rights with out regard to sexual practices; nevertheless, quite often, gay and lesbian activists formulate demands in ways that de-emphasize practice and emphasize identity. For example, instead of saying, "My having sex with women is irrelevant to the question of whether I should have custody of my child," a lesbian activist might say, "My lesbian identity is as moral and healthy as heterosexual identity and therefore should not prevent me from having custody of my child." The general claim is that lesbian or gay personhood is as good as heterosexual personhood, so lesbians and gays should have equal rights; our political system should recognize and protect a plurality of identities. There are obvious reasons why demands get articulated as support for identities rather than allowance of practices. Many people are much more willing to love the "sinner" if they are still allowed to hate the "sin," so gays and lesbians have formulated appeals in the ways most likely to be supported by heterosexuals. But, when pluralism of this sort is taken as the goal the powers supporting heterosexism go unchallenged and are even reinforced in some fundamental ways. In other words, pluralism as a political ideal may serve to oppress precisely those disprivileged or marginalized groups who might be expected to gain most from its realization. To make this argument, I will draw on the work of Michel Foucault.

Using Foucault's work in this way is, I think, extremely appropriate. Until his death in 1984, Foucault participated regularly in gay politics and theoretical discussion; in fact, virtually all of his work since 1970 can be read as political moves within gay political movements, as a series of contributions to what I will call "gay philosophy." Certainly gay politics is not the only background against which to read Foucault's work, but doing so can be very interesting and productive, so much so

that one might wonder why more people have not approached Foucault's texts in this way.<sup>1</sup>

One reason most people have not seen Foucault's work as unfolding within the context of gay politics is that it does not participate in the rhetoric of pluralism. Foucault never says gay identity is just as good as heterosexual identity. In fact, he registers suspicion of sexual identities in general and of homosexual identity in particular.<sup>2</sup> If gay politics centers on the affirmation of gay identity, Foucault seems more like an enemy than a comrade in struggle.

There is, however, another interpretation, namely, that Foucault is suspicious of sexual identities in general—and therefore of pluralism—because he believes the notion of identity is one of the tools of normalizing power, a genus of power of which heterosexism is a species. His attempts to undermine the power of identity can be read as an attack on heterosexism, an attack begun at least as early as the mid-1970s and carried on until his death. What follows is a reading of Foucault's work on identity that makes its implications for heterosexism explicit.

#### SUSPICIONS OF IDENTITY

Foucault never says homosexual identity does not exist. What he says is that it was invented in 1870 by the psychiatrist Carl Westphal (*HSI*, 43). Homosexual identity was made possible, he claims, by the transposition of the habitual practice of sodomy “onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul” (*HSI*, 43). Sodomy—a catch-all term meaning “any sexual intercourse held to be abnormal”<sup>3</sup>—is a kind of practice. Anyone can engage in sodomy, and almost everyone has, if we can believe Kinsey and Masters and Johnson. Homosexuality, however, is not a kind of practice, though it is strongly correlated with the tendency to engage in practices of specific kinds. Homosexuality is a way of being a self; it is an essential component of a personality; it is an identity.

Foucault's 1975 text *Discipline and Punish* induces suspicion of the notion of individual human identity, that is, of the notion of a true self that can be known. There Foucault argues that the identity of any individual person, insofar as it can function as an object of knowledge, is a site for the anchoring of disciplinary power.<sup>4</sup>

“For a long time,” Foucault writes, “ordinary individuality—the everyday individuality of everybody—remained below the threshold of description” (*DP*, 191). The only persons whose lives were chronicled were sovereigns and heroes. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, things began to change. In hospitals, schools, prisons, armies,

and factories, functionaries began keeping detailed records of their examinations of each individual patient, pupil, inmate, soldier, or laborer for various purposes having mostly to do with a desire for greater orderliness and utility. As the practices of examination and record-keeping were standardized, two possibilities emerged:

firstly, the constitution of the individual as a describable, analysable object, not in order to reduce him to "specific" features, as did the naturalists in relation to living beings, but in order to maintain him in his individual features, in his particular evolution, in his own aptitudes or abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge; and, secondly, the constitution of a comparative system that made possible the measurement of overall phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the calculation of the gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given "population." (*DP*, 190)

