

*Child sexual abuse: Professional and everyday constructions of women and sexuality.*

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Child Sexual Abuse: Professional and Everyday Constructions  
of Women and Sexuality.

Paula Reavey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

The thesis examines issues of sexuality and identity for women who have been sexually abused as children. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with ten professional clinicians, therapists and counsellors and five women survivors of child sexual abuse where constructions of child sexual abuse and sexuality in general were explored. In addition, five selected self-help texts aimed at women survivors of child sexual abuse were analysed in-depth with the specific aim of examining how women's sexuality and identity in relation to their past experience of sexual abuse was understood. A discourse analytic approach was used to examine how women survivors' 'sexuality' was 'situated' in wider discourses of sexuality, in order to locate the significance of gender when speaking of abuse and the effect it has on sexuality and sexual relationships into adulthood. The texts largely constructed survivors' sexuality as psychoanalytically driven towards powerlessness and further victimisation. This was achieved by drawing on individualised yet gendered representations of sexuality, sexual choices and stereotypical depictions of femininity and masculinity. The lack of distinction between 'professional and 'everyday' knowledges on sexual survival show how professional, psychological and everyday discourses are very much sedimented in 'ideological' representations of abuse and sexuality. To conclude, the implications for re-thinking how women survivors' lives and experiences are understood in professional settings and everyday life are discussed with reference to situating narratives of child sexual abuse, women and sexuality in wider representations of gender and heterosexuality.

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## Preface

### Introducing the thesis.

My first interest in 'child sexual abuse' began before starting an undergraduate course in psychology as I was often fascinated by 'abnormal' psychology, which distinguished dangerous minds from healthy ones. Men who were labelled rapists; paedophiles and perverts were clearly in the former category, as they represented the most dangerous and 'sick' section of society. I wanted to become a prison psychologist in order to 'help' men like this, and viewed a career in prison psychology as a 'mission impossible' but a worthwhile pursuit. I believed men like these to be the ultimate test for those who wanted to treat madness and believed whole heartedly in rehabilitation and getting to the 'roots' of their problem.

The concerns that I first had with the topic of child sexual abuse remained a crusade aimed at 'discovering' the reason 'why' - why people do the things they do - why do men abuse and rape, what is it about such individuals that 'make' them this way?

My approach to the study of child sexual abuse thus began its life as a mainstream psychological approach. By carrying out research scientifically, I could more neutrally 'assess' the problem, in order to transcend the 'lynch mob' mentality so often portrayed by the media.

However, as my third year undergraduate dissertation was developing more and more, I began to see how common the 'abuse' of children was. By reading sociological and feminist literature, I began to see a trend that ranged from sexual abuse, to other measures of force used on children, such as smacking, verbal threats, emotional abuse and bullying. All of a sudden, I was faced with a 'context' that situated child sexual abuse and put it into a wider frame of reference. I began to read about how child sexual

abuse was not believed if the number became too great (Cleveland), or why survivors spoke of the years they remained silent. I began to question the paradox that existed between people's hate for sex offenders and the degree of silence surrounding the reporting of abuse (and rape), the blame which was attached to the victim and the way in which features of the victim were used to dismiss a case (less than 10% of abuse cases reach prosecution stage, Smart, 1989). The issue of child sexual abuse began to take on a different form to the one I started out with; it was set in a social context, and a context which not only defined it, but could justify, mitigate and repress it. And yet, the proliferations of abuse stories in the media and in mental health were growing in number all the time.

I began to see a contradiction between what was supposedly taboo, and yet undeniably common. Furthermore, what did psychology make of it? and were institutions dealing with it as a 'social' problem, or one confined to mental health? What was going on when people spoke about and theorised issues of abuse and why were so many people who had experienced it being labelled as mentally unstable? I wondered many times whether this meant that childhood sexual abuse could 'cause' mental illness and a number of other dysfunctions.

On an everyday level as well, the way in which people spoke about abuse, attributed a cause and made sense of it was equally important, as the 'survivors' seemed to be blaming themselves well into adulthood, and how did the victims themselves understand what had occurred? If child sexual abuse was so common, I was then at a loss to see why the problem was being tackled at an individual level, rather than a political one.

My eventual investigation into the psychological literature began with a review of texts on 'adult survivors'. I subsequently became aware of the centrality of therapeutic

literature and its vast library on child sexual abuse and survival. There was also a wealth of self-help titles, such as *The Courage To Heal*, *Reclaiming our Lives*, and *Over the Rainbow* (and many more, often written by therapists who are survivors' themselves) which talk the reader through their childhood experience and offer techniques and exercises to overcome the pain. Of central interest in these texts were women's stories of secrecy, the feeling of 'not being normal' or 'feeling damaged'. The mainstream literature also focused on the 'problems' or 'dysfunction', which were now theorised outside of a direct connection to child sexual abuse.

This thesis focuses on the issue of child sexual abuse survivors and their place within social psychological theorising, feminist theorising and professional (clinical/therapeutic) knowledge. It will come under the heading of a social psychological thesis, but its implications for therapy, feminist and social theory are also addressed in detail. In particular, the key area addressed is sexual survivorship. The aim of this thesis is to examine those individuals who have grown into adults and have to live in a world as a psychosexual being: somebody who has a gender and an identity, as well as a history of childhood sexual abuse. One of the main concerns is to examine how gender, sexuality and identity are negotiated by the survivor of abuse, and how it is constructed by professionals (who come into contact with survivors) and self-help literature which offers a guide for women. Another central concern is to locate survivors in contemporary data and 'theory', and in 'practices', such as therapy and self-help (Chapters one - three). After locating abuse survivors in the literature and theory, there follows an analysis of the ways in which three groups speak in interviews about sexual abuse, sexuality, relationships and identity.

This thesis should be read as a feminist social psychological study of everyday understandings of child sexual abuse and its effects (by the survivors themselves, as

well as other popular genres, such as self-help) and as a study of the professionals who are there to interpret everyday understandings into their professional practice. All three sites (professionals, survivors and self-help texts) are mutually dependent and offer one another accounts and reasoning on the subject of abuse. It is with this in mind that I wish to examine how each group offers a construction of child sexual abuse and its subject (women survivors) and puts 'her' into discourse.

This research is a critical analysis of the professional and popular literature often used to 'represent' women's psychological, social and political disability through feminism, psychology and therapy. I am aware that this text is a re-articulation of theoretical practices that have raged now for over thirty years, and even longer if psychoanalytic theory is included. However, the contribution this research makes is its merging of post-structuralist and feminist work to explain the interpellation of gender, sexuality and identity in professional and everyday discursive constructions of child sexual abuse and women. It is also an example of how 'professional' and 'everyday' discourses on childhood sexual abuse, women and sexuality can not be regarded as 'separate' ways of speaking or distinctly opposed interpretations. As will become clear from the chapters that follow, within the condition of culture, ideological ('everyday', common) knowledges and 'expert' knowledges borrow and are constructed out of a mish mash of culturally available ways of representing the object of that knowledge.

According to many critical psychologists who are sceptical of positivistic claims to the 'truth' about people's psychologies, expert knowledges are not exempt from the psy-complex, they are part of its construction, its perpetuation and its 'life' in culture (Parker, 1992; Parker, 1997). This thesis cannot be read as three separate studies of distinctly opposed knowledges (i.e. professional, self-help and everyday). It has to read in the spirit of a post-structuralist attention to the way in which language/discourse

provides us with the tools to interpret reality, and that includes everyone, including the 'expert' *interpreters*. When reading both the professional, self-help and survivor studies, the reader must be aware that these studies cannot be regarded as accessing independently circulating discourses.

### Reading the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter locates various theories on child sexual abuse, ranging from the psychological, clinical and feminist theories of how and why child sexual abuse occurs, through to the contemporary therapy and popular (self-help) literature describing the effects of child sexual abuse on its survivors. The first chapter sets the scene for how child sexual abuse is spoken about and where the problem of sexual abuse is located (in individual minds, or in social structures etc.). The second chapter sets out a historical trajectory of sexuality research and discusses how the effects of child sexual abuse in terms of women's sexuality mainstream studies make connections between child sexual abuse and later sexual problems. This chapter sets the scene for how academic theories of sexuality are instrumental in informing therapeutic practice, and the critical issue this raises concerning the link between self, gender and sexuality and the social context of women's lives. The task of chapter three, therefore, is to aim to bring together and articulate a theoretical framework, which promotes an understanding of sexuality *as a psychological and socially defined* experience. This sets out how interpretations of data can be made and how they can 'situate' the sexuality of abuse survivors in a socially and discursively meaningful way.

Chapter four is the first of the empirical studies to examine how professionals who come into contact with women survivors of child sexual abuse understand its potential effects on women's sexuality and adult sexual relationships. The aim of the study was to examine how, where and when abuse fitted into the woman's present sexual picture (in terms of therapy) and the implications this has for treating 'women' who occupy social as well as personal psychological spaces. The material used as the empirical basis for chapter five was taken from self-help texts for survivors of child sexual abuse (usually only women survivors). The aim was to explore how and what self-help texts understand women's sexuality to be, before they begin speaking of the effects of abuse on it. Another aim of this chapter was to explore the role of self-help texts for women more generally, the function they serve and their role in contemporary culture.

The last empirical chapter (chapter six) focuses on women survivors' own accounts of their sexuality and sexual identity, in order to explore how they 'construct' themselves as survivors of abuse *and as women*. The aim here was to examine how their experiences of abuse inputted into the construction of their present sexuality, where both psychological and social discourses play a part in the forming an understanding of the role of the past on their present and future lives. The last chapter summarises and reflects upon the construction of the thesis (its benefits and drawbacks), the analysis of the empirical studies and the implications they have for therapeutic and everyday understandings of women and sexuality. The section on reflexivity traces issues relating to beginning the research process and the implications of conducting research in the area of child sexual abuse, regarding issues of power and representation. It becomes clear from this reflexive passage that the political ramifications of my research interests also touches upon how this research might be received in the academic community, which is



where extracts of conversations with other academics and non-academics are included to illustrate this point more fully. The final part of this work, therefore, highlights the developments that have taken place in my thinking and ideas for future work. A useful way of reading this work (as a whole piece) is to read it as a disruption or a resistance; a disruption and resistance to certain therapeutic, psychological and feminist thinking around child sexual abuse and sexuality. This text is then presented in the spirit of my own personal changes towards the subject of social psychology and a re-crafting of my political concerns as a feminist, and as an academic. One of the major shifts in my thinking around academic knowledges and their function in political activity has been constantly negotiated throughout this text which reaches conclusion (but does not end) in the final chapter. I have constantly aimed at being reflexive and critical; my hope is that the story told about child sexual abuse and women is a productive one.

## Chapter one

### Theories of child sexual abuse: Locating the problem, locating survivors.

This thesis, in its broadest sense, is concerned with examining how adult women survivors of child sexual abuse are constructed as sexual survivors, and how their past experience is understood in relation to their present sexuality in professional, self-help and survivor accounts. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of child sexual abuse, the extent to which it occurs and the long-term effects it produces. Many women remain silent about their abuse, believing they were responsible in some way, or they realistically fear subsequent negative reactions from their family and peers (Armstrong, 1994). In the past and present legal forums have often supported the perpetrator, or blamed the mother for not providing their child with adequate protection (Smart, 1982; Bell, 1993).

In 1992, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation was formed in North America, designed to protect parents wrongly accused of sexual abuse and a similar organisation has recently begun in Britain. Survivors of child sexual abuse are by no means a homogenous group and many 'become' survivors through a number of different routes, from flash backs, therapeutic intervention, having their memories recovered or being called by the courts to take part in a public enquiry years later (in cases of abuse in children's homes).

Child sexual abuse is no longer viewed as a rarity or a 'one off'; the effects it is believed to produce are now considered to be serious and long term. This has prompted a large research effort into the study of child sexual abuse, the long-term effects and their treatment. This has been led by feminist researchers, clinicians, child welfare

workers, charities for protecting children and psychologists who have been driven to explain biases and judgements about child sexual abuse (in legal forums) and the psychological impact on young and adult minds and bodies. In this chapter, child sexual abuse, its origin and continuation is introduced with reference to particular theories, which situate its victims and survivors' in particular public (social) and private (psychological/therapeutic) accounts and positions.

Feminist (socialist & radical/ cultural), psychoanalytic and psychological approaches have all contributed to the body of material informing professional and everyday understandings of child sexual abuse and the way in which survivors' identities and sexualities have been shaped by socio- historical developments. Before considering these theories, it is important to consider the contemporary context of child sexual abuse.

#### 1.1.0. Sex with children: The problem and extent.

Child sexual abuse was once thought to be extremely rare and carried out by a few psychopathic individuals. In the UK, child sexual abuse was not generally acknowledged on Child/Protection Registers until the early 1980's (Gillham, 1994). The sexual exploitation of children was a difficult for a civilised society to accept. Nowadays child sexual abuse is represented in the media as an abhorrent *social* problem and recognised by social agencies and therapeutic workers as having a significant psychological impact. Media coverage often defines its perpetrators as 'monsters' or 'paedophiles'. The demonising of perpetrators, especially those who then murder their victims, is the nation's response to the 'evil' created by a few sick men, and if it is a woman the outrage turns to mass hysteria: in the case of Myra Hindley (and now even Mary Bell, 1998) the depiction of evil has been sustained for over thirty years, aided by

infamous photographs which have become cultural symbols of an ultimate sickness. The 'horrors' of CSA permeate newspapers that frequently report the latest 'grotesque' discovery of a paedophile ring or the abuse of children in 'care'. It is most definitely contrary to popular ideas of normality and decent family life (Suppe, 1987). As one national broad sheet newspaper put it in the midst of 'trying' to open up the discussion:

There are few things of which we like to feel morally certain, but sex between children and adults is one of those.

(Dea Birkett, 1997, September: The Guardian).

Child sexual abuse was once thought to be confined to 'stranger' danger and single men. However, academic studies have revealed greater numbers of people who have experienced some form of sexual abuse by a range of family members, raising the public profile of child sexual abuse as a 'significant' social problem, occurring across all social classes (Gillham, 1994).

Definitions of child sexual abuse vary across studies, making it difficult to compare the prevalence rates. Generally, figures rise when broader definitions are employed and narrow when, for instance, only physical contact is used to represent abuse (see Russell, 1983). The rates of child sexual abuse in Britain, therefore, are inconclusive. Large scale prevalence studies usually focus primarily on women survivors in the general population, and it is expected that childhood sexual abuse is experienced by around 12% of women in Britain compared to 8% of men (Baker & Duncan, 1985) compared to 27% of women in the USA (Finkelhor et al, 1990). However, when the definition is broadened to include other forms of abuse, such as verbal abuse and 'flashing' the rates have soared to 62% for women (Wyatt, 1986, cited in Pilkington & Kramer, 1995). Studies comparing various cultural and racial groups do

not reveal any significant differences; for example Wyatt (1985) compared African-Americans and White Americans for occurrences of sexual abuse but failed to produce any significant differences between the groups (Wyatt, 1985; Priest, 1992). Arroyo, Simpson & Aragon (1997) also found that although there were no significant differences in prevalence rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites (27% and 33% respectively) there were significant differences in the acceptance of abuse by the survivors, with non-Hispanic white women being more reluctant to name the abuse. However, there is some evidence to suggest certain 'sub-cultural' groups do seem to abuse their children more. For example, Fontes (1995) found that the cultural values held by Seventh Day Adventists in North America allow high rates of child sexual abuse because of their authoritarian values over women and children. Overall, the figures suggest childhood sexual abuse is by no means the rare experience the 'Developed' world once led us to believe it was (Kelly, 1988).

#### 1.1.1. Types of sexual abuse.

The discrepancies between figures have often been due to the exclusion of some types of abuse, for example, certain studies include only 'actual physical contact', ranging from adult to child genital contact and vice versa, enforced masturbation (of the child, or the child is asked to perform onanism) through to genital rape of the child, by the penis or other penetrative instruments (bottles, candles) For instance, Russell (1983) found that figures rose from 16% (930 sample of women in the USA) to 38% when non-contact sexual abuse was included before the age of 18 years. Other writers believe it is essential to document all forms of 'child abuse' involving sexual acts, whether the child is directly touched or not (non-contact). For example, some writers argue that children who have been sexually abused through the use of pornography, witnessing sexual acts

and exposure to adult sexual intention feel abused and vulnerable. (Armstrong, 1986; Driver and Droisen, 1988).

For the purpose of this work, the definitions that either professionals, survivors or self-help literature use will be accepted (and challenged), as the aim of this thesis is neither to narrow particular symptoms to particular 'types' of abuse or measure the 'severity' of the effects according to the 'severity' of the original abuse, although this has been attempted elsewhere (Finkelhor, 1986). The key aspect of investigation explores how women are *identified* as a survivor of sexual abuse, whether in the form of incest, stranger abuse or from adults known to the family. Moreover, the type of abuse does not just simply tell us a straightforward story of the abuse of a child; that story can be told in many ways. The details of the abuse act in two ways; first as a description of 'what happened' for legal reasons, (if a child or adult survivor wishes to bring the matter to court) and secondly for assessing the 'gravity' of the abuse (Kinzl, *et al*, 1995). Penetration by rape is largely considered to be the most extreme and damaging form of child sexual abuse, as the violent nature of the act presupposes lasting physical, sexual and damages to mental health (MacCannell & MacCannell, 1993). Later sexual problems have been linked to childhood sexual abuse and are linked to sexual dysfunctions, deviancies and the difficulties the survivor has with sexual relationships and marital satisfaction (Finkelhor, 1989; Kinzl *et al*, 1995; Jehu, 1988; Finauer, 1989; Charmoli & Athelston, 1988).

By exploring in this next section the reasons 'why' the sexual abuse is believed to occur, it is possible to locate the way in which categories of persons are understood in general (man/woman/child) and how such categories link with the way in which the 'effects' of sexual abuse are understood, in therapy and wider culture.

### 1.1.2. Psychological accounts of child sexual abuse.

As long as child sexual abuse has been 'publicly' recognised away from biblical references to 'incest', psychoanalysis has been at the forefront of an aim to clarify the workings of sexuality, in developing children as well as adults (Parker, 1997). Psychoanalysis has pursued sexuality as an 'activity' interwoven into the psychical makeup of the family: psychoanalysis also severely disrupted the portrayed innocence of children and the relationship they had with parents and care givers, through the Oedipus and Electra complexes (Parker, 1997). When Freud began to discuss the connection between adult hysteria and sexual traumas in childhood, the notion that adults were abusing children sexually became a shocking and deeply contentious blow to ideals of family safety. Moreover, even the 'idea' of child sexual abuse disrupted the 'surface' of bourgeois culture which briefly became tarnished by tales of indecency and improper sexual conduct (as Freud's patients were from this class).

When Freud reported a link between hysteria and those women reporting sexual abuse by fathers and other adult males in childhood, it was not received lightly. In 1896, Freud's paper, 'The Etiology of Hysteria' caused a storm in the medical world where the work was treated with contempt and disbelief. Some might say that as a result of this rejection (although this is highly contentious: see Masson, 1984a; Scott, 1988; Rush, 1996 & Segal, 1996), Freud abandoned his theory of the aetiology of 'Neurotica' and replaced it with a theory of infantile sexuality, which acknowledged children's sexuality and the existence of the child's sexual fantasies towards the opposite sexed parents, rather than treating testimonies of abuse as 'real'. The upshot of this replacement was the exchange of 'actual' child sexual abuse with 'imagined' sexual contact or as sexual 'fantasies' created by the (girl) child, who desired sex with the father figure, and

who even acted seductively in the adult male's presence. The notion of 'seduction' rather than an adult's abuse of power is important, firstly for understanding how 'sexuality' and 'power' (the power of the child, her fantasy and mature sexual behaviour) were interlinked and secondly, it was a crucial method through which responsibility and blame was apportioned to the victim, rather than the perpetrator.

Other readings of the sexual nature of child sexual abuse were greatly influenced by Freud's theory of infantile sexuality (which also translated to academic accounts of adult rape - see Jackson, 1987) which often meant the child became the reproachful figure in place of the actual perpetrator. As Bender & Blau (1937) 'report',

These children undoubtedly do not deserve completely the cloak of innocence with which they have been endowed ... in some cases the child assumed an active role in initiating the relationship ... it is true that the child often rationalised with excuses of fear of physical harm or the enticement of gifts, but there were obvious secondary reasons ... these children were distinguished as unusually charming and attractive ... Thus ... we might have frequently considered the possibility that the child might have been the actual seducer, than the one innocently seduced.

(Bender & Blau, 1937:509)

Through these accounts, male sexuality was treated sympathetically, especially if no other means of fulfilling his sexual needs were available (if his wife had left him etc.). Although, things have changed since Freud, there are still remnants of the past present in research into the sexual nature of sexual abuse, where male sexual needs are presented as innate and self-fulfilling (Frude, 1982; 1986; 1992). Most of the literature has focused on male perpetrators of child sexual abuse, although there is growing awareness of female perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Ellis, 1994). One of the key topics scrutinised by authors who attempt to examine why it occurs is the role-played by the perpetrator's sexual needs in abusive behaviour.



In some of the psychological literature, perpetrators are often portrayed as psychologically weak individuals, with low self-esteem, poor interpersonal skills and emotionally immaturity (Krueger *et al*, 1998). Ironically, this portrays abusers as *lacking in power* or power is seen as a necessary mechanism used by the abuser to attain his sexual goal (Warner, 1996). Therefore, explanations of the sexual nature of child sexual abuse *reverse* traditional understandings of the parent and child relationship, where power is absent in the adult's behaviour and present in the child's (see below).

Other psychological studies emphasise the perpetrator's own history of childhood sexual abuse, and explain his actions as a continuation or extension of his own unresolved trauma; person (Davies, 1995) 'more sinned against than sinning' (115). Power, in psychological studies is viewed as a property of individuals, a feature of their past, or a lack of strength in their present (to control themselves or be sexually successful in a heterosexual arena).

The presented 'sexual' nature of childhood sexual abuse informs the reader, not only of the abuse itself, but how the 'sexual' element is then situated in other knowledge's around sexuality; for example, male 'needs' (sic) are seen to be generically integral to abusive behaviour, including rape (Frude, 1982;1986). By closely studying the constructions of male sexuality and the 'part' it is seen to play in child sexual abuse, it is possible to see how female sexuality is then implicated in binary representations (where men are exonerated) of females as Madonna/whore or lolita/asexual innocent, as she becomes enveloped in accounts which situate her as blameworthy and responsible for offering sexual cues to men (see Meiselman, 1978; Giaretto, 1976; Justice & Justice, 1979). Self-blame from child and adult survivors has been partly explained in terms of its fit with a cultural belief system which suggests that children assume responsibility for many familial unrests, including family break-ups or death (Jacobs, 1994). Jacobs

(1994), however, specifically connects this to Herman & Hirschmann (1977:751) and Herman (1981) note how women survivors in their studies described themselves as a 'witch' 'bitch' or 'whore'. Jacobs (1994) argues that self-blame is socially constructed in that female children internalise the father's position in the family (by identifying with the mother), and internalise their own position as sexually destructive and harming to the father and other men more generally (as female). This also holds for the mother in the family as the mother is often the focus of 'blame' due to her failure to be sexual provider, because of her own weaknesses and emotional immaturity (Frude, 1992). Indeed, studies on incest reveal the tendency for victims of abuse to point towards the mother as a source of blame for not providing adequate protection, even when it is clear that she did not collude with the abuser or suspect that abuse (Caplan, 1985). As Jacobs (1994) argues, being female informs the self-concept of incest survivors, as their sense of self is disrupted by a sense of their own guilt, shame and responsibility for their dangerous sexuality.

Thus, one of the ways in which the female/survivor/victim of childhood sexual abuse and her sexuality is storied surrounds her sexual conduct and status regarding her actions over the abuse. In a review of the literature (by a practising clinical psychologist) on the 'sexual nature' of sexual abuse in incestuous families, Frude alludes explicitly to self-evident accounts of male sexual needs and frustrations, offering 'his simple model' to describe the sexual nature of child sexual abuse. Consider:

...[W]hile the "normal" male seeks and obtains relief from prostitutes, pick-ups, or a more stable affair or with a mistress, the incest offender seems unable to utilise these time-honoured methods effectively... What factors lead them to see their own daughters as potentially attractive sex partners? Are these identifiable features which characterise how they relate to their daughters, or are there some things about the girls themselves that lead these fathers to respond sexually to them.

(Frude, 1982:215-6)

The language in this instance (and throughout the paper) centres on the notion of 'choice'. The primacy of male sexual needs and desire, presented by talk of various 'types' of women, outside of being the 'wife' as 'outlets' for male desire is offered as a central factor in child abuse. Indeed, Frude describes these 'time honoured methods' of sexual relief as something that the 'normal' male is perfectly and legitimately entitled to. Furthermore, Frude concludes that those men who cannot 'use these methods effectively' then become *respondents* to their daughters and will henceforth engage in sexually abusing them. The construction of male sexuality is dichotomised according to those who 'can' and those 'cannot' - who must find alternative routes. Male sexuality is split into dual 'types' - the man who can actively find a channel where his sexual needs can be fulfilled (the actor) and the man who is weak, and who responds to his daughter for sexual relief (the respondent). Two aspects of sexual conduct are ushered forth; female are brought forth as seductresses and male sexuality is construed as 'naturally driven to respond (see Hollway, 1984). Both constructions lead in one direction, however, and arrive at the place of male sexual fulfilment. This interpretation can be found in the language used in the quotation which begins by describing normal male sexuality as an 'activity' with particular rules and methods, and concedes that if normality cannot be reached, a 'response' to a sexual cue (which is at the hands of the daughter) is *inevitable*.

The message is that the generic male is not really to blame because the girls are nevertheless "provocative seductresses" (215). His attempt to explain the plausible reality of girls seducing their fathers is further clarified by Giaretto's claim that

We teach our girls to be Lolitas and sexual provocateurs from the time they are two ... how to flounce their hair, how to shake their butts...Despite the fact that such behaviour is not "sexual" it may often be sexually stimulating to the father and maybe interpreted as deliberately sexual.

(Frude, 1982:215)

Frude reiterated these themes in another paper in 1986, where he further emphasised the reasons for family breakdown and mother and child collusion with the abusing father, a theme which is representative of systems theory and family therapy literature (Warner, 1996). The portrayal of female sexuality in this instance is telling, in terms of how implications of blame and acquittal are tied up in notions of a male sexual needs discourse, where there are clear and unambiguous ways in which a man can become aroused through female behaviours and are legitimised through the concept of 'misunderstanding' a sexual cue, even from a two year old. (which has also been pointed out with reference to heterosexual relationships and rape incidences; Hollway, 1984; Anderson & Doherty, 1998)

The implications of these male sexual needs discourses have been huge. On a political level, legal and psychiatric issues over allocating responsibility have relied on these very same notions of sexual cue; misunderstanding and close scrutiny of the generic female's sexual behaviour. For example, if an adolescent girl is seen to be 'promiscuous' the likelihood is she will be viewed more in terms of an equal partner to the abuse, or an active instigator, rather than as a recipient of enforced sexual activity (Armstrong, 1994). Other research indicates that female survivors of incest and child sexual abuse internalise an identity which constructs them as whores, sluts and as active instigators (Jacobs 1994; Jorker, 1992). In recalling such representations of male sexuality then, it is clear that female sexuality is positioned within a discourse of male sexuality in texts on the sexual nature of child sexual abuse. It is clear that the 'sexual' nature of sexual abuse is based upon normative depictions of male and female sexuality, which is often internalised by the latter and is instrumental in terms of constructing women's identity and sense of self. The persistent representation of women and men's

position in relation to abuse (in terms of their sexuality) has not faded, and continues to pervade common notions of how men and women 'naturally' conduct themselves.

The language surrounding male and female sexuality persists into everyday life, where male sexuality is positioned as susceptible to women's ambiguous techniques of seduction. The following example comes from an article in *The Evening Standard* (1998) entirely illustrating this point,

It was, technically a case of attempted rape - but even the victim wondered whether it was worth pursuing. A policewoman advised her not to...Diggle went to jail for three years - even the victim was surprised at the length of the sentence...Diggle was a perfect example of man, the pathetic beast...For men, it was much more complicated. Because, as we shyly admitted, most of us have been a bit of an Angus Diggle at some stage...[W]e had at some at times been sad, sexually frustrated, confused by a woman's reaction to us 'Faint heart never won fair lady' ran the theme round our drink-muddled brains...women sometimes like you to pounce...how do you know whether they like it until you've tried?

(Renton, January, 1998:11; *The Evening Standard*)

The quotation above is concerned over the sentencing of a lawyer (who also lost his right to practice law, relating to a drink drive incident) who was convicted for attempted rape. The caption under Mr Diggle's photograph reads "It would be a hard-hearted man who couldn't empathise a little". The dominant scripts in this article regard Diggle's conduct as unfortunate, sad, pathetic but nevertheless part of every normal man's attempt to gain relief from sexual frustration. The article displays sympathy only with the man, albeit his 'pathetic' demeanour - he wears glasses, he is a nerd, he is socially inept, but even so, men everywhere should empathise with him still, as one does not know 'what to do' with ambivalent females, so one should simply plunge forth. It is surely not one's fault if a 'rare' mistake is made? The message is clear in that it campaigns for Mr Diggle, who "will never recover" and who should be rendered as a

tragic symbol of modern times, where men are shamed needlessly, because of their confusion over sexual cues, with "every honest man whisper[ing], 'There but for the grace of God go I'. The point being made is a simple one. Ordinary 'blokes' get frustrated, and if a woman asks them back for coffee - in their drunk and muddled minds, they may make a blunder, even if the woman is clearly asleep in a different room, quite incapable of sending telepathic imaginary messages through walls. Even so, this article quite clearly prefers to push this issue forward, issuing pathos to a symbol of 'homme pathétique' whose 'channels' for sexual relief are thwarted. The example given by Frude and the example in the Evening Standard draw upon very similar themes, surrounding male confusion, lack of 'complexity' and female seduction and ambiguity (terms which are popularly used to describe 'women' per se).

Frude's paper suggests that men's lack of sexual success prompts them to turn towards their family members for psychological and sexual relief. Studies on the psychological and sexual nature of child sexual abuse use taken-for-granted assumptions about the sexual outlets abusers use (their daughters, people they know) without offering any explanation of 'why' the outlets should be children per se, especially their own children. One question feminists began to raise against traditional psychological and popular texts was the tendency to leave 'sex' untheorised and conflated with 'heterosex' (Kitzinger, 1993). It is clear from the texts above that sex is also represented through the actors' genders to ascribe sexual desire, accessibility and subsequent blame and acquittal for the abuse. In short, the identities of the abusers and the abused were constructed out of normative understandings of the workings of heterosexuality, which protected the male sex drive and his psychological weakness (see texts above) whilst denigrating female sexuality to a status as the sexual provider and seductress.

It is the construction of the sexual actors and the events surrounding child sexual abuse (the silence of the abused) that feminists (starting with the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960's) strongly challenged, turning attention to issues of 'power' exercised over women by men, including sexual power, violence and abuse. Feminist sought to theorise how child sexual abuse was an activity perpetrated largely by men. Feminist theory, therefore, provided a socio-political framework for not only 'psychological deviancy' but also 'sexual normalcy' which raised issues around the connection between sex and power. It is the connection between sex and power, which creates the central dualism which separates psychological (individual) and feminist (social) theories.

Feminist arguments have constantly challenged the tendency for psychological theories to focus on the individual, without exploring how the 'social' creates the conditions through which individuals comprehend their experiences, desires, needs and sexuality. Patriarchy was the system on which 'the social' was built; a system which created what was perceived as natural (including sex) and normal which in turn normalised everyday experiences of sex and gender roles.

