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Orientalism, as introduced by Said, is a series of studies based on and around the Orient, which through the eyes of the West or the ‘Occident’ is generally considered to be East. These studies are a feature of postcolonial studies and they are concerned with the period of European colonialism and encounters with nations and places they have come to call ‘The Others’; that which is not European, the inferior. The Orient has been studied extensively by the British and the French during 18th and 19th centuries, creating discourse which as described by Hall (1992) constitutes the ways by which the West represents the differences between itself and ‘the Other’. As Said claims, ‘Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)’ (2003: 43). In light of this idea, this essay shall explore and examine Said’s theory of Orientalism and then in part take a critical look at the critiques exposing the paradoxes and lack of self-analysis in his work. Lastly, this essay shall assess the relevance of Said's theory of Orientalism in understanding Europe’s relations with the rest of the world, namely the East.

What constitutes Orientalism is the intention to study and write about the Orient and its culture. Whether through scholars, travellers, philosophers, writers or even artists, what is produced as a result of this interest, a study of culture or romanticised writings or paintings of the landscape of the Orient, is what forms Orientalist discourse. The power of Orientalism according to Said is its ability to form judgements of the Orient in the

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Westerners’ minds; the boundaries of the Orient are thus internalised, in other words, ‘The Orient is Orientalised’ (2003:67). As stated by Childs (1997), what is unique about Said’s analysis of the Orientalist discourse is that he divides it into two modes: Manifest and Latent. Manifest Orientalism is the series of historical, literary and widely accepted studies of the Orient. Latent Orientalism, however, is the subconscious perceptions of the Orient which form the basic underlying “truths” about the Orient as exotic, static and backwards. Labels for people, places, faiths etc. have always been used as ‘identifying functions’ (Bhabha, 1994). Orientalism means the study of the Orientals; that very nature of labelling people as Oriental, because it implies distinction and difference, is how the Orient, as geographically and ideologically disconnected and exterior from the West, came into existence. Orientalism can hence be described as ‘what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient’ (Said, 2003: 21). However, Said argues that Orientalism did not start with the objective of fabricating images of the East. The Westerner wanted to study the Orient, but neglected the already existing history of the Orient produced by the Orientals themselves. They did not put themselves as the subject of the study. What Said does not consider is the fact that the Orient in its original form of being was a totally new world to the European traveller. It had, and still has different cultures, moral values and relations between its people compared to the rigid, stratified European society. Therefore, they used all kinds of metaphors and synonyms to describe what they observed, especially in literary texts and the arts. Young hence claims that what Said is failing to offer is an alternative to this mode of representation of the Orient. Nonetheless, Said is adamant in that he argues that to seek an alternative method to Orientalism is to admit that the existence of the Orient is in dispute in the first place, and to do so is to disingenuously defend Orientalism’s creation of the Orient as Europe’s ‘Other’ (Young, 2004).

Said’s criticism of Orientalism is that it established an institution out of the Orient, so the only way to study the Orient was through European institutions and scholars. This indicates that Europeans did not allow the ‘subaltern’ – the Orientals – to speak for themselves and produce knowledge (Ghandi, 1998). The notion that the Orient is an entity that needs to be studied and represented by the West resulted in the creation of the ‘The Orient’ as Europe’s alter ego (Young, 2004). The very nature of representation brings about the question of authority. Conversely, Said argues:

[T]he real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions and political ambience of the reporter (2003: 272).
Within this is Said’s main argument regarding Orientalism. It is not entirely about creating stereotypes of the Orient, but rather about how these stereotypes and representations are used to exert power on the Orient. Said argues that the Western studies of the Orient were not entirely for their will to have knowledge, but instead, for their will to have power (Halliday, 1993) and in general, he declares that discourse is not innocent. Said’s ‘Orientalism’ comprises analyses of the discourses on the Orient; he has not analysed the societies of the Orient, and as a result of this, Huggan (2005) argues that ‘Orientalism’ itself can be considered Orientalist. Said, through his analysis of discourse on the Orient, has failed to identify and signify the importance of sexual representation as an integral part of cultural representations (Yeğenoğlu, 1998). She argues that the cultures of the Orient were represented through representing the sexual differences of the Oriental women to the Western women thus creating an Oriental sexually in contrast to ‘normalised’ sexuality of European women. Oriental woman was depicted behind the veil and dominated by men in the society, but also the Orientalists.

Essentially what Orientalism does is to dichotomise the world. “They”, the Orientals, live in their world – The Orient, which is created by the language of Orientalist discourse – and “we”, the Westerners, live in our world. But because we have more knowledge of them than they have about themselves, they are our subjects. There is no other way than “us” dominating “them” (Said 2003, Moore-Gilbert 1997). Essentially, ‘What unites these texts is the forms of knowledge they produce about their object of study and the power relations which are thereby involved’ (Childs, 1997: 99). What it is crucial to understand is the relationship between knowledge and power. What knowledge creates is representations of the “truth”, but what is presented is regarded as the “truth” by the author and those who read it. As Said claims, ‘In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation’ (2003: 21). Through these representations and essentially the repetitions, the ‘facts’ about the Orient are formed by the Western discourse, therefore a sense of power over the Orient is developed from the knowledge of the Orient. Because if ‘we’ know more about the social structures of the Orient, its culture and its history, when ‘we’ are representing it ‘we’ create a world which has essentially emerged from ‘our’ knowledge of the Orient so ‘we’ have had an influence on it. ‘We’ are defining the Orient to the Orientals as well as to ‘Ourselves’, the Westerners. Thus, as stated by Mackenzie, ‘Articulation of knowledge becomes an expression of power’ (1995: 3). Said argues for the use of Orientalist discourse by the European imperialist to justify their empire over the
Orient. Foucauldian notion of discourse, which is the theory Said uses to justify his own theory of Orientalism, argues that knowledge and power are interlinked and cannot exist without the other one already existing (Childs, 1997). Knowledge of something presupposes an already existing power over the source of knowledge, which in this case is the Orientals. Thus this claims that without European power in the Orient in the first place, there simply could not have been the starting point for the process of “creating” knowledge.

Essentially then, Said is arguing that Orientalism is the consequence of imperialism and imperialism a consequence of Orientalism (Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Maley, 1997). Said is totalising Orientalist discourse by saying it is contaminated with the language used to justify imperialism; thus he is repeating the very structure he is criticizing (Young, 2004). In doing so, he is undermining the resistance to colonial discourse and colonialism itself from those within the colonised nations, and in the West. Ironically, Said, by claiming that every European who wrote about the Orient was essentially ‘ethnocentric’, is reinforcing the same methodology he is using to criticise Orientalist discourse, by generalising the Western view of the Orient (McLeod, 2000). In the modern digital era, the Orient has been reduced to the Middle East. The Orient, for the widespread media in the West, is ‘commodified’, as Childs (1997) coins it. The resistance of the Middle Eastern nations against the intrusion of the West in their internal affairs is often presented as “terrorism” or acts of barbarism without mentioning the reasons and ideologies behind the resistance to the colonial discourse, which even if mentioned, as argued by Halliday (1993), latently connote the ‘atemporal’ mindset of Islam. What Said’s critique of Orientalism causes is the idea of ‘binarism’ of the relations between the East and the West, that there is just a tension between these two; with this, he undermines the split of discourse within the Western and Eastern scholarship. If Orientalism is about depicting Islam as all-encompassing, essentialist and dominant ideology in the Middle East then as argued by Halliday (1993), Khomeini (leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran) is also an Orientalist. As Bonnett (2004) notes, the image of the West was not created by juxtaposition of the discursive studies of the Orient by the West and the universally accepted ‘realities’ of the West. Rather, the West as a body was created in the East, or the Far East to be exact. Furthermore, Shilliam (2010) validates this argument by stating that representations of the West go back as far as the fourth century. However, this image of the West was used as a tool by Japanese Westernisers to create a self-image of Japanese society as primitive and underdeveloped as a result of European imperialism, so that it could feed the needs of nationalist movement in Japan in order to spark the process of Westernisation within Japan. Fukuzawa’s debate in a way simultaneously confirms
Eastern subordination and opposes it, in that it argues for ‘Japanese Humanism’ to be used for further modernisation of Japan, not Western Humanism, which is seen by the Western imperialist as a universally suitable system of modernisation (Shilliam, 2010).

What Said fails to analyse within the vast texts he has already scrutinised is works of historians and social scientists. He has predominantly given priority to literary texts (Ashcroft, 2001) which by default are filled with exoticisms. The most destructive effect of a European representing the Oriental culture is that he completely undermines the “heterogeneities” and “complexities” within that culture. The Orientalist generates the notion that people of the Orient are not the labourers producing the capital which, in a sense, is their culture. Rather the dominant ideology of the culture itself is the labour which influences how the people are produced. As Said argues, the cultures of the Orient were vastly different because the literatures of the cultures were different. Thus in a sense, for the West, who is the appropriator of the capital – culture – all the Orientals had a certain universality about them, that almost everywhere they are the same and so the same knowledge is needed in order to dominate them. This is called cultural hegemony, and is used to ‘institutionalise’ and ‘conceptualise’ every bit of culture in the Orient so they can assert authority over it more easily (Turner, 1994). What Orientalism does is to simultaneously generalise and homogenise the ideas and images of the Europe and the Orient; that is, to generalise the East for the West and thus necessarily generalise the West for the East. As Said asserts, reinforcing hegemony over the Orient has been used ‘to divide the realms of culture and experience into apparently separate spheres’ (1994: 58). It is crucial to understand that all Oriental discourse has one common denominator: to give the Orient and its people a generic identity. Through this, the West is given a generic identity which stands in contrast to that given to the Orient, namely, a superior one (Shilliam, 2010; Said, 2003).

It is not to say that the whole Orient is a fabrication, but rather that it does not reflect the entire reality of the Orient. However, the question is ‘whether Orientalism can be seen as a misrepresentation or ideological distortion of the East if ‘reality’ is itself, in fact, constructed by discourse’ (Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Maley, 1997: 24). Foucault’s notion of discourse suggests there is no ‘world’ out there that we can just explore and make statements about. It is within this discourse, which is a series of statements about the ‘world’, that it comes into being (Ashcroft, 2001). As a result of this, the potential of its people to understand where they are in the world arises. As argued by Said, Orientalist discourse ‘can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe’ (2003: 94). In a way, the West has created the Orient by describing it through language
The West, through its power, has accessed the Orient, it has studied the Orient and has “truths” about it, concluding that its people are not capable of governing themselves; thus a European, or simply a non-Oriental authority is needed to govern the country for the Orientals’ own benefit (Said, 2003). Said asserts: ‘Authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to “it” – the Oriental county’ (2003: 32). The Oriental identity is not what they discovered, because it is believed that they do not have the intelligence to do so. It is through the knowledge gathered by enactment of power over the social and cultural structures of the Orient by the Westerner that his world – The Orient – is shaped.

Thus, what both the Oriental and the Westerner perceive to be the Orient is the world created by the system of representations and repetitions of the Orient. It is able to maintain itself through establishing paradigms around which other representations can be added to the discourse of Orientalism. However, this, as opposed to what Said argues is not a rigid and non-flexible boundary which dictates the modes of representation of the Orient. Rather it appropriates all that is labelled and even not labelled as Orientalist discourse to form a stronger and more detailed knowledge over the Orient (Childs, 1997).

Since their first encounter with the East, Europeans have been fascinated by it, and thus they have formed an institution out of it, representing it through filters of Western civilisation so as to compare it to themselves. The very notion that something can be talked about brings that world into being, and that world has a set of characteristics, which in this case, is the Orient. The nature of this ‘objective’ approach promotes the idea that the Orient is what needs to be represented and spoken for. It is important to note that it is not the representations themselves which give rise to power; rather it is the effect of textual analysis of such representations which creates the Orient, or in other words, what one takes from them. Said continuously implies in ‘Orientalism’ that Western imperialism over the East gives the East, and in particular the ‘Arab world’, an essence of uniqueness. However, Halliday (1993) argues that it is an inherent feature of imperialism to appropriate cultures of other regions for its own purposes, and he validates it with the history of indigenous peoples of America. Said’s account of Orientalism is biasedly narrowed down to a non-Oriental representing the Orient. However, as argued in this essay, even Orientals can be Orientalist, provided they obey the paradigms of Orientalist discourse. Yet Said’s theory of Orientalism is not wholly useful as for its inaccuracies in explaining Orientalism by not taking into account multiple contradicting factors when describing how the Europeans used Orientalist discourse to justify imperialism; such as how sexual representations are a detour to negative cultural representations. He has indicated the outline of how the West observes the East, and how in various circumstances, has justified its interference in their internal relations through their
perception of the East as primitive. To conclude, as Huggan (2005: 125) puts it, ‘Orientalism’ has been able to ‘unsettle received categories and modes of understanding’.

References
The Challenges Posed by Intersectional Feminism to Radical Feminist Thought

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Introduction

“When the sex war is won, prostitutes should be shot as collaborators for their terrible betrayal of all women.”

Julie Burchill

I was first exposed to the seemingly novel idea that sex workers’ rights were labour rights at the age of 20, when I began working with the English Collective of Prostitutes in 2012. Founded in 1975 with Selma James as their spokesperson, the ECP campaigns for the decriminalisation of sex work and against poverty and austerity measures affecting women and single parents. They currently operate from the Crossroads Women’s Centre in North London, working collaboratively with groups like Black Women Against Rape and Queer Strike. At the time, I was the elected Women’s Officer for the National Union of Students – Union of Students in Ireland, which is the amalgamation of the national students’ unions in the UK and Ireland into a national union representing students in the North of Ireland. A bill aimed at combating human trafficking was slowly making its way through the Northern Irish Assembly. It contained a clause which would criminalise the purchase of sexual services, and introduce the Nordic model of prostitution to Northern Ireland.

1 Received 18 February 2016
2 Throughout this essay I talk about ‘sex work’ and ‘sex workers’, unless quoting an author who has specified otherwise. I also talk about radical feminists and abolitionists interchangeably – my focus is in this essay is on those who define themselves as radical feminists and wish to abolish sex work and work toward that goal.
In the two hour conversation I had with the incredible women from the ECP, I challenged my own misguided assumptions about sex work, the sex industry and the right of sex workers to work safely, which, more often than not, were the result of internalised misogyny and a society hell bent on moralising every aspect of a woman’s life.

In the years that have passed, I became a pro-decriminalisation activist, often speaking with students and activists in my Women’s Officer capacity on how to support student sex workers, campaigning for decriminalisation, and why the right for sex workers to work safely is something I believe feminists should be fighting for. I began working on parliamentary lobbying campaigns with the Sex Worker Open University, a sex worker-led collective based in the UK, and a few months ago we successfully lobbied against a pro-criminalisation amendment in the House of Commons, which then was thrown out³.

I am unapologetically pro-decriminalisation – first and foremost because I believe the right of workers to work safely with legal protections in a capitalist society is of paramount importance to me as a woman, a worker, and a trade unionist. I also believe that sex work is work, which is to say it is the exchange of money for labour, like any other job in society – the difference being that sex work is criminalised and stigmatised. I am opposed to the criminalisation of sex workers’ clients because I believe that the Nordic model has failed. Sex workers are less safe, and there is no conclusive evidence that the levels of ‘demand’ have decreased (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2013; Dodillet & Östergren, 2011; Levy, 2011).

In this essay I will interrogate the radical feminist position on sex work and sex workers using an intersectional analysis. I conclude that, as the radical feminist ideology is the foundation on which the current feminist abolitionist movement rests – which ultimately aims to criminalise the working conditions of sex workers and therefore make their lives and jobs a lot more difficult to do safely, – radical feminism is ultimately the wrong vehicle to base feminist activism on in the twenty-first century.

I argue against the premise that sex work is inherently abusive or exploitative, using the example of porn. I maintain that regardless of whether sex work is

³ See http://prostitutescollective.net/2014/11/05/victory-amendment-criminalise-sex-workers-clients-defeated/
exploitative or liberating, it does not detract from the fact that sex workers deserve labour rights as workers. I argue that the issue of consent in sex work is more nuanced and complex than radical feminists make it out to be, that the language used by radical feminists on the issue of sex work exposes both their hypocrisy and racism, and that the ‘white-saviour – oppressed-brown-woman-complex’ held by many radical feminist abolitionists, is both racist and patronising. I contend that an intersectional analysis is key when looking at sex work, and that radical feminist theory does not sufficiently account for the differing life experiences and choices available to women. In general, radical feminists oppose prostitution on the grounds that it further entrenches gender inequality and reinforces the male-dominated power relations that exist in society. They argue that exploitation, subjugation, and violence against women are intrinsic to and ineradicable from prostitution in particular. Furthermore, they maintain that contracting out sexual use of the body requires women to sever the integrity of body and self, which carries grave psychological consequences, equivalent to the consequences of rape (Bromberg, 1997; Barry, 1979; Dworkin, 1992a; Dworkin, 1992b; Echols, 1983; MacKinnon, 1989; O’Connell Davidson, 2003; Weitzer, 2009). They often make sweeping generalisations about women working in the sex industry: that most or all were sexually abused as children; that the average age of entry to the industry is 13-years-old; that most are forced or tricked by pimps or traffickers; or that most are addicted to drugs (Weitzer, 2009). They also reinforce the binary passive female/oppressed victim image of sex workers. This strips sex workers of agency, and highlights the degrading and dehumanising ways in which they speak about women in the sex industry.

**Why Intersectionality?**

Intersectionality is a concept and practice maintaining that gender, class, race, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, and similar identities cannot be understood in isolation from one other. Systems of power intersect and coproduce one another, creating a distinct constellation of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinct experiences for the individuals positioned within them (Chepp & Hill Collins, 2013: 58-60). It emerged from social movements of the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s in the United States, where AfricanAmerican women (and other women of colour) felt their experiences and issues as both women and people of colour were sidelined in feminist and anti-racist movements. Contemporary feminist and anti-racist discourses often continue to ignore the impact that intersectional identities have on marginalised persons’ experiences.
Looking at the issue of sex work through a distinctly intersectional lens has enabled me to account for social experiences located outside and between social boundaries, namely sex workers who face a multiplicity of oppressions outside of their status as sex workers. Chepp and Hill Collins argue that these marginal experiences may otherwise ‘fall through the cracks’ when power is analysed along a single axis (2013: 64). Following from Nira Yuval-Davis' position, I argue that universalist discourses on sex work which do not take into consideration the differential positioning of those to whom they refer often cover up racist (and classist, and disablist) constructions (2000: 199). Whilst the sex worker’s rights movement has its own character and history, there are many more sex workers in movements that are not specifically called sex workers’ movements; in queer and trans movements, in radical women-of-colour movements, in the prison abolition movement. You just have to know where to look (Gira Grant 2014:128).

**Radical Feminist Rhetoric – Do As I Say, Not As I Do**

Through much of their rhetoric around sex work and sex workers, we see how radical feminists perpetuate the Madonna/whore dichotomy that they claim to want to break. The way sex workers are analysed in many radical feminist works objectifies, dehumanises and strips sex workers of any personality or agency; sex workers are reduced to objects in the same way they charge with men who purchase sexual services (Barry, 1979; Bromberg, 1997). In a similar vein, the metaphors and parallels to other oppressions used by radical feminists in their work on sex work are highly insulting and appropriative, and are clear attempts to whitewash and de-racialise important colonial discourse. Radical feminists reinforce the patronising saviour discourse around sex work whilst simultaneously talking about sex workers in horrendously degrading ways; as a “collection of holes” (Dines, 2010); “accepting fees for sex” is “irrational and repugnant” (Shrage, 1989; 349); being “reduced to a few sexual orifices incapable of “staying whole” as a person once they have “been prostituted”; and as literally being “the woman covered in dirt” (Dworkin, 1992b). Dramatic and emotive language is typical of those who subscribe to the oppression paradigm of sex work (Weitzer, 2009).

Arlie Russell Hochschild talks about the doctrine of feelings: the importance of a person's feelings directly correlates to their importance as a person. The lower a
person’s status, the more their manner of seeing and feeling is discredited and less believed. Hochschild argues that it often becomes the burden of women, as with other low-status persons, to uphold a minority viewpoint and a discredited opinion (2003: 173).