This process of meticulous data collection made possible, on the one hand, the establishment of norms and, on the other, the identification of individuals insofar as their behavior or performance deviated from those norms. Knowledge gained through these methods—knowledge of individuals' abilities and disabilities, for example—might enable physicians, teachers, psychiatrists, or supervisors to help their charges realize their full potential; certainly, it enabled functionaries to arrange the individuals under their control to achieve greater efficiency in pursuit of their institutions' goals. Thus the individual, as a being identifiable in relation to a set of norms, becomes what Foucault calls "a 'case': a case which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power" (*DP*, 191). What is knowable about each of us, the truth of our individual selves, is the history of our particular deviations from established norms. That series of deviations, that truth, is how we are identified in a disciplinary society; it is our true identity. In potentiality, if not in actuality, each of us is a case. And as a case, as a knowable identity, each of us is a target and an anchor point for power.

Now, one might argue that the "identity" Foucault sees as an anchor point for power is not the same thing as the "identity" many gay and lesbian activists try to affirm. Affirmation of gay identity surely is not simply affirmation of one's deviations from sexual norms. We might want to impose or stipulate a distinction here between individuality and identity. We might want to say Foucault has analyzed individuality, while

political movements promote the acceptance of particular forms of collective identity.

This distinction deserves careful scrutiny. Is it the case that what Foucault critiques in *Discipline and Punish* is different from what gay activists tend to embrace? Is it the case that Foucaultian individuality is not the same as gay identity, or at least that we ought to use the two words to distinguish two kinds of things? Perhaps so. One's individuality, which is just the set of one's deviations from relevant norms, is one's own alone, whereas one's sexual identity is something one shares with others.<sup>5</sup> If one claims a lesbian identity, one is claiming a kind of group membership (abstract though it may be for people who are isolated from organized gay communities). What is more important, this act of "coming out" typically functions as a rite of passage through which one defies society's judgment that homosexual practice is a form of deviance and proclaims oneself to be outside heterosexist norms. Thus, it seems affirmation of gay identity is a direct assault on normalizing power rather than an anchor point for it.

Unfortunately, that may not be so. Announcing that one's difference is not deviance need have no effect whatsoever on normalizing power—even if the claim is heeded. As long as normalizing thinking itself goes unchallenged, the *best* we can hope for is establishment of a parallel set of norms of homosexual identity development, an event that would leave normalizing power completely intact and would simply make possible the identification of new forms of deviance. This is already happening to a limited extent. Occasionally, one hears people defend homosexuality as, for some individuals at least, normal.

Normalizing power can simply absorb new identities as new norms against which to measure new types of deviation. Any identity can function as the name for a type of personhood for which there are known or knowable developmental and behavioral norms. And, thus, any identity can be used to normalize and oppress those who deviate from it.<sup>6</sup> Setting up homosexual identity as just-as-good-as-only-different-from heterosexual identity does nothing to challenge the powers that enable heterosexist oppression to begin with.

It is true that the kind of identity many gay and lesbian activists affirm is not exactly the individuality that Foucault studies. *Individuality* is the name for a particular person's specific location within a normed type, whereas *identity* is the name for a norm, elevated to a type of personhood, that individuals have in common. Identity and individuality are not exactly the same thing; nevertheless, they are intimately related. Individuals exist in relation to normed identity types. Therefore, individuality, the anchor point for power, depends upon the existence of identity types. This dependency relation is the reason Foucault

attempts, particularly in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, to undermine identity. Identity is a tool of normalization, and normalization is the source of most of our sexual misery.