#### 1.1.3. Feminist explanations: Child *sexual* abuse and *power*.

In the preface, I explained that I have been very influenced by feminist theories of child sexual abuse, due to the conflation of sex *and* power in feminist theory. Feminist analyses of the power exercised over children's sexuality and the abuse of that power put child sexual abuse into a social context, rather than explaining abuse as a purely pathological or psychological problem. Rather than concentrating on 'sex' and/or personal deviancies (the need for it, the abuse of it etc.), feminists, starting from the early 70's and continuing today (Rush, 1971;1974; Armstrong, 1978, 1994; Ward, 1984;

Herman, 1981; Dworkin, 1987; MacKinnon, 1984) sought to politicise the 'male abuse of sex' experienced by women and children at a global level (Ward, 1984). Child sexual abuse was no longer reserved for a 'few' unfortunate women and children (found in dysfunctional families committed by perverts and the mentally ill); child sexual abuse became an issue which was now talked about through a socio-political dictum. Gender, rather than sex (as a socially derived product) was positioned at the heart of the debate on how and why so many women and children were abused by men, and why so many victims/survivors remained silent, not believed by their family, teachers and the legal system (Smart, 1982).

In the 1970's, feminist work (Armstrong, 1978; Brownmiller, 1975; Ward, 1984) on child sexual abuse, rape, sexual violence, in the family, marriage and institutions began to tackle the issue of, not just 'why' men were sexually abusive, but how they were able to continue virtually unabated. At the centre of this debate was the link between sex and power. In this, the task was to expose the strategies and institutions, which maintained the imbalance of power (in favour of men). One such institution feminists named was the family. Sociological explanations of incest and child sexual abuse viewed sexual abuse as a prime example of a disruption to the functional nature of the family - it was rare, confined to dysfunctional families and abnormal men (Bell, 1993). It was taboo, a threat to social order, in moral and biological terms.

Feminists drastically overturned this notion and produced evidence which shifted the focus on child sexual abuse, not as an abnormality, but as a frequent event in the lives of children and women, wherein "feminism encouraged the development of women as a group with their own collective consciousness" (Davies, 1995:3) (see MacKinnon, 1987; Brownmiller, 1978; Rush, 1974; Rich, 1980; Armstrong, 1978; Dworkin, 1981; Dumaesq, 1981; Russell 1984; Kelly, 1988; Jeffreys, 1990; Gilbert,



1994). They argue that, rather than sexual abuse being a disruptive form of behaviour for society, it was, in fact a way in which female children learnt the rules of heterosexuality and gender roles.

A prime site for this pedagogical journey was the family and feminist analyses focused on the 'private' sphere of the family and the cultural significations of family rules which they argued promoted women and children's subservience to the demands of the father. Such contentions over the structural formation of family life thus posed serious challenges to earlier psychological ideals of the family, places where 'attachment' and 'bonding' were viewed as having occurred successfully in normative familial settings (Bowlby, 1963; 1973; Ainsworth, 1967). Feminist challenges to mainstream theory did not, therefore, simply describe what was there, in terms of sex and abuse, the challenged was directed at everyday, normative understandings of gender and sexuality and its relationship to violence (Jackson, 1987; Ussher, 1991;1993; Nicolson, 1993; Russell, 1995; Kitzinger, 1987). Sex and sexuality was not viewed as something which was governed by intuition, natural desire, mutual pleasure and equality; feminists raised the issue of sex as a way in which women's needs were sublimated and men's prioritised. Women's sexuality was argued to be defined according to its 'fit' with male desire which suggested women could judge their level of success or failure (and others could) according to their compliance with the female role, which was synonymous with their sexual role (giving, submitting to the penis through penetration and being available; Dworkin, 1987). Feminist discourses of sex, gender and power, therefore, *politicised* sexuality and established 'sex' as a way of controlling women. Sexual violences against women and children were more than a 'rare' experience for women and children, but was not acknowledged because it was in men's interests to guard the impression that family life was beneficial to all, and that children were

protected by parents, family members and adults in authority (Barrett & Macintosh, 1982).

In short, the 'second wave' of feminism largely concentrated on how 'sexual' abuse should be understood as part of 'continuum' of the everyday oppressive experiences of women, and how this oppression was maintained and kept silent (Kelly, 1988). Outrage was expressed by feminists over the way in which men's sexual violence was often bypassed, or blame was allocated to the woman's behaviour, and even the child's (Rush, 1974). Child sexual abuse was among many of the forms of violence done to those under men's rule, and one of the major tasks of this period was to expose the 'reality' and sheer scale of violence (domestic, sexual, harassment, pornography, imagery) 'done' to women 'by' men.

Another aim of feminist research was to find out how and why few women ever reported sexual attacks, and why women were reluctant to bring these 'acts of violence' to public attention, instead they would often blame themselves and guard their secret under shame and self reproach (Rush, 1974; Armstrong, 1978).

It was argued that the woman's silence was sustained through the message that the perpetrator is weak or sick or that the victim had provoked the attack or abuse, due to men's insatiable desire and lack of control, in other words, it was individualised and/or pathologised. This construction of sexuality was formative in terms of women and children's understanding of their own responsibility and their role as a female (see above - Jacobs, 1994). Empathy and pity towards the father was also noted, as many survivors then expressed anger towards their mothers for not protecting them when their fathers were 'weak' (Burstow, 1992).

The lack of 'violence' per se required to abuse children and keep them 'silent' (although this is not to see that some children suffer physical violence as well as sexual)

represented the power of the male in the household to not only silence the abused child, but to turn her blame away from him onto the mother. This renders many victims powerless, not only in their ability to avoid the abuse, but to articulate their concerns away from the family setting and the father's rule. As one of Driver & Droisen's survivor participants (1989:81) explains, "I couldn't say no, I didn't know how."

Feminist work proclaimed that the family was a moral ideal that disguised the real power which was being exercised over children, allowing it to go unnoticed (they were the under the unfailing protection of their parents - a common myth which silenced [through physical punishment and violence - see Gough & Reavey, 1997a] children who disclosed abuse. Children were legally (up until the Children's Act which now allows a certain degree of autonomy to children over a certain age, the Gillick's child; see Bell, 1995) viewed as their parents possessions, or more specifically, the sexual possession of the father (Ward, 1984).

To conclude, 'power' and 'sex', in feminist discourses is located (developmentally) in the dominant 'position' of the male and the prioritisation of his desire and sexuality in the context of the family and heterosexual practices. These theoretical propositions have informed how women's subjectivities are understood and the relationships women form as a result of developing as a female in male-led familial contexts. For example, feminist object relations theorists and therapists stress the gendered relationships which form early in childhood and retain their form in later adult relationships and psychical structures (Eichenbaum, & Chodorow, 1982, discussed further in chapter seven). This discourse is based upon the existence of an incest prohibition that treats the 'existence' of male power and its visibility in familial relationships as undeniable. A feminist emphasis on the unrealistic expectations faced by women and children was tackled as a socio-political issue, pertinent to every woman

and child (Kelly, 1988/9). However, as child victims of sexual abuse grow into adults, a growing acknowledgement of the long term problems faced by survivors, their mental health problems and their emotional needs has become a big industry in the medical and psychological institutions. Practical solutions were not easy to come by, in terms of 'treating' the child, the family and the eventual adult. 'Survivors' of child sexual abuse who were not treated as children (as many did not report the abuse, or who did not acknowledge the abuse until later in life) had often to deal with their experiences alone or if need be, talk to a professional about the long term 'problems' they faced.

Therapy and treatment for the long term 'effects' of abuse has become a key way in which individuals disclose experiences of abuse and seek 'solutions' for their ongoing problems. In North America, especially, therapy is a key social movement enabling people to understand themselves in relation to their past experiences and relationships (Plummer, 1995). Individuals who had suffered childhood sexual abuse were soon to be offered full support in the shape of 'healing' and 'recovery' from their past trauma (Davies, 1995). The 'core of experience' (the abuse) which much of psychotherapy relies on in practice (Parker, 1998) has become a vital way in which abuse survivors come to understand and be understood, in terms of their psychology, sexuality and identity.

#### 1.2.0. Personal stories of abuse: re-telling experience, healing and recovery.

The momentum gained by early feminist accounts, which highlighted the structural constraints on women and children, has been translated into 'therapeutic' political practice in the 1990's. The documentation of medical and psychiatric diagnosis has steadily increased, resulting in general and specific pathologies relating to the effects of child sexual abuse and rape. Rather than emphasising 'radical' issues for feminism or

analysing the abuse of women from a socialist perspective, a more liberal feminism theme has arisen, where 'experience' forms the basis for a women's movement which promotes a humanist philosophy of the individual and their 'responsibility' and 'ownership' of self and life (Allwood, 1996; Elliot, 1997).

This ethos is particularly prevalent in 'pop' feminist texts, or what has been coined as 'post-feminism' (a la Camille Paglia) where 'people' power or 'the power to decide' is designated individually and refutes perceived attempts at treating women as victims. Although the extent to which child sexual abuse occurs is still recognised, attention has been re-directed away from collective political action; the focus is now upon individual victims and survivors who are needing to 'recover' from their experience. Issues which were previously concerned with political mobilisation now seemed to be overtaken by mental health professionals who re-defined child sexual abuse as a problem requiring therapy. As Louise Armstrong (1996:38) suggests,

[W]omen once strong and clear about the politics of the issue, certain in their desire to follow their own emotional and rational compass toward change, not only for themselves but for children now...succumbed to a language exclusively focused on personal pathology and recovery: language that is not theirs but that of self anointed experts?

Academic attempts to measure the extent to which child sexual abuse is linked to adult depression, tendencies towards suicide, low-esteem, sexual dysfunction and other mental health problems and illnesses is a vast and growing enterprise (Berliner, 1993; Mullen, 1993).

Therapy and self-help approaches have played a key role in the reformulation of child sexual abuse and its after effects, replacing political agitation with ideals of personal fulfilment and self-discovery. Not only that but its political dissemination meant child sexual abuse was separated from other forms of sexual violence, such as

rape and battery, which meant social issues were kept from view and 'personal' stories of women's traumatic became a mental health issue, rather than a socio-political struggle (Armstrong, 1994; Kelly, 1988/9). The rationale for recuperative repertoires was founded on the notion that the developing child (where innocence was lost) needed recovery and rediscovery, a motif present in the therapeutic literature and found in the autobiographies of survivors, giving shape to their accounts of their identity as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse (Spring, 1987; Fraser, 1989; Sandford, 1991)

Attention has turned to personal stories, experiences and self-help techniques where the 'feel' is often 'empathic' 'open-ended' and intended to create a more 'authentic' representation of women, as the texts are often written by survivors of sexual abuse. The aim is to aid women's recovery from sexual abuse in order to reach a stage of self-awareness and potential. As Bass & Davis, (authors of a well-known self-help text) *The Courage to Heal* (1988) comment at the beginning of their text,

This book, like the workshops is based on the premise that everyone wants to be whole, to fulfil their potential. That we all, like seedlings, or tadpoles, intend to become our full selves and will do so if we are not thwarted. People don't need to be forced to grow: All we need is the favourable circumstances: respect, love, honesty, and the space to explore.

(Bass & Davis, 1988:14)

Although Bass & Davis have been key players in promoting the public awareness of child sexual abuse, their emphasis represented in the quote above, is different to earlier 'socialist' feminist accounts in that they stress the importance of first person accounts and the interconnection between experience, authenticity and subjectivity (Davies, 1995). Kitzinger (1992) cites a movement of 'recovery' and 'healing' which has captured the imaginations of academics, survivors and therapists. 1990's 'society' is psychological, psychoanalytic and therapeutic (Parker, 1997).

Autobiographical accounts of 'healing' and 'recovery' have also joined force with this 'cultural' movement whose aim is to reveal 'experiences' which are direct, foundational and pre-given (Davies, 1995; Reavey & Warner, 1998). Self-help writings have not only provided a step-by-step recovery guide for survivors of child sexual abuse, they are on the increase for use within clinical service provision (Reavey & Courtney, 1998; 1997 POWS conference).

By turning to personal stories, abuse survivors have claimed that their stories have created a common ground for women's experiences and subjectivities. The traumatic experience becomes a foundational meeting ground for 'all' women, whose identity is assured by the experiences they share as abuse survivors. This is evident in the widespread use of self-help books that proffer the right of every woman to claim her abuse by reading an accessible guide. Entry into this begins as the reader is presented with a list of characteristics, feelings or emotions likely to be associated with sexual abuse which are referred to as 'warning signs' (Bass & Davis, 1988; Blume, 1990). These statements can be as vague as "Do you feel different from other people" or do you have the desire to change your name (which means escape from a paternal figure).

Ofsche & Watters (1995) consider the enticing nature of a symptom checklist which they claim are advertised in magazines, drawing women into therapy, in the hope they will 'recover their memories' which are a vague and distant feeling at present. The litany of 'personal symptoms' are positioned as reminders of abuse, and act as prompters which "spark some level of recognition in everyone but at the same time exclude no one" (Ofsche & Watters, 1995:69). Ofsche & Watters (1995) suggest that these are examples of 'pseudoscientific' claims where there is an almost mystical quality or 'lottery feel' to how symptoms of abuse are marketed. The popular self-help texts also market 'causal connections' between past (experience of abuse) and present 'symptoms',

[There are] assumptions that the disorders listed have shown a causal relationships with childhood sexual abuse...creating this sort of cause and effect connection...is methodologically extremely difficult.

(Ofsche & Watters, 1995:70)

This does not just have important implications for debates on recovered memory (although Ofsche & Watters, 1994 must not be regarded as neutral, as they have supported political organisations, such as The False Memory Society) and should not be blankly viewed as an attempt by these authors to inveigle the extent to which child sexual abuse occurs.

It is vital that this therapeutic discourse is scrutinised for what it is 'doing' and 'who' it is addressing (Burman, 1997). For example, therapists may target women for histories of abuse, by providing a symptom checklist which is recognised by women, and then 'personalised' where questions surrounding a client's history are not seen as 'part' of the therapeutic investigation, but *the* investigation (Reavey & Warner, 1998). In other words, part of the consequence of self-help texts are that they not only rely on women 'personalising' their problems, but as a result reinforce this individuation, which confines the personal to the personal and obfuscates the contextualisation of women's experience and the production of the 'personal' (Reavey & Courtney, 1998). For example, it is clear that some consequences of sexual abuse are that many who experience it blame themselves for the abuse and subsequently personalise the feelings they have towards themselves and the abuser (Davies, 1995).

The other way in which the personal may remains personal is through therapists describing their client's belief about the abuse and the problems they face as 'erroneous', without examining the context of their belief (Jehu, 1988). For example, Poston & Lison



(1990) claimed that "a woman and her therapist may see the same body of facts from totally different perspectives."

By locating the link between mental health problems and child sexual abuse within a 'body of facts' the survivor's perception is problematised once more, remaining unsituated and abstract. For example, Dalenberg & Jacobs (1994) describe how survivors of child sexual abuse may use the same belief or cognition in a number of ways, depending on the clinical question. Thus, they explain that the question "Do you feel you were to blame for the abuse" can differ according to the context; if the client wished to express that they were active during the abuse or found it pleasurable, they may wish to respond positively, according to their understanding of the 'blame' as something which involved agency.

A scientific discourse surrounding the 'validity' of a client's idiosyncratic perception of the abuse is established by the authors, even though they also reject other aspects of science out of hand (Bass & Davis, 1988). The vital dictum to recognise in such therapy texts is their insistence that they are acting in the best interests of the patient, because of the need to 'do something'. However, as a result of this, some therapy texts personalise the experiences of women, through the use of causal connection (using clinical empirical studies) between disorder and abuse and secondly by positioning the therapist as purveyor of fact separated from the 'myths' imparted by their client. This polaric discursive context operates on the premise of modern metaphors of individuals 'burying' their emotions and memories, or being 'repressed' on the inside. This is an important point for therapy and counselling in general. As Parker (1997) comments in relation to psychoanalysis,

Psychoanalysis both risks individualising distress and disempowering those who suffer, *and* it searches for an explanation for how that distress might have arisen (250) There is, then, an opposition between the past and the present in which the past is privileged as a site of

action, and the present is seen as the scene of its effects [which] produce a *sense* of the past as traumatic.

(Parker, 1997: 250 & 252, original emphasis)

The point made by Parker in relation to therapy should not be taken lightly; for example, Lacan (1974) speaks about the way in which the link between the past and the present is not produced in an abstract psychological vacuum, but is experienced and understood as part of a symbolic order which people are always already introduced into (e.g. normal/abnormal) via psychoanalytic discourses that *construct* the 'individual's' *raison d'être*, and *produce a version of* the past (with) present link. A psychoanalytic discourse is present in many different forms of therapy (including self-help therapy texts) by the centralised position which 'trauma' (including child sexual abuse) occupies.

#### 1.2.1. The recovery dictum.

The language of recovery is one of 'going back' (re) and 'growing'. Words such as 'healing' 'overcoming', 'breaking through', 'recuperation', 'survival', 'esteem', 'positive thought', 'regaining', 'reclaiming', 'recapturing', 'discovering' (the inner child), conjure images of walls, barriers, lost children and fighting the symbolic (the abuser) and becoming the symbolic (the child). This use of language is produced through the bifurcation of normal people and abused people (Bass & Davis's use of tadpoles and seedlings, see chapter six for a full discussion) where the latter have no need to discover the inner child or overcome barriers. The language of 'return' can succeed once more because of the primacy of the past event. Such language reinforces the individual's problem, and incurs further resistance to viewing the 'context' of survivorship. Let us turn to this aspect and consider the importance of therapy's avocation of recuperation maintains the individualisation of the survivors' 'problems'.

Therapy in general (and I shall return to therapy which has moved away from this approach) often relies upon a 'core of experience' which fashions behaviours, cognition and self into a discourse which can be appreciated and accepted. As Parker (1998:69) notes,

The therapeutic domains are constructed and maintained through patterns of discourse so that we are able to make sense to each other as therapeutic subjects, to speak the same language through commonsensical reference to like experience and response to events.

Common-sense calls for the individual to search 'inside themselves' for the past cause of their present problems (Parker, 1997). This is represented in the growing number of autobiographical texts on surviving sexual abuse which emphasise personal recovery and trauma (Davies, 1995).

Such therapeutic discourse (generated by the client and the therapist) and its focus on the 'individual's' past often ignores the 'discursive climate' which make the reading of child sexual abuse 'possible' (Parker, 1998). One of the tasks of this thesis is to examine the various discursive complexes which comprise the therapist's, self-help work and survivor's own perceptions of what they consider is the significance of sexual abuse in the production of sexuality and identity. One question that still remains unclear is the role that 'culture' takes in constituting the 'self' of recovery and sexuality. What then are individuals '*doing*' when they begin their therapeutic odyssey and how does this 'materialise' in what therapists and survivors construct *in* and *as* a problem for women's sexuality? Let us begin at the beginning when the person performs the initial speech act as a survivor; that is, the moment when they publicly disclose.

Recovery from child sexual abuse follows disclosure, which many people believe to be a *transgressive* activity, because we are encouraged to believe that the more

we speak, the more liberated we become as personal agents (Foucault, 1990). Foucault (1978:58) explains that confessional speech is 'an act' which contravenes legal, religious or social order; the person (in this case the therapist) then attributes credibility to the confession, assigning a true or false status, followed by an interpretation of present actions, behaviours and feelings.

Talk shows, magazine articles on the subject are everywhere (Plummer, 1995). Telling one's story, sharing one's pain is seen as a method of empowerment or a cathartic 'cure'. However, often the step to recovery is not straightforward. Speaking out on television, for example has become a sensationalised activity, where the confessors are put on the spot, asked why they did not do anything; if the camera cannot 'capture' the survivor's distress, the 'genuineness' of the claim falls into question. Alcoff & Gray (1993) also claim that speaking out has also been eroticised, where long and detailed accounts of the abuse are used, including a focus on the sexual event and genitalia.

The 'true' starting point for any recovery, thus starts at the point of the confession, the "raw experience" (Alcoff & Gray, 1993:264). This 'raw' experience is somehow treated as 'outside language' where the 'real' trauma lies (Burman, 1997).

This discursive space in therapy (which relies on confessional speech) reinforces the distinction between expert and naive teller and the subsequent interpretation of the normality or abnormality, which resulted from the individual's 'secret'. It is also within this secret context where identity (in relation to the past experience) can be named and assigned to the person who has experienced it. In the case of the child sexual abuse survivor's identity, there is then a case of the expert interpreting behaviours which can be 'produced' as an objective narrative which is able to link those behaviours to traumatic events (based on a behavioural notion of 'reinforcement' Parker, 1998).

One consequence of this is the focus on the individual's 'psychological' state *in relation* to her identity as a survivor. Once again, the personal remains personal, securing the position of the 'personal journey' embarked upon in therapy. The problem, therefore, arises as a result of the therapeutic discourses which continue to rely upon the 'individualised' representation of the 'self' without acknowledging how the 'self', 'identity' and 'sexuality' of the therapeutic subject is *situated* in knowledges produced in the social world. For the purpose of this thesis, the psy-complex (Parker, 1992) of the abuse survivor is situated in gender and sexuality constructs, constructions of the childhood victim and as an 'individual' in need of reparation and recuperation. The question that forms the basis of this research, is how these complexes *interact* to form a 'sense' of the child sexual abuse survivor's sexuality and identity.

#### 1.2.2. The individual survivor and gender.

Through the sense of being damaged, perpetuated in discourses of psychological trauma, girls and women are stigmatised both by the acts of power exercised against them and by the depictions of damage: other frequently devalues them in their communities and they devalue themselves. The sense of self is violated, fragmented or dignity and competence are thrown into question. At the same time, the sense of self is also reinforced as female, as abuse-able *and* as other.

(Levett, 1995:8)

Women survivors often report feeling 'different' from other people, or they feel that their upbringing has not been natural or normal (Miller & Perelberg, 1990). They often blame themselves, and suggest there was something they could do and often attempt to offer an explanation which looks inwards, to something about themselves which is credible (they flirted, wore inappropriate clothing etc.) (Reavey, 1997h).

The effects of child sexual abuse in the academic/therapeutic literature are produced within a discourse of 'difference' which can lead to singular or stigmatic lines

of investigation for 'signs' and 'symptoms' of the original abuse (Levett, 1995; Reavey & Courtney, 1998). This discourse is a prominent feature of therapeutic texts, which stresses 'difference' in order to 'highlight' and investigate signs of personal damage. This production of difference is set in place by a system whereby 'recognition' (of a difference) will allow for disclosure and recuperation - once you know why you have been feeling unusual or alienated, you have acknowledged your damage and trauma and begin recovery (Ofsche & Watterson, 1995). Through this, women survivors become a certain 'type' both psychologically and sexually (Levett, 1995; Reavey, 1997b).

Therapy is indeed implicated in this practice, as it reinforces individual difference, disorder and confession, with which it works with-in. Transference, re-enactment and behavioural reinforcement or cognitive maladjustment are all used as ways of identifying the individual's 'core of experience' (Russell, 1981; Jehu, 1989; Poston & Lison, 1990). The individual survivor, her (faulty) cognition, pathology, unconscious enactments or her benign sexuality becomes the organising principle of her identity, without adequate attention paid to other significant identifications in the 'signifying chain' of its social production *and* productive capacities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984).

Feminist therapists, for example, refute the idea that women survivors are thus at the centre of sexual problems, failed relationships and marriages which becomes a defining characteristic of their inability to sustain their role. As Hare-Mustin (1991) asserts,

Individual weakness is held accountable for failed relationships, of marriage, never the institution.

(Hare-Mustin, 1991:41)

This notion of individual adjustment also invests in the notion of heterosexual adjustment, which is seen as a sure sign that the past is behind them (Kelly, 1989; Kitzinger, 1993). By not questioning the power potentially operating within the context of a survivor's subjectivity (in sexual relationships, for instance) we reinforce the cultural hegemonic representation of man as stable, women as irrational and yet responsive in the sexual and domestic realm (Goffman, 1979; Burman, 1995; Warner, 1996).

It is, therefore, possible to begin to see how women survivors' sexualities and individual subjectivities are caught in a matrix, where discourses of damage and trauma reinforce, and (yet) are defined by heterosexual discourses, as the individual survivor's position within a discourse of 'difference' stabilises a polarisation of the 'normal' feminine/sexual woman. By investing in this discourse of difference and individualisation, contemporary moves towards child sexual abuse *as recovery in* therapy obfuscates readings of power in gender relations (c.f. Parlee, 1989). In terms of sexuality, individualised accounts offer an understanding of the sexual context as equal, pointing to the woman's trauma as the sole extant identity created by an abuse on body and mind. Bell (1991) considers the problem inherent in talking about childhood sexual abuse, where individual/sexual problems are viewed as a direct result of sexual trauma.

Similarly by concentrating on the individual 'subject' of abuse, she argues that there is a tendency to overlook the power which is already always there in the knowledge which produces an understanding of sex in the first place. Knowledges of sex and the individual must be situated in the context of how

Power operates on the body, ordering it as it studies, organising its movements as it observes, categorising as it proves. In this way, power, or power/knowledge produces our understanding of the body.

(Bell, 1991:87)

By therapeutic discourse deploying survivors' sexuality purely in terms of a singular identification with trauma, power is only *negatively* associated with the past, and the technologies of sex only become relevant when called upon (by the individual with a problem, a therapist, a partner.). 'Woman' stands alone, seeing her 'self' as other to 'normal subjectivity' (which is fictionalised as agentic and degendered). It is no wonder that 'she' is defined and defines herself through her 'difference' and is constructed as a person (subjectivity) through her identity as the 'abused'.

### 1.2.3. One voice and identity through trauma?

It has been argued so far that the subject (woman survivor) that the recovery dicta functions in a way which treats survivors of child sexual abuse as pre-cultural. Moreover, child sexual abuse is constructed as foundational to subjectivity in popular, liberal and therapeutic discourses (Davies, 1994). Metaphors of re-birth are found in this quotation by Ellen Bass (1988:15/16) who uses it as a way of conjuring images of 'realness' in feeling and spirit:

The opportunity to be part of women's feelings is a little like assisting at a birth. It's awesome to touch the miracle of life so closely. When women trust me with their most vulnerable, tender feelings, I am aware that I hold their spirit, for that moment in my hands...[to attain this state of being, she adds] "You can fight all you want...but the door's been opened and you're in the healing process whether you like it or not.

Although there are theoretical problems with the recovery dicta in general, there are also practical problems, as good intentions, therapeutic kindness can lead to irresponsibility (Haraway, 1988). For example, Haraway argues that appealing to some degree of 'truth' through subjective claims to knowledge makes it very difficult to argue with, using an academic or theoretical critique. Making claims to truth by simply



describing subjectivities and life worlds, creates a sense of there being an essential pain for survivors of child sexual abuse. The woman survivor becomes one subjectivity, regardless of her other positions; she is classless, without race and she is able bodied, and has an equal right to speak.

The different subject position occupied by lesbian and heterosexual survivors is rarely addressed in the therapeutic and recovery genre, assuming the identity of being a woman and a survivor is strong enough to contain that identity and give meaning to it. Her unity is fixed by her experience of sexual abuse, although the reality of child sexual abuse and 'being women' is made up from a much wider number of subject positions. One subject position, which is often missing from recovery accounts, is the position of women of colour. Melba Wilson (1993) describes the sexual identity assigned to black women as qualitatively different, because of the way in which they have been positioned in myths, which are related to black women and men per se. Wilson (1993) argues that historical factors must be understood in relation to black women and their sexuality. Often, they are presented as more highly sexed, because of a depiction of black sexual freedom relating to racist discourses that construct black people and their sexualities as more animalistic and primitive.

Another factor which fosters individualised feelings by black women survivors is the notion that if they disclose abuse, they are betraying the fight against racism and perpetuating the myth that black men are over sexed and deviant. Thus, the sexual identity and subjectivities of black women survivors are located within a matrix of discourses on black female sexuality and male sexuality, providing qualitatively different fictions, which have a historical and social power dynamic on behalf of both (Davis, 1978; Levett & Kottler *et al*, 1997). The lack of cross-cultural studies on child sexual abuse effects demonstrates the certainty with which the practice of representing

'one' subjectivity is. However, overlooking the multiple discourses which different communities 'identify' with adds strength to the clinical isolation of 'effects' which can inform women's 'self' understandings, treating the self as foundational and pre-discursive. In the concluding chapter of the thesis, consideration of the ways in which some therapies have started to tackle the social production of the individual will be examined in relation to childhood sexual abuse and women's sexuality, and in light of the following analysis, presented in the empirical studies.

### 1.3.0. Concluding comments.

This chapter has introduced some of the theoretical approaches that locate child sexual abuse and its survivors, making it possible to reflect on the way in which professional and everyday understandings of child sexual abuse have developed and changed. It is clear that one's 'identity' as an abuse survivor is grounded in various discursive constructions of sex, abuse, power, identity and subjectivity (this will be discussed in detail in chapter three). The purpose of this chapter was to outline and problematise the ways in which survivors have been located in certain approaches which 'locate' the problem of sexual abuse and the survivors either in the social or the personal. Public and private accounts of child sexual abuse are often used to reveal the 'truth' surrounding the effects of abuse, where feminists have cited power as structural power (in patriarchy) and therapeutic discourse has promoted private tales of recovery, through self discovery and 'real' experience. Similarly, the absence of sexual outlets are accepted as at least a 'reason' for abuse and rape occurring by citing male sexuality as a driven force, controlled by the female sex and abdicated due to its pre-given, instinctual nature (Frude 1982;1986). It is also important to examine what effect the portrayal of men's sexual needs have on constructing female sexuality.

This has significant and political implications in terms of how girls and women's sexuality is conceptualised according to male sexuality and how this has a bearing on how women understand their own sexuality in adulthood and the role they perceived themselves to play as a childhood victim. As Warner (1996) asserts,

The words and the methods that the abuser employs to control the child become part of the story that the child is held within: whore, seducer, oozing sex .... and given his centrality in her life, these are all the more powerful. Through this repeated experience gender becomes fixed, performed, coherent and has the illusion of arising outside of cultural practices. In contrast to this we would suggest that she is not abused because she is a girl/child, but through the abuse is constructed as such.

(Warner, 1996:46)

To re-iterate, this thesis is concerned with how survivors of child sexual abuse are constructed as sexual survivors, and how their past experience(s) is understood in relation to their present sexuality. It is clear that psychological, feminist and contemporary therapeutic theories are instrumental in situating the lives of the survivors. Due to the many problems with the theoretical accounts presented, academic, empirical studies, (clinical, sexological and psychological) have attempted to provide greater 'accuracy' in documenting the effects of child sexual abuse. Psychological, attributional, behavioural and cognitive theories have all been put to the empirical test, using standardised and reliable measures. In the following chapter, the aim is to critically review the social construction of sexuality, and examine how discourses of child are embedded therein. In doing so, the connection between child sexual abuse and its subsequent effects on women's sex and sexuality can be more fully scrutinised, in terms of locating contemporary academic theories of sexuality and identity which professionals 'treating' child sexual abuse rely on as a source of knowledge.

The next chapter, therefore, situates knowledges of women survivors of child sexual abuse in current sexuality research and the current psychological discourses which are adopted in academia to explain her existence in a clinical and social world. The aim of the following chapter is to review current social, psychological and popular discourses on sexuality as a whole, through which the woman survivor of child sexual abuse can become located and viewed as part of a complex of discursive and institutional practices, such as science, therapy, popular ideas and psychological methods of understanding her. The chapters following this then present alternative ways of theorising women, child sexual abuse and sexual identity (chapter three) by adopting a feminist discursive social psychological approach. Chapters four, five and six then present empirical material from professionals who work with women who have been abused (chapter four) and deconstruct professional discourses on women, sexual abuse and sexuality. Chapter five then analyses the discourses used in self-help manuals to construct a version of women's sexuality, consistent with the self-help authors' therapeutic and personal experiences of child sexual abuse. In chapter six, an analysis of the discourses women survivors' use to describe their sexuality and identity as survivors is explored. The common aim throughout is to locate women survivors of child sexual abuse in a complex network of discourses that create what is meant by abuse and sexuality, why it happens, how it affects people involved and how best to understand its effects. This involves decoding the epistemological and ideological underpinnings of both professional and everyday discourses as they circulate in culture, psychological practices and everyday lives.

## Chapter two – the abuse survivor as 'other' within academic accounts of (hetero)sexuality: A critical review of theory, data and practice.