We can apply this concept to the radical feminist ideology of sex workers whose voices and opinions ‘matter’ and those who don’t. Those who do not fit into the dominant radical feminist narrative of exploited, passive and victimised survivors have less trust placed in their judgements (in relation to their work), and less respect is accorded to them (in relation to their views on the industry). Radical feminist abolitionists consciously focus on stereotypical notions of the personal lives of some sex workers at the expense of examining, or even attempting to examine, the wide diversity of experiences, values and beliefs of those who work in the sex industry (Bromberg, 1997; Dowd, 2002). Sex workers' individual identities become equated with sex workers' collective identity. Differences, rather than being acknowledged, are interpreted by those holding the hegemonic power (i.e. radical feminist abolitionists) as merely reflections of different stages of raised consciousness (Yuval-Davis, 2000: 203). This is patronising to both sex workers who work with abolitionists, and those who work against them – sex workers' lives and experiences are used as mere pawns in the radical feminist 'sex wars'.

Arguing that the existence of sex work directly contributes to instances of violence against women (Echols, 1983), radical feminists believe sex work “hurts individuals” not as individuals per se, “but as members of the group women” (MacKinnon, 1989: 208). Some go further than this, stating:

Indeed, what is wrong with prostitution is... that it [legitimises] women's social subordination... Female prostitution oppresses women, not because some women who participate in it 'suffer in the eyes of society', but because its organised practice testifies to and perpetuates socially hegemonic beliefs which oppress all women in many domains of their lives (Shrage, 1989: 353).

Radical feminists assert the inherent immorality of all prostitution by defining its wrongness in terms of its “corrupting influence” on the dignity of all women (Bromberg, 1997). Sex workers' lives are valued as symbols, mattering only insofar as they impact the behaviour and treatment of other women. We do not matter because our lives are important, but because our actions make women who do not do sex work feel things they would prefer not to feel (Grant, 2014).
There are immense political dangers with refusing any group of people full subjectivity, even if one's aim is to 'help' (or 'save') them (O'Connell Davidson, 2002; 92). To form the moral basis for certain legislation (namely, the Nordic model) on sex work, misrepresenting, exaggerating, and universalising certain experiences over others has dangerous consequences; not least due to the absence of non-biased and impartial data. Abolitionists typically describe only the worst examples of sex work and treat them as representative. Anecdotes are generalised and presented as conclusive evidence, sampling is very selective, and counter-evidence is consistently ignored (Weitzer, 2009: 214). The experiences of sex workers within sex work vary hugely, and attempts to simplify what is a diverse and complex issue into a narrow one-size-fits-all model ensures that sex workers' experiences are molded into a politically appropriate form for the radical feminist abolitionist agenda.

**Porn**

Heartney argues that Andrea Dworkin's analysis of sex work (and porn in particular) leaves “no room for nuance, ambiguity or ambivalence”, and that her texts on sex work and porn are “[models] of fundamentalist thinking” (1991: 17). She shares with her abolitionist colleagues (predominantly anti-choice, anti-LGBT right-wing religious fundamentalists) a belief in the unchanging natural order of things – with men forever the oppressor, and women forever the victims. Alice Echols argues that the anti-porn feminist movement serves as the feminist equivalent to the anti-abortion movement. It reinforces and validates women’s traditional sexual conservatism, and manipulates women's sense of themselves as the culture's victims and its moral guardians (1983: 53).

There exists a growing feminist porn movement. Desire in pornography is constructed by the cultural discourse available, and the feminist porn movement tries to intervene positively in this process by offering alternative discourses that go beyond existing limitations on women's sexuality (Cameron, 1990: 793). A lot of porn is indeed sexist and racist, but it needn't be so. Directors like Anna Arrowsmith argue that radical feminists make a grave error conflating extreme sex with a lack of consent. In a 2013 debate, she used the metaphor of professional boxing and street violence - “televised professional boxing adheres to certain legal and cultural rules which render it different from everyday violence”. Boxing is a sport; porn is a performance. Pornography is not necessarily the acting out of gender politics, it is the acting out of imagination and role-play – which is only
partly influenced by the wider gender arena. In fact, through making things like female pleasure the primary focus of their product, the feminist porn movement actively challenges the heteronormative idea of male pleasure and ejaculation being at the centre of sex. It may also step in to try and make up for the lack of LGBT-inclusive sex education in the vast majority of schools in the UK and the United States today.

**De-racialising Colonial Concepts**

In terms of the language radical feminists often use when discussing sex work, Andrea Dworkin is particularly guilty of de-racialising colonial concepts. She argues that those who defend pornography “defend the new slavers” (1992a), that “fucking is an act of conquering” (1981: 23), and that:

> The power of men in pornography is imperial power, the power of sovereigns... who keep taking and conquering for the pleasure of power and the power of pleasure. Women are the land... men are the army. (ibid. 223).

Similarly, Kathleen Barry talks about the “enslavement” of women who work in the sex industry (1979; 11), Gail Dines talks about how “to be a real man in pornography is to violate sexual boundaries and borders” (2010), and Dworkin claimed that “the sexual colonisation of women's bodies is a material reality” (1981: 203).

Why are comparisons of sex work and the sex industry to war, slavery, and colonialism so problematic? It is firstly important to note that the aforementioned writers do not see sex work as work, but as abuse and rape; therefore my analysis must be taken from their premise. In any case, an analysis from sex work as just work would prove the comparisons to be grossly more insensitive and offensive. Comparing rape and abuse to the horrific realities of slavery, the human impact of war, and the lasting imperial legacy of colonialism has many effects – it minimises the lasting impact and emotional consequences of all of these things by lumping them together, as if they were in any way comparable. Using these metaphors as emotional linguistic devices trivialises the very real and damaging effects that war, slavery, colonialism and abuse can and do have on those affected by them⁴.

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⁴ For more information on the problems with using slavery etc. as inappropriate metaphors, see Lee's 2002 *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (University of Pennsylvania), and Hickey's 1996 article 'Dark Characters, Native Grounds: Wordsworth's Imagination of Imperialism' in Richardson & Hofkosh's *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1730-*
Consent, Capitalism & Choice

The issue of consent in sex work is one that polarises those who follow the exploitation model (radical feminists) and those who see sex work as work. Radical feminists argue that when there exists a financial exchange, consent is impossible.

Noting that “sometimes ‘consent’ is construed to exist” (1981: 205), Dworkin argued that when a man pays money, “he does what he wants”, and that the “gang rape [that is sex work] is [merely] punctuated by a money exchange” (1992b). She claims that “the power of money is a distinctly male power”, that “in the hands of men, money buys women” (1981: 20). She also claims that a financial exchange “magically licenses any crime against women... once a woman has been paid, crime is expiated” (ibid. 85). Describing sex workers as whores, she states that “a whore cannot be raped, only used” (ibid. 204), and that “neither rape nor prostitution is the abuse of a female because in both the female is fulfilling her natural function” (ibid. 203-204).

Discussing the “coercion behind” sex work, Catharine MacKinnon argued that it “produces an economic sector of abuse... the money in this view coerces the sex, rather than guarantees consent to it, which makes prostitution a practice of serial rape” (2013). She also argued that if the “sex is for survival” then “the sex is being coerced by the need to survive”, and that to claim that consenting is “what she is said to be doing” is an “ideological position” to take. She also argues that sex work is not like every other job, as “setting limits on the intimacy and intrusiveness on the demands that can be made of a person without recourse is one of the whole points of labour law and of human rights” (ibid).

There are endless problems with this analysis. Sex work does not allow the client to “buy” the person, as so often is argued by radical feminists. Within a capitalist society, money is exchanged for the commodity of labour power. Within the sex industry, a specific set of services are paid for by a client. The decision for the sex worker to engage in sexual intercourse\(^5\) with a client is based on a contractual

\(^{1834}\) (Bloomington: Indiana UP).

\(^{5}\) That said, radical feminists and abolitionists mistakenly assume that all sex work involves nothing more than penis-in-vagina penetration. Even with full service sex work (i.e. escorting, prostitution), this is not always the case and ignores the fact that many men pay escorts for companionship that does not include sexual contact (Dowd, 2002).
exchange – usually financial (Chancer, 1993). Sex workers negotiate based not only on a willingness to perform a sex act but on the conditions under which their labour is performed (Gira Grant, 2014: 91). The contract between sex workers and clients most often boils down to the sex worker agreeing not to use their personal desire for the client as the determining criteria for engaging in the sexual interaction (O’Connell Davidson, 2002; 91).

In broader terms, there are similarities between sex work and other personal service occupations, and can be better understood as involving a form of emotional labour. Emotional labour – whilst exhausting and draining, like any kind of labour, is not necessarily harmful to the worker in the way that sex work is presented to be (O’Connell Davidson, 2002: 88). Of all women working, roughly one half have jobs that involve emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Sex workers, like many other workers, are called on to produce an 'experience' – in a way similar to the person who works in Costa, Nando’s, or is a bartender. These professions, and many others, would not be complete were it not for the 'experience' that the workers produce as part of their role. In framing sex work as a performance, Melissa Gira Grant argues it could be more easily recognised and respected as labour were it the labour of a nurse, a therapist or a nanny (2014: 90).

In a capitalist society, the vast majority of people have to work, often in jobs they do not enjoy, in order to survive. Sex work is no different, but it has become an isolated category that is somehow separable from the larger world of day-to-day economic exchanges within a capitalist context. Consent is based on a financial exchange, but this does not mean that consent is absent – this is indeed an ideological position to take. In terms of sexual intercourse, to assume (and demand) that every participant in every sexual exchange must consent 'enthusiastically', and for their consent to exist due only to their sexual desires, erases the experiences of many - not least those who define on the asexual spectrum. A person's consent to engage in sexual activity does not have to be enthusiastic, nor does it have to be based on their own sexual desire to be 'legitimate' consent. Sex workers’ choices to engage in sex work to make a living are consistently documented as being invalid in a way that many more privileged women’s choices on how to make a living are not (Dowd, 2002).

Very few women's lives are models of free choice. Most women's choices are limited by their disadvantaged position within the hierarchical structures of sex, race, and class (Chapkis, 1997: 52). Some choose to work in the sex industry, as it
is the best option available to them. There exist millions of women across the world that see sex work as the best means of survival for themselves and their families. The best way to ensure that entry into the sex industry is for no reason other than a desire to do so, is to focus on tackling poverty, the housing crisis, creating a supportive welfare state, slashing the cost of education, the cost of childcare, and ensuring access to readily available, free healthcare, tackling the reasons that contribute to why people get into sex work, rather than their ability to do the job safely.

In a capitalist, patriarchal, white-supremacist society, there does not exist equality of opportunity to engage in what are deemed socially valued pursuits. A person’s human, civil and labour rights – as well as their right to both respect and social value – cannot be and are not dependent on whether or not they perform labour that is socially valuable (O’Connell Davidson, 2002). The university teacher, the heart surgeon, the prostitute, and the domestic worker are all equally entitled to rights and protection as economic actors. Those who work in prostitution have rights and deserve respect; not because or despite the fact they work as prostitutes, but because they are human beings (ibid. 93).

Gira Grant also notes that unlike other economic actors, sex workers are routinely expected to justify their labour as a choice, as if the choice to engage in a form of labour is what makes that labour legitimate (2014: 94). It is essential that we stop framing discourses around sex work within the narrow parameters of empowerment, legitimacy, and abuse. It is misguided to assume that the exploitation many people face working in the sex industry comes exclusively, or even primarily, from their paying customers.

The Pret or Starbucks employee is made to serve your coffee with a smile – but we don’t believe we can remedy this demand for forced niceties by telling attention-desperate customers to get their emotional needs met elsewhere. The demand lies... with the management. (ibid. 99)

Do radical feminists and abolitionists argue in favour of removing the existing labour rights of agricultural workers, so we can best combat trafficking in the agricultural sector? Should we remove the labour rights of waiters, cooks, cleaners? Will that help defeat exploitation within these industries? No, it will not. So why are they so obsessed with doing it in the sex industry?
The Nordic Model & Anti-Trafficking Movements

The Nordic Model is the name commonly given to the laws governing sex work in Sweden. Passed in 1999, the Sex Purchase Act criminalises the purchase of sex (i.e. the client/buyer), and ‘decriminalises’ the seller. Radical feminists and abolitionists support the implementation of the Nordic Model in other countries, and usually argue that it helps combat trafficking and targets the ‘demand’ whilst decriminalising the sex worker. Radical feminists team up with anti-choice, anti-LGBT, religious fundamentalist organisations when lobbying for the implementation of legislation of this sort (Dowd, 2002).

The Swedish Ministry of Justice themselves admitted that “the ban on the purchase of sex was intended as a statement of society’s view that prostitution is an undesirable phenomenon” (2010: 37), which highlights the ideological motivation behind the law - to abolish prostitution, not to ensure the safety of those who work in the industry.

In reality, the Swedish National Board (2007: 63) admitted that no causal connections could be proven between legislation and changes in the levels of prostitution. The Swedish police still do not know the extent of trafficking in Sweden (2012; 8), and several large anti-trafficking organisations have come out in opposition to the implementation of the Nordic Model as a means to combat trafficking (La Strada, 2013; Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women; 2011). Far from ‘helping’ sex workers, research shows that sex workers face increased stigma and are more vulnerable to violence (Jakobsson & Levy, 2014). Street sex workers in particular report increased risks and experiences of violence, and that regular clients have often turned to indoor sex workers for fear of police harassment and arrest (Dodillet & Östergren, 2011). Less time for negotiating with potential clients, greater competition for lower prices, and increased surveillance have driven sex workers to more secluded and isolated areas (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2013; Dowd 2002). The health and well-being of sex workers has been adversely affected, despite it being stressed by lawmakers that the ban would have no detrimental effect on sex workers (Dodillet & Östergren, 2011: 3). The 2010 Skarhed Commission recognised that there are complaints about increased social stigma and increased fear and mistrust of the police – but given the law’s purpose, these drawbacks must “rather be described as positives” (Skarhed Commission, 2010; Florin, 2012).

Service provision for sex workers in Sweden has been notably impacted – harm
reduction (such as condom or clean needle distribution) is seen to legitimise and endorse unwanted activities, such as sex work and drug use, which undermines the abolitionist ambition (Levy, 2011: 7). Abolitionists are against short-term harm reduction measures because they believe they are seen to legitimise morally degenerate behaviours (Dowd, 2002).

Where laws are introduced in efforts to create a “sex work free Sweden”, there has not been evidence demonstrating that levels have declined – but said laws are still advocated as successes to be exported to other states (Levy, 2011: 15). Prohibition will not stop the purchase and sale of sex – it will only make conditions worse for sex workers (Dodillet & Östergren, 2011). You cannot legislate sex work out of existence – but this hasn’t stopped radical feminists trying. The Act has more to do with a desire of upholding a ‘good’ moral society, ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexuality, upholding and perpetuating whore stigma, reinforcing the idea of sexual deviancy, and a stereotypical and uninformed understanding of sex work (ibid. 24-25).

A dangerous anti-immigrant sentiment lies beneath the Nordic Model, which harks back to the origins of the anti-trafficking movement⁶. As Kay Thi Win, a sex worker in Burma has said:

> We lie in daily fear of being ‘rescued’. The violence happens when feminist rescue organisations work with the police, who break into our workplaces and beat us, rape us and kidnap our children in order to save us. What we need is for the mainstream women’s movement to not just silently support our struggle but to speak up and speak against [those] who have turned the important movement against real trafficking into a violent war against sex workers.” (2012).

In December 2013, 250 Metropolitan Police officers, in full riot gear, raided 25 premises in Soho, London, and evicted, detained and harassed sex workers. They

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⁶ At the turn of the 20th century, more than twenty-three million immigrants came to the United States, mostly from eastern and southern Europe. Such huge migration across borders led to fears of “cultural contamination” and “moral pollution”. Unsurprisingly, these immigrants became the first targets of early anti-trafficking legislation. The campaign against the ‘white sexual slave trade’, despite limited evidence on its existence, was fuelled by concerns about changing gender, class and race relations. The idea of a ‘white slave’ resonated with white working-class labourers working under the harsh conditions of early industrial capitalism and to racial fears of an increasingly ethnically diverse population. Women who migrated across borders for the purposes of sex work also served a symbolic purpose in their journey from sexual innocents and sheltered daughters to working girls and independent women (Chapkis, 1997; 42-44).
took money, personal items, and threw sex workers out on to the street to a crowd of press and photographers who had accompanied them. The raid was supposedly to ‘tackle’ trafficking – the Met had recently received some dedicated European Union funding. A number of migrant sex workers were then detained at Heathrow airport to be deported, despite their pleas that they were working voluntarily. No trafficking victims were found, and most of the evicted women were mothers and grandmothers7. As advocated by the Nordic Model, increasing the powers of the police will lead to raids like this becoming more and more common.

What Does This Mean for Feminist Activism?

You cannot separate the abstract philosophical debate on the moral stature of sex work from the real impact legislation has on the people working in the industry. As activists, feminists today have a duty to work on expanding the choices available to women, rather than limiting those choices, and this includes supporting harm reduction measures.

By redefining sex workers from fallen women to helpless victims, radical feminists have done nothing to change the conditions under which women perform sex work. On the contrary, they have been a huge barrier to sex workers' organisation and self-empowerment (Lopes, quoted in Marking, 2005). Most sex workers are mothers driven into sex work by the lack of economic alternatives – if abolitionists focused their energy on fighting unemployment, poverty, low wages, and fought for social housing and an adequately funded and accessible health service, they would be helping tackle the reasons why women often end up in the sex industry in the first place.

In conclusion, I believe that radical feminism is an insufficient foundation to base our feminist activism on today – only by ensuring our feminism is intersectional and led by those who are most marginalised within our movement are we truly fighting for a better world for women, and that includes sex workers.

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The (In)securitisation of the Internet: 
Perceptions of Security in a Post-Snowden Era

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Introduction to Aims and Concepts

The global surveillance disclosures, revealed primarily in the form of the leaked governmental documents by Edward Snowden through various media outlets across the globe, have unmasked a near-global mass-surveillance regime, by which I mean “the systematic monitoring of people or groups, by means of digital information management systems” (Esposti, 2014: 211). Through various programs such as PRISM, Xkeyscore, Tempora and Dishfire (Bauman et al., 2014: 122-23), which form a net of surveillance data collection so expansive that it can be reasonably asserted as evidence of a previous securitisation process undertaken within the bureaucracies of security and intelligence agencies of the ‘Five Eyes’ nations. The type of systematic, multifaceted and exceptional surveillance and data collection programs that these leaked documents expose show that the internet is no longer an unexplored vastness, an “Electronic Frontier” (Godwin, 1996), for it has already been made the object of intense securitisation. This first securitisation process is captured perfectly by Foucault in his famous dictum; “our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance” (Foucault, 1977: 217). Indeed, the global networks of mass digital surveillance has meant that internally, within the agencies of various Western states, the internet.

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has been placed on the security agenda which has meant the growth of an extensive web of state surveillance mechanisms and technologies.

The aim of this article is not to investigate how this original securitisation process occurred, but rather to examine, through the analysis of discourse of self-designated security experts and politicians present reported in the mainstream media, how this previously successful act of (in)securitisation is now having to reaffirm itself through publically-orientated discursive speech acts. I wish to show how discursive practices are used by various actors and agencies to justify the continued securitisation of the internet, thereby rationalising the perpetuation and possible growth of large-scale surveillance. Through analysis of these speech acts, I seek to problematise the assumptions they use as foundations for their securitising practices. From this I hope to move discussion of the internet and the security threats back into an arena of public dialog in which the debate over the intersection of the internet, encryption, privacy and terrorism can move beyond the stale and misleading assumptions that underpin many of the discourses of the securitising agents and agencies. The scope of this article will primarily focus on the (in)securitisation process within the USA and the UK, although as it is important to note that these processes are not unique to the two countries (see Deibert, 2002). Ultimately, debate surrounding the specific policies and actions involved with the securitisation of the internet should be placed within a global, not national, context (Bauman et al., 2014: 121).