### ALTERNATIVE POLITICS: THE GENEALOGY OF SEXUAL CATEGORIES

Identities are tools of power. As such, they are never, under any circumstances, completely unproblematic. Given his own analysis, Foucault could not affirm the notion that for each of us there exists a true sexual identity that we have only to discover and manifest, nor could he accept a political imperative to establish a collective identity on the basis of which to demand legal and social change.

Nevertheless, one is given to oneself as an object of knowledge. One stands marked out and identified as a homosexual. One must assume that position, whether one wants to or not, in a society that imposes that label at sites of specific recurrent desires and practices. And in assuming that position one finds that one is oppressed. What can one do?

One might attempt to defend one's desires and practices without reifying them. But, while that might be a viable option in some circumstances, in the present climate it might be political suicide. Conservatives are trying to force gays and lesbians into just such a defensive posture by claiming that homosexuality is a choice of practice, not an aspect of personhood, and therefore is punishable. No doubt if the terms of the debate shift in the directions conservatives desire, political and economic oppression will intensify and lives will be destroyed. In addition, beyond the immediate strategic considerations, one might balk at the notion of "defending" one's desires, practices, lifestyle, or whatever anyway. Why assume homosexuality is the issue? Instead of defending homosexuality, why not attack the power structures of heterosexism outright?

That, I believe, is what Foucault seeks to do. With his critique of normalizing power carefully laid out in *Discipline and Punish*, he launches his direct attack on heterosexism in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. There Foucault makes his argument that homosexual identity and its opposite, heterosexual identity, are historical products of power.

Examining the legal prohibitions against various types of "sexual deviance." Foucault finds that prior to the eighteenth century "debauchery (extra-marital relations), adultery, rape, spiritual or carnal incest, but also sodomy, or the mutual 'caress'" (*HSI*, 38) were punishable as degrees of violation of marital fidelity. Practices that came to be called

“homosexual” were not marked out as separate from the rest. “What was taken into account in the civil and religious jurisdictions alike was a general unlawfulness. Doubtless acts ‘contrary to nature’ were stamped as especially abominable, but they were perceived simply as an extreme form of acts ‘against the law’ ” (*HSI*, 38).

All acts other than those considered appropriate for and within marriage were lumped together as violations of the Sixth Commandment, just more or less heinous.

Not until the nineteenth century did some of those acts come to function as signs of the specific natures, the true identities of the persons who engage in them. The advent of sexual identity occurred with the spread of medical and psychiatric power into the family, the home, and the school. Once perversity indicated an identity, every aspect of the perverse person’s life was subject to scrutiny. Foucault writes,

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. (*HSI*, 43)

With this understanding of habitual action and desire as indicative of identity, every aspect of a person’s life was open to the “lines of penetration” (*HSI*, 42) of a disciplinary power whose strategy generally included a fragmentation of previous unities and a reordering for maximal efficiency and control.

One conclusion of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, then, is that homosexual identity is produced by networks of power and that incitement to discover and confess one’s identity is a strategy for inserting individuals into a power-knowledge grid. Homosexual identity is not an ahistorical essence that comes to inhabit individuals either from birth or as a result of childhood trauma or aberrant physiological development; it is a historical category produced within a clinical discipline for the purpose of managing human behavior.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, its genesis is one with that of the category of heterosexual, the norm against which the deviance is measured, but more important for Foucault, the norm that requires its other in order to exist at all. For, without the category of homosexuality, heterosexuality could not be. Heterosexuals are pre-

cisely not homosexuals; they are normal. But normality exists only in relation to something defined as deviance.

Foucault's target here is not homosexuality. It is heterosexuality. It is the power that informs heterosexual identity and sets it up as natural, unquestionable, healthy, and right. It is the network of power-knowledge that, by rigidifying pleasurable practices into sexual essences, compels a majority of people to imagine that they are incapable of anything but genitality with members of another sex and superior to anyone who might be capable of something else. Foucault's genealogy of sexual identities disrupts heterosexist power by making the notion of pure or natural heterosexual identity deeply suspect.