There has been a multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.

(Foucault, 1978:18)

In this chapter, mainstream academic approaches to the study of female sexuality and the study of the effect of child sexual abuse on women and sexuality will be reviewed and explored, in terms of their relevance to how sexuality (and gender, in mainstream research) is understood, measured and theorised in research and practice. This entails taking a close look at the methods used in sex research in the past and the present, and some of the historical and theoretical shifts that have taken place, in line with modernist scientific developments that are rooted in empiricism and the pursuit of truth. In line with the questions raised in this thesis, a review of the contribution of mainstream research to the understanding of survivors sexuality will also be considered. This will lead to a further discussion of contemporary discourses of sexuality which whilst emphasising 'pleasure' and 'sex as life style' also draw upon psychological and moral narrations to further promote the connection of self to sex and identity. Thus, issues of sex as health and identity will introduce how sexuality can be viewed as a 'social construction' and a discursive label, rather than viewing sex and sexuality as a physiological response or a 'cognitive' attribution (Foucault, 1990).

Methodological issues regarding the study of sexuality will be reviewed, setting up some of the questions which are addressed in greater detail in chapter three. One essential question is how sex research creates the language and knowledge that specifies categories of sexuality that women survivors are classified within, in terms of their past *and* their gender. An examination of how such research constructs the question surrounding the link between past abuse and women's current 'problems' with sex and

the creation of the survivor's sexual 'identity' will be explored, in terms of its relevance to social psychological understandings of sex, as a role and identity, as well as a 'practice' (Tiefer, 1995; Weeks, 1998).

#### 2.1.0. The socio-historical origins of sexuality.

Before introducing the literature which links child sexual abuse to women's later sexual problems, it is necessary to trace the beginnings of the academic study of sexuality in order to arrive at more contemporary understandings of sex, sexuality and its relation to identity in the 1990's. By tracing sexuality's genealogy (from psychoanalysis to scientific/empirical measurements) it is possible to review the changes that have occurred and to assess the current theoretical underpinnings and methods of data collection.

At the beginning of the century, sex was still a taboo subject as the morality of sexual conduct was prioritised in the public arena and sexual activity which contravened the norm was defined in terms of damage and perversity (Hawkes, 1996). Nevertheless, it captured the minds of practitioners working in the area of psychiatric medicine, namely Fliess and Freud, who were looking at the connection between sexual repression and symptoms of hysteria in women and eventually men. As chapter one noted, the birth of psychoanalysis (around 1897) brought attention not only to adult sexuality but infantile sexuality and sex as an influential developmental phenomenon linked to the psyche. Moreover, psychoanalysis was the first discipline to begin investigating the relationship between 'events' in childhood and their potential impact on the development of the self and personality. Freud began to decipher a strong relationship between women reporting sexual abuse in childhood and hysteria. For Freud, sexuality was not merely a practice represented only at the level of the biological, psychical life was represented on many levels, including an unconscious level, where desires, wishes and impulses were confined, because of the danger they posed to a 'civilised' view of the rational mind and its 'supposed' distaste for sexual freedom and untamed desire (Hawkes, 1996). This thesis, however, was strongly rejected by the academic

community who relentlessly argued that Freud's suggestion was completely unsatisfactory, wholly unrealistic and scientifically flawed. Freud's decision to retract his theory on the formation of hysteria due to widespread objection from outside and one could argue the desire to keep this knowledge hidden from public view (Rush, 1974). Thus, his original hypothesis was eventually replaced by the 'seduction theory' which explained children's sexuality and their reports of sex with adults (parents often) of the opposite sex in terms of a fantasy.

Freud also provided a trajectory which traced the developments of gender and sexuality, beginning with the complex interaction to occur between mother and child, and 'stabilising' (according to what is expected for a normal development) with a sexual identification with the opposite sexed parent, which would eventually lead to a heterosexual identification. In this, the penis forms the basis from which a distinct separation of the sexes is achieved (resulting in penis envy for the female child). Although penis envy for the female occurred in childhood, Freud argued that it was a feature of the woman's adult sexual relations (enjoined by the wish for a baby), and the development of neurotic symptoms, if the wish remained unfulfilled (Freud, 1953). Freud's theory of sexuality, therefore, was founded on the notion that sexuality was deeply symbolic and multiply represented in varying levels of consciousness, which were culturally as well as biologically mediated (Parker, 1997). Freud was, therefore, one of the pioneers linking self-concept to (infantile) sexuality, separate from pure biology, but still dependent on a 'masculine' version of sexual pleasure and based on the premise that family life and the Oedipus complex are foundational features (a despotic signifier) of desire and its production in males and females (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1986).

The cultural situation of the time, was, therefore, viewed as instrumental in the production of gender and sexuality which included the widespread acceptance that children could and did lie about abuse. Indeed, it could be argued that child fantasy was accepted over the prospect of parents abusing their children precisely because of the

cultural acceptance of familial ideology and the centrality of familial identification, gender roles and sexual civilisation.

However, feminists preferred to argue that Freud's theory of infantile development provided greater justification for men to class women as pathological if they did not act according to their passive nature, and for women to self-pathologise if they did not accept their role with complete willingness and understanding (Ussher, 1991). The cultural conditions were in place enough for individuals and society to accept this; women at the beginning of the century were still viewed as irrational enough not to be able to vote, as they were positioned as creatures of the heart, rather than the rational mind.

Due to the immense speculation surrounding Freud's theories and the methodological criticisms his theory received, a more rigorous 'science' was established, a modernist venture which prioritised clear observations, measures of human behaviour which would reveal the specific behavioural and physiological minutiae of sexual activity. In line with the positivistic aim of de-mystifying human behaviour and offering objective alternatives, scientists interested in sexual behaviour were keen to replace sexual stereotypes with scientific facts, enabling men and women to take 'control' of their sexuality, revealing their true sexual potential (Jackson, 1987). The introduction of the 'science of sex' (sexology) was designed to place sexuality in its appropriate context and replace it from the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', both for females and males, and to explore the essence and 'nature' of sexuality in a neutral manner, using neutral instruments of science (Jackson, 1987).

Havelock Ellis (1913) a leading sexologist of the time was the first to present female sexuality as having some degree of autonomy and the ability to orgasm. Ellis re-worked the biological model of sexual intercourse and introduced a behavioural model



which indicated how male and female sexual behaviours operated in the context of heterosexual sex. He argued that heterosexual sex was successful when both partners adhered to generic behaviours patterns, resulting in the female receiving the penis (passive behaviour) and men pursuing the vagina (in control, assertive). His argument was based on the principle of evolutionary behaviourism, which depicted behaviours as strategically useful for reproduction and kinship, including aggressive pursuit by the male (even when it resulted in rape). Ellis' 'progressive' theory continued to rely upon essentialist depiction's of heterosexuality and thus perpetuated the notion that rape and violence were understandable and were (essentially) natural products of our society.

Ellis justified men's aggression, proposing it as an integral component of their biological make-up. Similarly, if certain women were prone to active sexual behaviours, (contravening the female norm), they were seen as reacting to the failure of their male partner who was clearly unable to assert his true 'nature' (Hawkes, 1995). Even 'pain' during intercourse (now labelled dyspareunia) was conceptually linked with biological pleasure, and seen as 'part' of natural sexual arousal. Science then paradoxically operated, not on a system of essential objectiveness and observation but relied upon the biologically driven mystification of the *social construction* of human sexual behaviour, largely to the detriment of women (Jackson, 1987).

Kinsey *et al*, (1948) and Masters and Johnson (1966) were the next generation of sex researchers (biologists) who presented sexual behaviour in a value free way, and *as an object of scientific, rather than moral scrutiny*. Although their studies took on different angles, the principle of defining clear and measurable variables and taxonomies in large samples regarding sexual behaviour was a key principle of the research. Their methods were presented as objective as they were concerned (although this is contested) with examining how women and men's sexualities *behaved* (Kinsey, 1948; 1953; Masters & Johnson, 1966). Thus, the shift was made between assessing

what sexual behaviour 'was' or 'should be' to focusing on how really sex operated in human societies, from masturbation to bestiality (Hawkes, 1996). This occurred along with other historical changes in the sociology of sex and sexuality, for example, in this period (the 1950 & 1960's).

Hawkes notes the representational change from sex as a tool for reproduction to sex as a mechanism for emancipation and factual information for lay people. For a while, it appeared to be the case that sexual modernism had arrived, bringing with it liberal and emancipatory information and techniques for a better sexual life. However, as feminists were soon to point out, this modernisation of sex was rarely achieved in practice, due to the socially embedded prioritisation of heterosexual coitus, and in this, male sexual desire. Furthermore, the idea that scientific knowledge would simply act in a positive fashion assumed that previous meanings around sex were purely based upon moral and attributional errors. Moreover, if Kinsey and Masters & Johnson offered no biological reason for the dominance of heterosexuality, why was it still considered to be at the centre of their therapeutic discourse?

The interpretations Masters and Johnson (1966) formed of female sexuality were gleaned from their findings which operated within a system of double standards. If one looks at their presentation carefully, their assessment of sexuality leads them to the conclusion that the most natural operational context of female pleasure is through masturbation (clitoral stimulation). "Real" sexuality, seems to still stand within the heterosexual act with no integrated explanation of how and where female orgasm really fitted into the heterosexual picture.

Although the information and evidence is documented by Masters & Johnson, it is not used to its full potential because of a notion that 'normality' can be achieved through intercourse. This has been stressed by Masters & Johnson's Human Sexual Response Cycle (HSRC) which documented all human sexual behaviour according to the physiological changes undergone in the process of sexual intercourse. This included coital activity only, and as Tiefer (1995) suggests, was implemented before the actual 'scientific' testing even took place. It can, therefore be argued that a reductive model was

used in order to 'capture' the main essences of one particular sexual activity (heterosexual coitus), rather than explore the full range of thoughts, meanings, roles and issues of power in sexual relationships. As Masters & Johnson (1966) themselves explain, the HSRC was deliberately partial, in order to present

A more concise picture of physiologic reaction to sexual stimuli may be presented by dividing the human male's and female's cycles of sexual response into four separate phases...This arbitrary four-part division of the sexual response cycle provides an effective framework for detailed description of physiologic variants in sexual reaction.

(Masters & Johnson, 1966:4, my emphasis)

Of interest is the use of the term 'concise' to represent 'effective' in Master's & Johnson's quotation (Similarly, Kinsey tabulated the category of "children's sexuality", though it was later revealed that the information was based on a paedophile's biographical account of the sexual acts performed with the children he abused). Other uses of language, such as 'arbitrary' and 'four part division' suggest that this model can and should only be seen to 'represent' one aspect of sexuality - that of traditional coital activity (penetration) between a selected groups of individuals. This is by no means a minor point, as Tiefer (1995) point out, towards the end of their text, it is revealed that only individuals with a history of positive masturbatory and coital orgasmic histories could be included in the study.

Tiefer argues that this is not an elementary point as the selective few have provided a template on which to base clinical classifications of sexual behaviour and disorder. This model, however, does not account for sexual negotiation between couples, or for sexual diversity per se (Tiefer, 1995).

The biological discourse set up by Masters & Johnson (among others) succeeded in reducing 'treatment issues' to being goal directed and symptom reversal phenomena, which usually meant that the woman's inability to orgasm during coitus became a pivotal focus for therapists involved in treating sexual dysfunction. This was set up by Masters & Johnson's conceptualisation of female sexuality which was viewed as a 'release' of female sexual tension, which reinforced the "primacy of penile

penetration." (Jackson, 1984: 45) The implications of which have far reaching consequences for all women and men. Although contemporary sex therapy manuals may not explicitly refer to intercourse, the importance assigned to response cycles, where male genital swelling is given precedence because of the lack of language available to women to describe their physiological response during sex. Boyle (1994) asserts that this can lead to physiological responses being described in terms of feeling language for women, as the language of penetration often operates without reference to a woman's genital swelling as an active part-ner in sexual intercourse. Tiefer (1995) also points to certain activities associated with sexual arousal which are driven by scripts outside of physiology, in

...all the [heterosexual] women thought that breast play was very important in their husband's arousal (p.67).

(Masters & Johnson, 1966; cited in Tiefer, 1995:57)

This move into science was viewed as a way in which sex could be demystified and 'modernised'. This cannot, however, be accepted as a move away from the persisting problem of heterosexual primacy as 'standard' where the central figures remain as "the [successful and orgasmic] copulating man and woman" (Hawkes, 1996:70). As Hawkes (1996) contends in a historical sociological account of the shifts which have taken place,

The fear of sexual danger has been replaced by a fear of sexual dysfunction, manifested in anxieties about performance, in the efficient deployment of the equation of desire with outcome [orgasm].

(Hawkes, 1996:71)

The science of sex, which informs sexual therapy, emphasising behavioural/cognitive phenomena (as these approaches assess cognitions and behaviours in terms of the 'logical scripts' or 'observable behaviours' which are being re-inforced by the environment, which in the case of sex means past trauma to the body and mind, partner relationships and emotional or behavioural 'stressors' - see Jehu, 1989)

### 2.1.1. The social construction of sex, therapeutic discourse and women.

The rhetorical move which positioned certain behaviours as 'disorders' rather than moral problems strengthened the scientific discourse (through supposedly neutral descriptions, measurements of the norm etc.) and maintains a position of authority over grass roots testimonies. Science and its legitimisation of the heterosexual norm is further demonstrated by the way in which 'other' sexualities (in this case lesbian sexuality) are represented *as other* in scientific discourse (Kitzinger, 1987:10)

For example, the Hite report (1981) demonstrates people's use of dominant discourse to describe what they perceive as normal and abnormal about themselves. In addition she argues that the emphasis placed on sexual and sensate response is often at odds with how women think and feels about the sexual act. In this study, women self-ascribed a 'dysfunction' by stating that they could only experience clitoral orgasm, rather than the mature vaginal type of orgasm (the idea of maturity being maintained by sexology and sex therapy - penile-vaginal penetration) (Nicolson, 1993). Furthermore, the emergence of distracting and competing thoughts, or feelings of comfort and safety in sexual encounters and relationships have not been addressed in therapeutic texts on sex which instead stress the importance of sensate focus (natural responsivity to sex) needed to learn the techniques of sexual intercourse successfully. (Tiefer, 1995).

Hare-Mustin (1991) argues that this results in many therapies tending to focus upon female sexuality within heterosexual relationships, because she has positioned herself as the problem, and as having the dysfunction. What this means for women in terms of their sexuality and sexual practice is the therapist aiming to negotiate some kind of 'therapeutic conversation' on the basis of the 'individual' way in which the client experiences her sexuality as difficult but still in relation to her heterosexual context,

This practice is problematic:...the focus on the individual has unfortunate consequences, such as blaming the victim for her fate, viewing gender differences as individual deficiencies and urging that the woman try harder to change herself

(Hare-Mustin, 1991: 260)

Women are often faced with re-interpretations of their sexuality and sexual difficulties by the expert mediator, often a General Practitioner, clinician or sexual health worker. Through and within this process of disclosure and interpretation, it has been argued that women's sexuality is being encoded in terms of the dominant form of normality, as prescribed by male and heterosexual sexuality (see Alcoff and Gray, 1993:67). This argument follows from Foucault (1972b), who defined discourse and its practices as an important site for such conflict, in terms of professional interpretation, dogma and power (Foucault 1972b, 216). Therefore, what we see surrounding the categorisation of female sexuality is a legitimisation of measurement and re-interpretations due to medical referential and political reinforcement by media and societal constructions.

In the following section that a critical analysis can also be applied to clinical presentations of female sexuality in survivors of child sexual abuse. Certain medical and societal categorisations must be explored in order to reveal the dominant discourses that underlie and are mediated through professional and institutional (such as medical, legal, educational, therapeutic) conceptualisations of women's sexuality. As Judith Butler comments,

A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* to those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points or origin.

(Butler, 1990:ix)

#### 2.1.2. Contemporary meanings of sex and sexuality: (social) science and the production of the self.

Scientific discourses around sex have shaped modern conceptualisations of sexual practices and psychological states, contemporary moves towards viewing sexuality as an identity, a facet of healthy living and a 'role' have also featured in both the popular and academic literature on sex (which will be explored in chapter three also). The break

from purely scientific depictions of sexual practices emerged largely from marginalised writers, documenting the lack of attention paid to homosexual practices, making way for a greater variety and more compassionate portrayal of sexual agency (McIntosh, 1981; Weeks, 1985).

In this way, sexuality could be treated as a socially constructed entity, as well as a biological reality, without presuming that biology played a deterministic or reductionist role in sexual practices and experiences. Identity categories concerning sex began to emerge in feminist theory (see chapter one and chapter three) which was at the forefront of debates arguing that sexuality is a social construction, rather than scientific and medical object of measurement (Daly, 1979; Dworkin, 1987; Kitzinger, 1987).

In contemporary everyday life, sex is also integral to a 'healthy' identity, responsibility and success. Sex and sexuality is now more than ever a circulative feature of social life where all healthy and conscious agents 'act' on behalf of desired sexual choices (Giddens, 1991). Consumer 'sex' is represented through stories around 'image' (as in lipstick lesbians and whipping women - see Hawkes, 1996) fantasy and desire, which are depicted along a continuum emphasising style, choice and expression. As with popular and contemporary writings on survivors of child sexual abuse, sex has become a topic subject to liberalisation, individual experience and choice. Thus, sexuality has begun to be associated with a

[R]eflexive project of the self ... consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives [which] takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance.

(Giddens, 1991:5)

In terms of gender, the liberalisation of sex *appears* to be an equal enterprise, although much of the popular material still emphasises the importance of men's pleasure and women's 'willingness' to achieve this (Hawkes, 1996; Potts, 1998). Science and sex are no longer a straightforward modern couplet, but multiply related to liberalised

identities and agentive narratives. A classic example is John Gray's (1998) most recent addition to the sex literature market *Mars and Venus in the bedroom* where he addresses a number of 'key' issues for couples seeking good sex (although he directs this at women, because he claims men 'aren't interested' in self-help). In his text, he equates sex with health and psychological well being and promotes the need for a 'therapeutic openness' between couples (he is in fact a sex therapist). In his science/fiction approach to sex 'as sport' and 'recreation', he provides the reader with a veritable 'menu' of sexual delights and intrigues, where one is invited to peruse the menu of 'fast food' (a quickie) 'home-cooked sex' or a gourmet deluxe menu (reserved for special occasions). The more serious message, however, appeals to inner fulfilment, self-worth and self-growth, on a diet of sex and communication.

Although some factions of society still emphasise the need for protection over women's sexuality, such as Anti-pornography campaigners, pleasure is now being promoted in place of sexual 'repression' and oppression. According to Gray (1992:1995) there is 'nought' wrong with a quickie, even if women have to "lie there like a dead log" (Potts, 1998:161). Women, according to Gray are "unrapeable ... unless there is physical violence" (Gray, 1995:51). Thus, where sexual messages in past years were previously confined to more moral and hygienic foreclosures on sex (Hawkes, 1996), contemporary discourses promote the 'need' to be *good* at sex, to *enjoy* sex and to *want* sex (Tiefer, 1995:130). Even when 'you don't want it' there is a constant reminder that 'it's for the good of your health' and the relationship's prognosis. These popular portrayals of sex have begun to fuse identity with sexuality and sexual activity, where the 'body' has lost its fixity in terms of 'categories of givens' (Giddens, 1991) and self becomes fluidly related to choice, 'experience' and fashion. Health is another key area of contemporary sexual discourse which is sustained by the idea that 'some people' are un-healthy. As Crossley (nee Davies, 1997:1863) suggests,

[T]he contemporary conceptions of self, are that "health" has become a key concept in the construction of identity for the contemporary middle classes, and this involves as its counterpart, the construction of an 'unhealthy' other.



The link between health, moral behaviour establishes an 'ontological security' which emphasises that 'right' choices regarding health and security (c.f. Taylor, 1989). In the case of individuals 'outside' the realm of sexual choice (i.e. survivors of trauma, disease and marginal groups) responsibility and choice is not guaranteed. The propensity to feel part of a 'normal' 'healthy' population is tied up in an ability to act out of choice and responsibility. This aspect of survivors' sexuality has been neglected from the research on their identities as survivors, even though the link between sexuality and identity is inextricable and 'assured' by their 'a-typical' sexual development (see chapter one). Similarly, this issue has been raised by McIntosh (1981) with reference to homosexuality; by examining the historical link existing between a person's definition of 'self' and their sexual role, she traced how categories of sexuality were powerfully linked to categories of health and notions of normality (see chapter three). Sexual narratives, sexual health and the sexual choices of survivors of child sexual abuse, therefore, take on a different meaning according to who is being spoken about, as the ability to 'act out of choice' differs according to the sexual actors addressed. The next section illustrates how the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality is written into their social identities *as* survivors and as through constructions of femininity.

#### 2.2.0. Academic constructions of sexual symptomatology in women with a history of childhood sexual abuse.

There are a growing number of papers in academic journals, therapy texts and self-help literature documenting the effects of childhood sexual abuse on women's sexuality. A measurable link between sexual dysfunction and a woman's 'history' of child sexual abuse has been vastly supported across a number of studies (Gundlach, 1977; Feldman-Summers & Edgar, 1979; Courtois, 1979; Matz & Holman, 1981; Fromouth, 1986; Becker *et al* 1982, 1984; Jehu, 1989; Charmoli & Athelston, 1989; Blume, 1990; Mullen, 1993; Kinzl *et al*, 1995; Fergusson *et al* 1997). Finkelhor and Browne's traumagenic Dynamics model suggests that child sexual abuse translates into long terms sexual difficulties because "sexuality becomes traumatic by its association with negative memories and negative stereotypes [and due to] sexual acceleration"

(1989:393) More specifically, the theorisation of women survivors and their sexualities often suggests a level of dysfunction or anxiety around *heterosex*; some are over sexed (Mathew & Weinman, 1982; Garvey, 1985) oppressed sexually by their partner (Jehu, 1989) unable to form appropriate relationships and are further targets for perpetrators of rape (Gorcey, 1986; Poston & Lison, 1990; Krahe` 1997).

Other research suggests that women who have been sexually abused in childhood 'appear' to 'choose' an abusive or violent partner in adulthood (Reder *et al*, 1993). It is, clear, therefore, that women's sexuality is implicated in stories of pathology and abnormality (Levett, 1995) as academic texts work as a form of stigma (fixation), in terms of the survivor's past and present behaviour. When the connection is made between an abuse survivor's history and her later choices of sexual partner, it is done so without adequately explaining why women with a history of abuse might have potentially lowered expectations of their adult relationships, rather than it being an expression of a 'choice' to be abused again (Warner, 1997). Thus, accounts of sexuality often appear 'frozen in time' (O'Hanlon, 1986) as they are linked so directly with childhood experience of abuse without situating individuals' personal and social development, giving rise to certain expectations (being feminine is equated with being heterosexual etc.; McIntosh, 1981.). 'Abnormalities' in relation to child sexual abuse are clinically and medically defined and operate to explain sexual dysfunctions, anxieties and interpersonal difficulties in sexual relationships *as if they were solely cognitive or solely idiosyncratic* (Davies, 1995).

Attribution research which has attempted to link obvious indicators of abuse survivors' self-blame, depression and low esteem has, so far, been unsuccessful in establishing clear cognitive differences between survivors and non-survivors with regard to their perceptions of their 'identity' as an abuse survivor and their attitudes towards sex and partners (Dalenberg & Jacob, 1994). It is, therefore, mystifying why abuse survivors would wish to 'choose' an abusive partner, with the intention to be harmed and it is certainly not clear why it would be on any person's list of priorities, according to any 'objective criteria'.

It is important to emphasise that sexual problems are defined in the academic literature according to the medical/biological model which focuses on 'types' of disorders, affecting various parts of the genitalia manifest *in* particular individuals. The measuring of dysfunction include vaginismus (spasm of the vaginal muscles, rendering penetration unlikely) dyspareunia (pain during intercourse) inorgasmia (inability to orgasm) situational inorgasmia (unable to orgasm vaginally), desire dysfunction, arousal dysfunction and fear of sex. These are medical categories found in the DSMIVR which clinicians use to locate sexual disorders. Another feature of the literature on the effects of abuse on sexuality is the portrayal of the abuse survivor as a certain 'type' of woman. For example, in an article about vaginismus, Adler (1989) argues that vaginismus 'sufferers' can be identified as five 'types' of women, one of which she describes as the 'sleeping beauty' (which is a story about a woman's sexual awakening through rape).

Although Adler (1989) does attempt to explain thoughts and fears around partner expectation etc. vaginismus is seen to 'cause' anger and unhappiness in relationships rendering the patient ultimately responsible for her own progress; lack of progress is thus attributed to her individual intra-psychic difficulties.

In this section, an attempt is made to detail 'what' the sexual problem is seen to be in relation to women survivors, according to the mainstream literature and to outline how 'other factors' contribute towards meaning surrounding women's sexuality employed by the mainstream research. Factors such as sexual relations, identity and deviancy depart from health, medical and biological models, which reach into the social and moral sphere informing definitions of health and well-being regarding 'survival'.

First of all, let us turn to the mainstream ways in which women survivors of child sexual abuse get storied in medical discourse surrounding their sexuality, and the function that these discourses have on 'constructing' women and sexual 'health' and survival.

### 2.2.1. Child sexual abuse, women survivors and the social dimensions of sexuality and survival.

Each person is an individual and when a number of people say exactly the same thing for the same purpose, it is a fair assumption that the expressions have been gleaned from something written or said by another who was seeking the same solution to the same problem. The statements are made on the theory that is they worked for someone else they might likely work again for the speaker.

(Prince, cited in Suppe, 1987:30)

The long term effects of child sexual abuse often include reporting damage done to the individual's sense of self and personality. This has been raised as a clinical issue, both in terms of the changes that can occur in people's cognitions and biological make up and the stress abuse exerts on the body as a result of sexual abuse (Jehu, 1989; Kendell-Tackett, 1993). In this respect, sexual abuse in childhood is seen to produce subsequent cognitive scripts inside the heads of the abused, who are often assessed for their level of cognitive deficiency according to inventory scales and other standardised cognitive measures (Draucker, 1989). In these ways, some academic research has attempted to locate the 'core' personality features of abuse survival, even though the cited study failed to do so. Nevertheless, locating a core feature of the abused person is still present in research on sexual abuse, even though there are nearly always a number of other 'abuses' alongside the actual 'sexual' violation (Richter-Appelt, 1995). Thus, the representation of the experience of childhood sexual abuse has set a precedent for subsequent descriptions of the sexual development in childhood through to adulthood.

This has been further supported by some authors suggesting the introduction of an 'incest inventory' used as a personality scale, used to predict the likelihood of 'character abuse' (Dahlstrom et al, 1972, cited in Meiselman, 1980). In Dahlstrom's study, individuals were described as 'delinquent' and 'impulsive' further strengthening the idea that incest has a negative effect on 'character' and 'personality'. Although such beliefs are not held by all, it is necessary to note how diffusely this idea operates in other research on women survivors and their 'problems' (where their identity is linked to their

sexual behaviour) as this can also be seen in the literature linking child sexual abuse with sexual health.

The literature on sexual dysfunctions and child sexual abuse is impressive, and there is no doubt that the experience of abuse is traumatic for a child and her feelings of sexual ownership. However, the aim here is not to refute studies claiming a link, but to critically examine *how* this link is presented, and how it functions in terms of *constructing* a discourse on child sexual abuse and women's sexuality as a social, as well as psychological experience.

The literature containing descriptions of empirical studies which document the sexual difficulties experienced by women with a history of child sexual abuse (and sexual assault in general) are based upon medical descriptors. Such diagnostic criteria (see DSM IV, 1994) measures sexuality according to its 'medicalised' function which is categorised according to operational workings (classified by penetration, orgasmic disorders, see above). Medical discourse can be successfully employed to link sexual dysfunction to a history of abuse, providing a case for abuse as a causative factor. As in studies on sexual relating, sexual dysfunction and even disturbances leading to body-image surgery (Morgan & Freeman, 1990), examples stress the purely sexual precedent set by sexual abuse. For example, a research team, whose studies are cited in every empirical study on sexual abuse that the present author can recall reading (Becker, Skinner, Abel & Cichon 1984) stress the importance of sexual dysfunction as a primary feature of the assault survivor, as they state that sexual abuse is 'none other than a sexual act' (Becker *et al* 1984:5). It is clear from this reasoning that women's difficulties after an attack can be heard by stressing their subsequent sexual dysfunction.

By stating that a sexual assault is "none other" than a sexual assault, the sexual assault can translate to a symptom because the medical measurements indicating the dysfunction reside in a specific sexual part of the person (vagina etc.). The study failed to find any *differing* sexual functioning levels in women with histories of rape, assault or incest, giving greater importance to the sexual element of the abuse or the universal nature of trauma effects (Bell, 1991; 1993). In the study cited above, measurements of

sexual functioning can be used to 'conceptualise' women's sexual problems as desire dysfunctions, anxiety, vaginismus, dyspareunia and fear, nonorgasmia (primary and situational orgasmia). Although the measurement used in Becker et al's (1984) study reports a link between the sexual component of the assault and subsequent dysfunction, there are several other factors which need to be considered with regard to women's sexuality. Psycho-social issues represent interpersonal, institutional, legal or socio-cultural meanings/practices surrounding a particular phenomenon. For example, in the case of sexuality, a psycho-social issue concerning the treatment of a person with an AIDS related illness could be the impact of being seen as someone (e.g. a heterosexual married woman) who did not 'deserve' to be 'infected' and can, therefore, be viewed as a legitimate patient (Willig, 1997).

'Socially' defined meanings around health issues impact on psychological well being, as they inform the person of their status and can, therefore, influence psychological well being in a positive or negative way. Other factors influencing the meaning of the sexual problems and its impact are discussed below with reference to the negotiations that take place and mediate its course. One factor, noted in Becker's study was the relationship between perpetrator and victim; if the assailant was known to the survivor, the likelihood was that the sexual dysfunction remained for a longer period of time, whereas those who did not know their attacker found recovery in a lesser time space. For those who did experience sexual difficulty, 80% of these women also held themselves responsible for the attack, compared to 49% who did not experience sexual dysfunction after an assault. Blame was, therefore, significantly associated with persisting negative effects on sexuality.

Other sexual difficulties experiences as a result of abuse have been linked to the survivor's interpretation of the abuse and the way they associate sex with duty. Feinauer (1989), examining a sample of abuse survivors claimed women's self esteem was better if they were able to be orgasmic, revealing that guilt and responsibility for sexual difficulties was affected by the perceptions women held of their partner's responses to their abuse. Feinauer's interpretation highlights how abuse and the meaning

surrounding their adult sexual abilities and disabilities is related to feelings of guilt for not supplying sexual satisfaction to their partners and viewing sex as a duty to men and the context of their sexual relationship with their partner. The presentation of sexual problem in a psycho-social setting reveal the presence of wider sexual scripts and the emphasis women might give to negotiating their partner's sexual needs. Bearing in mind there has been a shift (albeit a complex one) in contemporary discourses on sexuality, little research has touched upon these issues in relation to survivors of child sexual abuse (Reavey, 1997). For example, although there is a great deal of research on women with long term problems, women in stable heterosexual relationships have often been ignored, or there is an assumption that she has 'overcome' her past (O'Dell, 1997).

### 2.2.2. Sexual relations: marriage and partners.

A general fear of sex, marital problems and male phobia are among some of the consequences offered on behalf of women survivors' and the difficult sexual negotiations which occur in their sexual and marital relationships (Jehu, 1988). It is well documented that survivors of child sexual abuse have problems with sexual intimacy, relating and mood disturbances (Jehu, 1989). However, the figures presented in studies suggesting sexual disturbances are always open to interpretation and represent a methodological difficulty as clinical studies using questionnaires, make it unclear whether women survivors are simply *more likely to* report difficulties due to their past.