I will borrow from the fields of International Political Sociology (IPS) and Surveillance Studies (SS) to inform my critical analysis. From IPS I shall frequently refer to the notion of ‘unease’ and the ‘professionals of management of unease’. By ‘unease’ scholars in IPS allude to a metadiscourse of “global ‘(in)security’” that has been propagated by Western states in the form of, most recently, terrorism, which has only been aggravated by globalisation’s compression of time and space (Bigo, 2006: 47). Specifically, the increase in the extent that porous membrane that is the state’s border has been able to successfully distinguish between inside safety and external threats. Binaries of self/other, domestic/foreign and inside/outside have been subverted, replaced with what Bigo calls the ‘Möbius ribbon’ of the embedded outsider within (2001). Through the constant articulation in the media and official security discourse, terrorism has been framed as a constant yet
somewhat unlikely threat that lingers in the minds and the actions of the state that precipitates into the collective social psyche - this is what constitutes unease. The ‘professionals of management of unease’ constitute the various agents, agencies and institutions that utilise ‘unease’ with authority in order to frame the acceptability of their (in)securitising speech acts (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008: 5). These professionals mostly include politicians and chiefs of various security agencies, for their discourses are the most visible and most received by the public. Supplementing this is Bigo’s ban-opticon. The ban-opticon, a modern reworking of Foucault’s Panopticon, is how “profiling technologies are used to determine who is placed under specific surveillance” (Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 56) It is the means by which mass-surveillance is rendered productive. The ban-opticon utilises mass data collection, rendering knowledge out of seemingly unintelligible and random data to assist in its categorising of groups. Profiling and exclusion are core features of the ban-opticon, the designation of the ‘ban’ restricts the movement of an individual or group. It also has a positive (in the sense of production) element in the form of its ability to normalise non-excluded groups through the reification of certain forms of behaviour and norms (Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 57). It is the aspects of data utilisation and productive mobilisation that I shall be emphasising in my usage of the concept.

In the next section I shall introduce the IPS interpretation of the (in)securitisation framework which this article utilises throughout. This is subsequently followed by my discourse analysis, which is split into two core components, the first looking at the referent object and the discursive measures used to securitise it, the second surrounding the existential threat and how this relates to the logic of the ban-opticon and its powers of social sorting. For my discourse analysis, I looked at 48 reports and articles across nine British and American media publications:

- The Guardian (26 articles, British)
- The Washington Post (9, American)
- The Huffington Post (6, American)
- National Journal (1, American)
- The New York Times (1, American)
Given that the target audience of this ‘second-wave’ securitisation process is the general public, my analysis shall focus on reports and articles published in the mainstream media, rather than specialised publications, academic journals or official governmental documents. The omnipresence and penetration of the mainstream media as sole aggregator of information and knowledge creates a multiplicity of slightly altered distorting lenses through which discourses are refracted through, depending on specific publications and the interpretative processes that occur within a given reader. McLuhan goes as far as to say that it is the mainstream media that define “the nature of knowledge” (McLuhan, 1962: 32 in Taylor and Harris, 2008). It is through suitable contextual conditions, such as the visage of balanced and reliable media reporting, that speech acts are able to frame the legitimacy of securitising discourses (or promote resistance) and convince a given audience of the existence of an existential security threat (Van Dijk, 2015: 472-73).

From these publications I examined the speech acts from actors including various American Senators, the Chief of the MI6 and the Directors of the FBI and NSA. For cultivation I steered clear of opinion pieces, preferring ‘factual’ reporting of events, unless such opinion pieces were written by securitising agents themselves. Such pieces proved invaluable, for they presented unfiltered versions of the securitising discourses which would be received by the target audience. Articles inspiring resistance, or reporting that did not quote securitising officials directly were not included, although it must be noted that they certainly play a role in the overall success of a securitisation process, the scope of this article is to analyse the speech acts of the securitising agents and not of resisting actors. Finally, I shall finish by providing a brief conclusion regarding the success of the second securitisation process along with a summary of the key points made throughout
The Framework of (In)securitization

As mentioned in the introduction, I shall borrow various elements of the IPS reworking the securitisation thesis. This reconceptualization retains the core criteria of the ‘Copenhagen School’ formulation, as I will detail now. In its most visible form, the primary technique of securitising an issue is through speech acts, defined as “the discursive representation of a certain issue as an existential threat to security” (Baylis, 2008: 139 in Reid, 2014: 4). Speech acts are not simply acts of description, but a means of framing a given security threat in such a way as to present distorted and manipulated representations of it under the guise of a ‘real’ and objective description (Baker-Beall, 2009: 191-192). The target of these discursive acts is a designated ‘audience’, whose authorisation of the speech acts is required for a securitisation process to be considered successful. While this acceptance is not guaranteed, Buzan et al. note that, in many instances, the authority of securitising actors has been institutionalised over time (1998: 31), shaped by mega-events entailing the periodical re-calibration of the dynamics of security authorship (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009: 258), permitting a fair chance of a successful securitisation procedure. As the discourse analysis will later show, the most important mega-event in the context of the securitisation of the internet is 9/11, which shaped the dynamics of security authorship as firmly and legitimately resting in the hands of governmental chiefs and elected officials due to the constant threat of domestic terror. Lastly, the two final key components to a broad understanding of securitisation theory is of the referent object, that which is being threatened, usually the security of the state, and the existential threat, terrorism in this instance, the latter is applied to the former through speech acts as to justify the process of securitisation (Hart, 2011: 6).

While the above criteria are broadly shared across the two approaches to securitisation, there is a crucial difference, as I have alluded to in the introduction, regarding the ‘routine’. Without dismissing it, IPS scholars suggest that the Copenhagen School focuses too much on the spectacular and exceptional whilst ignoring the importance of the mundane and the routine (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008: 3-5). The internal dynamics of “security experts” (Tsoukala, 2008: 50) is
such that they are engaged in structural competition between themselves within governmental departments, agencies and private industry to frame the appropriate conditions for speech acts to become effective (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008: 4-5). These bureaucratic everyday interactions are marked by a larger and slower social and cultural trend towards a “governmentality of unease” (Bigo, 2008: 5, 10), the process by which the notion of a constant terrorist attack is utilised as a means by which governance can be performed. The logic of unease is deeply internalised within the ban-opticon, and as I will explore later is leveraged through the professionals of management of unease as justification for securitisation.

The Referent Object and its Protection

As is typical for the securitisation thesis, the referent object for the securitisation process of the internet is, primarily, the state. This is understood to be broadly synonymous with the term ‘national security’, the security of the state, a term frequently invoked by various securitising agents:


But without each and every important piece of the investigative puzzle, criminals and those who plan acts destructive to our national security may walk free. (Hosko, 2014)

One thread of the discourses employed by various securitising actors exaggerate the complexity and rapid development of cyberspace technologies and their growing integration into the ‘real world’ as a further justification for securitising the internet in the name of protecting the state in ‘reality’. Equivalences are constructed between the real world and cyberspace as to further justification for the expansion and retention of surveillance powers in the digital realm;

[W]e believe that is necessary to maintain the capabilities for our law enforcement agencies such that they can continue to do the excellent job, day in and day out, of keeping us safe and secure […] We are determined as far as possible that there are no safe spaces for terrorists to communicate. I would have thought that this is a principle that could be held by everyone in the Commons. (May in The Guardian, 2015b)

The above quotations simultaneously produce and re-produce a specific doxa of security, an unquestioned and taken for granted social narrative, that is presented to the reader as an intuitive hypothetical dichotomy; to deny even greater digital
surveillance powers would be to put our law enforcement and security agencies at a disadvantage in keeping us, the state and its citizens, “safe and secure”, meaning they would no longer be able to do their “excellent job”. To deny surveillance is to welcome insecurity. There is a constant sense of risk present in the language used to justify the various surveillance programs which deliberately restricts the scope of debate through ‘common sense’, leveraged through the intersubjective acceptance of politicians and heads of security agencies as actors in a position to define the boundaries of debate (Milliken, 1999: 229), especially regarding security. As Milliken asserts, discourses utilised in a such a way not only creates specific social realities, they also silence and exclude others (1999: 229). This culminates in the effective suppression of alternative dialogues that would traverse the boundaries of the debate as defined by this specific security doxa. Furthermore, encryption, another significant branch of the securitisation process, utilises specific emotive anecdotes and hypothetical situations to create a tailored social reality in which the sole purposes of encryption and privacy are negative and utilised only by threatening actors.

We’re drifting to a place where a whole lot of people are going to look at us with tears in their eyes. (Comey in The District Sentinel, 2015)

The harnessing of a powerful intersubjective experience in the form of 9/11 immediately increases the emotional resonance with many sections of the public. This means of manipulating surveillance into a tool of defence rather than, as some would see it, an invasive form of control, adds another dimension to the ‘common sense’ logic that the speech acts of the securitisation process hope to construct.

How did we end up here? 9/11 -- 2,996 people were killed in 9/11 [...] Prior to 9/11, we had no way of connecting those dots. (Alexander in The Washington Post, 2013b)

In addition to the authority entrusted in politicians and security agency officials to dictate the terms of security and defence policy, the vivid imagery of 9/11, and other events such as the Boston Marathon bombing, closes down debate and the room for resistance through a powerful swelling of patriotism, leading to greater acceptance of securitising discourses. Both modes of discourse help emphasise the need for the securitisation from two different avenues of attack; elucidating the
need for protection against the existential threat of terrorism as well as the need for pre-emption to foil such plans.

The means of protecting the referent object of the state through the internet, surveillance, can be better understood through the usage of oppositional binaries. As asserted by Jacques Derrida, discourses are frequently found structured as oppositional binaries, where one element is privileged over the other (Positions, 1981). Attached to any given binary is a number of second level binaries which help reinforce this overall sense of unease and promotion of securitisation (Fourie, 2001). In my analysis I saw a key oppositional binary in the form of privacy/surveillance, referred to many times by the securitising ‘security experts’ through the metaphor of “balance.”

[T]o strike the right balance between privacy rights and national security interests. (Cruz in The Washington Post, 2015)

There is a legitimate debate to be had over the proper balances to strike in our democracy. (McConnell in The Washington Post, 2014)

[A] balance between the privacy rights of individuals and the public safety rights of their communities. (Vance Jr et al., 2015)

In these select quotations, surveillance is understood through the motif of the ‘necessary evil’ (Esposti, 2014: 211). The abstract referent object of ‘national security’ is seen as something that must be secured against an idealised negative conception of privacy. The representation of surveillance altered depending on the context in which it was being used. These representations split into broadly a dichotomy; in the first, surveillance is portrayed as an ‘necessary evil’, usually mentioned in relation to a conventional, negative conception of privacy or liberty. In the second, the representation of surveillance takes that of a crucial tool of security and protection, usually mentioned in relation to the threats that the internet poses. Privacy and liberty also change, broadly speaking, the sentiment behind their usage changes from a privileging of a negative conception of privacy and liberty to a positive conception in which preventive security forms a vital part. The second half of the dichotomy is characterised by the following quotations from the securitising speech acts;

Certainly we should need protect America’s privacy expectations and privacy rights, but we also need an effective surveillance capability […] Every other country in the world, certainly those that are hostile to our
interests, have robust intelligence programs. (Rubio in The Huffington Post, 2014)

The powers that I believe we need, whether on communications data, or on the content of communications – I am very comfortable those are absolutely right for a modern, liberal democracy. (Cameron in The Guardian, 2015d)

From this perspective, surveillance is the privileged term, with the secondary binary of security/insecurity reinforcing this relationship. Additionally, there is no mention of balance in these forms of discourse, rather, an explicit belief that surveillance is compatible with a liberal democracy. This is positioned through the notion that the sole purpose of surveillance is to prevent the existential threat, that is, primarily, terrorism. From this position, the purpose of the various speech acts enacted is to convince the public audience that surveillance “is somehow patriotic” (Ratner in Giroux, 2014) and is a crucial component of national security, which itself is portrayed as a key element of liberty.

The Existential Threat Within the Internet and the Logic of Ban-opticon

It is through Bigo’s ban-opticon that productive powers of surveillance can be better understood. Esposti characterises modern surveillance as what he calls ‘dataveillance’, “the systematic monitoring of people or groups, by means of personal data systems in order to regulate or govern their behaviour” (2014: 209). It is through ‘dataveillance’ that the “panoptic sorting” of the ban-opticon exercises a regime of security that constructs a truth of security, an “authority of statistics” founded on numerical data and the algorithmic profiling of risk (Yar, 2003: 258; Bigo, 2008: 12; Reid, 2014). The categorisation of objects within the ban-opticon gives it a Deleuzian notion of control where the designation of one categorisation over another entails access or denial to spaces, services or even citizenship (Gane, 2012: 620). It is through the ‘ban’ that surveillance gains its credentials as a state activity that is conducive to security and it is under the guise of security that justification consequently follows through the speech acts of various professionals of management of unease that form the drive of the securitisation process.
The manipulation of unease provides a convincing foundation for legitimating discourse. Looking at a number of the discursive practices employed by the professionals of management of unease, the representation of the internet as a “terra incognita” is crucial in the way a vast majority of the speech acts are put forward. It is through this lack of knowledge of what exists digitally ‘out there’ on the internet that provides a supposed dark and invisible breeding ground for a wide variety of risks, ranging from paedophilia to terrorism. It is the equation of openness with insecurity that leads to the perception of encryption as the tool of the criminal rather than the sensible citizen and privacy and anonymity as the risk rather than a right that drives the heart of this discursive securitisation process (Murakami Wood and Wright, 2015: 135).

[T]o meet growing and increasingly complex national security threats, from adaptive and increasingly tech-savvy terrorists, more brazen computer hackers, and more technically capable, global cyber syndicates. (9/11 Review Commission in The Guardian, 2015a)

A decentralised notion of fear, one that is complex and mysterious, is mobilised to manipulate the acceptance of the public target audience (Debrix and Barder, 2009: 398). The existential threat to the ‘national security’ of the state is formally understood as an ill-defined notion of ‘terrorism’. The political value of a such a slippery and emotive term is very great, its malleability allowing for it to be used in discourse to argue convincingly for the securitisation of the internet. Whilst mentioned nearly every time the topic of risk or threat was mentioned, the closest to a definition provided as to what terrorism actually is was references to the group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or specific acts of terrorism such as September 11th or the Boston Marathon bombing. This is problematic due to the immense power of the ban-opticon, combined with the ‘authority of statistics’, can lead to statistical discrimination and marginalisation. In a circular fashion, when such discriminatory representations are rendered legitimate they then provide further justification for ban-opticon to enlarge.

Risk, more broadly, is used as a spectre through which a governmentality of fear dominates the apparatuses of security (Garrido, 2015: 159). Through the metadiscourse of ‘global (in)security’ the construction of the multifaceted, technologically adept and mysterious threat of online terrorism is accentuated through its ability to subvert traditional boundaries of the state and with it,
preconceived notions of security (home) and insecurity (foreign) as well as the identity of the state itself:

As the rise of ISIL has demonstrated, the world is as dangerous as ever, and extremists are being cultivated and recruited right here at home. (McConnell in The Washington Post, 2014)

Think about how many people are in Syria with western passports or even American passports. (Rogers in The Guardian, 2015c)

By removing the demarcation of the self and other, the paranoia of risk is certified through the ‘authority of statistics’ which legitimises the practises of ban-opticon and thus continued securitisation of the internet. In the eyes of the ban-opticon a degree of risk is a constant and is present in everyone and so everyone is made an equal and legitimate target for profiling and categorising (Lyon, 2010: 331), yet this does not necessarily result in equal or legitimate categorisation. Through the heterogeneous and mysterious security threats that function through the internet, the securitising actors can be seen to be producing the most persuasive element of the speech acts: unease. Through this extends to them the “management of the role of ‘antiterrorist’ surveillance” (Bigo, 2008: 25). It is from this fear of the unknown-yet-known existential threat that the focus on surveillance as means of pre-emption arises, grounded in the political necessity for ‘security experts’ to constantly stage the performance of effectiveness and efficiency against the threats of national security (de Lint, 2008: 180).

‘Connecting the dots’ is another recurring metaphor used in the discourses of the securitising agents to justify the perpetuating and expansion of surveillance programs in order to amass ever greater quantities of (meta)data.

Security is a direct result of the intelligence community’s quiet efforts to better connect the dots and learn from the mistakes that permitted those attacks to occur on 9/11. (Alexander in The Washington Post, 2013a)

Since you can’t connect dots you don’t have, it drives us into a mode of, we fundamentally try to collect everything and hang on to it forever. (Hunt in The Huffington Post, 2013)

The pacified term of ‘connecting the dots’ refers to the practise of utilising complex technologies that sort through massive swathes of data that render previously separate, opaque and disconnected information comprehensible and useful which can be then employed in a variety of unpredictable fashions to assist
in smooth functioning of the ban-opticon’s ‘panoptic sorting’ (Hier, 2003: 400). All “political and professional uses of technologies of surveillance” that are geared towards prevention are held in a particular importance (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008: 2) and so are the programs most vehemently pushed by ‘security experts’ as requiring expansion on the grounds of ‘national security’. Emphasised by the mysterious existential threat which lurks both within and outside of traditional boarders of both the state and physical reality, security has taken on a pro-active, anticipatory slant through ban-opticon (Bigo, 2008: 21). The growing need for agencies to increase their ability to ‘connect the dots’ is presented as vital to ensure ever increasingly accurate and timely profiling of populations (Warner, 2012: 225). This entails that those who are analysed as possessing deviant (risky) associations, connections or traits are managed, sorted and surveilled whilst those who are sorted into categories adhering to given social norms of behaviour are left alone. The profiling of individuals brings with it a self/other, security/danger binary. The creating of groups of ‘Others’ by which you place in contrast against the constructed ‘Self’ is one such example of how the ban-opticon perpetuates the unease needed for the underpinning of the securitising discourses espoused by the professionals of management of unease which then go on to perpetuate the need for a securitised internet.

**Conclusion**

In this article I have detailed the discursive justification of professionals of management of unease behind the second securitisation of the internet and analysed it through a critical framework influenced by IPS and SS. These securitising measures have primarily manifested in the multitude of surveillance and data-gathering programs enacted across the security agencies of the ‘Five Eyes’ nations, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. This article focused on the public speech acts employed by politicians and ‘security experts’ in the latter two states, where it was posited that the existential threat of terrorism could manipulate the internet and various related digital technologies in such a fashion as to harm the very existence of a referent object, the nation-state, if left undeterred. It leaves me to finish by
evaluating this process, was this secondary securitisation successful? Was such justification accepted?

Despite multiple public sites of resistance quickly arising from the grassroots of democracy in wake of the global surveillance revelations leaked by Edward Snowden and in response to the discourse of public officials (The Day We Fight Back, 2014; Big Brother Watch et al., 2015; Restore the Fourth, 2015; Stop Watching Us, 2015) and already existing sites increasing the intensity of their resilience under the statistical gaze of the ban-opticon, I suggest that it has. While changes in surveillance practices have occurred, most notably the passage of the watered-down USA Freedom Act of 2015, the various Western security agencies have retained the vast bulk of their surveillance programs and the silent majority of Western society has accepted this. Resistance to a process that has already occurred once would always be difficult, especially when facing the spectre of ‘national security’ that has institutionalised himself within all governmental departments pertaining to any such actions that concern duties of prevention or protection. Finally, on the topic of resistance, I suggest that a detailed analysis of the on-going opposition to mass surveillance would provide evidence that this securitisation process, far from over, will need to be perpetual in order to keep on being ‘successful’. In the light of the Snowden revelations, resistance to governmental and private-sector surveillance has increased, despite very limited reform on the legislative front or protection on the judicial front. The investigation into the growing culture of opposition to digital surveillance would offer a fascinating and contemporary prospective insight into the workings of resistance for the critical scholar and sources of normative hope for the privacy advocate.

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How Consumption is Made Possible: The Role of Religious Symbolism in Frivolous Consumption

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The decline of religious attachment resulting in the weakening of the unifying power of religion is a feature of modern society, with this being evident in Britain where the majority do not attend religious services with any regularity (Voas and Ling, 2009). The lack of a sense of belonging and shared values that arise from such fellowship can be seen as problematic for social concord as “the origins of religion are to be found, not in belief in spirits, in animism or other state of mind, but, rather, in the social act, in the rite or ceremony that symbolically binds the individual to his kinship community” (Durkheim, 1976: 3). The historic reshaping of religious authority through the separation of church and state in most Western democratic countries has led religious citizens in those localities to view the secular state as hostile towards such beliefs (Audi, 2011). The deterioration of religious truth as the only source of meaning, belonging and expression in the world has allowed for a distinct form of consumption to materialise - a frivolous consumption that draws inspiration from religious sentiments. This form of consumption is not guided by rationality but rather enchants through the aesthetic economy and the primal desire for community and belonging. Therefore I assert the view that frivolous consumption has become the religion of modern capitalism, providing truth and unity in an increasingly individualised world. I will argue this position by first establishing the historic relationship between capitalism, consumerism, and religion. This viewpoint will then be illustrated through the examination of the

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messianic figures of Steve Jobs and Kanye West. In relation to Steve Jobs I will focus on the Apple Brand, discussing how strong branding and aesthetic-centred design are powerful tools in creating disciple like consumers. In regards to Kanye West I will examine the importance of laborious self-branding and the maintenance of cultural relevance in inspiring extravagant and economically irrational consumption.