Still, uneasiness about Foucault's project may persist. Homosexual identity has served as a ground of countermemory and counterattack. What if we accept Foucault's analysis and cease to believe in the natural existence of any sexual identities? How will that help us, given the current configurations of power? It is hard for most of us to imagine a selfhood, much less a politics, without identity as a ground, so it may seem that Foucault leaves us with no alternative except disintegration both collective and individual—which is obviously unacceptable. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* all Foucault gives in answer to the question of how to animate a postidentity self-awareness and politics is: "the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (*HS1*, 157). It was necessary to wait eight years for a better answer than that.

Foucault's original plan for the *History of Sexuality* series included five more volumes after the first, each devoted to some aspect of the configurations of power that produced sexual subjects over the last three hundred years. But the project changed. In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault explains, "What I had planned . . . was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture."<sup>8</sup> Problems arose with the third correlate, specifically with the question of how to account for individuals being led to practice a hermeneutics of desire. A genealogy of desire was needed, an account of the centuries-long development of the experience of selfhood as desiring subjectivity. This new project led Foucault back to Greece and Rome. His puzzle now was "desiring man" (*UP*, 6).

Genealogical work is disruptive. It shakes foundations, fractures unity, and disturbs discursive continuity; however, it is also often a necessary aspect of creative work. In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault writes, "There are times in life when the question of

knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all" (UP, 8). Given that assertion, it makes sense to read Foucault's genealogy of desire as more than an attempt to dislodge established theories of what it means to be a subject; it is also an attempt to find different ways to think and live.

As Foucault cast the history of sexuality project originally, the series would have concentrated on delineating the institutions and disciplinary practices that created subjectivities such as "the pervert," the "masturbating child," the "hysterical woman," and the "Malthusian couple." Analyses of these forms of subjectivity no doubt would have furthered the project of destabilizing sexuality and sexual identities, the foundations of heterosexism, but these analyses would not have provided much opportunity to explore ways of thinking and living one's gay practice in the absence of the identity of homosexual. The turn to Greece and Rome did just that.

Foucault suggests that every morality comprises two elements: "codes of behavior and forms of subjectivation" (UP, 29). In some moral systems, the codes predominate; but in others, what takes precedence is "the practices of the self" (UP, 30). "Here the emphasis is on the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which [one] works them out, on the exercises by which [one] makes of [one]self an object to be known, and on the practices that enable [one] to transform [one's] own mode of being" (UP, 30). This latter type of morality is what Foucault encounters in Greco-Roman antiquity.

According to Foucault, the Greeks understood desire not primarily as attraction toward what one lacks but as part of a dynamic network that included act and pleasure. Desire arises out of knowledge that certain acts bring pleasures of a certain kind; the possibility of pleasure lures desire toward act, and act results in pleasure, which results, once again, in desire. This network is an *energeia* (UP, 50). As such it empowers human being, but it may, because of its very nature as force, get out of control. One must, therefore, both cultivate and guard it. The purpose of moral reflection, then,

was much less to establish a systematic code that would determine the canonical form of sexual acts, trace out the boundary of the prohibitions, and assign practices to one side or the other of a dividing line, than to work out the conditions and modalities of a "use"; that is, to define a style for what the Greeks called *chrèsis aphrodisiòn*, the use of pleasures. (UP, 53)

In fact, the form of sexual acts—the sex of one’s partner, whether indeed there was a partner at all—was not the issue. What mattered was the frequency and circumstances under which one made use of pleasure to strengthen oneself and take care of one’s needs. The goal was *sôphrosynê*, moderation, the enhancement of one’s strength in the reasoned mastery of the dynamic of desire, pleasure, and act.