For example, these studies often contain questions about the woman's satisfaction with her relationship and sexual functioning and found higher rates (only 2%) of satisfaction in non victims (sic). These results are by no means conclusive as it is difficult to conclude that sexuality or sexual 'problems' are necessarily linked to marital satisfaction. If one compares this to studies with "normal couples" the rates of marital satisfaction for survivors of abuse did not correspond to any level of sexual 'dysfunction'. For example a study by Frank *et al* (1980) illustrated that even though 80% of respondents reported very high satisfaction, they were traditionally defined as sexually dysfunctional, which was in turn over-ridden by issues of sexual dissatisfaction

(lack of interest etc.). Therefore, the issue of linking sexual problems with psycho-social sexual experiences is one requiring greater methodological and epistemological sensitivity, as clinical and medical definitions do not necessarily translate into psycho-sexual interactions.

Other issues relating to the measurement of a survivor's relational/sexual difficulties involves the way in which the subject of relating (the partner-usually a man) is fitted into the picture. Often the partner is absent from any definition of difficulty, satisfaction etc. and only the 'perception' of the individual woman is surveyed and measured, theorising 'personal difficulty' according the response by the woman to a pre-set question (Finkelhor et al 1989; Mullen, 1994). Both Mullen and Finkelhor criticise the use of questionnaires where women respond to questions without clarifying their answers and without describing their partner's sexual behaviour, their relationship, or talk about expectations at all. The questionnaires used, therefore, assume certain things before the answers are given (which is a common criticism of their use, Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Many studies use marriage or regular partnership as a standard measure of 'satisfaction' with sex where the attitudes/ behaviour of the partner is not approached or is represented as a 'control', indicating a degree of stability in women's sexual conduct (Kitzinger, 1993).

For example, in Jehu's (1989) study of 51 women with a history of incest, he describes women's cognitive error and their incorrect perceptions of sex, where women "hold dysfunctional assumptions or rules according to which they interpret their experiences and regulate their behaviour" even with a regular partner. Sexual functioning, satisfaction and cognitive error is locatable in the context of the 'regular partner', hence the use of 'even when' for describing the normalcy of the situation. The woman is therefore perceived to have the problem with sex. Yet, it is interesting to note later on in the paper (on the same page in fact) that Jehu (1989) then proceeds to describe these regular partners as



...[U]nsuitable partners who often misuse the women, and in some cases such ill-matched and exploitative relationships are repeated in the lives of victims.

(ibid)

Cognitive errors and distortions are used to describe 'all' sexual situations, as if cognitive activity was stable and fixed and not subject to negotiation. For example, it seems that when the partner is 'regular' the woman's attitudes are all wrong, and when the partner is unsuitable, this is again, because the woman is repeating patterns from the past. Whichever path is chosen, the abuse and its effect on sexuality and sexual cognition is still theorised as a central factor in sexual relationship. However, feminist writers, in particular have for a long time questioned the individualisation of the effects of child sexual abuse and located them within a wider socio-political and socially constructed psychological context. The section below describes how the sexual experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse are gendered, highlighting the *function* of individualisation and the contemporary ignorance of sexual abuse and sexuality as a social-political construction.

### 2.2.3. Child sexual abuse and the construction of gendered and sexual identities.

The empirical evidence on child sexual abuse and its subsequent effects has provided mainstream research (and self-help texts) with links between CSA and prostitution (Kames & Meyerding, 1977; Silbert, 1984) sexually slack behaviour (Fergusson et al, 1997) and sexual re victimisation (Mayall, 1995; Krahe, 1997; Herman, 1981; Poston & Lison, 1990). The cyclical discourse storying women survivors' sexuality is often interpreted by comparing the similarity between 'being abused' and 'looking for it again' in adulthood, through sexual promiscuity and being re-victimised (Jehu, 1988). Often clinical and/or psychoanalytic formulations suggest the reason for this as 'faulty cognitions', or a type of re-enactment (Simon, 1995). Women's behaviours are regulated and diagnosed according to this cyclical discourse which measures the sexual standards of 'other' women, their degree of unacceptable sexual behaviour and their susceptibility to being a victim again (Fergusson, Horwood &

Lynskey, 1997). For example, women with an abuse history who have 'multiple sexual partners' are necessarily presumed to be acting as victims and making themselves vulnerable to further attack. It is interesting that this is presented as a testament to an 'abused' character (a victim).

The facts seem to speak for themselves, without any reference to a social analysis and the behaviour of men. This is a problem which is not even addressed in mainstream clinical psychology, as gender is not thought to be a significant social variable and receives attention in only two percent of clinical research (Leitner, 1995). The 'sexually inappropriate' behaviours documented by mainstream studies, therefore, are gendered without any explicit reference to gender and sexual experience. Is there, for example, similar research on the male population, linking promiscuity to deviancy, or are their multiple partners seen as a testament to evolutionary strategies and the male species' need for propagating his genes? What this entails for clinical research *and* practice is a reinforcement of individualised problems which are implicitly gendered (i.e. a degendered link between child sexual abuse and later problems), reaffirming 'women' as more vulnerable and implicitly more susceptible to psychological distress and sexual re-actions (Boyle, 1997).

The practice and research in some therapeutic and clinical quarters not only ignores gender as an important site of investigation; certain 'versions' of particularised gendered psychological distress become the only focus of gender *as if it were a social variable*. Diagnostic categories (in psychiatry and psychology) become strengthened in relation to 'women's distress', experience and meanings (surrounding sexuality, the home, the family) as the focus remains firmly on the 'individual' without any reference to the cultural and gendered scripts (Harre, 1986; Boyle, 1997).

The important point is that the 'construction' of women's sexual activity in the mainstream literature 'acts' as a powerful rhetorical device, which evaluates the effects of abuse through 'its' fit with male and female norms of sexual behaviour. Other 'gender' features highlighted by the research include more specific sexual differences reported by male and female survivors. For example, Finkelhor (1989) states that female survivors

have a propensity to feel 'sexually corrupted' and boys to 'fear homosexuality', an indication that sexual problems are socially constructed by gendered meanings surrounding the abuse.

Sexual stigmas relating to gender can fuel the survivors' articulation of their sexual inadequacies and failures (Levett, 1995). As O'Dell (1997) asserts, being married and heterosexual is the only element of sexuality which has not been questioned for its level of unacceptability in women survivors of child sexual abuse. It is taken as 'normal' and set in opposition to labels of sexual inappropriateness, including unprotected intercourse. Cyclical discourses pervade these studies, feeding into the notion that women who have been abused will become abused again by men because their affliction is to re-act. It is clear then, that the measurement of women survivors' sexual identity is linked in with their feminine character, which reacts to victimisation, rather than acts upon it or against it (Herman & Hirschmann, 1981; Armstrong, 1996). If a woman with a history of abuse is unfortunate enough to be raped, it is because her abuse speaks for her, issuing signals which signify her weakness and vulnerability (an argument now being used by some psychiatrists in rape trials) (Poston & Lison, 1990). Her sexual health is thus presented in terms of the healing she can gain through therapy which can then rid her of this 'signal' of vulnerability or return her to a pre-traumatised state (Kelly, 1988/9).

It seems clear that there is confusion as to what constitutes a 'healthy' sexuality for women, especially when social and interpersonal expectations are involved. Sexual partnerships involve sexual negotiation, rather than the binary transferring of sexual 'essences' between partners. However, the literature about women's sexuality in interpersonal, relational and social contexts say very little or nothing about how these shaping factors are seen to contribute to women's experience of sexuality. Often, the only reference to the relationship itself is the women's bad choice of partner, her unconscious need to be abused again by men or that women's individual problems with the abuse are indeed the cause of the relationship difficulties (Poston & Lison, 1990 for

examples of this). This creates a sexual identity that is separated from wider issues around women and their sexuality (Choi & Nicolson, 1996).

### *Identity*

The identity of abuse survivors is an important place to begin looking at how sexuality and subjectivity is constituted, personally, and as a point of 'being in the world'. At the point when women identify themselves (or identified by other e.g. professionals) they are negotiating a position in relation to the rest of the social world. Davies (1996) describes

[I]dentity... as a process by which an individual discursively constructs a sense of self. Identity entails the ongoing integration of possible perspectives and versions of who an individual is into a coherent and meaningful life history. These possible versions are not idiosyncratic or individual, but part of a cultural web of narratives available to the individual.

(Davies, 1996:114)

It has been argued that theoretical understandings of sexuality in survivors of child sexual abuse are based on a discourse of 'difference' from other normal women, which has been defined according to physiological, cognitive and behavioural models (Warner, 1996). Identity, is, therefore defined along these demarcations for present and future prognosis - often if they are settled in a relationship, this is a 'good' sign, if they are still manifesting deviant behaviours, they are still identifying as victims (Kitzinger, 1994; O'Dell, 1997; Warner, 1996; Reavey & Courtney, 1998).

The literature on survivor's sexual 'behaviour' further illustrates how women's sexuality is positioned in issues of 'identity'. For example, Foucault (1981) argues that sexual behaviours have come to linked with 'who you are' - your identity. In general, sexual identities are now more likely to be attached to one's sexual practices - you are 'straight' 'gay' 'lesbian chic' 'butch lesbian' 'a lad' 'a cad' and all are identities which transpire from sexual practices. The literature on child sexual abuse has contributed greatly to this notion, by providing a convincing 'cause' of marginalised sexualities.

This is clear from the literature on survivors' sexual behaviour/disorder where a woman's sexual 'past' and 'present' are said to be linked through trauma and development and where the sexual identity of the woman rests within the individual past and present difficulties. This individualised presentation of the survivor's sexual identity can be criticised on grounds of methodology, epistemology and political motivations, all of which will be discussed in the following chapter. An argument for situating knowledge on women's sexuality in issues of power (including sexualised power) will be grounded in a post-structuralist framework, which utilises feminist politics and scholarship. It has been argued in this chapter that the empirical evidence does not simply 'describe' what is there, it forms and inform practices - both academic, medical, therapeutic, excluding certain stories (psycho-social) and focusing on pathological and psychological tales (symptoms) (Parker, 1992). Power over and within sexuality is exercised via discourses which prescribe gendered subjectivities (for men and women).

By situating our knowledge of abuse and sexual survival in issues of general sexual identity for men and women and the scripts they provide for understanding sexuality, a more ecological interpretation of sexual identity and sexual health (in this case, for women survivors) can ensue. In this way, the socially constituted nature of the survivor's sexuality and identity can be better understood: As Tiefer (1995:27) states, in doing so, we are better able to "analyze how people internalise the medicalised messages of sexuality professionals and how these messages contribute to their sexual scripts and expectations" rather than merely describing their presence as 'faulty' or 'wrong'.

Often if the level of explanation remains with the 'individual's' sexual history, little else is challenged or brought into the examination of the 'problem' in mainstream research and it seems mainstream clinical and therapeutic practices (Boyle, 1997; Bostock, 1997).

### 2.3.0. Guiding survival: professional issues and sexuality.

The sexual nature of surviving child sexual abuse has become institutionalised through medical practice, psychological therapies and counselling (Kelly, 1988/9). A person's concern about sexual health, sexuality, or a sexual problem/dysfunction will be most likely brought to the attention of a professional, working in the health service or private practice. Individuals may seek approval or 'expert' guidance, in order to provide them with a diagnosis and course of action (Metz, Milton & Seifert, 1988; Tiefer, 1995). Studies on help-seeking reveal the tendency for people to rely heavily on the professional judgement of a physician to diagnose the problem and suggest subsequent treatment, where concerns around normalcy of sexual thoughts, feelings and behaviour are examples of psycho-social issues, especially thoughts which carry a social or personal stigma (Metz, Milton & Seifert, 1988). The psycho-social experience and the meanings attached to sexuality and sexual health in the professional realm are regulated by the advice, interaction and diagnosis of the client which is often heavily constructed by the professional (Philpot, 1996). Thus, the interaction between professional and client is another example where psycho-social/symbolic issues can abound. Some professionals may be reluctant to approach the subject of sexual problems and/or sexual abuse. Studies investigating professionals interacting with survivors of child sexual abuse reported significant gender differences (Attias, 1986; Little & Hamby, 1996) where it was reported that women professionals had a tendency to assess more harm and 'prescribe more protective interventions to the adult victim' with the male professionals 'assess[ing] more blame to victims' of child sexual abuse (Doughty & Schneider, 1987, cited in Little & Hamby, 1996). Little & Hamby (1996) argue that as well as issues of gender, counter-transference, theoretical and socio-political views (such as feminism) played a part in clinical treatment and diagnosis.

In turn, they argue that a therapist who has been abused him/herself (Russell, 1986 found that 38% of women therapists had a history of abuse) is more able and motivated in dealing with treatment issues around child sexual abuse in clinical practice. Although there is a great deal of emphasis on the importance of mutual liking, trust,

openness and respect in the therapeutic context (Courtois, 1988, Jehu, 1988), professional interactions and the social expectations experienced by clients do not seem to be widely addressed in the mainstream professional literature (Tiefer, 1994; Ward & Ogden, 1994). For example, Ward & Ogden (1994) women may hold many beliefs about sexual matters simultaneously, which do not only concern the sexual problem, but are grounded in issues of self-protection from the negative attitudes of others, including their partners, and the professionals they come into contact with. As Ward & Ogden (1994) assert,

Vaginismus can be re-interpreted. It should not be conceptualised as a psychosexual problem which needs to be cured, but as a psychosocial experience. This reinterpretation removes it from the narrow parameters of health, biological and reproductive discourses, and places it within the wider contexts of the psychosocial and power/gender discourses.

(Ward & Ogden, 1994:43)

Psycho-social issues are rarely addressed in mainstream studies of sexual problems, leaving the primacy of the 'individual problem' at the centre of therapy and sex education, even though it is clear that they are integral features of professional/client interactions: psychological/social contexts are still a source of ignorance, guilt and embarrassment for professional physicians, teachers, parents etc. (Thompson, 1990). This can have negative implications for individuals and their help-seeking behaviour, and the interaction between therapist and client. Once again with reference to vaginismus, Ogden & Ward (1995) note that there is wide dissatisfaction with professional interventions by women with sexual problems, due to the incongruence between the beliefs held by both groups. This was further attributed to patients' having a physical examination imposed, unsympathetic conduct, including being pitied and 'fobbed off'. Comments from one patient revealed gross misconduct as one woman commented:

I waited twenty years to see this counsellor as, when I first went to a doctor, one doctor slapped my bum and said "go and get drunk" and another doctor, who wasn't able to give me an internal examination

told me to “come back when you've grown up”. I felt so humiliated I didn't tell anyone else.

(Ogden & Ward, 1995:27)

Ogden & Ward state that the above example was not an isolated incident, as a significant number of women reported a lack of support if clear, 'outward' or 'physical' signs were not presenting, highlighting how the primacy of biological symptoms are enmeshed in socially informed judgements around women's maturity and the legitimacy of their needs. It is indeed interesting that the command "Go and get drunk" by the doctor in the extract mirrors the common sense reasoning around women needing to 'relax' and enjoy sex, and not to “stress” about it.

Though studies on the sexual problems of abuse survivors do show great concerns by professionals and self-help literature to understand the cause and maintenance of the survivor's sexual difficulties, an examination of which scripts are used to achieve this will be critically reviewed, as there may be a tendency of such texts to invest political concerns in ways which are in fact antithetical to survivors.

#### 2.4.0. Concluding comments.

One of the main aims of this chapter was to review the theoretical underpinnings of the literature exploring the 'effects' of child sexual abuse and the empirical work carried out on its behalf. What was of importance in this part of the thesis was to illustrate how certain theoretical representations act as the essential or definitive explanation for problems around sex, relationships and identity. This entailed critically analysing the ways in which women survivors' sexuality, their sexual 'difficulties' and 'problems with relating' were not often addressed at the relational context of the woman's life and the expectations around her sexuality and gender. In other words, the academic literature on child sexual abuse, women and sexuality is still rooted in modernism, where clear connections between 'scientific' and 'expert' knowledge and the discovery of certain psychological and sexual truths still remain at the centre of research and clinical discourses.



Although mainstream academia has not provided an adequate forum for making discursive issues visible, this does not mean that an outright rejection of empirical work is required. However, a reworking of knowledge on sexuality and psychology within a wider discursive context is desirable if we are to understand how women survivors become subjects of professional and everyday discourses *and* sexual practices that circulate in everyday as well as therapeutic settings (Seu & Heenan, 1998; White & Epston, 1989; Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). The following chapter illustrates how these issues might become visible and how mainstream knowledge can be challenged on an intellectual, methodological and political level.

By exploring some of the current shifts in thinking in social psychological theory, my aim is to propose a reconceptualisation of women's sexuality and child sexual abuse by looking at how some social theorists and psychologists have 'turned to language' and interrogated psychology and everyday life by treating it 'as a discourse' (Forbes, 1996). When speaking about child sexual abuse and women's sexuality, we are not speaking 'neutrally about underlying 'natural' processes which occur as a result of the abuse. Speaking about sexuality involves professionals, academics and women survivors' speaking *within the social*, where, as I will argue, sexual and psychological *actions*, processes, cognitions, sexual practices take place and are situated, fulfilling a number of functions, both theoretical *and* rhetorical (Edwards & Potter, 1995). Chapter three will discuss these issues in relation to sexuality, providing a theoretical reconstruction of psychological and sexual knowledges as discursive practices. This reconstruction will outline how sexuality might be read with specific reference to the conflation of the 'personal' with the 'social', with specific reference to gender and sexuality.

### Chapter Three. Subjectivity, sexuality and power relations. Towards a discursive feminist social psychology.

The aims of this chapter are to articulate a theoretical framework that promotes a fuller understanding of psychological and social issues with reference to subjectivity, sexuality and identity. One of the aims of the thesis is to explore how the 'experience' of women survivors is central to our understandings of their sexuality, rather than just their sexual behaviour or problems with sex. The relationships between sex, sexuality and subjectivity are discussed in this chapter in terms of 'how' they can be theorised and how this can inform the basis on which interpretations of data can be made. In other words, epistemological questions must be raised before a methodological framework can emerge. There are a number of approaches covering these debates, ranging from feminist, post-structuralist and narrative approaches that are examined for their contributions to sexuality issues and the setting out of a social-psychological framework.

One of the most influential writers on sexuality is Michel Foucault who provided a historical and social context in which to study sexuality and the social practices sexuality is organised *within* (the family, marriage, homosexuality and pathology). He argues that the 'power' to define what is normal, therefore, is inseparable from the knowledge we use to characterise others and ourselves (as normal, abnormal etc.). The systems of statements (discourses) which are used to construct a sense of what sexuality 'is' are therefore crucial to our understanding how sexuality is 'understood' (by the scientists, psychologists etc.) and 'experienced' (by all). In short, the task is a move from 'hypothesising' what we might find, to begin analysing those systems of statements (a discourse analysis) which enables us to explore the complexity of the professional and social-psychological 'relations' in which people live and experience themselves sexually (Weeks, 1998).

A discourse analytic approach (Henriques *et al*, 1984; Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993; Gill, 1995) constitutes the methodology used in the empirical chapters to examine

how women survivors of child sexual abuse are constructed; as objects of professional/therapeutic concern and as psychological actors.

More recently, sexuality has been examined with reference to the dominant position of heterosexuality which *defines* sexual relations by constructing itself as normal and natural and privileged over other knowledges and experiences, a point which is currently unadvised in mainstream psychological and clinical studies (McIntosh, 1981). Heterosexuality is often 'cited' or 'reiterated' when referring to sexuality as a whole and creates a sense of its own stability and authority as a 'natural' presence guiding an individual's subjectivity *as if it were an internal or fixed property of people of that gender* (Butler, 1993). Butler (1993) argues, therefore, that sexualities are not only categories in discourses (which create the fiction of unity - through the family, law, psychological theory and medicine - see chapter two); they are 'performed' in a variety of contexts which reinforce heterosexuality as normal and natural (Butler, 1993; Weeks, 1985).

### 3.1.0. Feminist analyses of sexuality and power.

In chapter one, the connections between child sexual abuse, sexual violence and heterosexuality were discussed with specific reference to sexual behaviours, practices and the social endorsement of male sexual power. Feminist theory and research on sexuality examined the power to define and direct sexuality rests in patriarchal rule and dominance, in the public and private sphere, in heterosexual relationships and parent-child interactions (Daly, 1979; Dworkin, 1989). In this, men and women are seen to act in compliance to the structural systems which situate their behaviour and subjective *experience* of work, domesticity, family and sexuality (reinforced by the various institutions which legitimised behaviours e.g. the family, marriage etc.). Men establish their primacy and legitimate their sexual needs (because they control and hold power in society, and because they run the institutions that define and create knowledge. Knowledge designated as natural and normative- (medical, sexological) *which inadvertently favour maintaining present sexual practices*) sex, are able to abuse this

power because their sexuality is deployed as 'active' and 'natural' and yet *subject* to activation by women.

The ontological statuses of men and women are, therefore, partly defined by their relation to the heterosexual matrix. The following section aims to address feminist conceptualisations of sexuality and identity with reference to recent shifts in feminist theory and social psychology which suggests 'identities' (as women and men) as discursive and identificatory, rather than 'fixed' (at the level of gender). This approach does not agree that social organisation or experience is unitary or dictated by a patriarchal structure (either materially or ideologically) but constituted by discursive practices which 'situate' minds and bodies according to particularised discursive systems or discourses. The questions I aim to address in this thesis are how the survivor of child sexual abuse becomes identifiable and constructed as an object of knowledge (and therapeutic concern) through the interplay of culturally available discourses which constitute her as a particular 'sexual', 'gendered' and 'subjective' individual. In short, how can a feminist position and social-psychological framework meet and re-address issues of women's subjectivity, sexuality and power? One of the ways in which I aim to do this on an epistemological level is by drawing on the work of Foucault, who traced the emergence of discourses of sexuality and the connection of sexuality, subjectivity and power.

### 3.1.1. Epistemology and power: Reading Foucault

One had to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework.

(Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984:59)

The structuralism of the 1950's and 60's outlined certain basic processes, the 'symbolic fields' or 'signifying structures' responsible for constituting individuals and their relationship to their structural surroundings (society) (Sampson, 1989). The person-society relationship was a particularly important aspect of this debate, as it crystallised

the problem of the role of human agency in defining and being defined by physical and symbolic structures.

Post-structuralist concerns shifted from attempting to identify properties or the static structures or 'signifiers' (as in some forms of Marxism or feminism). Instead, the aim is to highlight how language *is* a material production (as in Derrida's 'supplementarity') serving as a hierarchical structure in which relations (between men and women) are stabilised or given a normative status through the knowledges which define our understanding of those relations, and their 'manner of production' and reproduction (Hariman, 1989). In order to grasp the link between the production of knowledge on sexuality, I will be addressing the work of Foucault who wrote extensively on how sexuality was established as a knowledge and how this such knowledge established both professional and everyday discourses on what sexuality 'is' and how it can be measured as a topic of the academy. In this, my intention is to detail a Foucauldian analysis of discourses of sexuality, which establishes an interpretive framework for my own empirical studies on child sexual abuse (of power) and the construction of professional and everyday discourses on sexuality.

### *Genealogy.*

The use of Foucault's approach to the production of knowledges on sex is used primarily as a way of problematising the separation of the 'individual' from 'society', rather "[B]oth are regarded as effects of a production to be specified, rather than as pre-given objects of the human sciences." (Henriques *et al*, 1984:100). Thus, the power to define who the individual is (as in psychology) is argued to be a socially produced 'immediately opening psychological discourses up for the effects of social practices in them; this enables one to seek in these practices the conditions of possibility of psychology' (op.cit, 101). Thus, Foucault argued that the 'truth' and 'method' of speaking about something or speaking 'as someone' (a woman or a man) was a necessary but not sufficient way of 'telling the truth' about one's position in the world.

The major reason for this, Foucault explained was to do with the 'act of speaking' which was more than representing 'what happened' or saying 'what is'. As he explains in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*,

... to speak is to do something - something other than to express what one thinks, to translate what one knows ... to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions (and not only a situation, a contexts and motives) and rules (not the logical and linguistic rules of construction); to show that a change in the order of discourse does not presuppose 'new ideas', as little invention and creativity, a different mentality, but transformations in practice, perhaps also in neighbouring practices, and in their common articulation.

(Foucault, 1972:209)

The implicit suggestion in some feminist work is that 'women's testimonies' of abuse, violence and oppression are indeed empirically 'true' stories representing the power which has or had been exercised over their emotions, sexualities and so on *as if this representative of some organising social structure*. Foucault, for example argues that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a unity between 'who one is' and their sexuality was forged, due to the bio-power discourse (discussed below) which designated bodies and hence subjectivities according to the 'knowledge' which rendered sex and person(ality) collapsible in public and private categories of experience. 'Real' subjectivity, identity and emotion were relocated to the core of one's sexuality. It is clear then, that 'knowledge' (and methods of obtaining it) is, in Foucauldian terms, inseparable from its relation in power (which is not necessarily negative, but simply operational in its capacity to "produce effects" (subject, people) and control those effects (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984: 56).

It is Foucault's analysis of power and its relationship to knowledge (and for the purpose of this thesis) on sexuality which provides us with an analysis of 'power' which demonstrates how 'gender' and 'sexuality' cannot be 'attached' to certain persons but are

locatable in knowledges which 'situate' women's sexualities. An important question in terms of this thesis is whether Foucault's analysis of knowledge and its link to power can usefully explain how power relates to subjectivities and sexualities, and how certain people seem to exercise it over others in the process. If a feminist position challenges existing discourses of sexuality and subjectivity, then we must be clear as to whether Foucault's analysis of discourses on sexuality can be beneficial to feminism. Rather than turning to Foucault's thoughts on this explicitly (as he did not explore gender inequality in any great depth), his work must be examined in terms of its framework and merger with feminist concerns regarding power and/or perspectives which lay claim to social injustices as 'real' and enduring positions which exert power over speech (Parker & Spears, 1996).

### 3.1.2. Knowledge and Power.

There are two meanings of the word subject, subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscious self-knowledge.

(Foucault, in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982:212)

Foucault devoted little time to explicitly 'feminist causes' although he did describe feminism as a worthwhile 'revolutionary movement' (Foucault, 1977: 216, cited in McNeil, 1993:151). Despite acknowledging the political decree of feminism, and the position that the 'hystericisation of women' held in history, he did not engage his discussion in feminist concerns or matters of gender production to any great degree (Butler, 1990). This has not, however, dissuaded some feminist work from drawing upon Foucault's conceptualisations of the individual (woman) in relation to power/knowledge networks and the larger deployment of sexuality as a causal truth of gender identity (Butler, 1990). The issues providing a convergence between feminism and Foucault are raised here as; firstly his frameworks of power (in/as discourse) and the 'position' of women in relation to a wider deployment of sexuality on a cultural level. Secondly, feminists have used his analysis of power as a way of resisting

knowledge presented on behalf of women in mainstream theories of gender and sexuality. Lastly, I would like to highlight some of the limitations of Foucauldian theory in relation to feminist politics: although my concerns here are academic, Foucault himself declared that any discourse is part of a 'warring battle' against the promotion of hegemonic norms which impose themselves on public and private practices.

One of the key disagreements Marxist and cultural feminism and Foucault have surrounds their respective analyses of power and/as sex. According to a Foucauldian framework of power relations, 'sovereign power' was the dominant power of the father 'patriarch' in the context of the family unit. Female subordination and female identity and the development of sexuality (in terms of children's identification (psychoanalytical) is unsatisfactory, because of the patriarchal structuring of family and sexual life (through marriage, employment and sexual coercion).

Sovereign (or juridico-discursive) power is problematic for feminism for two reasons: first of all, it locates power in a space specially reserved for the male (and his decision to exercise power over his family, mentally, physically and sexually). In this sense, the 'objectification' of children (in terms of objectifying their gender, through identification with the patriarch/father) centres upon female children and their 'use' in relation to the male (which persists outside the family, as boys will have learnt to identify positively with the father whose sexuality is prioritised) (Herman & Hirschmann, 1981; Ward, 1984).

Through the father's possession of power (which all others implicitly or explicitly recognise) the powerlessness of the female can be traced. Power and powerlessness are, therefore, inextricably linked via the father and his ability to 'order' his and the rest of his family's 'space' (this is a deliberate reference to Foucault's 'Order of things').

It is certainly the case that it is men who largely abuse children, and it is right to say that children do not readily speak openly 'against' their abuser. However, it has been suggested that citing juridical-discursive power at the centre of power and powerlessness would deny the 'productivity' of power which is 'exercised' rather than



'possessed' in the deployment of sexuality and in men and women's 'subjectification' in relation to that power (Bell, 1993). For Foucault power is never held by a central governing patriarch (in the case of feminism), it is dispersed and 'complex'; it does not have definitive central rule or violent force, neither does it "result...from the choice or decision of an individual subject" (Foucault, 1990:95). The other disagreement resides in the link that is made between sex and power in Foucauldian and feminist thought.

One of the key tensions between later 80's feminism and Foucault has been Foucault's stance on sexual crimes and whether these crimes were sexual crimes or like other forms of aggression (feminist work in the 1970's still argued that rape and sexual violence was *about* physical harm and not sex - see Russell, 1975; Brownmiller, 1975). He also perceived the strength of the women's movement as a collective body which moves away from centring sex as the key site of women's oppression (Gordon, 1980). This argument returns to his first work on the history of sexuality where he discusses the 'modern technology of the self' which conflates sex with identity and the self, where "power is more productive, producing subjects with sexualities...as part of their identity, and become attached to it as a truth." (see Bell, 1991:86).

The key point relating to sex as rape is the privileged position given to the genitals by retaining the rape/sex association. Such an attachment forces a conceptualisation of sex 'in' the body where the body is simply "the inscribed surface of events" which is supposedly outside discourse and the power/knowledge networks (cited in Bell, 1991:97). What Foucault warns against, therefore, is viewing one's genitalia as *separate* or *privileged* over other parts of the body. In doing so, there is a danger of allying with the deployment of sexuality stating bodies as facts and sexuality as nature or species. If feminists continue to represent abuse and violence *as* sex (albeit it being linked to power) there is a risk of producing knowledge which allied with earlier deployments of sexuality (linking sex to biology): knowledges which feminists were fighting against in principle (we shall return to this in the critique of Foucault).

The important thing to note in relation to note on the power exercised over all sexuality was its inextricable link with the techniques which brings it into being (and

this does not imply that it does not exist 'outside' of this materially). The point Foucault was making was that the powers over sexuality (bio-power, disciplinary and hierarchical) exercised over individuals were as a result of the *knowledges* being developed to investigate it,

If sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible object; and conversely, if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourse were capable of investing it.

(Foucault, 1990:98)

According to this account, oppression and power over women is a form of knowledge and discourse. Rather than focusing on 'men' (as a group etc. or patriarchy as a structure), the power exercised over women could be located in a network of power relations which contribute not only to an understanding of power, but of the objectification and subjectification 'of' women. In this way, an analysis of the way in which mechanisms of 'knowledge' (of women - and this is never particular to academic knowledge, but relates to the verb - to know) which formed the 'techniques' of power involved in the deployment of sexuality, is possible

One might add that this is all very well theoretically, but what about the 'real' issues and the specifics of the way in which power is grounded at the level of gender micro-politics? (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993). For feminism, the question surrounding women's subordination, in relation to men in the family, male sexuality and their position as 'subjects' demands a thorough investigation of the techniques used to 'keep women in their place'. One of the key difficulties feminist work often has with Foucault's analysis of power is his lack of attention to the ways in which sex and power *over women* are more specifically interlinked (Bordo, 1993).