The historic association between capitalist consumerism and religion is evident through the work of Max Weber who explains the emergence of modern capitalism through the Protestant work ethic. Protestantism, and more precisely the Calvinistic denomination, supported a doctrine emphasising work and the unification of faith as ‘requirements’ to please God. This energised the believers as “the summum bonum of this ethic, the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life” (Weber, 2006: 18), and proved fundamental in cultivating the necessary environment for the emergence of modern capitalism. The credibility of the view articulated by Weber is supported by many figures, including Jack Barbalet, who states:

The Protestant ethic and the capitalist ethos that has been discussed in various ways ... The continuing currency of what is known as the ‘Weber thesis’, and its reputation among sociologists, remains unsurpassed (Barbalet, 2009: 146)

This immediately places religious fervour at the forefront of modern economic and societal organisation, adding greater weight to the view that religious symbolism is a significant aspect in the maintenance of such a structure.

The messianic imagery bestowed upon Steve Jobs and Kanye West through the charismatic authority they possess is crucial to their influence upon consumer culture, with the products they create being extensions of their personhood and the manifestation of the aura they have constructed - this being most pertinent in the case of Kanye West. This charismatic energy equates to “absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership.” (Weber et al., 2004: 34).
The process of self-branding and the manufactured narrative of deity is epitomised by Kanye West, who constructs the image of divinity in his music through his stage name ‘Yeezus’, and through such songs as “I am a God” (Genius, 2015), to even having someone dressed as Jesus Christ appearing on his tour (Tardio, 2015). Such perceived godliness is solidified through the naming of his son Saint (Koren, 2015). The divinity of Steve Jobs is furthered through his influence upon popular culture, as he is placed at the centre of the positive narrative regarding the refugee crisis through the interplay with the famous counter-culture artist Banksy (Berenson, 2015). Such outlandish internal and external self-branding “involves the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings ….The function of the branded self is purely rhetorical; its goal is to produce cultural value and, potentially, material profit.” (Hearn, 2008: 198)

It must be asserted that the creation of such a striking persona through purposeful and clinical acts of self-branding are foundational not only in legitimising, but celebrating the culture of frivolous consumption. The products and services being bought act as the holy book, connecting the consumer to the atmosphere of the producers and providing an all-encompassing sense of enlightenment. This results in the gleeful acquirement of goods which are vastly overpriced in relation to their primary function, as highlighted in the case of Yeezy Boosts footwear by Kanye West (Kim, 2015), or overpriced in relation to their specification and capabilities which is evident in the case of Apple products (YouTube, 2015). This blatant irrationality in consumption is made possible by the brand value behind such products, which does not create mere consumers, but devoted disciples.

The concept of discipleship, actualised through vehement brand loyalty is epitomised through the zealous nature of consumers towards the multinational technological company Apple Inc. This is the case even though their products can be seen to be arguably inferior in specification and capabilities to competitors like Samsung (Phone Arena, 2015). The key to such unparalleled success and vast market share (Heisler, 2015) is in the commercialisation of emotions through the aesthetic quality of their productions, resonating deeply with buyers and the ability to capitalise upon the simple actions of daily life. The purchase of a new phone -
which was once viewed as a mundane event - has been constructed into a seemingly life altering-event. This activity now inspires thousands to camp out in wait (Griffin, 2015) like the lame in anticipation of the faith healer, in the hope that healing, rejuvenation, and salvation will be provided by the “mysterious satisfaction” which arises from “being in harmony with the spirit of the age” (Laver, 1945: 197). Another key element in the creation of disciple consumers is the separation of Apple products through a closed system, predominately through their IOS software, meaning that features like the installation of applications and the purchase of core hardware are totally exclusive to the company. This emotionally positions the consumer as separate from the rest unto Apple, the key idea being that “the person (persona) can only find fulfilment in his relations with others” (Maffesoli, 1996: 10). When a brand can create a unification of emotions between a multiplicity of groups, it inevitably results in the formation of a “solid social arrangement” (Maffesoli, 1996: 13). This translates into substantial economic gain, as the consumer is not paying for the product alone but for the community and congregational atmosphere that underpins the product as well.

The economic gain is further accomplished through the reassurance of individuality that is immediately created through the addition of the title “i” in products such as the iPhone and iPad, which contributes to a sense of ownership and freedom within a paradoxically closed system. The idea of “Glocalisation” utilised by Koller is particularly poignant in illustrating the techniques used by brands to not only create a synergy with the local but “to endow the brand with a human touch” (Koller, 2007). The use of the “i” is not only stylistically exciting, but it is incredibly effective in empowering the consumer on an individual level whilst emphasising the separation from other competitors. Another force in strengthening brand identity is the existence of “fake brands” which emulate the original in design. “Consumer desire is not so much the material form of the product but the abstract form of its brand name, of its logo (exchange value, symbolic value, and aesthetic value combined)” (Chang (translated by Yung-chao Liao), 2004: 231) and the popularity of the Apple brand equates to a booming market just for “fake products such as the Sophone i6” (Grush, 2014). The existence of such products strengthens the connection of the consumer to their genuine product and validates their choice of purchase, similar to the way most
religions claim a monopoly of truth. The confirmation of authenticity of owning the genuine product is paralleled to a person of religious belief hearing “I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you” (NIV Holy Bible, 2015, Isaiah 45: 5).

The disproportionate focus and merit placed upon the aesthetic quality of such products is fundamental to the dominance of frivolous spending that stains consumerism. Breath-taking design has the ability to evoke a sense of awe, manipulating the desires of the subject and consequently taking their consumption out of the realm of financial rationality and into that of pure desire and instinctual pleasure. An object with an aesthetic energy creates an aesthetic analysis rooted in pleasure rather than a logical judgement rooted in reason (Kant and Walker, 2007).

The creation and recognition of an all-encompassing atmosphere in the design process is paramount in inspiring such vast financial transactions as “aesthetic work consists in the production of atmospheres” (Bohme, 1993: 123). Atmosphere not only indicates “something indeterminate, difficult to express” (Bohme, 1993: 113), but something that has the ability to transform the mundane into the extraordinary. The approach ingrained into the branding of Apple products is exemplified by the launch of the iPhone in 2007 (YouTube, 2013), extolled within the framework of messianic semantics with terms like “magical” (News.bbc.co.uk, 2007), alongside the existence of the support staff section named the genius bar (Pearson, n.d.). This results in the purposeful and potent construction of an environment marked by innovation and modernity, as ultimately such “design creates emotions, sensory experiences, and, ultimately, sales” (Gobé, 2001: 107). The emphasis placed upon atmosphere in modern consumption with the creation of a memorable event in daily affairs is fundamental “in the increasing aestheticization of reality” (Bohme, 1993: 123). This is highlighted in retail stores like Hollister which are more overt in these practices, as, almost counter-intuitively, product visibility falls secondary to atmosphere creation (Fashion.telegraph.co.uk, 2011). Such tactics resulted in the satirisation of the store Abercrombie & Fitch as “a nightclub that happens to sell clothes” (Hancock, 2009: 89).
It is evident that branding, marketing and advertising processes are inspired by religion, namely religious symbolism with the ability to gather momentum and promote community; the value of a brand is generated through the production of an “ethical surplus in the form of a social relation, a shared meaning or, more generally, a common.” (Arvidsson, 2005: 249). That the creation of strong social bonds, a leader and a sense of togetherness are crucial in all forms of irrational consumption is epitomised by Lan:

The super-sized pictures of models and movie stars hanging over the counters deliver the promises of achieving beauty and preserving youth. This point is well made by a Revlon manager, who was quoted by an informant, "In factories we produce lipstick, in stores we sell hope!" (2003: 31)

Whilst Steve Jobs promotes frivolous consumption as the visionary of a company synonymous with aesthetic dominance, Kanye West does so through rigorous acts of aesthetic labour, as the success of his products in the world of fashion and music are far more dependent upon his own individual image and the persona he projects to the wider society. Aesthetic labour is characterised through “all manner of bodily work – dieting, working-out, tanning, looking after one’s skin, shaving, waxing, plucking bodily hair, paying regular trips to the hairdresser, the beauty salon, the gym” (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006: 785). Such dedication to selfhood is evidenced by the employment of his personal barber (Gandu, 2015), who is paid lavishly to maintain one aspect of the image of Kanye West (Britton, 2015). The maintenance of image through strident aesthetic labour is crucial to keep up the sign value of the products Kanye West produces.

The sign value hidden behind the garments brought to market by Kanye West is the key driving force persuading masses to spend beyond the expected monetary exchange value and often beyond their financial ability. The Yeezy footwear becomes more than footwear that facilitates movement; it becomes symbolic. An exchange of isolation for belonging, an exchange of mediocrity for prestige and a transition from defeated to all conquering. As such a commodity develops
Into an autonomous value, because they play a role for the customer not just in the context of exchange but also in that of use. They are certainly not classical use values, for they have nothing to do with utility and purposiveness, but they form, as it were, a new type of use value, which derives from their exchange value in so far as use is made of their attractiveness, their aura, their atmosphere. They serve to stage, costume and intensify life. (Böhme 2003: 72)

The commanding status of Kanye West’s brand is seen through not only the initial value and demand of such products selling out within minutes and consequently shutting down websites (Kim, 2015), but also through the resale value of the products garnering thousands in the sneaker resale market that is worth billions (Luber, 2016).

Another key factor of persuasion lies in the infiltration of culture and the cultural industries that not only strengthen the inner selfhood of the actor, but make Mr West a key player in recognising and actively shaping cultural shifts. The possession of vast cultural capital means that when such a symbol speaks, with or without their wishes, society hears. When one has such influence in the core industries of music, design and Internet content (Hesmondhalgh, 2002) there is indeed something distinctive about that area of human creativity that has often been called ‘art’. The invention and/or performance of stories, songs, images, poems, jokes and so on, in no matter what technological form, involves a particular type of creativity- the manipulation of symbols for the purposes of entertainment, information and perhaps even enlightenment (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 4)

The cultural influence and the cloak of enlightenment that Kanye West possesses is only visible through the impact upon the major industries of: music, through headlining and performing at the centre stage at Glastonbury (Haynes, 2015); fashion, through the debut of his fashion collection at the New York Fashion Week (Yotka, 2015); politics, through piercing statements as “George Bush doesn’t care about Black People” (Strachan, 2015); and emphatically in the realm of academia as a speaker at Oxford University (Jenkins, 2015), in addition to being the recipient of a honorary doctorate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for “transformative, genre-defying work” (The Huffington Post, 2016). Such honours not only cement his status as an icon of his generation, but, more
importantly in terms of consumption, strengthen his claims of godliness, thus legitimising and propelling the appeal of his products, as the sign value held within such products is immense and aligned to the narrative which exclaims to the masses that such “artists are different from the rest of us” (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 4).

The frivolity of modern consumerism in which the aesthetic appeal of a product supersedes the capabilities of the commodity is empowered through the creation of religious and wholehearted devotion to the brand. The call of the brand toward the consumer is to consume by faith. This faith compels the purchaser to baptise themselves in the gospel of the brand in exchange for purpose and fulfilment. The exchange is facilitated through the charismatic authority contained in the aesthetic charm of the product, and it is heightened by the godly attributes and innovative, culture-defining contributions of the faces of the brands. The appeal to the hearts of consumers numbs their intellect and rationality: lavish purchases are the actualisation of the insecurities and the pursuit of meaning that characterise human existence. The origins of capitalism are firmly rooted and established in religious energy. The further secularisation of modern societies will inevitably propel the influence and dispersion of religious sentiments in all aspects of culture for the foreseeable future, as religion is a ubiquitous aspect of societal relations.

References


What is ‘Good Social Science’? Negotiating Legitimacy in Critical Discourse Analysis: a Reflective Essay

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Good scholarship is not just the result of a specific method, but the result of how one employs, cross-checks, collates and analyses the data that methods assist one in collecting.
(Grix, 2002: 181)

Introduction

Last September, as part of our undergraduate training in qualitative methods, I joined the research group ‘Relationships and Emotions – Discourse Analysis’, where we ran a research project analysing LGBTQ+ representation in the British press through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

The following essay looks back on our journey through press articles, CDA books and group meetings, critically assessing the work we produced. I will provide an overview of our project – our research questions, our sampling methods, an insight into CDA, and a brief discussion of our findings and subsequent conclusions.

Choosing an openly political approach like CDA put ‘positionality’ and ‘reflexivity’ at the very front of our project. The present essay is a reflection of how we negotiated the validity of our interpretations.

We used different strategies to legitimise our novel interpretations. Firstly, we claimed legitimacy and rigour for our interpretations through the use of a checklist.

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proposed by Van Dijk (1993). Secondly, we mobilised our identities as justifications for our interpretations, arguing that sometimes our identities were allowing us to access particular insights. We are able, however, to positively use this explicit disclosure to challenge our work and improve it. Finally, I will examine how organising our project as a single coherent account obscured the continuous negotiation of different ideas that took place in the backstage of this critical project.

Research Overview

Our research project was titled “How did mainstream British press portray LGBTQ+ relationships, before and after the Same-Sex Marriage Act of 2014?”. Our aims were threefold: (1) to identify predominant themes arising in the press, (2) comparing differences/similarities in portrayal before and after the Bill and (3) exploring whether LGBTQ+ relationships were presented as ‘appropriate’ or not in comparison with heterosexual relationships. We finally focused on aims (1) and (2) rather than (3). This was the result of a lack of definition as to what ‘appropriateness’ meant in the first place, which made the comparison impracticable. Instead, our focus turned to what CDA could tell us about LGBTQ+ representation.

In order to do this, we employed stratified sampling. Stratified sampling is a variant of purposeful sampling which allows you to narrow down the data according to your research interests, followed by random sampling within those parameters (Harding, 2006). As a result, we narrowed down our articles according to our choice of newspapers, our timeframe (before the Act 2010-2013 and after the Act 2013-2015) and a keyword search (‘LGBT’, ‘relationship’) to flag up the relevant articles, but we chose randomly from the resulting bulk of texts.

We decided to study three nation-wide British newspapers that represent different political inclinations: -- the Guardian as a liberal newspaper, The Telegraph as its conservative counterpart and The Daily Mail as an example of tabloid journalism. The political inclinations of those newspapers have been corroborated in the past (Wilks-Heeg, Blick and Crone, 2012), but it is a decision that we came to by
drawing on ‘common sense’, a cultural baggage (and discourse!) that we have acquired by way of living in the UK. As such, our choices could be challenged. Originally we had planned on using The Times, but the newspaper’s website had a pay-wall that limited our access, so we opted for The Telegraph, which has expressed similar political aligment to the centre-right in the past.

We picked one article from each newspaper dating before the Act and one article from each dating after the Act, making up a total of six articles: Adams (2015), Doughty (2013), Eccleshare (2014), The Telegraph (2015), McAleenan (2013) and Nicholas (2014). As we were not interested in the Marriage Act itself but the ways LGBTQ+ people were ‘talked about’, we did not choose articles specifically on the Act, but around the time of its signing. We accessed those articles through each newspaper’s website, rather than through a general web search engine; this decision allowed us to minimize the effects of paid improved visibility in search engines. Our timeframe encompassed 2010-2015: in retrospect, this limited the impact of change we could capture over time. Even if the passing of the Bill had impacted societal views on the LGBTQ+, the effects would probably be clearer studying 2000-2015, for example.

We highlighted three findings in our study. Firstly, there was a lack of involvement of LGBTQ+ voices in the British press. The voices commenting on LGBTQ+ issues within our sample were the Church, teachers, academics and a straight ex-wife. We interpreted this exclusion as a lack of progression to integrate and valorise the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. Secondly, newspapers failed to acknowledge diversity within the LGBTQ+ community, both before and after the Act: gay males received more news coverage than any other LGBTQ+ group in our sample. The only LGBTQ+ author in the corpus was a gay man mischaracterising the bisexual community (McAleenan, 2013). This trend was consistent with Jowett and Peal’s (2010) coverage of Civil Partnerships in UK newspapers, which reported that most newspapers covered the reactions of gay male couples more prominently. Thirdly, we found explicit reference to the same events even within a tiny sample of 6 newspapers. This phenomenon is known as intertextuality -"the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or not" (Fairclough, 1992, 84) – and allowed
us to point out how texts informed each other from the same set of texts or events. This led us to conclude that discourse does not exist in a vacuum, but it is constantly being informed from different sources and that we had been able to capture a small fraction of it.

**Discourse Analysis and the Family’s Black Sheep: Critical Discourse Analysis**

Discourse can be defined as “the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view” (Fairclough, 1995, 56). We were looking at the particular ways in which the LGBTQ+ were talked about. As a method, Discourse Analysis assumes that the choices of grammar and vocabulary that speakers make are not random, and so it aims at uncovering the underlying social beliefs that they signify. In particular, within the broad tradition of Discourse Analysis, our group chose to apply Critical Discourse Analysis, which goes beyond contextualizing discourse in its social context.

CDA is a critical approach. Critical Theory rejects the possibility of ‘value-free’ research, arguing that all knowledge is socially-situated (Van Dijk, 1995; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Wang, 2006). As expressed by Fairclough (1993), CDA therefore does not conceive of itself as a politically neutral practice, but is committed to social change. CDA takes the side of oppressed social groups and aims at emancipation. “Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding” (Van Dijk, 1993, 252). By looking at the meaning of texts and rhetoric, it aims at making transparent what ideas about the LGBTQ+ community are being perpetuated. According to Van Dijk (2003), CDA research can be captured into two questions that one must bear in mind: “How is public discourse controlled?” (ibid, 355) and “What are the social consequences of such control for this minority?” (ibid).

Some researchers such as Hammersley (2005) have suggested that social science should not be critical, but we were drawn towards CDA because we were LGBTQ+ friendly and, therefore, agreed with CDA’s political aims. As Munro et al (2002) have pointed out, researchers are historically located and their context
reflects in the research process. Our historical situation facilitated our preference of CDA: we were situated in a context where LGBTQ+ research is considered a scholarly pursuit, rather than a private matter (Phelan: 2001). We also benefited from a setting where critical research is popular, rather than looked down on. In fairness, CDA in general pays more attention to ‘top-down’ relations of domination, and this criticism certainly applies to our research: our sampling method focused on widely circulated newspapers rather than gay magazines, which would presumably present the community under a different light, for example.

Critical Discourse Analysis is characterized by its political and emancipatory nature, and as such, it challenges conventional notions of reliability, validity and generalizability. Merriam (1995) argues that concepts exported from a positivist tradition are inappropriate to assess qualitative research. Given our purposeful sampling, our study cannot be said to be representative of all discourses of UK newspapers on LGBTQ+. Nevertheless, the underlying aim of Critical Theory is not to be representative, but the advancement of the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and transformation of society (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research, and moreover critical research, is constrained by positivist language. However, CDA is not exempt from quality control: it does not have to be coextensive with bias, but this means that we had to find other ways to assert the legitimacy of our results. One enters a constant negotiation of what it means to do ‘good social science’ when one abandons most yardsticks whereby research is evaluated. This question is what this essay will try to unpack.

**Negotiating Legitimacy in Interpretation: Van Dijk’s Checklist**

Critical Discourse Analysis cannot be classified as a single method, but rather an approach; it does not have a unitary theoretical framework (Van Dijk, 1988, 60). There are multiple methods within CDA, each of which is particularly associated with one researcher. It is a loosely-connected community of researchers committed to looking at society critically, but each of them does it differently.