Thus, Foucault shows us a culture in which desires and practices our society labels “sick” and “immoral” were neither and were not even distinguished from desires and practices our society considers healthy and right. His main purpose was to begin to give a genealogical account of our own attitudes about sexual practices and our own beliefs about sexual identities. But in the process of doing that, he also has managed to depict an alternative, and, more important for my thesis, an alternative that enables the practices we know as gay in the absence of homosexual identity.

Foucault’s work is a form of political activity. While he decidedly did not advocate a return to ancient Greece,<sup>9</sup> he clearly did advocate a turn to an ethics of self-aware forms of subjectivation as opposed to an ethics of the code.<sup>10</sup> He envisioned a morality in which those persons affected by the values and standards of a society have “the liberty to transform the system.”<sup>11</sup> “Restrictions have to be within the reach of those affected by them so that they at least have the possibility of altering them.”<sup>12</sup> He imagined ethics as an art of living, an art in which each would participate as artist.<sup>13</sup> This turn to ethics as art was, for Foucault, directly linked to affirmation of gay practice. In an interview just prior to publication of *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault remarked, “One could perhaps say there is a ‘gay style’ or at least that there is an ongoing attempt to recreate a certain style of existence, a form of existence or art of living, which might be called ‘gay.’”<sup>14</sup> Thus, Foucault’s work opens the way for, among other things, affirmation of gay *êthoi*, beautiful gay styles, without insistence on normalizing identity categories, and thus his work is a political act in support of the well-being of nonheterosexual people. The work also embodies a politico-discursive strategy that might replace gay and lesbian identity politics and the call for liberal pluralism.

### IDENTITY VS. STYLE

How are we to live that opening, to move into postidentity self-awareness and postidentity politics? First, we must recognize the instability of sexual identities; they simply are not what they claim to be. Undergoing the inadequacy of identity categories reduces their power to shape our lives.<sup>15</sup>

Loss of the power of identity will be nothing but loss, however, unless some other forces are enabled by it. Destabilization of sexual categories is merely destructive unless some other mode of living is imaginable. For Foucault, the decentering of identity occurs along with the shift to a language of style. His word *style*, Foucault notes,<sup>16</sup> is to be understood in relation to Nietzsche's comment in *The Gay Science*. There Nietzsche writes,

*One Thing is Needful.*—To “give style” to one's character—that is a grand and rare art! He who surveys all that his nature presents in its strength and in its weakness, and then fashions it into an ingenious plan, until everything appears artistic and rational, and even the weaknesses enchant the eye—exercises that admirable art.<sup>17</sup>

Life becomes not a process of self-discovery but rather a process of self-transformation. That process both produces and is “style” and is for Foucault both individual and collective.

Perhaps we can understand style more clearly by noting some of its limits. First, one cannot create styles *ex nihilo* without historical grounding. A self, having no essential nature, does not exist apart from discursive practice, so one cannot simply abandon the discursive practice in which one finds oneself. One cannot, for example, simply decide one is not homosexual. Stylings elaborate on self-formative practices and so may modify both the practices and the self, but stylings are never simply chosen as a Rawlsian subject behind the veil of ignorance might choose a set of governmental rules.

Furthermore, styling is not simply alternative identity production. Foucault is not advocating something like the construction of lesbian identity advocated by, for example, Barbara Solomon.<sup>18</sup> Whereas for Solomon the creation of a lesbian life is something like the creation of an identity that will take a certain predetermined form and perdure in a relatively stable manner, for Foucault as for Nietzsche, “style” never means anything like a finished product that one would simply live out or display. One does not create a truth of oneself that one subsequently comes to inhabit. Style, as a configuration of “will to power,” is never completely coincident with itself; style is a kind of self-patterning energy.