It is perhaps a truism to remind ourselves that sexuality and women are only 'knowable' to the extent that we speak about them. However, the power to define and shape reality (at an individual and institutional level) (Burman & Parker, 1993) has irreducible "effects" on subjectivity and sexual practices. Foucault embraces this

demand, and contributes two arguments in relation to the question of power, which are as follows:

1. Power is exercised over everyone "power is everywhere" (Foucault, 1990) and its strength lies in its techniques of subjectification (the capacity to define and control individuals). Knowledge and power are joined in discourse and strategically employed in institutions or by those who have a stake in 'telling or proclaiming' the truth (legal system, medicine, psychiatry and the 'expert'). Power and knowledge are never stable and are, therefore, open to challenge and resistance because they are not 'possessed'.
2. The subjectification of 'women' can be viewed in relation to its social/historical links to the knowledge, which constructed it (as well as male sexuality, children's sexuality etc.) The key concern for feminism, however, is the relationship between the subjectification of women and the 'perpetual asymmetry' they experience in relation to men (Foucault, 1990). Rather than viewing 'power' as 'held' by men, the key contribution Foucault makes is in his analysis of the way in which women could be said to be controlled by certain knowledges which 'subjectify' them as inferior, reflecting and reproducing cultural forms of thought. For example, the female survivor of child sexual abuse has a status as an object of knowledge in relation to power inequality, between adult and child (epistemological). This (power) relation is believed to produce psychological/sexual problems affecting mental health (ontological) which is in turn distilled in debates in law and politics (moral/political) (cf. Parker, 1992:31).

In the following section, the 'turn' to an analysis of discourse by Foucault (as a technique in which power/knowledge is produced) is used to illustrate some of the ways in which power has operated over women at a cultural and political level. In this sense, I am arguing that Foucault's analysis of power which can be used by feminists 'strategically' in order to disrupt and resist mainstream and common sense knowledge on women as subjects. In order to use this material effectively, I will be discussing it in terms of the thesis' direct field of relevance; our attention must, therefore, be turned to the convergence and divergence between Feminism and Foucault in relation to women's subjectification and the deployment of sexuality. In addition, reference will be made to

the argumentative potential of both in the context of child sexual abuse and sexual violence in general.

### 3.1.3. Theorising women: subjectivity, sexuality and perpetual asymmetry.

[The body's] disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterised the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body* (Foucault, cited in Bell, 1993:33)

Bio-power and disciplinary power refer to the knowledges which in the middle of the last century turned its attention to the 'bodily machinations' and sexual behaviours of the population (bio-power). Chapter two traced the scientific progression in the field of sexology, which was able to quantify and measure sexual norms, behaviour and sexual 'reactions' in order to establish an abstract model of 'human sexual behaviour'. Science, thus became an authority, not only on people's sexual machinations, but also on their understanding of themselves in relation to this knowledge. In order to ponder the question "Am I normal?" (which is implicitly invited by science through the common sense primacy of the central tendency, standard deviation etc.) individuals draw upon the power of the knowledge on sexuality in order to answer it. If and when this knowledge is legitimated (through arguments of rational thought, positivistic methods, institutionalised norms i.e. marriage and confessions of deviancy from individuals themselves) the power it holds is in its strategic ability to be able to tell the truth, and for that truth to be heard and accepted at the local level of subjectivity (issued forth into common sense and/or legislative knowledge).

The importance of bio-power in the deployment of sexuality was its *functional description* at the level of the body and at the level of disciplining the 'populace'. In other words, the bio-political power implemented by the introduction of knowledge 'on the population' became a way in which individuals (subjectivities) were 'produced' in relation to that knowledge (normal, abnormal, perverse and immoral). It is clear that this

production was instrumental in categorising subjectivity according to gender (differentiated according to the machinations of the sexes; Butler, 1993).

The alliance forged between the deployment of sexuality and the production of gender can, therefore, be traced to the mechanisms involved in the techniques employed by knowledge that exerted bio-political/disciplinary power. A genealogical critique of the production of gender would, therefore, look to the way in which sexuality and subjectivity (and its mutual links with one another) were 'put into discourse' via such knowledge (Foucault, 1990). However, if we consider Foucault's analysis of power and the productive way in which power incites 'all' subjectivity, why do women hold an 'asymmetrical' position with respect to the subjective positioning of men? Furthermore, why did Foucault neglect the 'woman question' in his analysis of the deployment of sexuality? (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Before discussing this issue, it is necessary to discuss the ways in which women are potentially 'subjugated' in relation to men, in order to discuss how a Foucauldian framework can and cannot be useful in providing a feminist trajectory in relation to sexuality and child sexual abuse.

First of all, the question as to how power is exercised specifically over women in relation to their bodies, sexuality and subjectivity must be raised. In order to do this, it is necessary to identify how power can be said to operate in relation to women's asymmetrical position (Foucault, cited in Bell, 1993:39).

Violence against women has often been used to depict a whole range of physical, emotional and sexual abuses 'done' to women (by men, largely). Frequently, violence against women is not a case of 'stranger danger' but one of 'familiar dangers' as those involved are usually 'family' (husbands, partners etc.) or known to the victim (MacCannell & MacCannell, 1993). The abuse of women is not uncommon and remains a key issue of feminism, both politically and theoretically. One of the problems with mercantile definitions of power (and freedom) in the political 'market' is that many women are seen to 'choose' to remain with men who have beaten, raped and/or tried to kill them (Sawicki, 1993). Children who are sexually abused rarely 'resist' the abuse;

abusers often abuse with relative 'ease' by silencing or persuading children to comply (Warner, 1996).

If this is the case, is it 'right' to apply the term 'violence' to a practice which women do not seem to remove themselves from? It may be the case that the man 'doing' the violence is himself a former victim of abuse and that both partners 'chose' each other, due to a shared sense of pain. However, this does not tell us why it is the man largely doing the beating and why the woman is in a position of submission; in other words, the monolithic analysis of power (central to some feminist work) does not explain how gender is not fixed but 'negotiated' by both men and women (Grimshaw, 1993). Foucault's analysis of 'disciplinary power' has somewhat fuelled feminist debates on power and sexuality. Deconstructing existing normative behaviours has provided a way for feminists to offer reconstructive moves, without reverting to libertarian or radical approaches, which may advocate freedom by women divorcing themselves from heterosexuality.

Disciplinary power is exercised in an indirect way but implements itself through the individual's commitment and management. Therefore, Bordo (1993) has argued that disciplinary power operated over women's bodies in ways that discipline them into defining themselves according to the dominant forms of femininity (described by the media, male desire etc.). Women seem to 'willingly' adopt and embrace this version of femininity and they will use self-discipline to obtain their goals (dieting, self-restraint, and sexual submissiveness). However, the way in which disciplinary power might be a useful way of exposing a link between women's subjugation and their gender and sexuality could be viewed in terms of the way they self-discipline themselves into 'performing' their gender role.

The continual difficulties some women face as a result of rape, child sexual abuse, domestic violence (which I am not undermining as superficially 'performative') cannot be treated the same as any 'other' physical event, such as being mugged etc. When someone is mugged, the psychological 'stresses' are not the same as when a person is raped or abused sexually. Furthermore, the 'experience' of 'all' women cannot

be collapsed into a singular category of experience, as individual women have to cope with differing encounters with different levels of support and articulation. Some women have never been sexually abused, raped or treated badly by another individual.

Although it is reasonable to say that people react in different ways to the same situation (Foucault, 1988a, cited in Ramazanoglu, 1993:258) the psychology of sexual abuse and violence must not be reduced to an 'individualised' explanation, common to mainstream psychological theory (Shotter, 1993; Parker, 1992). Even though different individuals may have differential experiences of life, their 'form' of experience will always draw on the existing and available knowledges which surrounds them and their self articulation and identification.

One could argue that it is by virtue of the 'knowledges' which inform and construct 'gender' which provide the mode of self-regulation and self-blame which so many women find the most difficult and 'damaging' to their self-esteem. This psychological subjugation occurs at the level of the 'self' where women may question their 'value' as an individual (and as a woman). This is an area, which has lacked a Foucauldian reading and interpretation. Although Foucault provided a framework for understanding gender identification, he failed in an attempt to explicate the link between violence and abuse against the individual to a specified 'social agents' of a heterosexualised identification. Thus, even when 'men' become victims of rape, they immediately become members of the *social* class of women, because their *bodies* have been 'appropriated' by a masculine sexuality. This is a crucial point integral to any discussion of sexual abuse, as it is in the *objectification* of the body as a form of *appropriation* by specific social agents that relates to sexuality, not the sexualisation of male power that can link to knowledge/power networks (Plaza, 1980).

If Foucault regards 'sex' as only a discourse or 'discursive label' (Bell, 1991) then how can we usefully draw on his ideas with regards the conceptualisation of identities formed as a result of their 'run in' with the direct use of power through sex? (I.e. child sexual abuse). This might be understood as a result of the way 'gender' is performed in knowledges of self and others (which are inextricably linked to power) with regards to

both sexuality and subjectivity. One could argue that the discursive 'I' who has been the 'subject' of abuse, becomes the 'we' of femininity and the 'identificatory' practises which can follow. Therefore, one of the key points of analysis must be how discourses on child sexual abuse and women's sexuality *produces* versions of women and survivors *as social agents* in wider discourses of sexuality (which clearly involves heterosexuality).

One useful way of analysing discourses in relation to gender, therefore, would be to examine how gender is cited in discourse and re-iterated in order to construct particular versions of woman (Butler, 1990; 1993) in various categories (such as the survivor of childhood sexual abuse). If we accept that gender is not stable and fixed, and that power does not act in a unitary way, (either on women's bodies or minds) we can usefully apply a discursive approach which aims to explore how power operates in relation to gender, by exploring how gender is cited and performed in discourse/knowledge.

Foucault advocated analysing 'discourses' in order to genealogically trace relations of power in knowledge and regulatory practices (in the deployment of sexuality). However, Butler's examination of performativity offers a technique of deconstruction which can be used to explore how gender is created in various knowledges which in turn creates fictive versions of femininity and masculinity *as specifically heterosexual*. The emphasis of gender as performative extends and elaborates upon how 'abstract' discourses are taken up in the social world and a turn to the ways in which gender and sexuality are performed within complex relations of discourse. Treating discourses as 'things' 'outside' the level of local interaction has been raised as a criticism against some of the critical (realist) approaches to discourse and power - Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). However, Butler argues that there are levels of performance involved in the dynamic and 'citing' of discourses in texts and wider heterosexualised practices.

In this way, a performative understanding acknowledges the 'heterosexual matrix' as a power-based process but one which serves different functions in 'particular contexts'. It is clear that the approach to analysing texts draws upon both schools of



discourse analysis, as on the one hand I am aware of the macro Foucauldian approach which stresses the abstract/historical status of discourses used in the deployment of sexuality. However, on the other hand, I am using techniques more closely associated with conversation analysis and the discursive strategies employed to 'accomplish' gender (Doherty & Anderson, 1998).

### 3.2.0. Performing gender and sexuality in discourse: Reading Butler

[T]he original [gender] ... is nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural.

(Butler, 1990b: 30-31)

Performativity theory is a way of interrogating texts in order to examine the performative aspect of the text. The idea that gender and sexuality is performative is consistent with the ideas of social constructionism (Weeks, 1998) and also consistent with feminist psychologists who argue that the “differences between the sexes [in terms of desire, sex, psychology] are socially constructed in the dissemination and exchange of scientific information” (Hegarty, 1997: 357). In this sense, the notion of performativity, enables a reading which de-constructs how texts are put together, what they cite as stable or true (such as a matter) and what the text re-iterates in terms of social and cultural constructions, for example of sex and gender. The notion of the performative aspect of texts, can, therefore, be applied to the performance of scientific inquiries into sex (Hegarty, 1997) gender and identities.

In other words, when we say that 'gender' is social or 'sex' is biological, it is clear that we are immediately involving ourselves in a system of citational practices, which have a history in naming and repeating certain ideas and knowledge. In this, all texts are producing and constructing knowledge *within* culturally available discourses and citational practices. If we attribute sex or sexual orientation as a system of 'difference' between men and women's genitals, it is possible for us to then cite the

compatibility between the organs, in terms of heterosexual 'reproduction' and 'desire'. It might be tempting to then iterate that heterosexuality is a 'natural' activity pursued by women and men.

Performativity theory draws on questions raised by Derrida, Foucault and Žižek's analysis of respectively citation and reiteration, power and discourse and the *stabilisation* of signifiers through differential relations within discourse. In other words, performativity theory is interested in the ways in which speech acts exercise power through the citation of norms which 'mark' and 'perform' gender by re-iterating certain norms or 'regulatory ideals' (which is clearly marked by micro-sociological approaches to discourses analysis - Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Doherty & Anderson, 1998).

Sex is still often defined under the rubric of 'gender', where certain sexual activities are understood as the antithesis of 'real' manliness or femininity. Gay men are still often seen as feminine, lesbians as 'butch' and heterosexual men as the real penetrators and activators of sexual normalcy (Butler, 1993). To overturn this predilection, heterosexuality would need careful deconstruction in order for a workable reconstruction (which would be able to subvert its primacy) to take place. One of the conditions which may enable this disruption entails examination of the ways in which sexuality (and with it all the implications of its relations in power) is 'performed' as a 'citation' in discourse.

A discourse analytic approach informed by Foucault's work and Butler's use of performativity forms the basis on which I will be examining the discursive details of professional and everyday constructions. One of the aims of this thesis is to explore in detail the chains of communication which link child sexual abuse to women's sexuality, and the link between the past (of the child's psyche) with the present female adult (sexual) identity (Reavey, 1997). A key problem in the mainstream literature asserting the link between childhood sexual abuse and women's sexuality is its lack of

examination of the way in which survivors of child sexual abuse are represented as materially different (sexual impairment) and psychologically damaged.

The supposed ontological necessity of citing the damage (physical, psychological, sexual pathology etc.) which occurs as a result of abuse in childhood is part of a 'performance' and citational practice which enables the emergence of a pre-discursive and foundational body which acts as a 'container' of damage. The 'truth' of that damage can then be more clearly recognised, contained and treated by professionals. Child sexual abuse must be cited as a line of investigation in an individual's past. However, Wittgenstein notes that citing one example as a clear or true picture or window to the past or a 'reason' for the present leads to a one-sided diet on which to 'nourish' the lines of investigation (Wittgenstein, 1953, cited in Shotter, 1993:76).

I would like to argue in this section that mainstream discourses on sexuality and child sexual abuse occlude an understanding of the ways in which abuse of the body or mind is not separate to the construction and citation of abuse in discursive practices surrounding women's sexuality and subjectivity. I also wish to express radical doubt over the often clear polarisation made between survivors - as women, and non-survivors - as women (Reavey & Courtney, 1998).

'Sex' as a practice and a 'name' is still understood as a material phenomenon, which is immutably biological and thus scientifically measurable. For example, there are all sorts of attempts by psychologists and biologists to validate a "neurological basis of [sexual] behaviour" such as the "gay" brain (Le Vay, 1991) and the supposed necessity of the penis for full biological pleasure (Tiefer, 1995). Within biology, psychoanalysis and sexology, sexual orientation, the material meeting between penis and vagina constructed as the subject and object of desire respectively are discursively paired as heterosexual (Hegarty, 1997). Furthermore, biological science often refers to

those outside of heterosexual orientation as "inverts" in order to lay claim to the bi-polar positioning of heterosexual against 'other' sexualities.

Butler (1993) argues that materiality is by no means exempt from being classed as a discursive practice. The relevance of Butler's claim that performances in knowledge (as citation) are connected to the relative power of the performance according to its reiteration of particular norm links with the Foucauldian treatment of the connection between knowledge and power. The secure position of the corporeal (body) and its long history of validation in turn secures and foreclose other categories, such as gender, pathology and deviance. The desire to keep seeking out biological truths on sexuality, mental illness and sexual orientation continues to be supported (financially, academically and institutionally) because of the power which citations of biological causation have which affirm the divide between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. Butler (1993) argues that the normalisation of heterosexuality has had a significant impact on our understanding on the body and its role in constructing subjectivity and gender, not outside of 'matter' (as some social constructionists have done) but as categories connected to the theorisation of matter.

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialisation that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter. That matter is always materialised has, I think, to be thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materialising effects regulatory power in the Foucauldian sense. Thus, the question is no longer, How is gender constituted as and through a certain interpretation of sex? (a question that leaves the "matter" of sex untheorised), but rather, Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialised? And how is it that treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own emergence.

(Butler, 1993:10)

Construction is achieved through the reiteration of certain norms, where sex can be posited in naturalised terms. With regards the present thesis, this conceptualisation is

useful for two reasons: first of all, by examining how child sexual abuse is performed in relation to 'cited' damage (to sexuality, identity etc.) it is possible to explore how gender is implicated in this construction by tracing what it (re)iterates (women's greater susceptibility to damage, women's physiological propensity for damage etc.). The 'construction' of women and sexuality through the citation of childhood sexual abuse is not attained at the level of the 'subject' (a personification) but "[through] *a process of materialisation that stabilizes over time to produce the effects of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter*" (Butler, 1993:9, original emphasis). Referring to the link between child sexual abuse and its subsequent effects on sexuality often occasions the citation of damage done to the body. 'Penetration' (in the context of abuse) is attached to later dysfunction and the disruption of normal object relations (between parent and child) is cited with reference to mental health and atypical development.

Performance as citation produces subject categories therein, and fixes them into already established identity categories (fixing femininity, women's bodies). The consequences of which positions women survivors as 'constructed' (through their damage and experience as an abused child) and leaves other women as 'naturally' feminine, because they have been left to develop normally (Reavey & Courtney, 1998). Yet, the citation of the body as the most 'significant' surface (for reasoning) re-iterates the female body as a natural site of sexual development (in the absence of abuse) but also re-iterates the damage, which prevents that functioning (when abuse has occurred). This can be applied to the concept of the subject and her psyche through the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious and its reference to the difference between genders, (which is often explained by oedipal identification).

This is particular insightful with reference to childhood sexual abuse, as one major story is the compulsion (at an unconscious level) for survivors to repeat the abuse they experienced as children (Bass & Davis, 1988; MacCannell, & MacCanell, 1993;

Poston & Lison, 1990). How, then, do signifying practices relating to an individual's experience (usually a-typical experience) become theorised in relation to psychic life, and how might this be a form of citation which reiterates gender categories? Is there, for example any dyadic differentiation made between male and female sexuality with respect to childhood sexual abuse? For example, MacCannell & MacCannell (1993) refute Foucault's claim that power and freedom are not owned, arguing that 'power' and 'force' cannot be theorised together. This means that sexual 'violence' impacts on a child or woman's sexuality in a physically different way to that of non-victims. Furthermore, they refute 'Foucault's de-sexualisation of sex and his theoretical neutrality' and argue that Foucauldians who view sex in this way have obviously 'not ... experienced violence' and "who are relatively undamaged subjectively [and] who can identify with the sexually deviant because they are not" (MacCannell & MacCannell, 1993:232). Although I agree that the experiences of victims of violence are vastly different from those who have never been physically 'subjected' and used by another person for their pleasure or pain, the issue I dispute is the way in which the authors cite violence in order to essentialise women's sexuality in relation to their experience of violence. In MacCannell & MacCannell's account, female pleasure is fragmented by a violent act, treating the violent act as pre-given and foundational. What is important (and a point of criticism) is that the body is treated as outside of the discursive constitution, as if it were outside of the definition of the relations of power.

The tendency to separate the act on the body and its citation in discourses of female sexuality generally is problematic because it assumes that the victim is outside of its social constituency, defined according to the iterative norm i.e. heterosexuality. With reference to sexual violence, the effects on the body and mind cannot be divorced from their function as re-iterational. By 'citing' the damage done by abuse in the individual's bodily responses, or impaired psychological functioning only denies how

the subject is constituted in those discursive practices (e.g. constituted as women, as sexual beings and in relation to subjectivity).

When a person is sexually abused, they do not become 'outsiders' to sexuality and subjectivity but are still constituted within the available discourses on sex and subjectivity and the experiences of all sexual actors (Butler, 1993). The naming of the victim of child sexual abuse inaugurates a person into that identity, but it also mobilises the performative use of 'gender' that will also be a defining feature of the way in which 'experience' and identificatory practices are understood (Reavey & Warner, 1998).

### 3.3.0. Towards a feminist social psychology as critical discourse work.

The feminist post-structuralist challenges to traditional psychological and medical definitions of sex (see above) has concentrated on the question of the relationship between sex, power and subjectivity. The separation of the individual from the social is, therefore, refused. This refusal has also defined new directions in social psychological work, especially by those who are concerned with issues of power and the epistemological questions posed by modern psychology and its scientific claims. The following section is an attempt to bring together some of the feminist post-structuralist approaches to sexuality and discursive social-psychological epistemologies and methodologies. In doing so, the aim is to establish a feminist social-psychological basis for interpreting professional, self-help and everyday discourses on child sexual abuse, women and sexuality. This involves detailing the recent shift in social psychology towards a discursive understanding of psychology, and the methodology it proposes to make discursive approaches in feminist and social psychology possible.

### 3.3.1. Modern Social psychology.

In modern social psychology, the aim is to establish quantifiable and measurable hypotheses, which are used to establish the presence of causal laws and the scientifically realisable structures. In British and North American, beginning in the 1960's, social psychology has been typified by empirical epistemologies and the pursuit of objective knowledges which serve to clarify the social-psychological makeup of human behaviours and cognitions, attitudes, schemas and social relationships (Hewstone *et al*, 1988). The methods in traditional social psychology are fervently empiricist and have largely been experimental (objective and scientific) and a-political (in that scientific methods were used in order to by-pass political issues) in order to produce reliable and valid 'scientific' information. Its aim is to reveal the central "processing mechanism for psychological functioning" and its application as 'observable' in social settings (Shweder, cited in Harre & Stearns, 1995: 1).

Implicit in this account of social-psychological activity is the split between the individual and the social, where the 'social' acts as a background through which psychological styles are experimentally ascertained. The content and context of the 'social' is not viewed as integral to the psychological activity, creating a dualistic representation of how the 'social' and 'psychological' co-exist.

Through experimental manipulation, the context and the content of the psychological action are, therefore, separated and believed not to be *mutually producible*. Symbolic interactionism undoubtedly challenged these notions and in the mid-eighties, challenges to this position were articulated in the text "Changing the Subject: psychology, social regulation and subjectivity" by Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine (1984; 1997). At this time, the subject of psychology and the methods used to ascertain this subject were criticised on the basis that the individual and the social were conceptualised as 'dual' 'separate' and mutually exclusive. Drawing on a Foucauldian historical social explanation and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the authors of this text reconceptualised the subject of social psychology within a post-



modern/structural agenda, treating the subject of psychology (the individual) as an extension of socially and culturally available systems of meaning, not as abstract information processors.

Post-modernism is often described as a condition in which the possibilities of human action are variable and plural, where people's circumstances change and where the individual 'self' is fluid and unstable, rather than representationally fixed. Instead of using 'grand narratives' or empirical realities to explain human behaviour and nature, 'little stories', discursive activities and subject positions are explored in order to make sense of the socially constructed nature of psychological thinking. Although, some social-psychological theories, such as social theories of social cognition (Hogg & Abram, 1988) or social identity theories (Tajfel and Turner (1986) have concentrated more on the socio-cultural production of individual thinking, they still fail to address the relationship between the *production of the* social and the individual as inter alia and mutually producible. Instead it retains some of the empiricist features or reducing them to abstract categorisations by continuing to treat social factions as measurable variables, rather than as inherently *interpretive and productive* of the psychology activity in question.

Language plays a key part in the challenge(s) to mainstream psychology and positivism which tended to separate political and moral questions directing social-psychological activity, removing them as integral features of the production of knowledge, including knowledge on racism (Henriques, 1984). In recent years, a critical challenge to mainstream social psychology has emerged. Post-modern concerns with the language (rather than set cognitions) people use to construct the social and psychological refused the split between individual minds from their social context in order to reveal abstract properties and structures (cognitions and behaviours). The unitary rational individual who can be measured and observed was argued by some to be a myth created by the ethos of positivism, rather than any 'real' measure of human minds (Harre et al, 1995).

Post-modernism in psychology and feminism has created a critical space from which to resist representing minds, behaviour, genders, sexualities as lawful structures *outside* of socially produced *situations* in discourse (Parker & Spears, 1996). In this sense, discourse can be taken as a "system of statements which construct an object" (Parker, 1992:5). Discourse is not treated as 'reflecting' 'real' power between or over women and men; instead it constructs *relations in discourses*.

### 3.3.2. Discourse and methodology.

Although the predominant feminist discourse of the 1980's set out a social constructionist argument, its theorisation of agency and power relations was criticised on the grounds of its exclusivity and socially deterministic theorisations. The Foucauldian argument which articulates power as a *relation* (produced in discourses) is the key difference between 'radical feminist' arguments and feminist post-structuralist approaches, using a Foucauldian framework. Language is treated as a social activity which is reproductive 'within' varying interactions and contexts. The study of human thought and behaviour can not be 'assured' by isolating the *independent* variables which alter or manipulate their *dependants*; instead 'true' 'representations' (outside in an objective reality) of human behaviour must be abandoned in favour of viewing 'all' activity as interpretive and situated (Harding, 1985). The process of *interpreting meaning* in language and the way it is used is the key to analysing discourses (see chapter 4,5 & 6). All social and psychological activity is *socially constructed* (*created by the possibilities laid out in the social/symbolic world of language*; Deleuze & Guattari, 1984; Weeks, 1998).

This theoretical position is vital to the arguments of this thesis, which argues against treating 'the effects' of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality away from other signifying features, such as gender for example, rather than working with child sexual abuse *or being a woman* as a starting point through which to make sense of a person. Child sexual abuse as an experience should not be treated as the unifying feature of the person's psychic life, but as an integrated feature of other 'significant' features - of sex,

gender, race, class etc., where different 'survivors' have different capacities to speak *and* be heard. This is a general criticism against British and North American psychology and feminism whose codification of the term *individual* is based on white, middle class subjects (Bhavnani, 1995).

Discourse analysis has almost come to signify 'critical research' enabling some feminist social psychologists to move away from locating power in gendered bodies in order to distance themselves from a unitary version of gender identity. This has taken place alongside a current shift amongst some social psychologists from modernist concerns to a post-modern 'turn to the text' (Parker, 1992). Instead, the project is one of 'identifying' the complex relationships in discourse, which 'construct' what Rose (1985) names as the 'psy-complex' which is the surface by which we come to know ourselves and which regulates the 'techniques of self' which form self-reflection and self-identity.

This has had important implications for some feminist academics that became dissatisfied with the 'universalistic' claims and unitary explanations, which characterised some of the earlier feminist work *and* the work of mainstream psychology. Feminism no longer seems to be about grand narratives; this is clearly demonstrated in the range of approaches, methodologies, and theoretical underpinnings, which makes up current feminist psychology (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). The project of 'social change' for women is still a steering force for feminist psychologists who adopt this approach. In this section, I would like to introduce the approach (or should I say approaches) which I argue offers a way of situating interpretations of women's experiences, sexuality, subjectivity and identity in discourse and power.

Feminist discourse analysis is the way in which the 'truth' surrounding women's experiences in the social psychological world is constructed in relation to their *position* as 'subjects' in discourse and an emphasis on "language as an interactive activity, mediating linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge, constituting a site for the construction of identities and subjectivities...and language as a key site of resistance" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). However, feminist social psychologists who argued for changes to structural feminism were not simply arguing for a more 'subtle' or

'qualitative' feminist methodology, they were arguing for a different epistemological framework, based in language and discourse, and not unitary power structures. Immediately this becomes problematic for those arguing a feminist position, as challenging norms and dominant practices is difficult when faced with pluralism and multiple versions of the truth. As Stevi Jackson (1992, cited in Gill, 1995:169) asserts,

If no one set of meanings is more valid than any other, she asks, then what basis is there for distinguishing between the rape victim's account of forced sexual intercourse and the rapist's version of it as a pleasurable seduction?

However, instead of viewing the 'turn to language' as an exercise in 'anything goes' Wittgenstein's claim that it is the way we speak about 'things in the world' and the grammar we use that gives us a clear indication or reference to the 'object' we are trying to 'understand' stresses the importance of knowledge and human action as 'situated'. (Wittgenstein, 1953). This is not just a philosophical assertion (Shotter, 1993) but one involving 'everyday activities and practices' where language does not just exist, but has a *use* (Wittgenstein, 1953). The way we describe activities in everyday life involves human action comprising more than a singular 'mental process' but a use of language based on the *context* of a speech action. 'Reality' whether we are speaking about women's oppression, child sexual abuse, rape or heterosexual pleasure is always 'given' a meaning by a

...sense of their relation to that context...and is guided by a person's vague and unordered *sense* of their relation to that context [in this sense, we must ask of all human action] "how do I myself recognise my own disposition?

(Shotter 1993: 80, latter quote by Wittgenstein, cited in Shotter, *ibid.*)

### 3.3.3. Discourse and interpretation.

By examining discursive practices, we can see how the scope for understanding human action operates dynamically, in certain discourses, which are then used to create the fiction of a 'coherent' version of reality. Post-modernism posits a significant challenge

to 'unifying' (realist) modes of thought by asserting that people are not 'kept in their place' by an overarching static ideology or power source. Instead, political concerns turn to how discursive structures illustrate how individuals can be 'immobilised' by the 'justifications' 'or 'mitigations' (maybe of their husband's 'bad' behaviour or violent tempers) which are spoken of within the context of their lives (identification as a 'wife' 'woman' and 'married mother') and not as an ideologically abstract system of mental representations (an attitude, cognition, false belief etc.).

Post-modernism theorises that reality is constituted in plurality (although this is central to many phenomenological/existential theories on the subject, (see Merleau Ponty and Sartre), where the 'subject' (the topic, which is psychology's individual) is not universal and where identity is never static. Therefore, this approach refuses to accept the claims that a hypo-thetico deductive model can capture the activities of human beings, as behaviours, thoughts and language are always flexible, un-'law'ful and can be taken up 'strategically' rather than lawfully (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It is through an analysis of the way people talk (language) we can begin to understand, how psychological thinking operates, how experiences are understood, and how social discourse are relied upon to make-sense, construct that thinking and shape the way we live as 'subjects'. Post-modernists in social psychology argue that there are many 'little stories' which individuals draw, the 'interpretative repertoires' they use to situate thinking and the way they interpret their experiences in the world. This 'psychological' process, therefore has been described as an exercise in 'micro-sociology' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Other social psychologists have broadened definitions of the ideological nature of human thinking, which is never fixed, but dilemmatic rather than cognitive in nature (Billig *et al*, 1988) approaches such as these. acknowledge the rhetorical nature of modernist thinking which has 'created' rather than 'reflected' a unitary version of reality (Harre & Stearns, 1995).

This argument has been useful for feminist psychologists in two ways: first of all, feminist thinking on people's subjectivity and sexuality has had to account for the diversity of women's experience and the 'differences' between women. Secondly,

feminist theorists have acknowledged post-modern approaches in the study of power as dispersed, rather than unitary.

#### 3.3.4. Eliciting accounts: Qualitative methodology.

Chapter two detailed the professional/academic research proposing a link between a woman's history of childhood sexual abuse and sexual problems. The predominant methodology used to elicit such a link have been based on 'objective' quantitative methods, based on questionnaire studies or clinical measurements. The use of quantitative methods in mainstream academic research has posed problems for feminist psychologists, humanist psychologists and post-structuralist writers who challenge the epistemological status of applying natural scientific methods to human consciousness and human meaning and 'comprehension' (Wittgenstein, 1958; Harre & Secord, 1972; Shotter, 1993). Scientific methods are based on a hypo-thetico deductive model which suggests that theoretical hypotheticals (theoretical interpretations) signify the objective mode by which *empirical* facts are test-able, in a value free and standardised manner (Popper, 1959). They are there to tests 'observables', such as behaviours, neurological activity and aspire to represent mental processes as abstract cognitive activities.

According to positivist arguments, the reliability and validity of scientific claims should always be subject to verification or falsification (if the study is replicated). Thus, the revision of a theoretical proposition is made on the basis of new empirical findings and suggestions for 'further empirical work'. However, there have been several humanist and feminist critiques of this position. Included are criticisms over the proposed 'value-free' nature of scientific claims, which have been shown to ignore or reduce the complexity of human thinking (Harre & Secord, 1972) exclude voices (Henriques *et al*, 1984; Kitzinger, 1987; Weeks, 1985) and base its claims on white, middle-class male subjects who are usually educated and attending university (Ussher, 1990; Nicolson,

1992). Much of the 'mess' of human thinking, or the descriptions people offer of their life worlds, therefore, become translated into numerical form and remains sanitised, abstract or reduced, or parsimoniously presented, in Occam razor fashion (Ashworth, 1996)

In order to include, rather than exclude complexity, and to enable marginalised voices to speak with more 'authentically', many feminist researchers proposed using qualitative approaches to eliciting accounts and *interpreting* the meaning of those accounts, with a respect for variability and lack of fixity, establishing a

[C]ommitment to constructivist epistemologies, and an emphasis (at least in its pure ethnographic form) upon description, rather than explanation, the representation of reality through the eyes of the participants, the importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in context and in its full complexity...an attitude towards theorising which emphasises the emergence of concepts from data rather than their imposition in terms of *a priori* theory, and the use of qualitative methods.

(Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992: 156)

Thus, an avoidance of 'objectivity' (in the scientific sense) was translated by qualitative, humanist and feminist research into a quest for the meanings of 'experience', however, variable and idiosyncratic (Squire, 1990). The principle of qualitative methods is its focus on agentic and constructive activity and thinking (rather than responsive or 'real' thinking), using interviews, diaries, Q-methodology, observations and case studies. However, although qualitative research shares a common methodological ground in terms of its use in eliciting accounts and examining meaning, its epistemological bases cover a more far reaching interpretative and political field, reaching beyond a simple refusal to represent reality in numerical form (Burman, 1996).

Many advocates of post-structuralist theory and social constructionism use qualitative methods to elicit 'accounts' from which interpretations of discursive patterns emerge and become interpretable (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Squire, 1990; Burman & Parker, 1993; Edwards & Potter, 1995) (although Q-methodology is also used in

conjunction with interview data - Kitzinger, 1987; Stenner, 1993; Curt, 1994). Due to the constructionist questions I am asking in relation to child sexual abuse, women and sexuality, I required an approach that would elicit accounts in a narrative form, especially from the women survivors I interviewed, who could link their past and present in a self-directing manner, allowing participant reflection, possible revision the freedom to elaborate and refuse or revise the questions I was asking (see chapter six for further discussion of this as an ethical process).

Similarly, the study of professionals was designed, using the interview process, in order for professionals to 'discuss' their work in its complexity, including the full range of meanings they ascribed to their client's problems and behaviours. In this way, I felt that a fuller discursive potential could emerge, using questions only to guide the conversations I held with women survivors and the professionals, although the interview would be classed as semi-structured (see chapter four and six).

The basis of interpretation, however, is not to reveal 'true' stories, or secret lives or pretend true authenticity (proposed by some humanists or ethnographers); because the interviews were to be understood from a discourse analytic perspective, both the researcher and the participants' discourse is of interest, not any 'underlying belief or thought processes' (Potter & Wetherell, 1996: 85). Thus, interviews are considered to be useful in that they the researcher can use them to elicit accounts in a less structured and more jointly conversational manner, allowing narratives to unfold and in order to create the conditions through which fuller texts emerge, in the context of the social interaction (between researcher and participant). However, it was believed to be appropriate to produce an interview schedule, which was devised beforehand, concentrating on i. Key themes and areas to be discussed, leading to ii. A set of questions which were used to open the session, guide the talk according to the key research questions, such as how child sexual abuse is constructed in relation to sexuality, sexual relations, a sense of self and the differences between men and women who are abused as children.



Another consideration was the ordering of the questions (Smith, 1996), wherein I began the interview asking general questions about occupation, interests etc. and exchanging information (as I often briefed the participants on my status and the nature of the research). After this came a gradual lead into more complex areas, such as asking participants to describe in general terms why they think abuse is wrong or harmful, through to the more personal accounts of how they survivors' think the abuse has impacted on their sexuality, or examples of professional interpretations of sexual behaviours etc. I often prompted the participants if I felt they might want to expand on a certain point, or if I required more information or if the participants found one of the questions difficult or too general.

By tape recording the interviews and transcribing them into textual form, it is also possible to concentrate reflexively on the role of the researcher in this process, both in terms of the interaction itself and the production of the presented 'knowledge' which is created from it (Kitzinger, 1987; Parker, 1992).

### 3.3.5. Discourse, feminist social psychology and relativism.

The turn to the text is not a unitary movement, as discourse analysis has been used for explicitly political aims, as well as operating as a theoretical challenge. Among two of the most contentious are Discursive Psychology and its critical sibling Critical Social Psychology. Although both uses of discourse theory agree on the discursive nature of social psychological life, the major difference is in the claims they make upon the structuring of the social. Analyses of 'repertoires' or 'rhetoric', linguistic function in Discursive social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Madill & Doherty, 1994; Gough, 1998; Doherty & Anderson, 1998) concentrate and indeed celebrate the concept of 'plurality'; this implicitly promotes a version of relativism which argues that 'reality' is always relative to the way in which people and academic disciplines (even science) 'construct' and 'argue' that reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Gergen, 1985).

This way of thinking has been a vital challenge for academic feminism; yet, it is still questionable as to whether post-modernist or structuralist arguments can fully align

with a feminist politics of 'value' and 'collective' activity in and within themselves (Burman, 1991; Unger, 1995). Can a purely discursive social constructionist argument (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Gergen, 1985; Shotter, 1993) which states that no version can be prioritised over another be seriously sustained if 'change' is at the heart of the challenge to the mainstream? For example, those 'discourse analysts' who reject the postmodern 'everything is up for grabs' ethos acknowledge the material obstacles which allow some to 'speak' while others remain muted (Parker, 1992:73). This means an inclusion of 'ontological' considerations as well as 'epistemological' language games which can only put forth ideological claims. As Parker & Spears (1996:13) comment:

The social constructionist position that we cannot aim for the truth but must only rely on rhetorical skills to persuade others of a version of reality necessarily ignores the differences in power and resources which make voices more or less heard. Simply presuming an ideal speech community in which communicators are equally able (and entitled) to advance their own accounts of reality is itself inherently ideological.

This version of critical (discourse) analysis, whilst recognising the constitutive function of language also examines the *varied* and *subjugated* 'situational' statuses of individuals. The collective *experiences* of certain marginalised groups in society can, therefore, be accounted for in terms of the power exercised over their right and access to speaking *in the world*.

Some critical psychologists (Parker, 1992) who use discourse analysis claim that, rather than looking simply at language as a repertoire, we also need to establish how 'power' (to act, or to define and shape reality) runs through the veins of institutions, practices, which are not simply 'discursively' real-ised, but materially enforced. The use of the term *discourse* will be used to place the language used more abstractly - in wider cultural discourses. Thus, the 'constitutive powers' embedded in discourse practices are ones which not only 'offer meaning' to people's actions, they can also be used to 'constitute' real material practices which structure speech *and* physical movement.

The arguments put forward by Parker (1992) and Burman & Parker's (1993) collection acknowledges that social relations are regulated and reproduced in the

discourse used to support those structures. Therefore, discourse analysis can be seen as a useful of 'critiquing' the social practices.

This version of discourse analysis (as opposed to repertoires) treats discourse as situated 'inside' and 'outside' of intersubjective uses of language and acknowledges the social conditions, which impact on an individual's *ability* to speak. This approach is more in line with a critical realist take on post-structuralism (Bhaskar, 1989) which accepts society as 'real' and deconstructs discourses (which construct versions of the individual and the social) in order to understand better how not to reproduce oppressive practices *in society* and so *transform* it (Parker, 1992:37). A critical realist approach never denies that discourse and the way it is used strategically, how it performs and in turn *how it* 'constructs objects' and creates 'subject positions': the difference between a critical realist approach to discourse analysis and a relativistic reading of discourse is that the former supports the notion that there are "social structures" which create the conditions for discourse and discourse *use* (Parker, 1992:40).

Patriarchy and capitalism, therefore, are accepted as structures, which yield the conditions through which subject positions become available, a position that I am in agreement with and use to lay the basis of a feminist argument. Thus, the methodological position I adopt for the empirical chapters are based on interpretive, qualitative, discursive social constructionist approaches used to explore the ways in which professional, self-help and survivor discourse constructs accounts of women's sexuality in relation to experiences of childhood sexual abuse.

The purpose of the following section is to trace how a feminist post-structuralist approach can positively deconstruct explanations of power and how this can provide an 'examination' of gender, sexuality and sexual abuse in a socially grounded and political way. For the purpose of this thesis (as I acknowledge there are problems with this) I am not attempting to make any 'ontological' claims on behalf of sexuality; my aim is to deconstruct the discourses which story women survivors and their sexual subjectivity into being through the designation and adoption of certain 'subject positions' in relation to sexuality and sexual norms. As well as examining women's subject positions,

however, a post-structuralist approach requires paying attention to the performative aspects of language and an analysis of discourses, which constitute institutional and everyday practices.

Foucault's primary contribution to feminist/political readings of sexuality concerns the link he establishes between knowledge and power. His arguments show how power and knowledge inform actual social practices and institutional policy. In short, in 'deconstructing' women's sexuality (in relation to child sexual abuse) I am taking apart the dominant 'academic' 'scientific' 'popular' 'everyday' concepts informing our *understanding* of sex and abuse and gender. A Foucauldian analysis concerns itself with 'how' structures are implemented at the level of 'fictions' in the social world, rather than neutral 'facts' or naturally occurring structures (such as heterosexual behaviour) (Urmson & Ree, 1991).

Although Foucault's analysis of sexual abuse was limited, his line of inquiry has been useful to feminists challenging power in academic/professional knowledge, defining women's relationship to child sexual abuse and sexual violence (Bell, 1991, 1993; Warner, 1996; Hare-Mustin, 1991; Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Burman, 1995; Gavey, 1995; O'Dell, 1997; Reavey & Warner, 1998). It has also been useful to feminist psychologists wishing to challenge the singularised subject positions implemented by psychology's preoccupation with universal schemas and globalised mental processes (Weedon, 1987; Gavey, 1989). One of the main aims for the rest of this chapter is to show 'theorising the subject' cannot be divorced from its implications in practice (in this case, the practice of sex).

Post-structuralism and its emphasis on the 'thoroughly discursive textual nature of social life (Gill, 1995:166) brings to light the argument that there is no human nature, no pre-given foundation and no 'quintessential' man or woman. Instead, post-structuralism leads us to abandon the study of facts in order to pursue the 'fictive' production of meaning and subjectivity through discourse - which is always reliant on the 'function' it serves and its position in relations of power (Burman, 1991). A feminist Foucauldian analysis of discourses has provided a way to interpret the way in which

discourse 'produces' gender and sexuality and form social practices (sexuality, eating, employment etc.) using Foucault's arguments on sexuality, power, truth and method. Many feminist writers/psychologists have used aspects of Foucauldian discourse to make sense of gender and sexuality and the relationship between knowledge and power (Squire, 1989; Butler, 1990; 1993; Hollway, 1995, Warner, 1996; Squire, 1990; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995; Lovering, 1995; Burman, 1997).

The Foucauldian analysis of power and Butler's reconceptualisation of Foucauldian constructions of power, sexuality and subjectivity have been instrumental for a feminist reworking of the 'social' and its productive capacity to define the individual and the gendered nature of the sexual. Thus, Foucault and Butler's outline of the relationship between power, discourse and identificatory practices will provide the approach to discourse analysis adopted for each of the empirical studies in this thesis, where "a discourse ... is a system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992:5). Parker (1992) stresses that discourses need to be deconstructed in order to understand the "ways in which meaning is reproduced and transformed in texts, and in the ways people's subjectivities are affected or limited in and by surrounding discourses. Discourses are, in other words, seen as both facilitating and limiting, enabling and constraining what can be said by whom, where and when." (Nikander, 1995:9).

The approach to discourse analysis used and addressed in this thesis is, therefore, working with feminist epistemological concerns over how women's sexuality is constructed in discourse (professional, self-help and survivors accounts) and how these constructions 'identify' the social-psychological activity of sexuality and survivorship through the process of deconstruction and resistance. The problems of this position are raised in the final chapter (chapter seven) where a reflexive and critical overview of working with a feminist post-structuralist framework is explored.

#### 3.4.0. Concluding remarks.

The use of discourse analysis, using social theory and exploring the performative aspect of social-psychological life can be argued to be less transgressive than the aims of

earlier feminism, as it appears not create a sufficient sense of collective identity among women, or survivors of child sexual abuse (Unger, 1995). Another criticism is that it does not explain how 'power' is exercised at a local level between the genders, and in favour of men (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Though I would argue that collective engagement and a recognition of the way in which power is exercised over women and children is ultimately political, the process of disruption does not necessarily have to stabilise power *in* gender distinctions or a gendered *ontology* (Lather, 1990).

Disrupting heterosexual norms should be viewed in terms of an 'identificatory practice' and used as a strategy of intervention by those voices excluded or consumed by normative sexual practices, not as a means of fixing women's powerlessness at the level of (gendered) identity. This is a proposal which advocates of 'queer theory' would use in order to de-stabilise the powerful hold of the heterosexual matrix without assuming a fixable identity or stabilising identity characteristic (Warner, 1996). Although child sexual abuse is often a physical act; ontologically, it is one which often continues to assist in the identity formation of the initial victim (by the victim themselves or by a 'professional'). If this is taken to be a significant identity (which it often is) the process of ascribing meaning to it should be recognised through the interplay between this and other formative fictions - such as 'woman' 'heterosexual' 'black' 'dis-abled' etc. If the only 'true' fiction is 'abuse', we have failed to allocate a space for other important formative fictions, which are mutually (but not perhaps equally) responsible for the 'meaning' and 'experience' of childhood sexual abuse in a socially constituted world.

In the empirical chapters which follow, the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and its iteration in matters of adult sexuality and identity will pay close attention to the ways in which 'woman' 'gender' and 'sexuality' is performed as a citation in discourses of damage and a-typicality.

## Chapter four. Professional talk and the construction of women and sexuality.

Sexual activity is a source of therapeutic effects as well as pathological consequences. Its ambivalence makes it capable of healing in certain cases. In others, on the contrary, it is likely to lead to illnesses...

(Foucault 'The care of the self' 1986:118)

This chapter is the first of the empirical studies to examine how women survivors' identity and sexuality are constructed through talk. This chapter examines professional discourse as the participants are involved in a profession which 'treats', 'guides', 'counsels' (among others) women who have been sexually abused in childhood. The study explores how professionals begin understanding 'who' they are working with, in terms of women with a traumatic history, and the *social-psychological experience of those women in terms of their sexuality and their relationships*.

One of the concerns in the chapter is how these professionals 'choose a language to articulate their concerns' (Plummer, 1995: 13) about the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality. This chapter is an empirical study based on ten interviews with professional counsellors and therapists. A discourse analytic approach was used to deconstruct professional talk and examine how child sexual abuse, women and sexuality (after abuse) is 'put into discourse' (Foucault, 1990).

The majority of mainstream literature which has shown a link between 'sexual problems' and child sexual abuse has often emphasised the damaging effects of sexual abuse and its subsequent longevity (or the complete 'absence' of symptoms). However, it is not clear 'how' this link is situated apart from a common sense connection between past abuse and present signs of damage. The 'worldliness' of personal claims (which link personal history) to later sexual 'problems' have often been taken for granted and

accepted as clear indications of the 'individual's' unresolved attitudes towards sex. Thus, professionals and survivors alike often accept abuse as foundational and pre-given (Davies, 1995): the conditions in which the link between past and present thus remains confined to the 'personal'.

This chapter analyses the ways in which knowledges of abuse and its effects are situated in certain discourses, pertaining to categories of 'femininity', 'masculinity' and relations of power, and in turn how 'gender' in the present (the 'woman' survivor) is 'constructed' in reference to the past (women's sexuality directly defined in relation to male power). In this way, an understanding of 'how,' 'where' and 'when' abuse fits the woman's present sexual picture (in terms of therapy) can then be 'situated' in social worlds which include not just the child victim but the socially constituted 'woman'. The analysis presented in this chapter forms the basis for a 'problematizing mode of reading text', scrutinising strategies (linguistic/discursive) which function to (re)produce relations of power, and as a result, stabilise subjectivities (victims/survivors) (Curt, 1994).

#### 4.1.0. A brief review of the literature.

The literature which links child sexual abuse to later sexual problems (sexual dysfunctions and relationship difficulties) is fairly well documented. There are many ways in which sexuality has been seen to be affected by child sexual abuse, from medical dysfunctions such as vaginismus/dyspareunia (Becker et al, 1984), sexual insatiability (promiscuity) (Tsai et al, 1979) aversion or fear of sexual activity (Jehu, 1989) and relationship problems, including choice of partner and the inability to trust men (Porter, 1982). Direct connections are frequently made between the 'past' experience of child sexual abuse and the mimetic quality of adult sexuality in relation to the abuse. Child sexual abuse, has, therefore, become one of many important narratives in which to place women's sexuality and womanhood, as it provides a cogent



explanation of normal/abnormal sexuality. This is generally illustrated in cognitive models in the therapeutic domain where

There is an assumption that the mind operates as a parallel-processing mechanism in which certain thoughts may stray from their proper place and cause trouble with rational thinking about the self.

(Parker, 1998:70)

This approach assumes that there is a 'woman' to be treated, but who is this woman and how is her sexuality seen to exist in a social context? The aim of this chapter is to examine professional discourses relating to sexuality and survival. Once child sexual abuse becomes cited in an individual's history (in therapy) the field of sexual enquiry appears to narrow and focus on a unitary narrative (abuse) which acts as a steering guide to the sexual 'truth' and beyond (Ofsche & Watters, 1995). The purpose of this study is to examine how these themes feature in professional talk, and to what avail.

#### 4.2.0. STUDY OF PROFESSIONALS.

##### 4.2.1. Identifying participants

The groups of professionals who were working (or had worked) with women survivors of child sexual abuse were based in the public *and* private sector. Table 1 below provides a list of characteristics, including professional affiliations, gender and pseudonyms used for the analysis extracts.

TABLE 1: List of professional characteristics.

Profession	Sector	Gender	Pseudonym
Counsellor	Public	Female	Suzanne
Clinical psych	Public	Male	Oliver

Clinical psychologist	Public	Male	Stan
Psychotherapist	Public	Female	Irena
Psychotherapist	Public & private	Male	Sam
Counsellor	Public	Female	Audrey
Sex therapist	private	Female	Margaret
Sex therapist	Public & private	Female	Beryl
Counsellor	Public	female	Chris
Clinical Psychologist	Public & private	female	Liz

The professionals who were eventually interviewed were recruited from a number of sources, including university web pages and the use of the Yellow Pages. Twenty professionals were contacted by telephone or by letter (see appendix 1), with ten agreeing to take part. In order to incorporate a broad range of perspectives, adverts were placed in a Rape Crisis newsletter (see appendix 2) calling for participants; this was unsuccessful, as was an attempt to include two feminist therapists who responded by saying that they could not spare the time.

An informal conversation on the phone was used to recruit some of the professionals (who were recommended by colleagues who had already approached them on my behalf). Following an informal agreement to be interviewed, a letter was then sent to the professionals (with a tear off slip) asking them to allocate an appropriate place and time for interviewing (see appendix 1).

The letter sent to professionals stated the aims and objectives of the research (see appendices). Further telephone calls were made to some participants who wanted to know more about the study and the use of qualitative methods. Five of the participants requested copies of the interview questions before hand, in order to prepare some of

their answers (which could have had a differential effect on the outcome; see chapter seven, reflexivity section).

Eight out of the ten professionals worked in community-based settings and clinics based in hospitals. The sample eventually consisted of seven women and three men. Issues of 'race', 'disability', 'class' and 'sexuality' (of the therapists or in terms of their client population) were not explicitly addressed in this study; this was due to a limited number of participants and because those groups who did tackle these issues were too busy and overworked to be able to spare the time (Rape crisis and centre in London) (see also chapter seven). Only one professional touched upon the issue of race and sexuality, as she linked her identity as a black feminist and lesbian woman to some structural constraints she encountered as a counsellor (namely GPs who would not refer some lesbian women for counselling). Seven interviews were held at the clinician's work place, two were at their homes (which was used as a counselling base) and one was held at my office at the University.

#### 4.2.2. The interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured according to certain questions which were used to guide participants (see appendix 3). Due to the specific nature of the research questions developed in the thesis, it was necessary before hand to develop an interview schedule. This prompted me to think about the interview and the issues I wanted to raise with the participants. More specifically, it enabled me to think of any potential difficulties, and to give some thought to how these difficulties might be handled (Smith, 1996: 12). In social research generally, it is always difficult to question what we might call 'direct' experience (Antaki, 1985) as people are very sensitive to questions about what they perceive as 'direct perception' or authentic interpretations, in 'I am simply telling you what I heard'. It also difficult to gauge the responses of professionals who may be unwilling to have their practice questioned in this way. As one of the aims of the research was to examine the way in which sexuality was seen to be affected by abuse, a structure was felt to be appropriate, in order that I guided the talk, from descriptions of

women in therapy to conceptual issues around women and sexuality, prompting the professionals to elaborate. The interviews could, therefore, not be classed as 'conversations' but structured interactions, guided by set questions that were there to steer, rather than shape the dialogue.

#### 4.2.3. Conducting the interviews.

The interactions formed between myself as researcher and the professional as participant in the interview were complex. There was, for example, conflict in terms of the position of the researcher and professional at various times during the interview e.g. at certain points, some participants voiced their concern at 'not knowing' the correct answers, at other times, they would refer to their vast experience and years of 'observations' of clients (see reflexivity section for more detail, this chapter). I began the interviews by giving a brief overview of my research project and then asking participants to tell me about their professional life. This was intended to create a 'sharing' atmosphere; they could tell me about their work (as well as their status) which in turn created an opportunity for me to talk about my research. This was done in order to create a mutual context, where I could discuss how my research fitted in with ideas around professional practice. Before the 'official' interview began, I asked them to raise any questions they might have about the interview itself or the use of the material (prior to analysis).

Once the interview was finished (and the tape turned off) I wound down the meeting by generating a general conversation about the study, asking the participants how they felt about the interview and where they could contact me if they needed to add anything further. Overall, the interpersonal aspects of the interviews ran very smoothly.

#### 4.3.0. Approach to analysis (thematic decomposition and discourse analysis).

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed (following specified guidelines; see appendix 4) using a tape recorder and transcribing machine. The analysis

then proceeded through several stages of 'thematic decomposition' (Stenner, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1996) with the explicit purpose of arriving at understanding of i. the shaping discursive minutiae and ii. abstract/social discourses. A Foucauldian 'type' of discourse analysis (informed by post-structuralist concerns; Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993; Gavey, 1995) set within a feminist framework was used to examine how knowledges on child sexual abuse and women's sexuality were constructed and 'situated' in discourses.

This process began by thematically deconstructing the interview transcripts in order to learn how the sexual self of the abuse survivor is 'fashioned' and situated in the context of knowledges' of sexuality and its social-psychological experience (sexual knowledge/gendered knowledge) (Parker, 1998: 76). The aims of the analysis section are to establish the more abstract patterns of discourse in the text, setting it in a historical/critical context (see chapter three). However, the other point of interest were the localised discursive patterns (ways of speaking) which illustrated the way discourse could be taken up in an unstable manner, and contradicted or resisted by its users and 'performed' in relation to the wider discourses of sexuality (Butler, 1993). The discursive strategies identified at the beginning of the analysis were very functionary, in terms of viewing linguistic frames of reference and rhetorical achievements which were important in terms of locating spaces for more abstract discourses (Billig, 1988; Madill & Doherty, 1994).

The transcripts were read several times, and passages relating to sexuality and identity were underlined and notes were made in the margins. There were, of course, many themes, which could have been developed, but for the sake of depth (and furthering an understanding of how professionals constructed women's sexuality through their talk etc.) the themes relating to sexuality and identity took precedence. The process of selecting the passages was carried out by hand, which relied on my individual interpretation, requiring constant reflexive work, re-reading and personal vigilance (a fuller account of this process is found in chapter seven). However, other people involved in the project and outside of it were invited to validate or challenge my

interpretive reading, resulting in further interpretive work and a more fuller detailing of the extracts.

The transcripts were colour coded according to each theme (still retaining all of the themes, in and outside of sexuality and identity) and the passages relating to sexuality and identity were cut from the transcript and pasted into a separate word processing file.

The created file then formed the basis of analysis (although the final interpretations were read against the original transcript). Each passage included in each themed file was labelled (according to participant) and given a number, so it could be identified more easily.

The process of identifying themes was carried out once more, by readings the edited text again and again in order to establish discursive categories within the larger theme of 'sexuality and identity' i.e. promiscuity, further sexual victimisation, relationships and choice of partner etc. The different ways in which this theme (sexuality) was talked about formed the final basis for identifying discourses i.e. choice, autonomy, sexual culpability etc. This process relied on reading the text several times, making notes about recurring themes on separate sheets of papers and finally selecting the extracts and allocating them a category ('choice' 're-enactment' etc.).

Once a discursive theme had reoccurred in more than one participant's talk, the participant's name and extract numbers were put under a themed heading (choice): the extracts selected for analysis were identified according to their relevance to the final discursive categories. Discourses were then identified more fully in the discussion and were discussed in terms of their implications and relevance to wider issues in the relevant literature and their association with broader discourses (Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). The transcripts are not included in the appendices as there are many references to places of work, colleagues and personal details. It would not be difficult to work out who some of the participants are from their place of work and the personal characteristics they relate in the interviews.

**FIGURE 1.**

**Stages involved in data analysis: from coding themes to identifying discourses.**

**(i) After several readings, break the text down into themes, making sure all of the transcript is included. Make notes of themes arising on a separate sheet of paper.**

**(ii) Highlight (colour code) passages which come under a particular theme i.e. sex/family etc.**

**(iii) Cut and paste these passages from the transcript file. (for each participant) into the file created for analysis on sexuality and identity.**

**(iv) Identify the different ways in which 'sexuality and identity' is talked about i. sexuality as choice/autonomy etc.**

**(v) Link these discursive categories to wider discourses on sexuality and identity where appropriate etc.**

**(vi) Discuss how discourses overlap, where they look like they are doing the same thing, or look like the same objects (Parker, 1992:14). Highlight contradictions between and within discourses.**

**(vii) Discuss the implications of talking in this way: discuss what discourses 'do' by constructing object and subjects in this way - issues around power, ideology etc.**

#### 4.4.0. ANALYSIS

##### Main aims.

The following themes illustrate the relationship which is created between i. child sexual abuse and an individual's sexual 'problem' and ii. how the context of the woman's life is talked about, in terms of her sexual problems per se and her sexual relationships. The themes outlined below comprise thematic work (the latter two) which explore how talk about a survivor's sexuality relate to broader discourses concerning 'gender' *and* discourses referring to sexual relationships (exclusively heterosexual relationships.) The 'representations' section begins then by discussing how 'personal' problems surrounding those who have experienced abuse in childhood are located (in cognition, unconscious motives, behaviour etc.) before broadening out the discussion to how women are constructed in broader discourse of sexuality.

**(i) Representations of the effects of childhood sexual abuse (inner problems, damage and control and trust)**

**(ii.) Women survivors sexual choices.**

**(iii.) Understanding survivors through receivership.**

##### Introducing the analysis.

The point here is not only to remark upon the difficulty of delivering through discourse the uncontested site of sex. Rather, the point is to show that the uncontested nature of 'sex' within the heterosexual dyad secures the workings of certain symbolic orders, and that its contestation calls into question where and how the limits of symbolic intelligibility are set.

(Butler, 1993: 1)

The discursive context (comprising descriptions of effects, psychological damage etc.) shapes our understanding of how individuals are seen to be psychologically



affected by events in their lives, and how this 'forms' a relationship (in talk) between an individual's past and her present (sexuality, life, relationships etc.).

For example, if professionals' in this study described only the positive effects of child sexual abuse, we may wish to question the motives of the speaker (as someone who may be in favour of sexually abusing children etc.) as the therapeutic 'majority' generically equates child sexual abuse with damage, negative effects and mental health (Armstrong, 1994; Ofsche & Watters, 1994; Levett, 1995; Warner, 1996; Reavey & Courtney, 1998). However, if professional discourse contained notions of 'damage' 'anxiety' or 'inner turmoil', the legitimacy of professional discourse could less easily be called into question, as the 'motives' for speaking could be viewed as sympathetic and thus regarded as a positive recognition of a 'legitimate' problem.

By adopting euphemisms which incite descriptions of personal 'horror' and 'damage done by abuse in childhood', other categories can then be produced within this discursive space (such as mental illness, sexual dysfunction, individual recovery; Reavey & Warner, 1998a). Therefore, the following discussion of discursive deployments of sexuality and subjectivity show us how child sexual abuse and its 'effects' are employed in strategic ways. These strategies could more accurately be termed 'representations' as they are instrumental in depicting how child sexual abuse is used to in understand a woman's present sexuality (womanhood and sexuality in this case). I will provide a brief sketch of some of the most common examples, split between professional talk around individual problems and then talk about women's sexuality more broadly. The extracts presented below have been specifically chosen to illustrate these points relating to sexuality and identity. A large body of transcript was not included (as is always the case) which touched upon issues of trust, family and mental illness. However, the 'power' of the analysis does not reside in how many participants were interviewed; the power of the following analysis rests with the pertinent nature of the extracts to the research question at hand.

#### 4.4.1 Discourses of survival and sexuality: Women survivors and sexual choices. Repeating old patterns: familiar stories of male power.

This analysis highlights how survivorship and sexual choice are constructed via a notion of re-enactment. Although there were other themes on the topic of sexuality, 'choice' was used most commonly to denote how sexuality was negatively affected by sexual abuse in childhood. The professionals talk about women survivors' sexuality is thus defined and directed by women's personal experiences of child sexual abuse. Some talk about the effects of child sexual abuse in terms of women's needs in sex and relationship; other talk about generic differences between male and female sexuality and the likely effects of abuse on both. The formative link between sexual choice and abuse is found in the link between a lack of control experienced by the child over one's sexuality and re-enactment in adulthood (seen through sexual choices).

The connection between past and present draws upon notions of sexual maladaptation, seen as promiscuity (P1 & 7)<sup>1</sup>, prostitution (P4 & 5), sexual problems (all) and most commonly, the survivor's choice of partner (P1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10). The focus of the analysis is how this link between sexual trauma in childhood into adulthood is realised in certain discursive spaces. Sexual 'choice' is a widely used narrative which depicts a sense of 'health' and positive action in contemporary discourses around sexuality and sexual ownership (Giddens, 1991). Yet, these liberalist depictions of choice inevitably take on a different meaning when one is speaking of survivors of sexual trauma (as choice takes on a greater moral/political meaning). The following analysis, therefore, aims to tease out the ways in which 'abuse' was seen to be played out in specific categories of sexual behaviours (choices) and specific types of 'men' and 'women'. Not all of the extracts could be included in the analysis (due to size limits).

Re-enactment or the concept of 'using' one's sex in an unusual way (stemming from experiences in early childhood) has been related to many sexual behaviours (perverse, inhibited, pathological). Child sexual abuse has been a formative way of

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<sup>1</sup> 'P' refers to other participants who reproduced this way of speaking but who could not be included in the analysis due to lack of space.

understanding adult sexuality, in terms of understanding the reason for perpetration (by men) sexual dysfunction homosexuality and sado-masochism. The major way in which women are seen to relive or re-enact the childhood abuse is by choosing abuse in a receptacle form i.e. they choose men who will abuse them again in their adult life (Herman, 1981). The 'sexed position' of the woman survivor, therefore, becomes one who receives abuse, both as a child and adult: this notion is almost synonymous with learned helplessness, led and kept stable by the unconscious need to repeat the past; this is kept in place by the rhetorical sounding of 'but this is all she has ever known'.

In order to understand the concept of 're-enactment' or repetitive behaviours (stemming from the abuse) the analysis will show how mutually related this is to certain norms of heterosexuality, by looking at how abuse is seen to affect women's sexuality and more importantly their sexual choices. Furthermore, the analysis indicates how 'power' and 'authority' are written into the production of masculinity and femininity, which is drawn upon to explain 'women's' reaction to abuse and her subsequent sexual choices. Re-enactment, vulnerability and choice are the guiding repertoires which ground child sexual abuse and women's sexuality in a psychoanalytic discourse (which is talked about through its mutual alliance with heterosexuality). Both discourses are further examined for their deployment of 'power' and 'dis-empowerment' in producing categories of femininity and masculinity .