Upon reflection, our choice of author shaped our research. We sought legitimacy
for our interpretations through imitation of someone else’s practice: we chose Van Dijk because he was one of the few authors that spelled out for us how to do discourse analysis. In his article ‘Principles of CDA’ (1993, 264), he provided a checklist of cues to look out for while we read our texts. The list included: argumentation devices, rhetorical figures, lexical style (vocabulary), story-telling (inclusion of personal events, stories), syntax and semantic elements, as well as quotations from different sources.

As novice researchers, CDA was particularly challenging, as we did not possess the confidence to make strong assertive interpretations. We were looking for rigour and theoretical backing; having a checklist allowed us to focus on a set of specifics to look out for (Lingard et al., 2007, 507). For example, when reading an article, an expression would catch my attention, but I would find myself unable to deduce the proper relevance of a specific word, or whether I was looking for the right signs in the text; worst of all, was I missing the actual relevant parts for my research? There was a fear that my interpretations were not ‘valid’ or ‘rigorous enough’, a concern with how to produce a good, solid and sound research project’. The lack of specificity of the workings of CDA fuelled my concerns even further, so, I sought Van Dijk’s table as a way of organizing my thoughts into a ‘proper’ interpretation. Behind my fear was an assumption that there exists a ‘right’ interpretation that should be achieved. However, CDA rejects the idea of such a ‘right’ answer, as long as the interpretation is questioning how the text is affecting a minority, in our case the LGBTQ+ community.

We extracted the checklist from a particular article, situated within perhaps Van Dijk’s (1993) largest contribution to CDA, the development of the socio-cognitive model. We adopted this part of the method, the checklist, without examining the socio-cognitive model it belonged to; this means that we uncritically accepted all of the author’s assumptions and preferences for this model (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, 423). This move resulted in two consequences. Firstly, it meant that we did not focus on non-verbal data, such as the lay-out or images of the text, which could have been a fruitful aspect to explore to examine how the LGBTQ+ community is represented graphically. Secondly, Van Dijk’s checklist combines a mixture of linguistic elements (rhetorical figures, syntax) and more general
elements like argumentation or story-telling at the same time, which determined what features we would be looking at, controlling or restricting our interpretations.

Moreover, I found it easier to defend and justify my interpretation starting with linguistic evidence and then relating it to socio-political themes. I exposed my chain of thought and, if possible, provided ‘hard evidence’ for others to understand my connection with the text. Talking about ‘argumentation devices’ seemed too slippery, hence I gravitated more towards the linguistically-orientated parts of the text. For example, I was drawn into reading more deeply into the use of subordinate clauses: nominal relative clauses such as “the Archbishop of Canterbury” (The Daily Mail, 2015) added authority to a quoted interlocutor; passive and impersonal sentences were used to speak about violence, implying that no one could be blamed for it. Reading CDA, I have come to understand how one’s background can shape the academic craftsmanship embraced later. Fairclough (1995) comes from linguistics, therefore his CDA method examines much more intensively the semiotics of a text. Having taken courses in linguistics in the past, I felt more comfortable with a method closer to his, even if he did not provide a checklist. This preference was another way of negotiating my own legitimacy as a researcher, which highlights the difficulties of using a highly interpretative method, as opposed to quantitative ones. It also emphasises how, even when following Van Dijk’s step by step guide, one’s preferences can influence research.

Description and interpretation are the two key stages of CDA analysis. The application of CDA works in steps: (1) reading the articles, (2) circling or coding Van Dijk’s selected components, (3) critical interpretation. Reading and arranging examples into different tables is part of the description stage. The interpretation stage is concerned with this question: what does this word/rhetorical figure/verb mean for the portrayal of the minority collective? This implies that CDA is both descriptive and interpretative (Fairclough, 2001, 62). Nevertheless, the jump between description and interpretation is not theorized, as there is not one specific way of doing it. CDA is open to multiple interpretations and, as such, justifying your own interpretations becomes crucial. In the following section I will look at how we negotiated the reliability of our study though inter-rater reliability, which
in turn revealed power dynamics within our group.

**Negotiating legitimacy in interpretation: Identities and epistemological privilege**

Reliability is the notion that an experiment can be repeated with the same result independently of the researcher (Merriam, 1995, 55). Reliability in this sense is very difficult to achieve in a CDA study (Flowerdew, 1999). CDA is based on a particular interpretation of a text, and while there is a chance several researchers will reach the same conclusion about the meaning of a piece, it is unlikely it will be a guaranteed occurrence. We tried to strengthen our reliability by following inter-rater reliability, which involved the collaboration and agreement of multiple researchers (Merriam, 1995, 56; Armstrong et al, 1997). Nonetheless, group work brought to light another set of issues when justifying one’s own interpretations.

Team member (TM) 1: “I feel that this whole article is just very demeaning towards the gay community.”

TM 2: “I don’t think so, it’s the Daily Mail, and they treat everyone poorly! Even straight couples are talked about in this way.”

TM 1: “I feel there’s a difference, I don’t think they would.”

(Extract from one of our working sessions, around the 9th November 2015)

The use of inter-rater reliability meant that only interpretations all members of the team agreed on would have reached our final presentation. This raises the question of how and why some interpretations made it and others did not. Waser and Bresler (1999) point out that “translating personal interpretations into collective products” is challenging (ibid, 11). We used inter-rater reliability to negotiate competing interpretations and reach common conclusions. Following a checklist meant that there was an initial consistence in the ‘themes’ we looked at, but the content of each section varied greatly from researcher to researcher (Armstrong et al, 1997). Our assumption at the beginning was that our findings would be more reliable because we all agreed on them. Now I wish to challenge the ways in which said agreement came about.
Given CDA’s aims, our positionality became a crucial part of our project. Insofar as CDA is based on a purely interpretative epistemology, the ways one justifies his or her interpretations of a text are key. Having to be explicit becomes even more of a burden in the context of team work, where members come from different places within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. One of the sources used to make sense of the texts was our own lived experiences and identities. Identity is a core driver in the process of symbolic interpretation of discourse.

“Team member (TM) 1: “Hear me out, do you think gay people know more about gay people than you do [as a straight person]?”
TM 2: “Well, yeah.”
TM 1: “I don’t feel I do.”
TM 3: “Same, I would not be able to say anything more about A or B or to say what they feel just because I am also gay.”
(Extract from one of our working sessions, around the 20th November 2015)

The quote above is an illustration of one of the problems we were facing. Sometimes some members of the group would explain to others how their identity allowed them to read the text in a different light. We legitimised and justified our claims by reference to our characteristics (“from personal experience”, “as a gay man”). We mobilised our personal identity to add more weight to our interpretations, while the disclosure of sexual identity was also used to attribute legitimacy to our own interpretations.

However, the same members of the group felt uneasy stating that their interpretations could be applied to the entirety of the LGBTQ+ community, or by extension, that their readings were more legitimate or valid. My concern was very similar to what Mauthner and Doucet (2003) reported, I felt the “pressure to be ‘authoritative’ to claim the validity of [my] interpretations while not feeling comfortable shutting someone else’s account down”, as “[my] account is just ‘one’ story among an infinite number of possible stories” (Denzin, 1997 in Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, 423).
In the past, it has been argued that insiders hold an epistemologically privileged research position and it will conduct to more accurate representations of LGBTQ+ because they are more aware of the participants’ lives (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015, 92). Nevertheless, the complexity of the insider/outsider dynamics must be acknowledged. Even this brief discussion seems to suggest that the divide in our group was straight/LGBTQ+. However, ‘insider’ accounts are more complicated, as there are multiple subtle ways to be an ‘insider’. Our experiences reflect the idea that Hayfield and Huxley (2015) put forward: the insider/outsider distinction as a dichotomy oversimplifies our position, we are neither one nor the other altogether. Once, a member of our group raised the inexistence of a medical discourse in our sample, a feature which used to be dominant in discussion of male homosexuality in the past (Phelan, 2010). I had never picked up on it, presumably because female homosexuality has never been medicalised in the same ways that male homosexuality has. Even as a self-identifying LGBTQ+ woman, I was moving back and forth from an ‘insider’ to an ‘outsider’ role during my readings of the texts.

On top of that, we hoped to maintain an open environment at all times, so that any interpretation could have been openly discussed and submitted to criticism. We acknowledged the insider/outsider dynamic that the literature refers to (Lingard et al, 2007, 507-508), but we were careful to always ask others if they were okay with the interpretation reached. Each individual member of our team cannot be reduced to one specific identity; we were also students, sociologists, friends with gay friends, or have gay siblings. For Lingard et al (2007, 505), it is the multiple inhabitation of identities which makes conflict, and creativity, surface. The validity of our account was strengthened by this active display of reflexivity: the “validity of their interpretations is dependent on being able to demonstrate how they were reached” (Mason, 1996 in Mauthner and Doucet: 2003, 418). We took less of our interpretations for granted due to the existence of this insider/outsider dynamic, as indicated by Lingard et al (2007).
Negotiating Legitimacy in Interpretation: Ethical Behaviour and Group Work

Traditional or institutional ethics focuses on the relationship between the researched and the researchers. For this reason, our research project seemed at first free of ethical concerns. Most literature focuses on power relations between the interviewer and the interviewees (Munro et al, 2004, Punch: 1994). Institutional ethics, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994, 114) stands in opposition with critical methods like CDA. For more positivist approaches that lack a clear commitment to furthering the interests of minorities, ethics is an external check on research. For critical approaches ethical behaviour is intrinsic to the research process. We aimed at behaving ethically, thus, I considered that how to relate to your research colleagues is in as much need of theorisation as how to relate to interviewees.

Wasser and Bresler (1996) present team work “as a methodological tool, which deserves active consideration rather than passive acknowledgement” (ibid, 7). What constitutes a ‘finding’ or a ‘conclusion’ is a political act that is arrived at collectively (Lingard et al, 2007). We wrote our project as a “unified we” (Lingard et al, 2007, 500; Wasser and Bresler, 1996; Bradley, 1982), which shadowed the vote casted against some alternative interpretations. Challenging the existence of one ‘author’ or the identity of the ‘group’ would maybe have allowed us to trace better how we reached our interpretations and to present “each individual voices alongside the group perspective” (Lingard et al, 2007, 513). There was some discussion on the issues/rhetorical figures we did not agree on, but neither of those made it to the final presentation. It would have been interesting to insert a set of findings that were not agreed by the team as a whole and dedicate a section to explain the reasons behind the decisions of each member. This choice would have allowed more transparency and would have tackled the possible power dynamics at play in our project.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to map out the difficulties of embracing a critical approach in Discourse Analysis. An inherently interpretative approach like this one challenged us to use various resources to defend the interpretations of the texts
under scrutiny. I have described the political nature of CDA and the agreement that we shared with it as LGBTQ+ friendly students. I have also highlighted the use of Van Dijk’s checklist as a legitimization device: as novice researchers, using a checklist oriented our interpretations towards a set of specifics. Secondly, I have examined how we used inter-rater reliability to compare our interpretations, as CDA is open to multiple readings, and we were using our identities to make sense of the texts in front of us. This generated a certain dichotomous insider/outsider tension which is not as clear-cut as it may seem. We nonetheless mobilized it to challenge ourselves to be more explicit and reflexive about our assumptions, explaining each own perspective to our colleagues in detail. Finally, I have argued for an ethical approach to research among researchers and suggested that a unified account obscures the collective decision-making process.

References
London: Sage


**Appendix A: Our corpus – articles analysed**


order/11692894/Hate-crime-is-an-everyday-reality-for-gay-people-expert-warns.html


Nicholas, S. (2014, 3rd September). Can any wife forgive a husband who was secretly gay all along? Sarah still can’t, 14 years after the confession that broke her heart. The Daily Mail. Retrieved from:
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2742597/Can-wife-forgive-husband-secretly-gay-Sarah-t-14-years-confession-broke-heart.html
Bridging the Gap Between Foucault and Feminists: The Repressive Hypothesis

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Michel Foucault, born in 1926 Poitiers, has served as one of the most influential theorists across a multitude of disciples, including sociology. Foucauldian thought has permeated and indeed underpins much sociological theory to this day. A particularly noted work, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (1978) explores sexuality in the Western world, particularly focusing on classical Foucauldian theories of power in an attempt to reject what Foucault refers to as the repressive hypothesis. The repression of sexuality is an arguably well-known hypothesis; Foucault’s rejection of it is less of an attempt at proving its inaccuracy but more an effort to place it back into the general economy of discourses on sex (1978: 11). Providing arguments suggesting that the repressive hypothesis is no more accurate a description of sex than any other, Foucault gives us an opportunity to reflect on the potential reasons why we commit so much passion to our proclaimed state of sexual repression.

Foucault introduces the reader to *the story* (1978: 3, italics added) of the repressive hypothesis in part I, volume I, entitled ‘We “Other Victorians”’ by describing early seventeenth century sexual practices. He recounts how there was ‘a certain frankness’ and ‘a tolerant familiarity with the illicit’ (ibid) suggesting that sex was an accepted and evident part of society. He continues to describe the Victorian era as the sexual twilight that fell upon the bright day of the seventeenth century (ibid). In describing Victorian sexuality Foucault tells of a private, prude and shameful

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silence. The repressive hypothesis, thus, claims that prudery took over previously liberated sexuality and from its birth onwards all things sexual were confined to the ‘parents’ bedroom’ (Foucault, 1978: 4). Foucault questions whether we have been liberated at all in the centuries that followed on from the repression of the Victorian era, claiming that perhaps some progress was made by Freud but even this has not brought us far in terms of sexual liberation (ibid). After some lengthy description of the repressive hypothesis, we begin to see Foucault’s critique of the theory.

Foucault’s first doubt of the repressive hypothesis is whether or not it is historically accurate. He begs the question of its validity as an ‘established historical fact’ (1978: 8). The next central facet of his rejection of the repressive hypothesis is his doubt on the grounds of power (ibid). Foucault outlines his criticisms of the repressive hypothesis stating that ‘the objective is to analyse a certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power’ (1978: 92).

Foucault’s final reason for rejecting the repressive hypothesis is his question of: was there really a break in history between the age of repression and the analyses or critique of repression? This he calls his historico-political question (1978: 10). I would argue that Foucault also heavily suggests another criticism of the hypothesis, and that is the way it appears to shape modern liberation, arguing that the simple act of speaking against the repressive hypothesis allows one an ‘appearance of deliberate transgression’ (1978: 5), a concept due to the restraints of the word count will not be explored in detail but is an important rejection to consider.

Perhaps the most interesting question Foucault begs in HS ‘is not, Why are we repressed? but rather, Why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our recent past, and against ourselves, that we are repressed?’ (Foucault, 1978: 8). This essays aims to explore why we are so compelled by the repressive hypothesis by using two of Foucault’s major doubts – history and power. Furthermore, this essay will be underpinned by intersectional feminist theory and use feminist appropriations and critiques of Foucault such as those of Braidotti, 1989; McNay, 1992; Ramazanoğlu, 1993 to name but a few, to discuss the issues and feminist contributions to his theory, that arise alongside Foucault’s understanding of why we believe we are sexually repressed.
History

Foucault’s first doubt of the repressive hypothesis is his concern with it being considered historical fact, with historical evidence. Foucault introduces us to this doubt and begs the question whether “sexual repression is truly an established historical fact” (Foucault, 1978: 10). Foucault argues that a major contributing factor to how well (and indeed long) the repressive hypothesis has been held up is down to it having a “solemn historical and political guarantee” (Foucault, 1978: 5), that Foucault goes on to argue protects the hypothesis from dissolution and arguably has allowed its permeation through society. This historical doubt of the hypothesis I would argue is an important rejection and indeed an important contribution to why we so vehemently claim we are repressed. Perhaps it is the appeal to authority or indeed an appeal to tradition that causes history to be our first point of call in the uncovering of why we consider ourselves repressed. Foucault argues that with the historical guarantee it has, the repressive hypothesis is affirmed by so many as historically evident because people have continued to discuss the hypothesis ‘for such a long time now … because repression is so firmly anchored, having solid roots and reasons’ (Foucault, 1978: 9). Thus, we remain trapped in a discourse that has for so long existed it seems difficult to suggest it is not historically accurate. Despite his doubts with the historical accuracy Foucault does not deny or claim that sex has historically not been repressed, instead he argues that the repressive history of sex is only on component of the discourse of sex. Foucault goes on to say that the repressive history of sex must not be considered in a vacuum, moreover it plays a ‘tactical role’ (1978: 12) in transforming sex into a discourse and a technology of power, as opposed to a factual reality. Thus the repressive history of sex cannot simply be reduced to the sum of its parts. A more accurate analysis would be a holistic view of sex as a system with many historical and politic fractions.

That being said, in part II of The History of Sexuality, Foucault outlines some of the ways sex was indeed repressed and these examples accurately describe the why it is a hypothesis that is so widely accepted; calling sex by its name was difficult and costly, language around sex was controlled and words that displayed sex too visibly were smothered (Foucault, 1978: 17). This ‘muteness’, is still evident within today’s
society, stigmas around sexuality, in particular female or non-binary sexuality are still very much impolite topics and so it seems understandable for those who suffer this silencing of their freedom of expression to look to the repressive hypothesis as a means of explanation. Foucault counters this idea however, with his argument that even with this lack of conversation ‘there was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex’ (Foucault, 1978: 18). Foucault argues that this proliferation was particularly enhanced by institutions in the field of exercise of power, his example being the Catholic Church. Arguing that by sex being in some ways repressed there was now a reason for personal engagements with sex to be told, both to oneself and to others, specifically those ‘in power’, a concept which will be discussed later in the essay. And so, indeed there was now new ways to navigate the concept of sex, but to use Foucault’s succinct description ‘A censorship of sex? There was installed rather an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy’ (Foucault, 1978: 23).

McNay, in her work Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and The Self (1992), deconstructs Foucault’s concept of history arguing that history is in fact not the development of ideal linear schema, but in fact history is a navigation through the constant struggles between various forms of power which have time and time again attempted to enforce their systems of control, governance and domination (McNay, 1992) particularly on the female body. Braidotti similarly argues that despite philosophers having sexualised the ‘sexual difference’ question as feminine they have not related their discussion to the ‘discursivity or the historical presence of real-life women’ (1989: 89). Arguably, it is this negation of people’s lived experiences that has resulted in the repressive hypothesis to remain a considerably accurate account of modern sexuality.

**Power**

This essay will look next at power in some depth, analysing the juridico-discursive model of power as a compelling reason as to why we say with so much resentment we are repressed, as well as addressing feminist critiques of Foucauldian power. Foucault outlines his historico-theoretical question, which is perhaps the most central and compelling of Foucault’s rejections of the repressive hypothesis – his
doubt on the grounds of power. Foucault poses multiple questions on power in his introduction of the doubt, in summary, he asks us to consider whether power only exists in terms of repression? And whether prohibition, censorship and denial of liberties are actually the way power is generally exercised in ‘our’ society. (1978). Foucault’s concern with the repressive hypothesis’ construction of power, he argues, was not an attempt to determine who has sex, nor whether there are prohibitions or permissions involved in sex, instead he argues that what is an issue for him is the ways in which sex is ‘put into discourse’ (1978: 11), and the ways power is channelled and the ways in which it permeates through the discourse of sex until it eventually it controls and directs personal action and personal sex (Foucault, 1978).

The repressive hypothesis only considers ideas of power in the juridico-discursive sense, considering power as a centralised entity repressive in its exercise (Sawicki, 1991) which some have access to and other do not. Foucault defines this model of power as ‘All these negative elements-defenses, censorships, denials-which the repressive hypothesis groups together in one great central mechanism destined to say no’ (1978: 12). The repressive hypothesis’s concept of power is one that is particular to traditional Western politics, that being that power is and indeed has long been principally understood as a negation of liberty, repression, exercised through laws, censure, constraint and so on (Lemke, 2010). The juridico-discursive concept of power suggests that power is concerned on the one hand by A, the freedom of the subject and on the other by B, political sovereignty (Lemke, 2010). However, Foucault argues that “power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organizations” (Foucault, 1978: 92). Thus we understand Foucauldian power to be not a substance, or concept of possession, but instead power that is generated in every situation, relationship and interaction – it is power that has to be analysed in relational terms (Lemke, 2010). So why is it that we, with so much passion, claim that we are sexually repressed by the powers that be? Arguably, the juridico-discursive model of power is one that is particularly easy to comprehend. Within a capitalist system where the ruling classes order the proletariat with an iron fist it seems fitting to consider that power is something controlled and exercised by those at the top. Foucault’s deconstruction of this
concept of power – albeit elitist in its accessibility and questionably neutral considering it is an inherently male perspective (Ramazanoğlu, 1993) – challenges and allows room for growth for understanding how power exists, for feminism and for activism alike.