What fascinates Foucault, what he advocates and attempts to practice, is a kind of ongoing “styling” that he calls “gay”—which is, to be sure, a child of clinical discourse and normalizing power but which is not bound to repeat the past. To be gay, then, is not to have a specific identity either congenital, chosen, or socially produced; it is to be engaged in a certain kind of cultural, discursive, meaningful activity

made possible in part by and to some extent destructive and parodic of nineteenth-century sexological discourse.<sup>19</sup> Understood in this sense, gay styling is not something yet to be produced; it is already occurring—has been occurring since soon after Westphal did his work. As a result of a set of historical forces, self-patterning, dynamic gay cultures have formed and are forming—and have passed or are passing away. We need posit no ahistorical identity to account for the emergence and power of gay styles as political and cultural forces.

If we want an example of gay style, we need look no further than the texts examined here. Foucault's work is a response to the gay imperative to challenge heterosexism, and as such it is an acceptance of the invitation to participate in the ongoing creation of gayness, of gay style. It is a direct, sustained attack on heterosexism—and thus it supports gayness—but it is not thereby a simple affirmation of homosexuality. This latter point is extremely significant. Foucault's work, as he himself says in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, is *askesis*, a series of exercises designed to change those who undergo them. Thus his work is antithetical to stasis, to the affirmation of anything self-identical. It is styling, ongoing, changing self-styling; it is Foucault's own self-styling, his own shaping of himself within gay discourse. Hence my assertion that Foucault's work itself is gay; it is an effect of gay style. Further, within Foucault's gay styling, his strategic counter to heterosexism, "gay" becomes an *anti-identity*, a name for resistance to the finality of definition, a perpetual transgression of sexual categories.

## CONCLUSION

Foucault once made a remark that this chapter is intended to echo: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind,' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures."<sup>20</sup>

Maybe the best course of action nowadays is not to work for the political recognition of a plurality of sexual identities but rather to bring the entire notion of sexual identity into question. Maybe only by doing so will we undermine the normalizing powers that oppress all of us together and each of us in his or her own isolated, individual way. Political acceptance of a plurality of sexual identities may serve the interests of those who will instantiate the new norms perfectly, those against whom new deviants will be identified, but it is not likely to undermine heterosexist power structures fundamentally because it will not undermine heterosexuality as a norm for the majority of the

population and it will not prevent the label of *deviant* from continuing to be applied to someone, if not all the same someones who bore it before. Our goal should not be to win public acceptance of a plurality of sexual identities; it should be to challenge the notion of sexual identity per se and heterosexual identity in particular.

Having shown that Foucault's work calls pluralism into question in gay and lesbian politics, I want to conclude with two other, related points. First, though on the basis of the foregoing analysis I cannot make specific claims about the value of pluralism as a political goal in other social movements, I do want to suggest that feminists ought to consider Foucault's arguments as carefully as lesbians and gays should. As plenty of lesbians know, the identity "woman," even when construed as equal to "man," serves a normalizing function that oppresses many people. Establishment of two parallel but equal norms of gender identity development does nothing to counter the oppressive power of normalizing thinking. Affirming a plurality of genders will not end gender oppression. Similar arguments might be made against pluralism in other spheres.

Second, I want to emphasize that I have read Foucault's work in the context of gay political and intellectual activity, a context in which that work was conceived and written. Reading Foucault against that background is both an obvious strategy and a productive one. Too often Foucault's writing is extracted from its political context, and as a result absurd charges are made. For example, some assert that Foucault's work disables political practice, or that it amounts to a quietism that preserves the status quo, or that Foucault offers nothing to feminists because he avoids questions of gender. Only when we refuse to acknowledge Foucault's philosophy as gay can such charges sound even remotely plausible. Only when we refuse to acknowledge the political force of his work on behalf of himself and others as nonheterosexual people does the work seem apolitical—*only when we refuse to acknowledge the work's political force does it seem apolitical*. But is that really a surprising outcome? It is time to lay these assertions to rest and to acknowledge Foucault's political context. It is time for politically concerned intellectuals to pay attention to what Foucault's work is doing and has to say. Foucault is not the enemy; he is a comrade in struggle.