Although promiscuity (and prostitution) was viewed as a sign or 'response' to child sexual abuse, participants found it difficult to 'ground' their explanation. The only reason given in the context of speaking about women's sexuality was that promiscuity was a sign that women had not adjusted sexually, and were 'looking' for something through sex. It is important to bear in mind that this use of promiscuity could not be used in the same way to apply to male sexuality. As we shall see from the following extract (which will set the scene for describing sexual choice) women who have sex with different men are still viewed as being in receivership of their sexual activity. The following extract shows how promiscuity is constructed as a way in which individual

women use promiscuity to gain control over men (stemming from the abuse in their past). What is of interest is 'how' this is spoken about.

### **Extract 1.**

**Paula** And when you talk about um, different behaviours, you almost have a feeling that there is some sort of sexual abuse or things there, you know, what what kind of things do you see, in particular, what sort of behaviours?

**Margaret** I mean they are attractive, tough, well tough on the exterior, and um, you know Friday night, the power they have in getting the men and how many they have sex with, and how many they control, you know, so they will use their sexuality in quite a different way, um, from other women, often they'll (inaudible) what they'll catch, um, and the whole thing, about, it doesn't make them feel better, they're controlling it, and they have to really trust themselves, you know it never, it doesn't actually get them what they want, and almost having to do more and more in order to satisfy this thing that they will control, men, rather than the other way round.

This extract illustrates how the effects of abuse on sexuality are constructed by situating promiscuity as 'different' from 'other women'. The signifying feature of abuse is achieved by drawing upon a discourse of 'difference' which locates the abused woman's maladaptive behaviour, against that of 'other' women. This rests on the notion that women who cannot share their feelings engage in promiscuous behaviour as a means of controlling men, rather than 'the other way round'. The important and critical facet of the extract, however, is the production of 'difference' through promiscuity which is seen to allow women 'power over men' (and set in opposition to being held by male power). 'Men', in this instance are chosen for sex in order to gain control over the abuse in childhood; this is achieved via a discourse of 'difference' which is set as a unitary testament to abuse, causing women to behave in quite 'a different way'. 'Controlling' men, or holding 'power' over them sexually is put into discourse through a description of its sexual 'difference' from women in general. It is important to note the concept of 'difference' when referring to women survivors as this is a central way in which 'personal' experience confines explanations of sexual behaviour and choices: through separating these women from the others, their symptoms can be singled out.

#### 4.4.2. Women survivors and sexual choices.

Choice:~ the act or power of choosing; the thing chosen; an alternative; a preference; the preferable or best part; variety from which to choose; select; appropriate.

~Chambers Dictionary

Psychological choices relating to sex are often discussed in psychological, self-help and in modern liberal ways, implying that people in general are 'free' agents (Hawkes, 1996). However, 'choosing' sexual partners is often talked about in the literature on women survivors as a form of re-enactment (usually when one is referring to perversities or abnormalities), a psychoanalytic concept which Freud introduced as early as 1914 (Davies, 1995). The idea is that abuse transcends to other significant structures in the person's life (such as gender, culture etc.). Based upon ex post facto reasoning (reasoning based upon the subsequent actions and choices of the 'subject' in question - the survivor) the 'fit' between the survivor of child sexual abuse and her choice of partner is based upon observable connections between the woman's present situation and her past. The following extracts show how the concept of repetition relies on the ability for us to reason that a split between the conscious and unconscious occurs, depicting an 'inner' and 'outer' life of the individual. Alternatively, 'faulty cognitions' provide the explanation for women choosing to be abused once again in adulthood. This is linked to the individual's internal life (which has been skewed) and offers a reason why women are seen to 'choose' abusive men in adulthood. In the following extracts, I show how this is talked about by some of the professionals in relation to masculine types, and how certain depictions of male power (and/or its lack) represent the mirroring of past abuse in a woman's life and her present sexual needs. The important element of this is the cleavage between the 'inner' (foundational nature of the abuse) and the 'outer' (choice of partner).

## **Extract 2.**

Oliver ... and I think always think the choice of partners often fascinating

Paula Right, why?

Oliver So often they choose a partner who will in turn will abuse them in some form

Paula Right?

Oliver Cos it's like its almost like um ..depending on the length of abuse and who did it...and it it if it's ..yeah depending on the length of abuse and who did it ..kids build up some kind of internal working model of of um the the environment still being abusive in some way, and I think in in some unwitting way also seek that out, its like kind of if that's what you know, that's all you know...you know don't know anything of nurture or what have you.

This second extract sets a precedent for the remaining extracts in this category, as it portends to the 'consequences' of sexual abuse - as an 'internal working model' or one could say a 'transcendental' feature of the individual's self and subjectivity. The event of abuse in a person's life is offered as a pre-given, foundational occurrence, altering time scales (as time remains frozen in the confines of the past) where abuse remains lodged in inner worlds. The extract makes reference to 'inner structures' or the inner 'model' which mirrors the previous abuse. This is a popular cognitive theme which 'refers' people's mental states to coherent cognitive scripts inside their heads (Warner, 1996; Parker, 1998).

'Nurture' is positioned 'outside' of the world of the abuse victim, allowing abuse to take centre stage as the central feature of development, causing the adult subjects to 'seek out' similar structures to childhood (abusive). In order to achieve this connection, the therapist produces a version of childhood which exists in a world of inner cognitive models which do not seem to connect with the outside world: abuse not only creates an 'inner' world outside of nurture, it forms a course of development outside the social

world. It is therefore constructed as something personal and considered to be an individual identification by the survivor.

Before offering any kind of analytical framework for the following extracts, the reader is invited to absorb the content of the extracts (which is vast) and keep in mind that they are providing a way in which to comprehend women's (irrational/unconscious) sexual choices in adulthood. What I would like to get across is the mutual alliance produced between i. child sexual abuse ii. male sexual aggression, impotence and authority and iii. women's eventual awakening in 'reality'. Once again, the centralisation of the pre-given unconscious (as the defining organiser of experience) is presented as the organising power of women's sexuality, fusing women's sexual choices with certain representations of male power.

### **Extract 3.**

**Liz** Often its the men and the power, and the dominance, (inaudible) aggression out, which a lot of men have, [P Yeah] and its it's comes out sexually.....

(later on)

**Liz** What I would like to add to that is that not all men are the same [P Of course, yeah] and er, and that's something I work with on a one to one level, who have put all men in that bracket. And I think that's a very very difficult one for them to work with, and what what I have found interesting in sex therapy is that some women who have been abused have gone then into a relationship where the man is very gentle, and some times impotent which is quite interesting [P Mmm] the fit then.

**Paula** So, right you think they've done that because there there's a non-threatening sexual activity going on.

**Liz** *Mmmm (affirming)* ... Well I don't think they consciously seek out abuse [Paula, no] and I think initially some men are very charming, and behind that, is whatever they haven't worked through themselves, their anger. and and so, I believe yes there is truth in that, I do, and women go into relationship after relationship at an unconscious level and it appears later on in the relationship. But the, it often feels that the fit with them is that they, they're drawing out from that man what they've always been used to [Paula right] in their family history of

their father... Because I I just think I think she she'll be just so wary of coming into contact with um men, sometimes with men.

#### **Extract 4.**

**Margaret** Well, um the most obvious one, is that people very often talk about, you know, about their own sexuality's, or their own sexual relationships, that if they're struggling with things, penetration, they're frightened, obviously that's a bit of their sexuality that they have um, problems with. She actually could um, she could be sexually responsive, and I believe she could be orgasmic, but it was so much to with how, with most relationships, how the relationship and how her husband treated her and he had come from a rotten background and wasn't you know, his manner was intrusive, and would come home drunk, and was pretty abusive. So she started from a bad place, but I do think actual abuse was part of the, and that maybe she turned to her mother, and it wasn't taken seriously, and quite often people say that weren't taken seriously.

. I, I, I, I means I think, the distrust of it, I would have thought the big things, a fear of intimacy, a fear of trust. They may be very much more needing to control, not let themselves go, making sure that's there's a safe, longing for quite unrealistically, a man without any force, when in fact what they do need is a man with force, because they end up getting a man without any power, and then that isn't going to work for them because they need a powerful man, and one with authority, but it needs to be a good authority, not a manipulative and abusing one. If that makes any sense?

**Paula** Yeah, no, I mean, what what do you need by them needing a man with authority?

**Margaret** Well, I think they might go for a mild, kind, loving man, but may be somebody who isn't strong enough to trust to say, um, I don't want you to do that, that isn't right. Um, (pause) you know, you need somebody who's powerful but to use their power well, the only, and I think they can be attracted to somebody who's mild, um that then, and that they're they're not may be strong enough or firm enough, or um (pause).

#### **Extract 5.**

**Paula** Right, okay. Okay, um, sexual health, what would you say merits sort of sexual health, if you like, a sexually healthy partnership, what sort of things would you look for?

**Chris** Because that the history seems to be that you choose a partner, erm, that doesn't understand, or that isn't there for you [inaudible]



**Paula** And do you find that that's the same for both men and women again?

**Chris** Mmm (affirming) I've worked with a lot more women than men.

**Paula** Yeah, do talk about women because that's what I'm interested in as well.

**Chris** Yeah, I've only worked with about half a dozen men [inaudible]

**Paula** And do you see any problems that you could put down to not just them being a survivor, are there any sort of problems there that exist because there's different expectations and stuff like that?

**Chris** In a relationship, erm, yeah sure, looking at the initial fit, why they both chose each other, it would tie into both their histories, and it usually does.

**Paula** So you find that the abused er, the survivor has a partner who's been abused as well, is that what you mean?

**Chris** Well a survivor can pick a rescuer, so a man that needs to rescue this woman, that's quite a powerful position, while she can choose an abuser, and if she's come some way along, she may choose a healthy partner, that might enable her to look at the abuse herself, and I've has quite a few of them like that. Choosing them a healthy partner has enabled them to have that space, [P right] to work on the abuse.

Extract three defines the notion of power and powerlessness in direct connection to gender and male power. Women's' sexuality is directly connected with their past history of abuse in childhood and their 'unconscious' need to 'control' 'contain' 'trust' a certain 'type' of man. However, what is of interest is the way in which this is 'performed' through discourses of masculinity (and male power) which these texts draw upon to illustrate the peculiarity of the survivor's choice of 'man'. I have called masculinity a 'discourse' for the very reason that I wish to clarify the way in which the extracts use a system of statements (about male - power, impotence, dominance, aggression, sexuality and perpetration) which 'constructs' a version of man. The way in which this discourse is employed is through its formal treatment and connection to the

discourse of child sexual abuse - which enshrines the subject (female victim in past and present). Liz, for example begins to situate feelings of helplessness away from this direct causation between the abuse and the present and begins to explore how male power in the family can have an adverse effect on a woman's feelings towards her sexuality. Therefore, the acceptance of male power is located in several settings, the family, marital relationship and through sexual aggression. However, a link is also made between the inevitability of male sexual aggression and aggression per se, where she claims

“ Often its the men and the power, and the dominance, (inaudible) aggression out, which a lot of men have [Yeah] and it's it's comes out sexually.”

In contrast to this, she makes claims surrounding the notion that men are individuals, and not all aggressive. However, the assertion that

“[What] I have found interesting in sex therapy ... that some women who have been abused have gone then into a relationship where the man is very gentle, and some times impotent which is quite interesting.”

Although Liz talks of 'men's' generic aggression at first, she goes on to suggest that not all men are 'the same'. However, although recognising 'difference' in men's behaviour, another category of man is set up *contradicting* her final explanation which refers to the cognitive script model i.e. she has chosen a man to 'fit' with her father (although drawing 'impotence' from a man would seem to contradict the presentation of the father as 'actively' *sexually abusive* and, therefore, not impotent sexually). For example, those men who are gentle, impotent and therefore 'opposite' to a masculinised idea of male power are meant to represent what the survivor has 'unconsciously' sought from a partner. What is quintessentially male or not male is realised through the notion that the female victim of abuse will either repeat the abuse or reject the phallus (impotent man). Female sexual choice is in this instance positioned against a polarised depiction of the 'masculine'. This is confused by the rather contradictory and speculative way in which it is applied to the woman's 'unconscious' choice to repeat the past, as it appears gentleness *and* abuse represent the woman's unconscious repetition.

In the last extract, Chris talks about women 'choosing' a rescuer (which is another masculinised ideal); this was 'separate' from other women's experiences, as this is disconnected from depictions of a healthy partner. The idea that the woman survivor 'chooses' a partner is set up in a specific way, centring as it does on female dependency - on rescue, enablement and male power (good and bad power). This is made more explicit by Chris who begins by talking about 'both' histories, and the initial fit (why both partners chose each other). Furthermore, although I ask her to explain the man's 'need' in the relationship, this is by-passed in order to focus on the woman's receiving role, where the man's history becomes an 'empty category outside of describing his function as 'rescuer' or 'enabler' in the context of his relation to the abused woman.

Although it is made clear that the therapist has not 'seen' as many men as women, it is the way in which male and female are described in the context of their relationship which is of interest. Health, dependency and further abuse are understood by drawing on specific forms of masculinity and feminine dependency (to be rescued from the abuse, to re-enact the abuse and to be enabled to heal from it) within the heterosexual context. Furthermore, Margaret continues with the theme of male strength (by talking about authority) not just in terms of choice but sexual functioning per se. Her reasoning is grounded in the suggestion that women are holding 'unrealistic' beliefs if they expect to trust a man who does not have, what she refers to as 'good power'.

The depiction of male authority and power, however, is not just connected to sexual choices, it is also used as a way of grounding women's problems with 'penetration' (which is a common way in which sexual problems relating to abuse are discussed). The mutual alliance between heterosexual discourse (relying as it does on certain depictions of masculinity and femininity) once again fuels a psychoanalytic reading of abuse effects, represented through choice and re-enactment.

The discursive practices, which enable the offered explanation to make sense, are also of interest. For example, the language used is at times is tenuous, such as 'it feels as if' (Liz) and the use of the grammatical subjunctive, using "I would have thought" (Margaret). The connections made between the woman's past and her sexual

present are constructed as 'plausible' in this instance, or that it seems reasonable to suggest this explanation in the light of the woman's history etc. Similarly, Stan tries explaining the differing effects of abuse in men and women by talking about the difference in men and women's aggression in relation *by referring to their emotional and expressive differences.*

#### **Extract 6.**

**Stan** I think the evidence is not strong, but the suggestion is that that male victims tend to become abusers more often....male victims turn their aggression outwards whereas females turn it in on themselves...fears of homosexuality seem to become known in males, if if they've been abused by males they um sometimes tend to think they are homosexual or something of that sort...boys/men are supposed to fight it off or something...then they're not men...so then there tends to be over compensation or something that they tend to be aggressive towards others to assert their own masculinity I mean I say the evidence is non-existent but um those are the things you know appear to be possible...I mean certainly a large proportion of men who are sexually aggressive er have been abused themselves.

Stan's understanding of abuse effects in men and women are significantly different on a generic level, and it clear that he is drawing on common representations of men and women's sexuality to make sense of their 'difference' both emotionally and sexually. For women, sexual abuse turns their emotions 'inward' whereas men turn theirs to the 'outside' or concentrate on their normality (i.e. being homosexual) and 'survive' in the world through being aggressive and continuing to abuse. Stan's 'way of knowing' about abuse survival and emotional expression is very much situated in categorical difference in men and women and their means of sexual survival. More specifically, he connects women's sexual survival with constraints operating in marriage, although it is interesting that this following quote contradicts an earlier statement, where he claims that

"...as far as sexual dysfunction is concerned that that problems that they're having sexually really reflect the abuse experience earlier...rather than the current marital situation"

Later on, he frames sexual problems in a quite a different way when he contextualises sexual problems in marriage.

**Stan** Well, it's highly desirable that you treat them as a couple [P yeah] so obviously it does require both of them to change, I mean if the partner is becoming more understanding of the victim's difficulties...yet it is quite difficult because you have to ask of course, well why did they get, why did he marry this particular woman with these particular difficulties and actually then get better of course?

By moving away from the individual to the context of her life, it is clear that 'choice' of partner enters into the sexual equation - an equation which can result in the maintenance of abuse. In this instance it is the 'man's choice which is referred to, as it is in other transcripts (P1, 2, 4, 8, 10) where 'both histories' tie into the maintenance of the problem, which links to the woman's ability to 'trust and control' in a relationship where both individual's 'contribute' to the sexual relationship in a negative way. The contributions outlined above can be seen to be very gendered contributions, where women are said to choose certain 'types' of men (represented in particular versions of masculinity and femininity) and men are said to 'choose' women to revictimise or rescue them when 'they' are not authoritative enough. If there is sexual aversion in a relationship, or problems with sex or closeness and intimacy, these ways have been talked about as gendered and as 'presenting' problems with the relationships which make sexual 'health' difficult, on an individual and relational level. As P8 claims with reference to women's sexuality

#### **Extract 7.**

**Chris** sometimes a lot of the time, it's not, they're trying to have a normal life [inaudible] so they can't have sex and the partner can't penetrate, they'd much rather think...that something we immediately look for, whose goals, right, yeah and that's very much part of their, so their sexuality, if you like is very confused as to what they want and what their partner wants...and by definition the only thing that they can give a man is penetrative sex.

It has been clear from the extract that individual women with sexual difficulties or relationship problems are talked about in a gendered way, with reference to their emotional attachment to certain versions of men, who they choose or who choose them. The above extract illustrates the constraints on women's sexuality through their partner's goals and the subversion of their sexual 'difficulties' in order that they can offer something to men. Masculinity, therefore, is part of how 'female sexuality' and women's sexual relations with men are understood, in relation to the effects of child sexual abuse. We have seen this in relation to 'choice' 'control' 'support' 'features of gender' and expectations surrounding the behaviour of both men and women. The following section draws on perceived levels of coping in men and women in relation to their sexuality and the constraints that are seen to operate on sexuality and identity.

#### 4.4.3 Understanding survivors through receivership.

So far, the use of 'relationships' (seen through the lens of women's sexual choice) has functioned to represent the link between events in the past (abuse, damage, loss of power) and the present (choice, re-enactment), the result of which has relied on certain representations of men and women in relation to those events (male power etc.) I would like to examine how such events, such as child sexual abuse produce and shape versions of female sexuality (which again is mutually constitutive of heterosexual activity, involving men, the penis, phallus) which contribute to the production of a femininity based upon 'receivership'. The extracts show female sexuality (receivership) seen at the corporeal level (bodies) and at the level of social construction. Therefore, this analysis does not reveal some 'gap' in the discourse over socially constructed meanings; it is the manner in which 'social' categories are taken up and cited which is of interest to categories of sexuality.

'Woman' is created as a category for understanding the effects of child sexual abuse on sexuality and heterosexuality. For example, through talk of women's ability to be penetrated (given as a sign of adjustment) we can explore the ways in which the

deployment of sexuality is achieved through a discourse of female receivership (in terms of power, domesticity, physiology and intimacy)

The following extract demonstrates a joint attempt by the participant and researcher to 'express' what the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality might be. The portrayal of effects is at first extended to both men and women but then moves on to more gender specific terrain. Irena goes on to offer a context for the effects, grounding them in depictions of women's expressions and physiology.

**Extract 8.**

**Paula** ....right.....OK again we've talked a bit about this anyway but um, you said you've done some sexual and marital therapy, um, do you think that you know child sexual abuse um affects significantly affects the sexual practices of women in particular in adulthood or how do you think it affects, it might be that pretty much what you said before or?

**Irena** Yeah, I think it can often profoundly affect women's experiences of sex, again a think there's a great violation, depending on what kind of contact it was, penetration or whatever, um I think because women's expression of themselves can be quite fragile sometimes and their sexual identity can be quite fragile and maybe its the same way with men, its easily distorted and affected and um, I think it can lead to many difficulties later on, I think there's an underlying factor of difficulties with intimacy and relationships as an underlying factor which I don't think

**Paula** Right, is is what you're saying is that there's something a bit more general there is that is going on, apart from, you know the you know the abuse per se, do you think there's something a bit more general?

**Irena** I have a feeling that is very different for men and the way they experience and to see themselves in the world in wider culture and expectations of women and I'm sure that plays into to it too, um.....I think it's different for women, quite how its different....and how there and how they're affected, I'm not entirely sure

**Paula** but I mean you mentioned that at some point that women can have a more fragile expression, I mean can you explain that a bit more?

**Irena** ....um.....it seems that women tend to, women's sexuality seems to be more easily affected or influenced by things, whether its attitudes, parental attitudes, or parents with the child, the way we learn about sexuality, it seems to be very easily knocked off course and influenced by things, because of the way

they respond sexually, maybe partly to do with physiology, and the way women are made, and so, um so basically they seem to be affected differently to men.

In the above extract, Irena begins an account of women's sexuality by speaking of its 'social' origins and their grounding in social and familial factors. Gender neutral effects are alluded to (which was a feature of other transcripts) in a tentative manner, in "maybe it's the same with men". However, the text is contradictory, as we can see that the effects of child sexual abuse (fragile expression, distortion) are directed only at women and are talked about in a very gender-specific way. For example, once again the notion that 'types' of abuse can be linked to its propensity to knock female expression off course, as "women's expression of themselves can be quite fragile sometimes and their sexual identity can be quite fragile". Irena links this to culture and expectations of women, which are found in the family and 'attitudes'. The way in which this discourse is essentially related to women is by the reversing gender neutrality and directing comment specifically at women and their expression and physiology.

"I have a feeling that it is very different for men". Furthermore, the fragility of female expression is defined according to its oscillating path, its penetrability (I use this term deliberately) in terms of 'attitudes' 'culture' parental attitudes, parental relationships with the child and so on. However, the reducible feature of women's sexuality finally rests with sexual response, which is how women are seen to differ from men. The way women are made, their physiology (which infers that women are 'designed' to respond - vaginally; this in itself is highly contestable) is given as an 'essential' feature of sexuality. This is further supported at the beginning of the extract where the 'type' of abuse it was (especially penetration), connecting as it does, contact (from the abuse), fragility and women's expression. At a base level, the physiological design of the female body sensically holds that connection in place, especially if penetration occurred from abuse, reinforcing notions of receivership (response) in the past and present (through the adult female body).

In the following extract the possible effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality is grounded in a generic explanation of effects through talk of socio-historical/psychoanalytical depictions of women. In doing so, Sam also talks about



abuse and women's adult sexuality in relation to inhibition, male sexual drives (as innate) and the domestic sphere (socio-historical).

**Extract 9.**

**Sam** I think women have been treated differently for a long period of time, er, if you like the nineteenth century changed things in such a way, men were psycho pathologised, or that's the wrong word, er they were, where women were hysterised, women were psychopath, you know termed psychopaths and the great problem is that men's awful innate aggressive drives which are very much tied up with their sexual drives and for women, you know that that great deal of medical moulding into er into the woman as near hysteric, someone who's always at risk of breaking, because they're fragile, because they're the weaker sex etc.etc. um I think all of those things have had an impact, um. I think the consequence is though that in our lived lives, in the family for example, girls are regarded still as the sort of flower, and boys (laughs) are regarded as the more robust, sort of get play a game of rugby type and thing, that hasn't, that view, and the way the family life is structured, I think probably do render girls more likely to render subjects of abuse than boys ... what I'm saying is there's a range of social and historical um, factors that have rendered the family, in particular, sort of, its got asymmetries in the way men and women interact and the way adults interact with girls and boys, which I think make it more likely that girls will be subject to abuse, given other circumstances changing ... (women) they're always checking for bad things around them um, they're they're much more likely to have blanket inhibitions on their sexual experiences, or sexual feelings and so on, um.....and that can make them very sexually inhibited people sexually, very inhibited, um...No sexual liberation hasn't really happened ...

**Paula** So, I mean in terms, I mean, if you like of women who carry on a normal life if you can out it like that, do you do you think in a sense that its just a watered down version of that, in a lot of respects?

**Sam** Sorry that its?

**Paula** You know, er um is prostitution is an extreme form if you like, as you said, a sort of representation of all the different effects child abuse can have upon a woman, well what about normal women in normal relationships?

**Sam** Well as one (laughs) as one prostitute, as one prostitute pointed out, said "tell me how I'm different - you tell me how many people [women] have a fuck, yeah for a new freezer?

The above extract begins by emphasising the socio-historical conditions which precludes women's full sexual development or examines their fragility or inhibition. Another participant Chris (P8) describes the effects of abuse according to gender differences by asserting that men possessed a greater ability to control 'bad impulses', which she claims is the reason for women's higher rate of depression, as a result of childhood abuse. In the above extract, Sam attempts to explain experiences of abuse 'as part' of the experience of womanhood, integrating culture, upbringing and wider social practices into subjectivity and sexuality. Drawing on psychiatry, he talks about the tendency of the medical profession to hystericise women and cites the family as a 'structure' that fosters female fragility and male robustness.

The structure of the family (which still contains images of girl flowers and male rugby players - robustness) is offered as an explanation for the predominance of female children becoming subject of abuse. The reasoning follows that fragility (or the perception of it) is socially constructed in familial (and psychiatric) settings. The powerlessness of the female child, thus, follows from its position in a socially constructed context of feminised fragility. This leads on to describing women's sexual inhibitions in the light of abuse and their socially constructed position, for which he situates them as "very sexually inhibited". The 'girl' and 'woman' in this sense are non-separable, because their sexualities are both processed (understood) in the context of male sexual aggression, which de-activates their sexual expression (hence - inhibition). This contrasts noticeably with male (adult) sexuality, which is socially constructed for boys, but 'driven' for men. For example, Sam begins by talking about the socio-historical conditions that 'render' girls to become subjects of abuse and then sexually inhibited people "because they're always checking for bad things".

In contrast to this, male adult sexuality is separated through "inner sexual drives" equating 'mature' male sexuality with aggression (this was a feature of extract three, in which Liz equates sexual aggression and men). This is starkly contrasted with that of women who are blanketed by the threat of 'bad things' and socially constructed

fragility. Although initially trying to critically describe the role of the medical institution and its role in hystericising women, talk of drives (a psychoanalytic concept) firmly roots women as receivers of the male aggressive drive, whether as children or adult women: thus, the separation between child and woman is never made. She remains at the level of 'subjected' - to innate and inevitable aggression from men.

Following on from this, female sexuality (talked about in the context of prostitution – which was introduced by Sam, and followed up by me) is then further delineated in the domestic sphere, where women's sexuality is exercised against men (by 'fucking') for domestic gain i.e. a new freezer. Although this extract is a pernicious example of how women can be represented sexually (as fragile, inhibited, manipulative, domestic sex worker, subject to male inner sexual drives, and as economically dependent) there is a more general point which needs further clarification, that of women constructed as receivers (in the context of abuse) which is grounded in broader discourses of heterosexuality, male and female sexuality, in the familial, medical and domestic sphere. For example, could we apply the notion of 'inhibition' and 'fucking for a new freezer' to connections with child sexual abuse and hence greater vulnerability if the deployment of female sexuality was equated with that of the male - i.e. 'driven' 'aggressive' and 'robust'? The positioning of women in this discourse maintains men's tangible and innate path (see also Irena) whereas women are defined by the social and their physiological design. At both discursive levels, women are positioned as the receivers, men as the activators. The extract also women as hidden manipulators, within this discourse.

#### 4.5.0. Concluding comments.

Professional understandings of the effects of child sexual abuse are not merely an example of 'observation'; they are embedded in understandings of gender, sexuality and childhood; they are part of the 'psy-complex' operating in culture and are found not only in professional accounts but everyday (ideological) accounts as well (see chapters five and six). As other critical 'deconstructive' texts (Burman, 1994; Parker & Shotter,

1989; Parker *et al*, 1994; Burman *et al*, 1996; Burman *et al*, 1998), the present analysis has been to suggest how certain discourses can constrain and stabilise meanings and assume certain properties of individuals. The analysis, therefore, can act as a political challenge to i. regulatory categories of the masculine and feminine (defined according to re-iterations of male power, or its lack) and ii. the designation of sexualised identity categories and the constitution of a 'damage' in the past and the present need for the woman to control her circumstances.

By designating categories in this way, heterosexualised versions of male and female sexuality allow the woman survivor to become 'knowable' in relation to particular gender roles and through constraints operating in heterosexual relationships (see also Butler, 1990; Warner, 1996; Reavey, 1996; O'Dell, 1997). In attempting to make visible some of the issues associated with representations and constructions of women who have been sexually abused in childhood, heterosexuality has been cited many times as a system constraining women's sexual expression, at a systemic level (in the relationship) and on a level attributed to the way professionals talked about men and women's expression, needs and ability to control sex and emotions.

This does not lend 'proof' to men's power, but is an important story used by professionals to understand the abuse survivors' lack of power and how her past potentially connects with her present - in terms of 'being' a woman (her ontological status - see extracts 8 & 9) and the conditions in which she has had to 'sexually survive' (in relationships)

Furthermore, I would suggest that, rather than viewing men as a 'possessing' power, the analysis reflects the way in which heterosexuality is still extant in providing a clear discursive context for 'situating' male and female sexuality and the psychologies of abuse survivors. In the context of talking about child sexual abuse and its effects on sexuality in the present, the 're-iteration' of sexual things in the past mimicking sexual problems or actions in the present has been presented as dependent on the "approximations and citations" of heterosexuality (in which categories of gender are assigned and judged for their alliance or exclusion i.e. ideals of masculinity) (Butler,

1993: 14). The dependency on a psychoanalytic trajectory in order for heterosexuality to be that form of approximation and citation was also demonstrated by the analysis.

Furthermore, notions of sexual maladaptation, 'bad' choices, sexual dysfunction appeared to be predicated on women (as sex and gender) as the receivers of their sexuality (through damage, neglect, fear or physiology/ again the reiteration of the past in the present). These relationships - between the personal and its therapeutic interpretation (with the aim of recovery) is able to mask its mode of production, through individualising effects according to personal history, predicated on an acceptance of 'truth' (of the abuse) and the embrace of 'damage'. The incitement to speak of women survivors' sexuality is enabled by the power of the personal truth and its ability to hide its means of production (its alliance with heterosexuality and representations of men and women).

The power to produce the category of 'woman' (inculcated through references to abuse and damage) resides in woman's relation to heterosexual normalcy (and man's power within this) realised at given moments through a psychoanalytic discourse offering explanations for sexual actions, choices and dysfunctions. Choice, therefore, loses its meaning (as an action of an independent agent) and becomes consumed in the category of male power. The definition of choice is inextricably directed and defined by categories of masculinity which confines, rather than plays out, the power of the woman survivor to 'choose'. Her identity as a sexual agent becomes 'fixed' and 'assured' through her exclusion from the 'normal' population who are able to 'choose' normal men and normal women. I have argued that women survivors' sexuality is represented through normalised depictions of heterosexual relations - as an opposition to normality and as a product of it. This was secured through reference to the inner and damaged 'personal' aspect of the survivor's sexuality.

Furthermore, the way in which male sexuality was produced in the texts continued to provide a signifying discursive space in which to define female normality or abnormality. By deconstructing these professional texts, it is possible to see how the discursive tracks of gender and sexuality are laid with reference to child sexual abuse. If

texts are open to interrogation, it is possible to start work on re-signification, that is, refusing the 'ontological' claims made about women's sexuality and survival (women's receivership - through body and mind). It is time to give up ontological claims about women's sexuality and their recovery from abuse *as if it were outside of definitions of heterosexual normalcy*. Only then can professional/therapeutic discourse start to treat the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality as a 'means of survival' rather than treat their sexualities as feminised, fixed and unitary. In the following chapter that examines self-help texts' discourses on women, child sexual abuse and sexuality. Once again, the texts were examined in terms of how they construct women's sexuality (and their sexual identity).

## **Chapter five. Survivors and sexuality: A discourse analysis of self-help texts.**

“If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were”.

*Bass & Davis, 1988 ~ The Courage to Heal.*

“In the Truth Itself, There Is Healing.”