Foucault outlines his propositions of power, in Part II of History of Sexuality, firstly, Foucault claims ‘power is exercised from innumerable points in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations’ (Foucault, 1990: 94). Here he rejects the repressive hypothesis claim that power is exercised by a centralised source, for example through the hysterisation of women’s bodies – the production of women’s bodies as hyper-sexual and hyper-medicalised by the state for reasons of control or governance. Foucault argues that this contributes to the proliferation of discourse and knowledge on sex instead of necessarily repressing it, thus further solidifying his argument that sex was everywhere, in every aspect of society at the interplay between all social actors (Foucault, 1978). However feminists argue that although Foucault shares their line of thought regarding the social construction of sex through discourse and knowledge, he does not recognise in any way the gendered notion of oppression.

Braidotti argues ‘Foucault never locates woman’s body as the site of one of the most operational internal divisions in our society, and consequently also one of the most persistent forms of exclusion’ (1991 quoted in McNay, 1992: 11). Agreeing with feminists like Braidotti and McNay, the repressive hypothesis and the notion that certain people experience certain types of repressive power more than others becomes understandable to argue. And here I arrive, as a queer fourth wave feminist, attempting to navigate the tension between ideas of systematic powerful repression and Foucault’s account of power, with great confusion. Indeed, Foucault argues a strong case for the proliferation of power, but a lack of recognition regarding privilege and access to power seems difficult to ignore. Perhaps a large contributing factor to why we womyn consider the repressive nature of power as compelling and why we argue with passion that we are sexually repressed is due to precisely that, as womyn, as queers, as ethnic minorities, as people with (dis)abilities, we suffer a systematic repression that Foucault would
argue does not precisely exist. Perhaps here, Foucault and feminism beg to differ, and the repressive hypothesis seems a lived experience for many.

According to Foucault, the problem with the juridico-discursive account of power is that power is reduced to certain modes of existence, oversimplifying the concept. Foucault argues that this juridico-discursive model of power only analyses power in terms of legitimatization and or continuation of negative social relations such as exploitation, patriarchy, capitalism etc. What this model ignores, is Foucault’s argument that power has the ability to generate and transform (Foucault, 1978; Lemke, 2010). Furthermore, when power is used on the body the body becomes a site of production, take for examples factories, classrooms and armies. These exercises of power can ‘generate and change material forms of existence, social identities and bodily experiences’ (Lemke, 2010: 33) which can be considered productive exercises of power. Similar to the previous proposition of power, feminist critics of Foucault argue that this representation of power and ‘the reduction of individuals to passive bodies permits no explanation of how individuals may act in an autonomous and creative fashion’ (McNay, 1992:12). This is considered a significant critique of Foucault as feminists, sociologists and social theorists’ aim is often the ‘rediscovery and revaluation of the experiences of women’ (McNay, 1992:12), and I would add, of non-binary people. Furthermore, Foucault’s ideas of productive power on the body are argued to assume gender is imposed by the complex workings of power, as opposed to ‘a dynamic process’ (McNay, 1992:12). McNay’s work on Foucault and Feminism explores in great detail the lack of elaboration on the gendered character of methods of discipline and governance (1992). Scores of scholars have explored the sexual repression experienced by women, in fact the subjugation of certain social groups (particularly women of colour and Indigenous women) has paved the way in the liberation of others (Moreton-Robinson; 2000), race and gender are central in the exercising of biopower, and are components of a discourse on sexuality that Foucault excludes.

Foucault’s rejection of the repressive hypothesis and his subsequent theories of power, despite their mixed reception by scholars and academics, have paved the way in understanding the proliferation of discourse on sex, the normalisation of
specific kinds of sex, and what happens when power is exercised on the body. They set a foundation for understanding ideas of biopower, surveillance and the biopolitical. However, there’s a significant lived experience which Foucault has failed to acknowledge. Perhaps we should ask the question ‘why do feminists say with so much resentment against our recent past that we are repressed?’ In solidarity with the scores of feminists who remain both appreciative yet critical of Foucault, I would argue that Foucault’s rejection of the repressive hypothesis and the theories that frame it are void of a critical engagement with the lived experiences of women, which are inextricably tied to concepts of patriarchy and resistance. Foucault does not engage with the feminist theory that suggests women are a centralised site of oppression and indeed sexual repression. His theory fails to recognise that women, especially women of colour, poor women, (dis)abled women, and trans/non-binary women/people are subject to oppression and repression disproportionally more so than other genders/social groups. Perhaps there’s a space in the theory for Foucauldian understanding of power to align with feminist understandings of oppression. The Foucauldian rejection of the repressive hypothesis has potential to develop further, working alongside feminists, paying attention to the voices and experiences of those at the margins of society and indeed sex, expanding into the realms of power as it moves through society affecting some perhaps more directly than others, commenting further on specific oppressions and creating a more intersectional, encompassing argument around the discourses of sex.

References

When what has become known as the Paris terror attacks happened on the 13th of November 2015, news articles following the events were shared almost instantly on social media platforms. Not very long after, new content relating to the event, most of it expressing solidarity with the victims — such as the hashtag #PrayforParis — but that was not part of the official news reportage on it, started circulating around social media: the Paris attacks had quickly gone viral. Facebook and Twitter users from all over the world shared profile pictures incorporating a picture of the French flag; art (one of the most popular ones was a drawing of a peace sign with the Eiffel tower inside, which has come to officially symbolise online transnational solidarity and grief); and some also published and shared islamophobic and xenophobic messages linking the events to the recent refugee crisis — crafting a digital archive that tells the story of the terror attacks through personal engagement and emotion. However, archives take differing forms, and different technologies produce different archive dynamics (Parikka, 2012). This essay will take a closer look at the mediation of the Paris attacks through the archive dynamics of the social media platform Tumblr, where stories of the attacks differ from both official news coverage, and that of other social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. I argue that Tumblr’s identity as a social network, as well as its technological structure, gives rise to a particular kind of virality, creating an ‘alternate’ archive where certain aspects of the event are emphasised and others
underplayed or criticised in a way that is distinct from other social media coverage of it.

Sampson’s (2012) concept of virality draws on Tarde’s (1903) classical idea of epidemiological microrelations, where the ‘social whole’ is comprised of overlapping and interacting small relations between individuals. Desire is central to Tarde, who sees social interaction as repetitive, imitative radiations of desire ‘that stirs the social into action’ and coming together into shared beliefs, sentiments and performances (Sampson, 2012: 18). This repetition and imitation driven by affect, bringing about a ‘porosity of boundaries’ (Clough and Puar, 2012: 15) is precisely what characterises the viral in the network age. Parikka (2007) argues that there is a logic of contagion to how information is transmitted in digital culture; describing how objects are no longer controlled by humans, but lead lives of their own — replicating and mutating like viruses, which can be seen in social media in particular, in which context virality has also been conceptualised as online success, or electronic word of mouth (Alhabash and McAllister, 2015). Seen through this logic, the Paris attacks went viral through the globalising character of social media, allowing contagion to take place, but also simultaneous emotional anxieties of the contagion of terrorism. This could be discussed in depth in relation to social media in general, but that is beyond the scope of this essay. I will therefore focus on the digital archive of Tumblr, where the affective aspect of the most shared messages on the Paris attacks were less fixated with fear and anxiety, but rather more focused on reason and calm.

The famous phrase ‘the medium is the message’, coined by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s, describes how a message is a product shaped by the character of its medium. This notion is visible in Parikka’s (2012) discussion of how archive dynamics are contingent on a material’s ability to persist in time; digital files need compatible software (and hardware) to be accessed; written documents that decay and withstand developments in language become altered in their character with time. However, the medium also shapes the message in the present. Tumblr as a social media platform is distinct in two main ways: the actual technological structure of the user interface, and the social community and culture that this has produced. Marquart (2010) characterises Tumblr as a form of microblog, having a
‘real-time characteristic’ that ‘allows stories to spread faster than ever before’ (2010: 71). Its ‘reblog’ function allows instantaneous sharing of content, let users add optional comments and hashtags. However, Tumblr differs from other microblogs such as Twitter, as its design integrates comments as part of the main post in a way where other users can comment on the original post, but also on the comments, outlining the history of the spread and transformation of the content. This creates a space compatible with the notion of the digital archive in constant motion — ‘Freezing an electronic image means freezing its refresh circle’ (Ernst, in Parikka, 2012: 117). Tumblr demonstrates this particularly well as not only the meaning of posts, but also the literal content of them is easily altered in their circulation as comments are given as much space as the original message. Parikka argues that this tendency marks fundamental changes in software culture: ‘the key characteristic of digital memory is the coupling of degeneration with regeneration’ (2012: 119-120). The virality of the Paris attacks can also be understood in these terms. Some of the most popular entries that were circulated on the topic of the attacks were ones providing information for people in the affected area and what others could do to help, with additional information added onto the main post by other users as it was shared; demonstrating how the ever-changing and mutating character of the viral contributes to a modern concept of the archive.

The other side of the kind of virality seen on Tumblr comes from its archive dynamics created by the very specific collective identity that is shared and constantly rearticulated by its users. The culture and identity of an online space is heavily influenced by its technological structure — for example, while Facebook is designed for sharing personal content with immediate friends and family, Tumblr lets the user follow and interact with any other user they may find interesting. This generates an online culture that is much less centred on the individual that creates or shares content, and more on the content itself, resulting in a space where opinions can be expressed and ventilated with less perceived personal judgment from other users. There are many different blog ‘niches’ and sub-communities within Tumblr (Marquart, 2010), but social justice issues like feminism and anti-racism are generally seen as important and tend to cut across the diversity of blog types. For instance, Fink and Miller (2013) show how Tumblr provides a unique space for trans and gender non-conforming self-expression:
It is these specific elements of the Tumblr interface that have allowed the site to host the “disidentificatory” (Muñoz 1999) work of queer users wrestling trans sexualities out of a white, middle-class, cisgender (non-trans), mass-consumption paradigm and toward an individually tailored, polyvocal, margin-based, and personalized form of distribution. (Fink and Miller, 2014: 612)

When it comes to coverage and commentary on news events, *Tumblr* users often make a point out of telling ‘the other side of the story’, circulating counter-narratives and critical comments on ‘mainstream’ news coverage of events. This makes *Tumblr* very interesting to study as an archive, as it actively works to destabilise the idea of the ‘bureaucratic archive’ (Gane and Beer, 2008) and the power relations attached to it — claiming the power to tell stories neglected by the mainstream. Hashtag activism as a new way of mobilising awareness and social action has been written about quite extensively (Bennett, 2014; Stache, 2014), but *Tumblr* has different ways of circulating messages and spreading awareness. Instead of using particular hashtags, entire posts, containing text, videos, audio or images are ‘reblogged’ and commented on. The usage and circulation of user-made animated GIF images is common on *Tumblr*, that are, in the context of events such as the Paris attacks, often remediated snippets from videos that summarise or illustrate a point that the user agrees with. For example, a GIF from CNN where a religious scholar answers the question ‘Does Islam promote violence?’ (Fig. 1) has been circulated as a message against the anxieties following the Paris attacks, and presently has 120,932 ‘notes’.
The *Tumblr* mediascape on the Paris attacks ranges from simple messages such as ‘TERRORISM HAS NO RELIGION. PASS IT ON.’ (currently has 99,723 ‘notes’), information posts — that could not have reached the same level of virality on a medium like *Twitter*, due to its limit of 140 characters per post — to more explicit counter-narratives, like posts addressing the unequal mediation of terrorism, using the event of the Paris attacks to draw attention to recent terror attacks that happened in other places which did not get the same amount of media coverage. Humour, and the remediation of messages from other media platforms are also used to create critical commentary — like a screen shot of a Tweet poking fun at the way the popular understanding of what constitutes terrorism is informed by racism and xenophobia (Fig. 2). This image has been taken out of its original context on *Twitter* and has in its circulation on *Tumblr* gained more ‘notes’ than the original tweet had ‘retweets’ and ‘likes’.

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*Fig. 1: Does Islam Promote Violence? ([tumblr.com](https://tumblr.com), 2015)*

Religious scholar Reza Aslan answers CNN’s question, “*Does Islam promote violence?*”

#reza aslan  #islamophobia  #islamophobia

120,932 notes
This shows how some messages, through their remediation in different contexts, resonate better with some digital archives than others, coming to mean something different than it was originally intended to. In this case, Tumblr as an online community that largely identifies as advocates of social justice adopted this message as its own, to reinforce this identity.

In conclusion, the modern digital archive is a multifaceted one: negotiating content through online communities and identities — shaping what goes ‘viral’ and where. Perhaps it is more fitting to talk about not one virality, but multiple, where different meanings of online content co-exist.
References


The Problematisation of Public Understanding of Science Surveys

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Introduction

Over the past several decades there have been numerous attempts to ascertain information regarding both public opinion towards, and knowledge of, science. This has been carried out in an attempt to gauge what has come to be known as the ‘public understanding of science’ (PUS). Explorations of the relationship between science and society are by no means a recent phenomenon though, with attempts as far back as the 19th century to gauge public understanding noted (Yearley, 2005). Furthermore, the issue has been a recognisable part of the cultural and intellectual milieu of Western culture for centuries, with novels such as Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein and H.G. Well’s The Island of Dr. Moreau offering social commentaries on scientific practice; questioning what it means to be human and warning against the dangers of ‘playing God’. Ongoing concerns about the safety of nuclear power plants, particularly since the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan, have raised fresh questions regarding the safety of nuclear technologies, risks, and the issue of public trust in scientific authority. This article attempts to explore and examine some of the problems that the use of PUS surveys raise. It will proceed as follows: firstly, it will consider the methodology of the survey techniques employed before proceeding to a theoretical consideration of the PUS surveys. Throughout it argues and hopes to demonstrate the following: that the methodological approach behind the PUS surveys is inherently flawed and limited;

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that it obscures the fact that any individuals’ understanding of science is mediated by a host of socio-cultural factors; that such factors impact not only upon an individual’s cognitive understanding of science but also on the weight of importance accorded by them to scientific authority; that behind the PUS surveys lie assumptions regarding the superiority of scientific knowledge as compared to other, lay knowledge forms; and, finally, that the PUS surveys serve as an ideological instrument to buttress and legitimate scientific authority above other knowledge forms. Firstly though, it is important to consider some of the methodological issues raised by the survey-based method.

**Methodological Issues**

PUS surveys arguably suffer from the same methodological flaws that are common to the survey approach in general. Firstly, there is the issue of bias with regards to the surveys themselves. Surveys are carried out on the behalf of, and are normally financially supported by, ‘…sponsors such as government, business and scientific institutions’ (Bauer et al., 2007: 79). Furthermore, there have been moves by corporations to engage with publics with regards to PUS as a strategic PR tactic (Bauer et al., 2007). As a result of this, there are very real risks of bias in the process with administrators/interviewers (knowingly or not) directing the survey toward a particular, preferred end. This is not to suggest that such a problem is unique to quantitative survey-based research, however, as the same issue can apply with more qualitative approaches. Putting this aside for the moment, even if we assume intelligent, ethical, self-aware researchers, with no vested interests (something arguably not possible), there are obvious issues regarding the potential bias of samples. For example, those who tend to answer such surveys are likely to be those with a greater interest and enthusiasm in the subject matter to begin with, thus immediately biasing the sample. There is also the issue of bias with regards to surveying using new electronic media technologies such as the Internet and social networking sites. As there is not equal access to such tools in any given population, the likelihood of sample bias in any surveys using such technologies is high. Next, there is the potential for respondents to give answers that they feel are the ‘expected’ or ‘correct’ ones to give, even if such answers do not necessarily reflect their genuine beliefs or views. This can be as result of interviewer bias or pressure (knowingly or not), or can be due to the
respondent’s fear of appearing to look ignorant. Such a factor is often present and has been a concern in some of the most notable PUS studies. For example, in their renowned survey, Durant et al (1989) admit that, ‘people possibly felt pressured to give false answers’ (Durant et al: 1989: 12). Furthermore, such surveys often attempt to ascertain the public’s knowledge of both the ‘facts’ and ‘processes’ of scientific endeavour. But such a task is by no means an easy one, particularly with regards the latter of these in which, ‘the issues are more abstract and less clear cut, and the task of formulating sensible and serviceable questions is inherently difficult’ (Durant et al., 1989: 12). Though no doubt a difficult task, for surveys of any public understanding of science to be valid, there is an absolute necessity to provide clear, unambiguous questions that clearly allow for the separate measurement of the relevant concepts. The potential conflation of concepts will only lead to misleading measurements and conclusions. This can be a particular problem when attempting to compare results cross-culturally. Any survey attempts to do so must ensure that all appropriate concepts and their relevant indicators are indeed comparable and that like is being compared with like. Failure to do so means that any attempted comparisons would be meaningless. Next, the way in which the questions are worded, often in a quiz-style format, ‘necessarily assumes that scientists are in the right and that all that is in question is the extent to which the public has ‘got’ the right answer’ (Yearley, 2005: 118). Such an assumption, traditionally referred to as the ‘deficit’ model and prevalent in the early PUS studies, arguably neglects the extent to which scientific knowledge is itself contested and debatable, with competing opinions not just amongst scientists themselves, but also between science and other competing forms of knowledge held by lay persons. This is more clearly illustrated by considering the matter of the ‘weighting’ of questions to be included in surveys. How many ‘marks’ are awarded for a particular question, which questions are considered most ‘essential’ to know, and how ‘grave’ an error it is to be ignorant of certain questions all rest on assumptions regarding the importance of said knowledge, and, ‘assumes an abstract, uncontentious, universal knowledge’ (Michael and Brown, 2010: 11). As such, a contrary position is reached, where the social negotiation of what constitutes ‘legitimate’ scientific knowledge obscures and denies competing epistemological claims. This, in turn, reduces the potential for other knowledge(s) to be evaluated for falsification and is thus, itself, unscientific. Whilst it can perhaps be argued that there is merit to examining any deficiencies of a particular knowledge, it is worth pausing to
consider who decides what counts as a ‘deficiency’ and how it ought to be remedied? This is a point that shall be returned to later on. An obvious weakness has come to be recognised in the original surveys; that the approach neglects to consider the influence of a myriad of factors that makes up person’s identity in how they might view, understand and relate to science. Factors such as political orientation, class, gender, cultural values and religious beliefs all play a role in shaping an individual’s views towards science. The earlier survey approach based on the deficit model saw science itself as unproblematic and implied that, ‘all public disagreements with science are due to ignorance’ (Yearley, 2005: 119). But this is certainly not always the case and it is this that shall be examined next.

**Problems with the Deficit Model**

One of the problems of many PUS surveys is that they assume ignorance on behalf of publics, but this is not always necessarily the case. To see this more clearly, one need only consider, for example, the attitudes of many Americans in the United States with regards to the theory of evolution. Whilst the Darwinian theory of evolution is a widely held tenet of modern science, a survey there revealed that, ‘In the U.S., only 14 percent of adults thought that evolution was "definitely true," while about a third firmly rejected the idea’ (Owen, 2006: 4). And this was contrasted with survey data from Europe, which suggested that, ‘more than 80 percent of adults surveyed said they accepted the concept of evolution’ (Owen, 2006: 5). The reason behind such a difference is arguably the result of the fact that the United States has, on the whole, far higher levels of religiosity than Europe. So, for the individuals surveyed there, their views toward, and acceptance of, a central belief of modern science was interpreted through a lens of religious belief. In the case of the United States, that dominant religion is Christianity, and so we can consider that those of religious persuasion prioritise religious knowledge and understanding at the expense of modern scientific explanations. But the point here is that other religions/world views may possess alternative theories that compete with and challenge accepted scientific wisdom. This is illustrated by the fact that, ‘The only country included in the study where adults were more likely than Americans to reject evolution was Turkey’ (Owen, 2006: 7). Though officially a secular nation, Turkey is a country whose history has been shaped by, and the majority of whose population still follows, Islam. These survey results
suggest that it, ‘might be more accurate to say that they disagree with or are doubtful of the scientific view than that they are ignorant of it’ (Yearley, 2005: 119).