ABBREVIATIONS OF FOUCAULT'S WORKS  
(NUMBERS IN NOTES REFER TO TEXT SECTIONS)

DP *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Press, 1977).

- HS1 *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978).
- UP *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

## NOTES

1. One who has is historian Jerrold Seigel, "Avoiding the Subject: A Foucaultian Itinerary," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51, no. 2 (April-June 1990): 273-99. Seigel writes, "I believe that there is a hidden level of homosexual reference in many of Foucault's writings, and that bringing it into the open will help to clarify certain dimensions of his views about subjectivity; at the same time it will allow us to understand the connection between the works for which Foucault is famous, from *Madness and Civilization* through his studies of sexuality, and an earlier phase in his career which has been too little considered but which casts his well-known works in a somewhat different light" (275). This chapter will not take the same approach as Seigel, but I do recommend his article for anyone seriously interested in this issue in Foucault's work. Foucault discusses his sexual self-understanding and practice in a variety of publications, e.g., "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, Hall, 1988): 286-303; this interview originally was published in *Salmagundi*, 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983) and was entitled "Homosexuality: Sacrilege, Vision, Politics." See also the interview with Charles Ruas at the end of Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986): 169-86.

2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), part 1, chapter 2.

3. *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 3rd college ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 1274.

4. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Press, 1977), 187-92. Foucault also argues through this text that the individual is a product of disciplinary power, but for the purposes of this chapter that argument is relatively unimportant. For a more extensive examination of the whole set of arguments, see my "Self-Overcoming and the Will to Truth: A Reading of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*," *Praxis International* 12, no. 4 (January 1993): 341-51.

5. Actually, none of this is as clear-cut as it might seem. My individuality, as the peculiar set of deviations from norms that make up my history, theoretically could be shared completely by one or more others. If it so happened, then social scientists might come up with a name for my particular brand of individuality. However, such an occurrence seems statistically unlikely. It is much more

likely that I would share a subset of deviations—sexual, racial, or any number of other common traits—with many people, and thus I might be identifiable as a member of some group. An identity of this sort—a shared subset of deviations—probably is what sexologists mean by a sexual identity. Whether one sees homosexual identity as a shared subset of deviations or as a normed type unto itself is really just a matter of one's experimental or theoretical focus.

6. Such norms are being established, tentatively, in certain gay and lesbian communities (as well as in clinical practice). For evidence, see the discussion of lesbian definitional exclusivity in Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 69–76. For the difficulties such normalizing produces for some practitioners of “homosexual” behavior, see Tomàs Almaguer, “Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior,” in *Differences* vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 75–100.

7. Of course this does not mean that homosexual identity must always be nothing more than a site for the exercise of disciplinary power. Certainly the category has become a rallying point for those who would resist the normalizing power that invented it.

8. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, Volume 2, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 4.

9. See Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 233. There he refers to the specifics of Greek attitudes and mores as “disgusting.”

10. In fact, he thought the ethics of the code was dead anyway, and some creative work was necessary. “And if I was interested in Antiquity it was because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence.” See Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 49.

11. Foucault, “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act,” 294.

12. *Ibid.*, 295.

13. “From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art” (Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 237).

14. Foucault, “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act,” 292.

15. Foucault writes, “Even on the level of nature, the term homosexuality doesn't have much meaning. . . . It seems to me that it is finally an inadequate category. Inadequate, that is, in that we can't really classify behavior on the one hand, and the term can't restore a type of experience on the other (*ibid.*).

16. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 237.

17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), 223. Most English translations of this work are entitled *The Gay Science*.

18. Barbara Solomon, "Taking the Bullshit by the Horns," in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 40.

19. For one account of the ways in which lesbian identity developed out of sexological discourse, see Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," in *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from Signs*, ed. Estelle B. Freedman, Barbara Gelpi, Susan L. Johnson, and Kathleen M. Weston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7-25.

20. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 216.