An additional problem following on from this is that behind the surveys stands a tacit assumption that if people know the ‘facts’, they will change their behaviour to the most ‘appropriate’ or ‘rational’ one. This is the line of reasoning behind continuous attempts to inform publics of the dangers of smoking tobacco or drinking alcohol, for example. But, again, such a perspective neglects that individuals may be well aware of the risks involved, fully accept scientific wisdom on such matters and choose not to follow said advice anyway. An example of this is provided by a 1993 PUS survey carried out in China which revealed ‘the Chinese, a nation of smokers, are very well aware that smoking can cause lung cancer and heart disease’ (Gregory, 2001: 13). What such a fact reveals is that the rationales employed by individuals with regards their own life courses are informed by a myriad of considerations, the advice of the scientific establishment being just one of those voices. Such individuals may choose an alternative path in keeping with their own, informed views regarding what they conceive to be ‘the good life’. They thus make use of what is arguably a different yet equally valid form of rationality.

Furthermore, the traditional deficit based approach neglects the extent to which individuals may tacitly possess scientific knowledge. Although individuals may perhaps be unable to articulate answers to specific questions on the spot, that does not necessarily mean that they have no such knowledge. For, as Miller (2001) points out,

‘in real-life, stressful situations—as on an adventure holiday, where knowing that boiling water will kill viruses but antibiotics won’t, and that this knowledge can be the difference between life and death—humans are very resourceful. Among their resources will be scientific knowledge gained at school and in later life—knowledge often deeply buried through lack of use or day-to-day relevance…’ (Miller, 2001: 118).

From such a perspective, it can be seen that the PUS surveys are unable to detect such tacit knowledge. The traditional PUS survey approach, then, neglects a number of factors that mediate any individual’s cognitive uptake of, and acceptance of, science. They also miss a more overtly political dimension that is more clearly seen through an examination of two case studies. It is to these that we now turn.
The Neglect of Identity Politics: The Need for Context

Mei-Fang’s (2009) study concerning the attitudes of the indigenous Yami tribe on Orchid Island, Taiwan further highlights the complexity of attempts to gauge any public understanding of science. The Yami are presented in contrast to the predominantly Taiwanese migrant workforce at Taipower, the state-owned nuclear waste depository located on the Island. Mei-Fang, through a series of focus groups found significant differences amongst the two groups, with the Yami far more concerned with the potential risks of the depository. This is arguably the result of the Yami’s cultural heritage and history. The Yami are native to Orchid Island and have become the minority group after numerous waves of migration by Han Chinese through the centuries. With the formation of modern-day Taiwan essentially legitimising the rule of an ethno-Chinese group to which the Yami do not belong, the result has been an uneasy tension between the Yami and the state. This is well known with the Taiwanese community and,

‘For many of the Taiwanese migrants, the Yami’s invariable objection to the nuclear waste repository is shaped by an exclusionary attitude toward anything foreign—i.e., a tribal resistance to the dominant Taiwanese society’ (Mei-Fang, 2009: 167).

Distrust towards what are perceived to be agents of the state can be further seen to shape the Yami’s perceptions. For example, in response to concerns regarding potentially harmful exposure to radiation, state authorities arranged for health checks. Yet, one particular Yami housewife’s comments neatly capture the problem:

‘I had the health check once, but I really don’t know whether the result is serious or not. The doctors said, “It is OK. Your result is normal. You can be relieved.” But how could I know that they did not lie to us?’ (Mei-Fang: 2009: p: 171).

The challenging of expert authority and legitimacy is perhaps understandable and natural: it is a way for individuals to buttress their already existing cognitive schemata and world views. Indeed, Turner (2001) states that:

‘When issues arise in which there are grounds for questioning the legitimacy of expert claims, they may, along with the legitimacy of the experts, come under
public scrutiny and lose legitimacy. Indeed, this process, call it ‘ politicization’, is a normal fact of political life, and it goes both ways’ (Turner, 2001: 142).

But Mei-Fang’s study not only reveals tension between the Yami and the state, but also highlights differences within the group itself. In one of the discussions, the conversation turns to the topic of increasing rates of cancer among the Yami. Now, while the majority of the Yami focus group participants attribute this to the depository, ‘a woman argues that the causes of cancer might involve the factors of eating habits and sanitation problems’ (Mei-Fang, 2009: 171). But this woman’s views are shouted down and met with hostility by the other participants (Mei-Fang, 2009). Such an act can perhaps be considered as a way for the other participants to reassert and buttress cultural authority and maintain community cohesion in the face of a perceived threat - this time a dissenting voice from within. This highlights another weakness of the PUS surveys, that their tendency to treat publics as homogenous groups can mask individual dissenters. Only through the use of a more qualitative approach, in this instance focus groups, was Mei-Fang (2009) able to uncover such information.

The Arrogance of Science

A careful reading of Durant et al.’s (1989) classic PUS survey raises more issues. In their opening paragraph they state, ‘Why should anyone care about the public understanding of science? First, science is arguably the greatest achievement of our culture, and people deserve to know about it’ (Durant et al., 1989: 11). But is this really the case? First of all, even if science is a great cultural achievement it is unclear why any particular public would deserve or need to know about it anymore than other forms of cultural knowledge. Even if we accept the need for greater scientific knowledge as a prerequisite for modern democracy as Durant et al (1989) suggest, we must recognise that such a notion rests on an assumption which privileges democracy as a cultural ideal. Without explicit mention of any meta-criterion through which to adjudicate between the ‘worth’ of differing cultural ‘achievements’, their assertion lays unsupported and requires buttressing. What we need to guard against is the type of tacit arrogance displayed by scholars such as Miller (2001) who argues:
'We do not want a public understanding of science political correctness in which the very idea that scientists are more knowledgeable than ordinary citizens is taboo. Scientists and lay people are not on the same footing where scientific information is concerned, and knowledge, hard won by hours of research, and tried and tested over the years and decades, deserves respect’ (Miller, 2001: 118).

Though this statement is of course true at a certain level, without explicating criterion through which to assert the contrary, the reverse is also true: that many scientists are not on the same footing as laypersons with regards to whichever particular form of lay knowledge informs their life-course. Many of those knowledge forms have been handed down from generation to generation and arguably deserve just as much respect. Secondly, such a sentiment not only implies a superior from of knowledge but also neglects that in a world increasingly filled with multicultural societies, notions of ‘our culture’ can be difficult to substantiate (unless one is content to talk in terms of some overall ‘human’ culture).

We can consider, then, that PUS surveys present scientific knowledge as unproblematic and value-neutral as a form of rhetorical discourse that serves to legitimate science itself. But such a view is without explicit warrant and neglects that science is, ‘situated always amongst competing meanings and explanations, and never […] in a domain free from political, economic, and cultural processes’ (Terry in Halberstam and Livingston, 1995: 135). Science itself is a cultural artefact shaped by context-specific forces particular to its environment. It is not value-neutral but can be considered as an institution which serves to control, maintain, and regulate existing ideological and cultural norms, values and discourses. This can be further illustrated by considering the cases of Intersex individuals.

**Crossing Boundaries: Intersex and the Social Construction of Categories**

There are individuals born into society with either a combination of male and female genitalia or ambiguous genitalia of some manner. There has been a tendency for the medical establishment to treat such biological variations as defects or aberrations that need to be ‘corrected’. Now, a decision is made at the time of birth for such individuals concerning which sex they will be designated to, depending on the particular development of their genitalia. After such a decision is made, said
individuals are raised as belonging to that particular sex. However, many of these individuals end up deeply unhappy, some suicidal, as they feel that they have been designated incorrectly. For some, they would have preferred to be designated to the opposite sex whilst others reject the notion of pigeonholing altogether. The important point here is that:

‘nature doesn’t decide where the category of “male” ends and the category of “intersex” begins, or where the category of “intersex” ends and the category of “female” begins. Humans decide’ (ISNA, 2008: 6).

Human scientists make a conscious decision to assign individuals in accordance to existing norms and values, thus maintaining the status quo and regulating what is ‘natural’ - in this case a binary gender which perpetuates the dominant, existing patriarchal structure. This is not meant to imply some vision of the evil, manipulative scientist serving existing powers though. Scientists themselves are humans influenced and shaped by the prevailing discourses and social milieu of their times. What this tells us is that claims that science is a value-neutral institution do not hold up. This is, and always will be, the case. Even if some supposedly ethical, self-aware and reflexive practitioner recognises this and tries to adopt some neutral position, the cherishing of neutrality is itself a value. Instead, consideration of the discourses surrounding intersex should be understood as always historically specific and malleable. Creighton and Liao (2004), for example, show that, ‘The existence of people who are neither ‘all male’ nor ‘all female’ has long been recognized in many societies’ (Creighton and Liao, 2004: 1). Attitudes of whatever constitutes the medical establishment in any period towards intersex individuals have varied throughout time and regions across the globe and as such must be considered in its specific social, cultural and historical contexts. In some tribes the birth of an intersex child was treated as a joyous occasion. In others they were believed to be the possessors of supernatural powers resulting from the combination of male and female energies. Many would perhaps be surprised that there were numerous theological and medical writings in the ‘twelfth-century[…]that characterize sex as continuous rather than binary. Unlike later, twentieth-century contentions that an intermediate intersexed state is not truly possible’ (Preves, 2002: 535). Today, in our particular time and culture, surgeons treat the birth of an intersex child as a problem to be fixed. The point of this for our discussion is that any survey which attempts to gauge a public’s understanding of science is flawed if it rests on an
assumption that the knowledge being tested for is universal and unproblematic. Knowledge(s) are always contextually dependent and provisional.

Conclusions
As has hopefully been made clear, there are a number of problems that PUS surveys raise. There are methodological issues; there is the need for increased cultural and contextual sensitivity; a greater appreciation and understanding of how identity politics shapes attitudes towards science and technology, and the need to recognise that we are witnessing a clash of cultural boundaries that amount to an ongoing war of knowledges. There are to be no easy answers though, with each camp likely to be reluctant to engage with the other side. There is a need for greater transparency, reflexivity and most importantly, humility, in any future debates by all actors involved, for, ‘As long as science and society are not entirely identical spheres, the issues of the public’s understanding of science, and of scientists’ understanding of the public, are here to stay’ (Bauer et al., 2007: 90). Only such an approach provides any hope of an ethical dialogue going forward. In the coming decades, with the predicted developments in biotechnologies, this will arguably be needed more than ever.

References


In What Ways Can Feminist Arguments in Favour of ‘A Woman’s Right to Choose’ Come Into Tension With the Disability Movement?

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Women and disabled people have occupied similar positions within society throughout history due to their explicit differences to the universal and able-bodied male. As a result of this marginalized position, both defend the rights they have gained vehemently, as well as refuse to allow any reduction or loopholes within them, therefore producing unavoidable and rigid tensions between the two. The ‘right to choose’ argument according to feminists is a matter of championing reproductive control, and allowing women the right to terminate a pregnancy if they wish. On the other hand, disability activists claim that feminists neglect to take into account the aborting of ‘impaired’ foetuses when advocating abortion rights, therefore resulting in selective abortion. This essay will begin by outlining both the feminist and disability activists’ core positions, which is where the conflicts begin. Also, a factor upon which they appear to both agree on will be examined, which is rooted in the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 1992. Next, the motivations for terminating the pregnancy will be looked into -- where feminists claim reasons are not important. Subsequently, the implications of allowing women ‘the right to choose’ will be considered as a strong tension, due to the threat of eugenics for the disabled. After this, prenatal screening and

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technologies will be analysed. Finally, the notion of choice itself will be debated to conclude that regardless of society or medicine’s influences, a woman should possess the right to choose.

The core of the feminist argument is grounded in a greater picture of female independence. In allowing women the ‘right to choose’ they will be empowered to gain bodily integrity, which is paramount to the advancement of their societal positions. Cynthia Lewiecki explains that ‘reproductive control has been a significant element in women’s ability to secure individual rights’ (2011: 65), and many feminists compare these individual rights to human rights as both are as equally indisputable in securing identity and individuality. A fundamental turning point for this group was Roe vs. Wade which Laurence Tribe claims asserted a ‘principle of self-ownership’, by allowing women in the USA to terminate a pregnancy within the first two trimesters. It therefore created a zone of privacy in which the state could only intrude upon with ‘compelling justification’ (ibid: 70).

One of the key ways they outline their argument is to compare it with the pervasive conception of ‘pregnant women only in relation to the “maternal environment” she provides for the foetus’ (Chavkin 1992: 194). There is a heavy emphasis on the unborn, which has been exacerbated by technological accomplishments, foetal therapy and perinatal medicine (ibid 1992). Consequently, women have been seen to only exist in relation to the foetus and are therefore portrayed as mere vessels and carriers, which is exemplified in the penalisation of women undertaking ‘harmful’ activities whilst pregnant. For example, in 1980, a Michigan court upheld that a mother could be sued by her son due to the discolouration of his teeth as a result of antibiotics ingested whilst he was in the womb (Westra 2014). The implication from such court cases is that many deem the foetus to have distinct rights that are in conflict with the pregnant woman. However, the feminist argument in favour of ‘a right to choose’ counters this claim by stating that the woman’s rights outweighs that of the foetus, due to its lack of citizen status.

In direct challenge with the feminist argument, disability rights activists firmly state that whilst a woman may possess the right to choose, aborting a foetus based on
impairments is unacceptable. Terminating a pregnancy based on the skin colour of a foetus is viewed by most of society with complete disgust and it is deemed to be ‘irresponsible to use scientific means to reinforce racial prejudice’ (Hubbard 2006: 187). Consequently, disability activists seek to demonstrate how selective abortion due to ‘defects’ is just as negligent. Their view is based on the social model for disability, claiming that the core reason for aborting disabled foetuses is that the awareness level around disabled people in society is very low. Additionally, the unfamiliarity with the unknown causes this marginalised group to be treated as contagious due to the reluctance of society to face its own vulnerability (Hubbard 2006). This is demonstrated through terms used by physicians, which portray disabled people as tragic and a drain on society, for example ‘avoiding pain’, or, ‘reducing the burden of care’. Loaded phrases such as these are often used in counseling or genetic testing and presuppose that women will choose to abort ‘defective’ foetuses as ‘rational health-care’ decisions (Boardman 2011). Whilst both sides of the choice debate are in defense of traditionally marginalized groups, the fundamental threat to disability lobbyists is that of eugenics: eliminating disabled people from the human race. The risk of eugenics ‘hangs over disabled people’ due to the increased development and use of technologies that advise who is a valid enough human being to live (Sherry 1966: 772). The crux of the argument here is that health and physical competency are not strong enough standards by which we can measure a potential human being.

The ‘right to choose’ debate largely revolves around the grounds cited for aborting the foetus. According to feminists, no one reason is better than another as it is simply a woman’s choice. For example, a woman seeking abortion due to its impact on her career is as equally justified as a woman who has been raped; whether we consider one to be more ethical than the other is entirely irrelevant and should not influence her decision (Sharp and Earle, 2010). Conversely, disabled activists such as Nancy Press see this view as naïve, as it is the ‘societal phenomenon’ of aborting impaired foetuses that sends a ‘disparaging message to disabled people’ (Nelson 2000: 221). She is therefore suggesting that abortion has a much larger impact on society as a whole, and thus the reasons for abortion must be considered.
This impact is demonstrated through one survey conducted by Uslaner and Weber, which found that 83% of respondents believed abortion to be more acceptable in cases of ‘birth defects’, compared to 44% who thought it was adequate if a woman does not wish to have any more children (1980). If reasons truly did not matter, then these results would not show that abortion on the grounds of impairments is more socially acceptable. These results further reflect the disproportional influence physicians have on the grounds for abortion, as studies such as one by Katz Rothman show, the majority of genetic counselors believe abortion due to impairments is a ‘good thing’, and is therefore encouraged (Rothman, 1994). However, by grounding their argument in the social model of disability, some activists challenge that feminists exploit society’s fear and hatred of disabled people in order to advocate the right to abortion (Kallianes and Rubenfeld 1997). The feminist response to this reinstates that whilst the reasons to abort may be seen as morally unacceptable to the disability activists, it is a woman’s right to choose and therefore outweighs any discrepancies over the legitimacy of said reasons.

It is undeniable that there are significant tensions between these two groups as they originate from exclusively distinctive principles. However, they both agree that the time constraints on abortions that the UK law enforces are discriminatory. Under the current provisions of the 1992 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, abortions are not permitted beyond 24 weeks. On the other hand, this restriction is lifted when there is evidence of ‘severe handicapping’. This is not an isolated case with around 170 countries permitting late abortions on the grounds of ‘severe impairment’ (Drake, 1998). From a feminist perspective this law hinders a woman’s rights: if it is lawful to terminate a pregnancy after 24 weeks on the grounds of ‘deficiency’, then this should also operate for all abortions, as some scholars assert that no reason is more legitimate than another (Sharp and Earle, 2010). Furthermore, this law transgresses everything disability activists stand for. It is explicitly discriminatory towards the disabled, as the ‘normal' foetuses are warranted more rights simply because they are more able-bodied according to physicians and society. It is also notable that some disability activists accept that in cases where the foetus will die very soon after birth, or suffer horrendously, that it would be morally cruel to force the mother to carry the baby until gestation.
Nevertheless, the nature of this law is open to abuses, with cases of foetuses being aborted after the 24 week period due to minor ‘defects’ such as cleft palate (Disability Now, 2012). Therefore, whilst both groups disagree with this law, they are still ultimately conflicting. Feminists want to see the law encapsulate women seeking abortion for any reason and disability activists reject any law that reinforces the discriminatory binaries of able and disabled.

Another way tensions between feminists and disability activists arise is in the implications that occur from giving women the right to choose. Whilst feminists argue that this right allows women full bodily autonomy and independence, disability lobbyists claim that this focus is too narrow. They argue that the debate is not just about the individual but the implications for the collective, and the threat of eugenics, which permeates the lives of the disabled (Nelson, 2000). At the centre of this issue is the prevention of ‘impaired’ foetuses being carried to term, and therefore, eventual eradication of disabled people in society. Whilst this is not a new threat, with eugenics being at its apotheosis during Nazi Germany in the 1930s, the justifications used for such policies throughout history are cited as being related to principles applied now. For example, Nazi Germany claimed that disabilities ‘enfeeble the race’ and allowing ‘defects’ to be passed on through children and reproduction is negligent — as well as stressed the case of a ‘defective free’ society (Hubbard, 2006: 189). Furthermore, there is a line of argument suggesting that once a pregnancy with impairments is decided to be carried to term, parents must assume a ‘moral obligation’ which society should not feel obliged to pay for (Proctor, 1999: 183). This is reflected in today’s culture, in which medical practitioners and physicians refer to the ‘burden of care’, and see selectively aborting fetuses with impairments as a way of reducing this. Moreover, this links to common misconceptions used to encourage selective abortion: that caring for a disabled child causes family and marital difficulties due to the stress and emotional strain of this distorted household dynamic (Parens and Asch, 1999).

On the other hand, John Harris reflects the feminist position on this issue, stating that it is merely a matter of ‘exercising choice in reproduction’ (Harris, 2001: 383). Therefore, the feminist position returns to its original claim; that freedom of
choice and independence is the main implication. Consequently, the fear of eugenics is possibly misplaced; it is not that physicians are trying to exterminate disabled people from society, but allowing women to freely decide their futures with all the necessary information available -- whether another person chooses to agree is insignificant. Moreover, the freedom of choice is assumed to apply both to terminating a pregnancy and carrying it to gestation. Thus, many feminists believe a woman should be free to give birth to a child with disabilities, and be allowed all the help and care any other woman would. Subsequently, disability activists claim that feminists neglect this side of the debate is refuted. It is not an attempt to eliminate disabled people from society, but women exercising their reproductive autonomy.

The threat of eugenics is exacerbated by the advances in technologies and testing, which feminists claim assist women in making more informed choices, based on developments in the availability of information. However, disability activists argue that this information does not free women at all, but constrains them further by allowing physicians and scientists to exercise large quantities of power and reinforce society’s prejudices. As Hubbard proposes ‘scientists and physicians [are] engaging in developing the means to decide which lives are worth living, and who should and should not inhabit the world’ (Hubbard, 2006: 196). In other words, it is argued that technology is intercepting with nature and deciding who is, and is not, worthy enough to live2. Whilst physicians believe they are preventing human suffering by creating preventative tests, it is possible that concepts of impairment and disability are in fact being constructed by these technoscientific practices (Tremain, 2005). This supports the concept that this technology is doing nothing more than reinforcing societal prejudices and discrimination. However, whilst it opens the risk for exploitation, it has undoubtedly opened up a ‘field of choice, prudence and responsibility’ (Rose, 2009: 69). It has, therefore, allowed women to become primary decision-makers, but also to accept accountability for the consequences of those decisions.

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2 This section of the disability debate does, however, cause it to be linked with the ‘pro-life’ group. Whilst one denies abortion entirely, the other denies abortion primarily on the grounds of defects. Yet due to their rejection of screenings and prenatal testing, disability lobbyists lament the connection between the two due to their distinctive differences.
It is important to note that both groups being discussed are not homogenous. A feminist may support the right to choose; yet this does not mean that they necessarily advocate abortion. Similarly, for some disabled activists reprogtenetics is both a progressive and harmful presence. Reprogenetics is a reproductive and genetic technology involving the screening of embryos in order to test them and reveal whether they are carrying the ‘faulty’ gene; the genetically modified embryo is then implanted into the woman in order to prevent the disabling gene being passed through the family (Pray, 2008). However, some disabled women claim that this adds pressure, as medicine encourages them to prevent transmission of their disabilities, yet they view their lives with these disabilities positively. They therefore cannot ‘evaluate the life of any potential child’ that may have the same disorder differently, and the decision becomes blurred (Boardman, 2011: 48). However, this does arguably avoid the process of prenatal diagnosis, and the decision surrounding termination.

The accuracy of prenatal screening is another factor used to counter selective abortion. It is not possible to identify all disabilities as some develop at birth, or are the result of an accident, or develop with old age. Additionally, even if the impairment can be detected, the severity of particular conditions cannot necessarily be established. For example, in California thousands of pregnant women are tested for Neural Tube Defects (NTD), yet these tests generate large numbers of false positive results -- thus suggesting the foetus has NTD when it does not. Moreover, even if more testing is undertaken and the foetus does in fact have NTD, the severity cannot be identified (Hubbard, 2006). Therefore, it is argued that the technological information that feminists claim to have helped women make informed choices is limited and potentially harmful. Genetic screening is also seen to exaggerate and emphasize impairments in favour of the ‘whole’ and able-bodied, as well as explicitly undermining the worth of disabled people’s lives (Kallianes and Rubenfeld, 1997). Society and science puts all pregnant women with potentially impaired foetuses in a difficult position. If a woman refuses screening then she is seen as irresponsible. If she refuses to abort the foetus she is seen as cruel, yet if the termination is carried out then she is essentially saying a life with a disability is not worth living. This is crucial to the emotional pressure and turmoil such a situation can cause and the debate
surrounding abortion itself seems to neglect that; the choice is not an easy one, irrespective of the reasons.

Disability activists argue that there is actually no ‘choice’, as women are being continually influenced by society’s prejudices when making their decisions. If an individual’s actions are a result of wider influences, then it becomes extremely hard to distinguish if they are their own independent choices. Therefore, if a woman’s decision to terminate a pregnancy is the result of ‘the distorting influences of a medical establishment’, which is claimed to be ‘deeply prejudiced against disabled people’, then they dispute it is not in a woman’s best interest and thus should not be permitted (Sharpe and Earle, 2002: 142). Nonetheless, this has very little impact where the feminist argument is concerned. It is self-evident and unavoidable that our beliefs, preferences and attitudes depend upon our social, political and cultural situations. It is therefore impossible to differentiate between the choices that resulted from external influences and those that did not. Moreover, if disability activists claim that women are merely adhering to medical norms and internalising the concept of the ‘whole able bodied male’, due to the influence of societies fear of the vulnerable, then it seems naïve to think preventing women terminating unwanted pregnancies will change any of that (Lewiecki, 2011: 68). The women’s movement is aware of how temperamental society is, in the sense that the rights they have attained can be removed at any minute. Consequently, an attempt to limit those in any way will simply be confronted with intense resistance.

This essay began by outlining the two groups main arguments in order to show that whilst both are born out of a desire to vocalise a marginalized group, their core opinions on abortion are entirely different. It was then established that both groups agree that the UK law is discriminatory in its time constraints on abortion, yet the reasons behind this were starkly different. Feminists believe that if the ban is lifted for disabled foetuses, then so should it be lifted for any abortion. However, disability activists claimed that is further ostracises disabled people by seeing them as ‘special cases’. Eugenics was then considered as a prevalent implication of selective abortion. However, there is a distinct difference between linking the argument to that of mass-scale extermination in Nazi Germany in the 1930’s and
‘minimizing [disabilities] occurrence in the future’ (Silvers et al., 2001: 373). Moreover, technology and the use of prenatal screening can indeed be seen as a way of contributing to normativity. Nevertheless, this disregards the freedom of choice information has allowed society to exercise. Finally, the attempt to argue that the choice to abort is not at all a result of a woman’s independent choice, but that of society and medicines attempt to reinforce their own prejudices, is flawed. It is not possible to determine if a decision has been influenced by our society, culture, and politics, as nothing acts in a vacuum. Furthermore, these are the very things that make us human and affect our daily lives; therefore to make such a great decision exclusive of them is unreasonable. To conclude, the feminist argument on ‘the right to choose’ will always be in conflict with the disability activists due to opposing basic principles. Moreover, both are thoroughly conscious of how volatile the rights they currently possess are; therefore they will defend their positions exhaustively due to fear of losing the rights they have fought long and hard to advance.

References


Are we living in a late-modern or post-modern society?

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In the following, I seek to offer a contribution to the debate as to whether we are now living in a late modern or postmodern society. However, my intention is not to continue this debate on its own terms, since this has no doubt become a stale and dated enterprise, but to challenge its very foundations. To begin, I will first sketch the broad contours of this debate, examining the claim that we have moved, on both an empirical and philosophical level, beyond modernity to a state of postmodernity. I will then discuss the rebuttal of this argument offered by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, who contend that what we are experiencing is a shift within modernity. Following this, I will then proceed to problematise the foundations of this debate on two main fronts. Firstly, against the claims of societal flux, I will utilise Mike Savage’s criticism of ‘epochalist’ thinking tied to the recent findings of Thomas Piketty to claim that what we are actually seeing is a return to much older structures and patterns. Secondly, I will discuss Latour’s work to highlight and challenge the taken for granted notion of modernity itself. Finally, I will conclude by claiming that the nature of the dispute between late modernity and postmodernity is far too binary, and thus cannot adequately capture the complexities of contemporary society and historical change.

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Modernity vs. Postmodernity

Beginning in the late 1970s, and continuing over subsequent decades, there has been a major debate in the social sciences as to whether Western society has undergone processes of transformation so profound that it can be said to have shifted from a state of modernity to one of postmodernity (Thomas and Walsh, 1998: 363). However, as Lyon (1999: 6) points out, there is often an ambiguity as to whether the terms associated with postmodernity are used to refer to an idea, a cultural experience, a social condition, or a combination of all three. Thus, Shilling and Mellor (2001: 185) offer a helpful distinction between the theory of ‘postmodernity’, which describes an epochal shift from a modern social order to new forms of social life, and ‘postmodernism’, which is more of an aesthetic reflection upon the nature of modernity. For our current purposes, while conscious of the impossibility of completely separating them, I will primarily be focusing on the former. In any case, in order to address this issue as to whether we are living in a late modern or postmodern society, we must first revisit that which these positions claim we have either extended or exceeded: modernity.

In the first instance, Giddens suggests ‘modernity’ refers to the ‘modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence’ (1990: 1). In particular, this is held to have entailed a ruthless break away from the preceding structure of the feudal social order, dissolving a world of tradition, custom and religious worldviews (Harvey, 1995: 12). However, what exactly are these ‘modes of social life or organisation’ that Giddens speaks of?

For ease of exposition, it is perhaps useful to differentiate the foundational institutions of modernity, and the characteristically modern forms of human action and thought (Sorensen and Christiansen, 2013: 301). In terms of the former, some of the key structural features of modern society are: ‘a large and heterogeneous population; a high level of industrialization; a primarily capitalist and market economy; highly specific and structurally organized forms of social differentiation and division; [and] a territorial and administrative system based on the nation-state’ (Thomas and Walsh, 1998: 363). In regards to attitudes towards the world, we can say that modern societies are characterised by: a belief in rationality; an
instrumental view of nature; an increased faith in science and technology; the ascendency of asceticism; and the emergence of culture, belief systems and practices that are primarily consensual, normative and secular (Sorensen and Christiansen, 2013: 31; Turner 1995: 6). In addition, it can be said that modernity, at least at its inception, was considered more of a ‘project’ than simply a historical period (Habermas, 1997); underpinned by a notion of ‘progress’ based on human intervention. Modern society, it is claimed, reached its apex in the nation-state order of industrial society after World War II (Beck and Lau, 2005: 526).

Beginning in the 1960s, however, some came to argue that the whole shape and organisation of modern Western society at the levels of the social, economic, administrative and cultural had undergone such radical disintegration and transformation as to facilitate a further fundamental disjunction: from modernity to postmodernity (Harvey, 1995; Lee, 2006). These arguments pointed to a plethora of forces and developments as responsible for, and evidence of, this transformation: a shift to a globalising post-industrial economy, where the service sector, financial markets and consumption occupy more of a central role than industrial production (Bell, 1973); a huge expansion of information technology, communications systems and global media; increasingly pluralistic, fragmented and heterogeneous cultures and lifestyles; and the declining significance of the nation-state in the face of privatisation, marketisation and internationalisation (Dodd, 1999: 3; Thomas and Walsh, 1998 :364).

Apart from these more tangible structural and cultural changes, Lyotard (1997) famously argued that the emergence of a world beyond modernity had also been brought about by disintegration at a more philosophical level. Contrary to the modernist grand stories of social progress, science and liberation, he contended that nothing can be known with any certainty since all pre-existing epistemic foundations have been shown to be, at best, unreliable or, at worst, interlaced with power. Consequently, he claimed, we should pursue a plurality of ‘little stories’ that focus on heterogeneity and difference. Moreover, he argued that events of the twentieth century – death camps, two world wars, resurgences of ethnic conflict, nuclear bombings – had demonstrated the project of modernity’s unequivocal failure, and so thought it should be abandoned.
In response to this challenge of postmodernity, however, came those who sought to defend the tradition of modernity, albeit in a more sceptical and pessimistic manner. Perhaps the most notable example of this position is seen in Jürgen Habermas, who argued that modernity had not failed but was an ‘unfinished project’, and that ‘we should learn from the aberrations which have accompanied the project of modernity’ and attempt to redeem its unfulfilled promises rather than abandon it completely (Habermas, 1997: 51). Nevertheless, while Habermas defended modernity on more political and philosophical grounds, it is the sociological rebuttals of postmodernity that I wish to focus upon. In particular, as found in the closely related work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, who offered somewhat of a middle ground between these two polar positions in the debate.

**Modernity Renewed?**

While accepting that society has experienced such profound transformation that it can no longer be adequately conceptualised from a purely modern perspective, Beck (1993; 1995) and Giddens (1990; 1995) reject the view that this means we now live in a postmodern society. Instead, they see the changes described earlier – globalisation, post-industrial economy, cultural pluralism, and so on – as symptomatic of a transformation *within* modernity. Indeed, they claim what we are experiencing is an era in which ‘the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before’ (Giddens 1990: 3). More specifically, for both Beck and Giddens it is processes of ‘reflexive modernisation’ that are the motors of change driving this radicalised transformation of modernity (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1995). Nonetheless, there are important differences between the two that are worth reflecting on.

For Giddens, modernity has not been surpassed but developed, detraditionalised and radicalised. Thus, he proposes the notions of ‘late’ and ‘high’ modernity to capture and emphasise this (Giddens 1990, 1995). In his view, it is the same social forces which drove the transition from pre-modern to modern society that are now, in a radicalised form, pushing us into late modernity. One of the key
dimensions to this is the notion of time-space distanciation, which refers to the ‘complex relations between local involvements (circumstances of co-presence) and interaction across distance (the connections of presence and absence)’ (Giddens 1990: 64). He suggests that although present to some extent in traditional societies, before being significantly increased with the advent of modernity, it is in the globalising world of late modernity that distanciation becomes radicalised; enabling relations between local and distant social forms to become increasingly ‘stretched’ (Giddens 1990: 64). In other words, rather than being surpassed, it is only now that modernity is reaching maturation.

Beck (1993; 1995) also shares the view that Western societies have not moved beyond modernity. In Beck’s account, however, it is not so much the case of a radicalised continuation of modernity, but instead the emergence of a new modernity beyond its classical industrial design. Rather than being in late modern society, then, he argues we have moved from first-simple modernity to second-reflexive modernity (Beck, 1995; 2009; Beck and Lau, 2005). Nonetheless, unlike that of postmodernity, the theory of second modernity maintains that there is an overlapping of continuity and discontinuity between first and second modernity (Beck and Lau, 2005: 532). In particular, Beck argues we still share the same ‘basic principles’ of first modernity (rationality, civil rights, progress, equality, functional differentiation), which guarantee the continuity of modernity, but that it is the discontinuous transformations of its ‘basic institutions’ that brings about the transition to reflexive modernity (Beck and Lau, 2005: 532).

Importantly, however, and contra Lyotard, for Beck it is not the failures of modernity that have led to its reconfiguration but on the contrary the unforeseen side effects of successful modernisation (Beck 1993, 1995, 1997). For instance, as an unintended consequence of enormous industrial development, the proliferation of human-induced risks – such as nuclear disaster – have called into question the basic institution of the nation-state; radioactive particles do not respect borders and so undermine the sovereignty of the nation-state, forcing a significant degree of supra-national political cooperation, and thus furthering global interdependence. So, in short, while the modern principle of statehood has
remained intact, the modern institution of the nation-state has been forced to reconfigure.

In any case, what we have seen from both Giddens and Beck is the argument that although there have been profound societal changes, on both a local and global level, these are symptomatic of transformations within (late/second) modernity rather than signifying a world beyond modernity. Nonetheless, I would now like to suggest that the debate as to whether we live in a postmodern or late modern society can be problematised on several fronts.

**Back to the Future**

Savage (2009; 2014) argues that over the past fifty years in sociology (especially in Britain), there has been a tendency towards what he calls ‘epochalist’ thinking. Such thought, he says, can be characterised by an ‘almost constant agitation for detecting new kinds of epochal change and transformation which makes our contemporary times different from anything that comes before’ (Savage, 2014: 596-7). Importantly for our current purposes, examples of this type of thought can be found in the various claims discussed earlier that we used to live in industrial, capitalist, modern society, but now live in post-industrial, globalised, post/late/second-modern society. Indeed, Savage argues that these claims of change have now been around for so long that we should regard them, paradoxically, as a point of stability; a constant amidst the flux. Against this type of thought, however, Savage offers a critical rebuttal of the idea that our present time has somehow left history behind. More recently, drawing on the work of Piketty (2014), Savage (2014) has developed these arguments further, and I would like to examine them as a means to problematise the debate discussed thus far.

In essence, Piketty’s argument is that what we are now seeing is the reassertion of older structures and patterns, history repeating itself, especially in regards to wealth inequality. In particular, after a brief decline during the middle decades of the twentieth century linked to the two World Wars, he suggests that we are returning to a state of affairs whereby a higher proportion of national income is constituted by inherited wealth (accumulated capital) as opposed to labour income.
In response to this, and opposing the picture painted by the epochalists of a rapidly developing world, Savage suggests that this shows how ‘in fact we are becoming rather more like our Victorian forbears than was the case fifty years ago’ (Savage 2014: 598). In this sense, rather than debating whether we are post or late modern, I would suggest the more pertinent issue is the extent to which we are moving towards becoming somewhat pre- or early modern; whether we are going back to the future. Indeed, as Savage asks:

Actually, is Jane Austen’s world so different from ours? Have we really left behind the elitism and pervasive inequality characteristic of aristocratic society and the Belle Époque? Don’t the strategies for wealth accumulation developed by Bill Gates and other billionaires share some common characteristics with the very wealthy of previous centuries? (2014: 597)

What this discussion of epochalism highlights, therefore, is that the whole question as to whether we are living in post or late modern society is inherently problematic; it puts excessive focus on what is new rather than appreciating the persisting influence of broader historical forces. As such, the more historical approach offered by Piketty and Savage offers an important counterbalance against the temptations of ‘presentism’ (Savage 2014: 597); without which we may be blind to see how we have not made progression but are in fact, at least in terms of wealth inequality, experiencing a regression. In any case, I would now like to further problematise this debate by drawing on the work of Latour.

Have We Ever Been Modern?

As Latour provocatively argues, ‘[n]o one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world’ (Latour, 1993: 47). The premise of this argument is that modernity was founded on a strict separation, which Latour calls the Great Divide, between Nature and Culture. This was followed by a process of ‘purification’, whereby phenomena were categorised as either belonging to Nature or to Culture, and thus various domains of knowledge were constituted which concerned themselves with entities that belonged to either side of this Great Divide. For instance, biology as the study of Nature, sociology as the study of Culture. Indeed, he suggests this differentiation and specialisation is
generally seen to be one of modernity’s greatest contributions: it separated science from politics, politics from religion, religion from law, and so on.

For Latour, however, this binary separation is impoverished, reductive and completely false. Echoing his arguments (Latour, 2005) that there are no actors and networks, only actor-networks; and that there are no objects and subjects, only quasi-objects; he suggests there is no Nature and Culture only ‘natures-cultures’ (Latour, 1993: 104). In other words, neither ‘natural’ objects nor ‘social’ subjects are entirely natural or social. Instead, they are always and necessarily hybrids circulating in networks of translation and mediation. For example, Science is not constituted by purely ‘scientific’ entities; it consists of economics, law, government, religion, financial donors, publics, and so on. In short, despite the efforts of purification, it is unpure; it is contaminated, and necessarily so.

If to be modern is to have a strict division between Nature and Culture, then, it is evident claims Latour that we have never been modern. Since, in reality, we have not succeeded in separating things so cleanly. In fact, Latour contends that we have only proliferated the hybrids, such that even more than before it is impossible to live in a non-hybridised world. For example, Latour asks (and answers):

where are we to classify the ozone hole story, or global warming or deforestation? Where are we to put these hybrids? Are they human? Human because they are our work. Are they natural? Natural because they are not our doing. Are they local or global? Both. (Latour, 1993: 50).

Following on from this argument, Latour extends his critique to the ‘postmoderns’, whom he says are foolish since ‘they claim to come after a time that has not even started!’ (Latour, 1993:47). In particular, he claims their biggest mistake is taking modernity at its word. That is to say, for assuming that modernity was a seamless, all-enveloping, totalising and complete environment. For Latour, as we have seen, this is certainly not the case.

Accordingly, I argue this exposes the problematic nature of the debate in question; its binary logic fails to capture the reality in which both simultaneously exist (or perhaps do not exist) and interpenetrate each other. Indeed, as Meštrović argues,
‘contemporary Western cultures exhibit traditional, modern, as well as postmodern characteristics simultaneously in addition to hybrids of these ingredients which appear to be relatively new’ (1998: 165). In this sense, perhaps we should reject the binaristic notion of either post or late modern society, and recognise that contemporary society cannot be reduced to such one-dimensional conceptions.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, my intention has not been to put forward a definitive answer as to whether we live in late modern or postmodern society, since this would be to follow and reinforce the binaristic logic that I have attempted to deconstruct and problematise. Instead, I have highlighted that in order to grasp the nature of the contemporary world, it is undoubtedly essential to focus on both the discontinuities and the continuities. In this sense, I would like to suggest that the two approaches discussed – the epochalists on one side, and what we may call the continuitists on the other – are both equally necessary: perhaps without the epochalists we would still be debating the contours of feudal society, while without the continuitists we would suffer from historical amnesia. For me, therefore, the task is to ensure that these two approaches engage in dialogue, and do not cancel each other out. Thus, instead of grappling the question as to whether we living in a late modern or postmodern society, we should perhaps try to understand how it is that we live in an early, late, post and non-modern world all at the same time.

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