*Ellen Bass, 1987 ~ I Never Told Anyone.*

“In silence secrets turn to lies. Secrets shared become sacred truths”

*Terry Wolverton, (cited in Pummer, 1995, 46).*

This chapter critically discusses notions of self-help in contemporary society based on an analysis of some of the literature aimed at women survivors of child sexual abuse. Although, the analysis of self-help discourse is similar in approach to the study of professional and survivor discourse, the difference rests in it being an analysis of ready presented 'literature' rather than an analysis of empirical data, based on interviews and shared conversations.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a review of the function of self-literature in general<sup>1</sup>, and to present a sample of extracts from self-help books and discuss their role and the role of self-help more generally in terms of the way it theorises sex and abuse more generally. To this end, I will be concentrating on a review of self-help and its 'function' in knowledge (on abuse and women) and provide an analysis (of the literature) of the issues pertinent to some of the areas currently debated in feminist and academic forums and how readers are invited to engage in these texts (Rose, 1989; Kitzinger, 1994; Ofsche & Watters, 1994; Allwood, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter formed part of a paper, by Reavey & Courtney (1998). I am grateful to Louise Courtney for her help with the self-help literature search.

Self-help has proliferated through grassroots activity in recent years, particularly in health and social care. It has also become a space where 'common stories of abuse' are told, the idea being that sharing stories provides a mutually supportive context for disclosure (both private and public). Self-help books are part of a growing industry which has made the process of sharing secrets and story telling commonplace (Plummer, 1995). In North America, fifteen million people participate in over half a million self-help recovery groups (Kaminer, 1992). The common stories shared in groups such as these hinge around the recovery and therapy dicta. The emphasis on recovering, surviving, breaking the silence are all too familiar in tele-advice forums and chat shows. Recovery stories in the main operate within a system which promotes immediate recognition and appeal and are commonly targeted at women (Potts, 1998).

Alongside this, professional interest and involvement has also grown as self-help has become increasingly important in service provision in health care settings. However, research is emerging which challenges the accepted view of self-help as straightforward and empathic towards survivors of child sexual abuse and other health issues (Kitzinger, 1993; Ofsche & Watters, 1994; Allwood, 1996; Reavey & Courtney, 1998). Nevertheless this is a sensitive debate, as any attempt to raise issues with therapy and self-help can be viewed as 'evidence' for their flawed arguments. However, like Burman (1997), this analysis attends to the 'power' which self-help/therapeutic discourses have in shaping women's understanding of their lives. The analysis, raises questions about 'authentic' or 'empathic' accounts around survival, which presents its claims as 'lived' and thus more 'real'.

The connection forged between self-help and sexuality and cultural understandings of sexuality is assured by 'guides' which 'everyone' can grasp immediately (Potts, 1998). In this chapter, I explore the apparent tensions within the individualism of self-help books, written for women (and sometimes men) who are 'healing' from child sexual abuse. The purpose [of which] is to explore how women survivors' sexuality is mutually constructed in available deployments of sexuality, power and 'recovery'.



### 5.1.0. Reading the texts.

The immediate impression one may get when reading self-help books is that they provide an empathic and 'authentic' account of surviving sexual abuse, and many are often written (or co-written) by survivors themselves. It is necessary, however, that I acknowledge how self-help texts are situated in the authors' aims of promoting recovery, telling their personal story and inviting readers to recognise their need for self-regulation and personal fulfillment (Rose, 1989). However, a discourse analytic approach to the texts can illustrate how certain constructions (ways of speaking / discourses) of survivors' sexual problems locate these issues predominantly in the individual, rather than addressing a broader social context. Conversely, although many of the texts talk very briefly about the 'social' context of sexuality, there are contradictions between talking about the 'social' and applying prescriptions for 'doing sex'.

Through this critical analysis, I argue that 'problems' of the individual survivor must be viewed within a broader picture (incorporating, for example heterosexuality, victim blaming and so on) in order to understand how her sexuality is occasioned/embedded in social settings. I also problematise the ways in which tales of recovery and self-help construct themselves around the notion of being able to discover the 'true self'. Finally, it is suggested that self-help books can (and do) offer help to survivors but do promote narrow understandings of 'normal' and 'healthy' women - they do not challenge societal 'norms' about womanhood which could contribute to a broader understanding of sexual abuse and the portrayal of women's social psychological (with regards to their sexuality) more generally.

The analysis of self-help books must be viewed in the context of a broader self-help 'movement', which emphasises individual responsibility and control over well-being by 'helping yourself'. Consumer guides such as *The Health Address Book* (which provides a directory of groups, their own publications and services) produced by organisations such as the Patients Association and Nottingham Self Help provide a further source of information concerning the wide variety of groups - and self help books - available. In this, I hope to use this discussion to contribute to a more general discussion about the nature and meaning of self-help in contemporary society and the way it used to interpret social-psychological issues.

This work has developed from a discourse analysis of a number of self-help books and a critical review of relevant self-help literature. At a time when the visibility of self-help in health and social care is increasing, there is a need for self-help - at a practical and theoretical level - to be critically evaluated in order to challenge a widely prevalent view of self-help as a straightforward and unproblematic tool for individual empowerment. This must be viewed in the context of a growing 'false memory' movement alongside other groups designed to help individuals with recovered memory. The self-help literature helps by providing people with checklists for symptoms and signs of childhood sexual abuse (Ofsche & Watters, 1995). Many women find this way of 'recognising their problem' useful for locating themselves within a group of invisible others, with whom they share a common narrative (Simonds, 1992). Throughout this chapter I will also endeavour to consider the implications of critical analyses on self-help for mental health professionals working with survivors of abuse.

#### 5.1.1. The current context of self-help.

Over the past twenty years or so, ideas about self-help have gained in both credence and visibility (Lurie & Shulman, 1983; Simpson, 1996). Self-help has arguably always formed part of social activity, although historically it has been subsumed under

the banner of volunteering, charitable work and philanthropic acts. However, as voluntary sector work continues to flourish, so to does self-help in its own right, most notably in connection with health and illness issues. The reasons for this are arguably as numerous as the variety of techniques available and illustrate its broad appeal across social and health work (Davis Smith, 1992; Rochester & Hedley, 1995).

Self-help initiatives have formed a central part of civil rights activism for a number of years. It covers areas such as disability politics, mental, and feminist health movements, where it is often presented as an alternative option to what some regard as paternalistic and dogmatic health care provision (Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Kenner, 1985).

Moreover, commentators have argued that it also appears to fit as well within the current context of citizenship and 'consumer empowerment' as it does with cuts or 'freezes' in health and social service budgets (Williams, 1989; Wilson, 1995).

Furthermore, self-help's general emphasis on holistic - mind and body - approaches, has been reinforced by Alternative or Complementary medicines, who have benefited extensively from the increasing interest in self-help. One recent addition to the 'sexual health' market for heterosexual couples has been John Gray's (1995) *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom: A Guide to Lasting Romance and Passion*. In this guide for *women* and men, as "...men couldn't care less about romance and self-help books" (Gray, 1995:16). Gray makes a number of statements surrounding the benefits of self-help, it promotion of 'therapeutic openness'. Coupled with this is the promotion of completeness and self awareness and a discovering of the inner self (Potts, 1998) which mirrors popularist writings and their use of a humanist approach to sexuality and identity. The often taken-for-granted overreaching benefit of self-help, which spans this diversity of issues, is its purported use as a tool for empowerment, where individuals can take 'control' and thus positively improve their own circumstances (Poston & Lison, 1989; Kenner, 1985).

In the field of mental health work, the growth of self-help has largely developed from perspectives that regard the ethos of self-help and self-reliance as the key to tackling many 'mild' psychological difficulties.

As the popularity of self-help has grown, so too has professional interest and subsequent involvement with it. While numerous changes in service provision have occurred on a regional basis, many National Health Service Trusts, Charities and Voluntary Organisations now employ specialist self-help workers (or at least have training opportunities) to facilitate self-help work at both group and individual levels (Kenner, 1985). Conferences and networks have also been established to promote professional work with (rather than for) service users.

On a more individualised - but related - level, there has also been a rapid growth of populist self-help books, reinforcing a do-it-yourself or 'can-do' approach to many issues (Gray, 1995). This has been, among other things, a way in which individuals can bypass professional intervention and avoid authority figures, like therapists (Simonds, 1992). Other methods used today range from tapes, manuals and leaflets, through to telephone help lines, newsletters, letter writing networks and self-help groups and organisations.

Many of these organisations are consulted by local and national policy makers, and have been central to changing, developing and challenging established services. In a more individualised approach, Public Health and Health Promotion work continues to endorse self-help as behaviour aimed at maintaining and reproducing good health as well as a tool for tackling existing health problems.

Self-help then, has in recent years become an established tenet of health and social policy; its role in shaping definitions of health and illness must not, therefore, be underestimated. For women survivors of child sexual abuse, this provision has been a vital forum; especially when we consider the likely shame and problems surrounding the disclosure of sexual abuse to a professional which is often viewed as a potentially negative step (Dixon, 1998).

### 5.1.2. Defining self-help.

At its broadest level self-help can be defined as;

“[the] use of one's own abilities, resources etc. to solve one's problems”

*Campbell & Oliver, 1996*

There is a scarcity of more precise definitions of self-help work and particularly self-help groups, due in part to the sheer variety of approaches involved. However, there are a number of tenets widely regarded as fundamental to self-help (such as shared experiences and mutual aid - see further reading); at the centre of these is the emphasis on participation and responsibility in one's own health care.

On a more theoretical level self-help sits at the cusp of two fundamentally competing ideologies, namely individualism (helping oneself) and collectivism (helping others) (Kenner, 1985). This contradictory relationship is most apparent in self-help groups but other techniques for self-help are also situated along an individualistic - collectivist continuum.

This chapter contributes a further dimension to a growing number of critiques by feminists and others of self-help books which problematise the straightforward connection formed between self-help and political action (Williams, 1989; Wilson, 1995).

While books are aimed at a national or international population they are principally for individual use. However, the analysis presented in this chapter will show how certain discourses presented in the texts unnecessarily problematise the survivors' own conceptions about (for example) men or sexuality, while paradoxically failing to address how this might reproduce popular notions of sexual violence (Doherty & Anderson, 1998).

Professionals involved in self-help work may need to familiarise themselves with popular texts and consider the approaches they favour in terms of suitability and

the time available for both themselves and their clients. It is also appropriate to think about the resources available in terms of access to materials for women with physical disabilities and for those women with learning difficulties.

As many critics have pointed out, self-help does not suit (and may not be readily available for) every person, although with the growth of methods available, finding a suitable approach is becoming increasingly possible.

### 5.1.3. Self-help and professional involvement.

Self-help initiatives are frequently viewed by professionals as positive in that they promote proactive and self-reliant behaviour. Furthermore, they add to existing services, at relatively little cost, through the provision of information and supportive networks. In addition, some professionals who believe the health service to be less than 'sympathetic' to the degree and scale of survivors' problems may recommend self-help texts on the basis that they are 'easy' to read and nurture empathy. However, difficulties can and do occur between professionals and self-helpers', particularly in defining boundaries of participation, control and interaction. Some of these tensions become apparent because of the sheer variety of approaches available and the professionals often limited time and opportunity to explore each potential avenue. Also, as many self-help activities are conducted away from professional involvement, organisers can be wary of, or even hostile to, professional participation. In some instances, groups may provide information which (some) professionals disagree with. With respect to self-help books, professionals may be concerned that such texts offer advice or information contradictory to their own. Alternatively, many people use self-help books without reference to professionals or prior to seeking more formal help; this can result in professionals feeling pushed out or challenged in ways which they have not previously encountered.

The remainder of this chapter will examine a sample of self-help books on a general level, and then specifically in relation to texts written for women survivors of

child sexual abuse. All the texts are written by therapists or survivors (or both) and offer women an 'easy to read' approach to tackling the potential problems faced by survivors (Poston & Lison, 1989; Bass & Davis, 1988; Kunzman, 1990; Finney, 1989; Blume, 1990).

They hold certain similarities in that they discuss sexuality in the context of 'healing' as well as issues around intimacy, rather than isolating sexual dimensions. The Poston & Lison (1990) texts differs from the others, in that it presents the reader with a snap shot of a focus group session involving women survivors talking about sexual issues, and they also make more of an attempt to talk about sexual issues in a social context, by referring to issues concerning all women ie. health and illness etc. The extracts used are from all five texts, illustrating the specific themes raised in this chapter.

#### 5.1.4. Sample of texts.

The sample of texts used in this chapter were chosen because they featured in a paper by Jenny Kitzinger (1992) which addressed the issue of self-help and political subversion. She argued that self-help texts, and their reliance on sexual self-help techniques (used in in the process of healing) subverts radical feminist concerns with exposing power relations through sex. I found this argument fascinating, as it highlighted how assertions of 'empathy', 'gentle language' and 'acceptance' in self-help texts towards survivors obscured not only political issues but they individualised women's reactions to abuse, and narrowed the focus of psychological 'difficulty'. I wanted to deconstruct these texts to further the analysis of how the texts functioned - in existing discursive practices. Had the self-help texts created a whole new 'empathic' language and altered the content of discourse, or had they merely shifted the 'context' of prevailing discourses on women's sexuality? By this, discursive constructions of abuse and its consequences on women's sexuality and identity remain firmly focused on the

woman's behaviour, inviting her to look 'inward' for answers to her presenting problems with sex and relationships.

#### 5.2.0. Methodological issues.

The analysis that follows is based on a discourse analytic approach which treats language as a constructive tool, thereby allowing the researcher to examine what constitutes a text - entailing a de-construction of that text (a thematic decomposition once again). (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995; Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As chapter three explained, the important aspect of discourse analysis is how 'objects' (in this case female survival and sexuality) get talked about and constructed through discourse and the discursive strategies used to make that object credible in the given context (Parker, 1992); which is in turn a 'practice' which constructs the subjects (survivors). This approach is informed by post-structuralist inquiry, proposed by Foucault (1981) who was concerned with how knowledge (produced in texts) can position subjects in ways which can empower or disempower, via the possible or available explanations for an event, a behaviour or judgement.

In the case of abuse survival, addressed here, an analysis of text construction allows a reading which can locate the woman survivor in order to see how she is 'produced' - as a woman, survivor, agentic sexual being and responsible adult. How is her story told in texts, and where is she situated in wider representations of 'woman'? The exercise of the analysis is, therefore, deconstructive and an interpretation of 'what the texts are doing'.

According to most versions of discourse analysis, people use language for a variety of functions, including justification, blame and so on. In addition, such themes are examined in order to see how they are constructed and/or talked about. Themes are then located within particular discourses or frames of reference, which facilitate an understanding of how they became to be employed (situating it in a historical context,



institutional politics, ideological referents). The implications of the mode of discourse adopted can then be located in wider practices, at institutional levels (medical, educational) which impact on 'practice'. In terms of the self-help texts, a post-structuralist approach to analysing discourses was once again employed in order to examine the constructing function of discourse, and their interaction for producing a subject (the woman survivor of child sexual abuse).

### 5.2.1. Reading the texts

The texts explored in this study were chosen because I wanted to further expand on Kitzinger's analysis of their reliance on individualistic discourses that further pushes radical feminist arguments away from psychological and political concerns (Kitzinger, 1994). The texts were read several times with the aim of presenting a critical feminist reading of their function in discourses of women's survival and sexuality. Starting the analytic process for this chapter was more difficult than the other studies, as the coherence of a written text (especially written by 'authentic authors' who are telling the reader how they experienced it, or what they 'did') provides the reader with a far more cohesive fiction, a more assured form of textuality. At first, the task of viewing the text with a critical eye was extremely arduous, especially because of the soft padded language of empathy and temporal freedom (take your time, relax, enjoy your sexuality). The empathy dictum is a powerful device that makes it difficult for the reader to begin to question it, without being criticised for 'not listening' or having an agenda, which is not sympathetic to women. However, the analysis was committed to providing a feminist discursive reading of the self-help discourses; the aims being to cast a critical eye over the ways in which women survivors are constituted *as* survivors with sexual identities.

The same mode used in the other empirical chapters for creating themes, discursive categories and the identification of discourses was employed for the

remaining stages. The analysis here is based on five self-help texts, three of which are written solely for women survivors, with one exception (Kunzman, 1990).

### 5.2.2. Issues of gender, power, sexuality and 'difference'.

For the purposes of this chapter I have focused exclusively upon women survivors and issues relating to sexuality and 'normality'. This is not an attempt to 'hide' the fact that men are abused; rather, I would argue that the issues surrounding male survivors' psychological well-being merit separate attention (universalising the work to all survivors is a common simplification). With this in mind, I am also aware of the epistemological and ontological difficulties contained within the use of the word 'women'. There are many differences between women, not least in terms of class and cultural background, disability and sexuality, which will have important and significant consequences on the ways in which women identify with (if at all) the term 'survivor' (Reavey & Warner, 1998). I think in this sense, it is important to 'place' myself within this context as a white woman, from a working class background (who is presently working in a middle-class context), who might - from this standpoint - downplay or underestimate issues facing women with different life circumstances. Having said this, it is important to reiterate what is believed about the category 'woman' from a feminist standpoint. I argue that there are certain attitudes, behaviours, responses and beliefs which affect women *as* women. One appropriate example with respect to women survivors of sexual abuse would be issues involving power - its usage and imbalance in society generally - which can provide insights into discourses presented in survivor self-help books.

### 5.2.3. Introducing the texts - Self-help books.

The publication of self-help books has proliferated in recent years to encompass such diverse issues as sorting out tax affairs, improving interpersonal skills and 'teach yourself' health maintenance techniques. Obviously standards vary between publications but the overwhelming thrust of books is empathic, and one which supports and guides the reader through their particular difficulty. Self-help books are accessible and reasonably affordable tools available to women who have experienced sexual abuse and as such are widely used. Such is their popularity that they are virtually synonymous to therapy in print and are often therapeutically recommended for their everyday language and non-prescriptive approaches. The 'check-lists' for symptoms (of sexual abuse) make it easy for women to assess themselves against (Ofsche & Watters, 1994).

The following section deals with the representation of survivors and the function of this re-presentation of normal and abused women in terms of constructing sexuality. The extracts have been selected because they illustrate wider 'common sense' responses towards 'helping' survivors of child sexual abuse, both in books and wider society. I set out to explore some of the representations of women (as survivors and 'normal' women? De Beauvoir's otherness) in order to examine what kind of discourse is being used and the purpose it serves. For those practitioners working with women survivors of child sexual abuse, the following analysis highlights the need to view women's 'difficulties' as part of other broader cultural depictions of women and sexuality.

On a reflexive note, I am drawing attention to aspects of self-help which are central to feminist debates on sexual abuse and sexuality. By adopting a post-structuralist approach, attention is paid to the 'function' and positioning of discourse, rather than the true meaning of the texts and their intentions. This account is one among many and should not be read as an ultimate or definitive interpretation, but one of

several possibilities. This analysis is an argument and one which I intend to be convincing (Billig, 1988).

### 5.3.0. Analysis.

#### 5.3.1. Discourses of health and 'natural' sexuality.

Even if I emerge as a healthy sexual creature, capable of love and intimacy, my road there has been veered miles away from that of the person who has not experienced incest. I got there by a different route entirely.

(Poston & Lison, 1989: 153)

The construction of a healthy sexuality in the self-help texts is a common one and one that is used to illustrate the primary difference between incest survivors and 'normal' women. Health is constituted in the discourse of 'natural' sex which is seen to emerge via the 'normal' development of the child. The above extract contains the metaphor of a road in order to illustrate the linear path that leads to a healthy sexuality, and one which survivors veer away from. The extract suggests that it is not that survivors are unable to achieve health in terms of sex, the difference is in the straight road for women who have not experienced incest. This polarisation positions female sexuality in generalisable terms and also gives it a uniform / linear status. Blume's (1990) opening statement also offers this position of 'difference' and exclusion from sexuality, portrayed most forcefully in 'sex is not sex'.

The context in which the child victim is first introduced to sex is responsible for numerous distortions in her later life. Sex is not sex for the incest survivor.

(Blume, 1990: 207)

None of it came naturally. And while I may be wrong about this notion, I think that most people who did not experience incest had a pretty fair shake at discovering sex naturally.

(Poston & Lison, 1989: 157)

This extract represents not only a sweeping generalisation of the effects of incest on the course of 'natural' development, but it also constructs sexuality around essentialist notions of sexual growth. The above extract draws on a discourse of 'nature' by claiming that a natural sexual potential can be fulfilled automatically through non-exposure to abuse. Similarly, the Kunzman text (p 107) recommends that incest survivors' speak to 'other women' who can reassure them that a full and enjoyable sex life can be achieved by challenging attitudes from the incest experience alone. It assumes that 'being female' and reaching a normal potential is grounded in positive attitudes that other women share. 'Woman' is unproblematically assumed a status of femininity and positivity through attitude consumption.

Think about the information and attitudes you picked up about being female and remember where you learnt them. Share these with some women friends to help you sort out your underlying beliefs about yourself as a female. Revise those rules and attitudes that you disagree with and that hold you back from living your life and sexuality to the fullest.

(Kunzman, 1990: 41)

The naturalised language continues when talking of healing and recovery, where

The opportunity to be part of women's healing feels a little like assisting at a birth...When women trust me with their feelings, I am aware that I hold their spirit, for that moment, in my hands...As we become capable of nursing ourselves and living rich personal lives, we are enabled to act creatively in the world so that life can continue - the eucalyptus trees, the sunfish, the squirrels, seals, hummingbirds, our own children.

(Bass & Davis, 1988:14)

These texts present sexuality as twofold, bifurcated according to incest or no incest. Women must, therefore, necessarily position themselves either firmly within this category or outside of it. The last extract also demonstrates the way in which 'healing' is presented as something which can subtract sexual abuse, in order for a true spirit to emerge. This essentialises sex in that the polarisation of women around this twofold description of sex divorces the construction of sexuality from any social and/or cultural

context. The 'rules' of 'being female' are presented as accessible to women without a history of abuse who can live a full sexual life due to the absence of abuse. The construction of sex is presented as something we have stored inside us which can be readily and unproblematically 'discovered' by women with no history of childhood sexual trauma. This further positions the survivor as 'other' as they have not followed (and thus are implicitly outside of) the path of 'naturally' given sex. Self-regulation is presented as achievable through sorting through one set of rules in order to replace them with the appropriate others.

### 5.3.2. Survivors speak a different language: Interpretations of the male gaze.

In feminist research, there have been detailed discussions in debates on pornography (MacKinnon, 1987) rape (Kelly, 1988) and self observation generally (Leibman-Jacobs, 1994) around the male 'gaze' and the effects that this has on women's feelings of safety, self-esteem and possible powerlessness in certain situations. The self-help texts discuss the male gaze in relation to both past abuse and present sexuality. For the women survivor, a non-verbal signal of sexual desire in the present is seen to also remind her of the 'look' (define) from her childhood perpetrator. The 'look' therefore symbolises the survivors individual and 'abnormal' response to male attention in present situations. Many texts focus on polarising survivors' experiences of this gaze against 'normal' and 'healthy' reactions from women who are not survivors of child sexual abuse.

A discourse of 'difference' informs the construction of the survivor's abnormal response. A healthy reaction (discourse of sameness for all women) is described as 'flattery, response, control and attraction' (Poston & Lison, 1990;175). The women is presented in terms of her active control of the situation (she can respond or refuse). In opposition to this, the survivor's reaction is conceptualised within a victim discourse. The following extract illustrates the naturalistic assumption underpinning 'natural' sex communication and the differences between the two groups of women. It is clear that

the discourse of 'difference' employed to represent survivors is mutually constructed by the opposing discourse of sameness (the unity of women's responses).

When the incest victim grows up, 'the look' does not remind her of healthy anticipated pleasure....she is responding differently from most women in her situation....not only is she a stranger to 'normal sex' communication; she knows that she is a stranger...This is a wearing business for women translating sexual language into what she thinks she ought to feel. It is so difficult and confusing that survivors may find ways to avoid this kind of communication altogether. Some become social hermits, never mixing with others long enough at any one time to bring about sexual messages. Others make themselves so unattractive by being over-weight, unkempt, or ill clad that no one is likely to notice them; being attractive carries a risk.

(Poston & Lison, 1989:169)

Following on from this the authors go on to say;

Many women in society at large think that a woman makes herself attractive in order to lure, as a bright spinner to a lake bass. They are flattered by such attention, even if they decide to reject its source. They know that an "I find you attractive" message does not mean that the sender of the message necessarily has to end up in bed with her. She has the right to say "no". And that person has the right to be telling her she is beautiful without necessarily wanting any sexual outcome at all.

(ibid;175)

These extracts are very informative and performative on a number of levels; firstly they contradict what has been said in previous extracts about 'natural' sex, as something given and discoverable via a straight road. In this instance for example, the authors' clearly construct the 'look' at the centre of healthy anticipated pleasure and then also at the centre of what a woman 'ought' to feel. The use of the word 'ought' is interesting in this context as it seems to implicate a set of guidelines by which other women adhere to. This further implies a system of meaning that is 'learnt' by adult women (as they did not have to learn it as children). Sex is referred to as a 'language' and a learnt system that shapes 'healthy anticipated pleasure'

A further poignant feature contained within these extracts is the use of the term 'risk' (line 11c) in sexual communication. According to these authors, the 'risk' that comes as a result of the male gaze originates within the survivor's perception of the risk, rather than it being a reality for women in general. The polarisation of survivors and normal women yet again functions to maintain survivor individualisation through their perception of 'risk'. This is compounded by descriptions of women who do not participate in the sexual communication system as deliberately 'unattractive'. It seems as though the notion of 'being unattractive' exempts women from participating in communication that is 'risky'. While implicit notions of attractiveness pertain to young, slim (but curvaceous) white, and middle class women, those outside this definition are by default unattractive. This forms part of a wider discourse which promotes 'risk' (of rape, sexual abuse and attacks) as being linked to a woman's ability to attract men; the message is clear, if you are 'unattractive' or 'fat', you are more likely to go unnoticed and consequently less likely to be at risk. This is closely linked to a male sexual-urge discourse which commonly promotes the lack of control experiences by men (Hollway, 1989).

This is a harmful and victim blaming stance, that has always positioned women as the responsible allures, where only sexually attractive women are raped and attacked. Being 'overweight, unkempt, or ill-clad' is synonymous with being excluded from sexual communication and risk as they do not fit in with popular views of physical attraction and inclusion in sexual exchanges.

The positioning of women is stabilised through this discourse of sexual communication; they are either too unattractive to attract male attention or so (sexually) attractive that men are unable to control themselves and are in some way provoked, further supporting a discourse of rape as straightforward uncontrollable attraction and desire by men. This notion is further supported by the latter part of the extract that outlines a 'normal' woman's reaction to sexual attraction. Here, 'normal' women are portrayed as the willing, 'natural' (and passive?) receivers of male attention; in this



example women are regarded as setting out to receive such attention. This is strongly contrasted with survivors who are storied in an overtly problematic approach;

The most fundamental reason adult women survivors of incest feel that there is something wrong with their sex lives is that they are speaking a language different from everyone else's...

(Poston & Lison, 1989;175)

This extract reduces survivor experience to one fundamental reason which is both caused and framed by their past experiences of abuse. This reduction not only separates survivors from 'women' generally, it also achieves exclusion through a very specific form when it is stated that;

Women in society know that they will not necessarily have sex, and that they can say no if they wish to.

(ibid.175)

This is reiterated in Bass and Davis (1988), where they define the ability to say no by referring to children who contain a 'healthy' ability to say so.

Consider :

Around the age of two, children learn to say no. They practice it all the time. They are asserting themselves, making it clear that although some things are okay with them, not everything is...[t]his is healthy. Unless you say no clearly and effectively, yes is meaningless and cannot give you full satisfaction.

(Bass & Davis; 241)

It is ironic that they use the example of children saying no to things that they do not want to happen in order to illustrate the simplicity of refusal. In addition, this extract illustrates how saying no is portrayed as straightforward and something available even

to small children (which seems paradoxical in a text which amongst other things deals with how difficult it was for children to express needs in the face of abuse).

In the extract below, 'normal' women are now positioned as logical agentic thinkers who are in complete (and autonomous) control of their decisions. From this perspective women can communicate successfully and are in control. This contradicts the earlier extracts which emphasise women's passivity in sexual communications. The next extract suggests how this sexual language is even a normal everyday facet of life, where it is accepted that;

Most people speak the universal sign language of sex, a kind of language where nothing need be said and which goes beyond linguistic and geographical barriers. It is by this subtle language that a woman travelling in Italy knows she is being eyed lasciviously or that a G.I. in Vietnam brings home a bride who speaks not a word of English.

(Poston & Lison, 1990:166)

While male definitions define sexual language, the onus is on the survivor's lack of control and her escape from sex due to her inability to 'reason' as a 'normal' and 'healthy' person. Yet, as the next section will highlight, through the 'victim' discourse another position is taken, that which frames survivors' experiences of re-victimisation within talk of signals that a survivor 'sends out' to men.

### 5.3.3. Victim discourse.

This discourse can be found in academic work about women survivors, for instance in studies on sexual victimisation which aim to isolate the characteristics of women who are sexually victimised (Krahe, 1997). If a survivor of child sexual abuse is raped as an adult, there extends a panoptic gaze over her life/sexual history and labelled 'vulnerability'. Her behaviour is a self-fulfilling prophecy which adds further reason to believe she precipitates attacks and advances from men. She is constructed as the *source* of the problem, as she does not behave as 'normal' women behave, neither does she hold

the confidence that warns off potential attackers. This location of re-victimisation within the individual survivor 'type' (vulnerable, victim) prioritises a discourse based upon women's supposed provocation and men's subsequent exemption from responsibility for their actions. The woman signals rape by her very demeanour and the man responds because he has spotted his opportunity;

By such demeanour a woman survivor is giving out another signal loud and clear, and that is, 'I am not looking at you because I am afraid'. Her body language broadcasts a message that she is a helpless victim, frightened even to exchange glances with a man. Perhaps this is the very message that accounts for the excessive number of reports of rape and sexual re-victimisation's in adult survivors. Sex offenders are less intimidated and more likely to pursue a "victim" who appears to be an easy mark.

(Poston & Lison, 1989;169)

Some women do not go quite as far as selling their bodies but, instead, find a string of men who dominate and hurt them, mentally, if not physically, and who remind them unconsciously of their abusers...Until she deals with the memories of her past, she can expect the acts which terrorized to be repeated.

(Finney 1989; 39)

A high percentage of women who were sexually abused as children have been revictimised in adulthood through assault, rape, and battering ... The reasons so many survivors experience violence as adults is that they were trained to be victims. The effects of child sexual abuse leave them especially vulnerable to attack.

(Bass & Davis, 1988:220)

These seemingly 'singular' and straightforward explanations of re-victimisations do not attempt to contextualise the occurrence of sexual violence, citing the reason for rape in the individual's behaviour only. This is achieved by adopting a psychoanalytic discourse which frames the connection between past abuse and present unconscious association. While I am not denying the possibility that re-victimisations are a real problem, I wish to problematise the way it is discursively constructed in the

texts. For example, it implies that women survivors can expect violence if they do not alter 'their' behaviour. Without a discussion of the role which the rapist plays in violence, the implication is that women are 'doing' something which invites violence. This is then further strengthened in the former text by suggestions that it is the woman's behaviour which somehow 'attracts' this unwanted attention.

It is not clear whether the definition used of 'rape' includes date-rape, rape in marriages and verbal abuse. The account of rape in this text simply refers to the rape that occurs outside of familiar interactions. In this sense, this location of re-victimisation stemming from the individual can barely account for (a) women attacked by strangers, (b) attractive women, as defined in the last section (the rest go unnoticed) and (c) women who encounter men who (apparently) cannot do anything but respond to the 'signal' *she* is giving to them. Similarly, the following quote illustrates the glaring contradiction of asserting women's victim status, while ignoring the significance of male power and authority;

Rebecca reports that she had lost weight and become more attractive in college and had many dates with men her own age. She had no trouble with them, and stayed out of sexual entanglements just by saying "no". It was the older men in authority - the Priests and professors - who seemed to pick up a signal from her. Did the years of incest condition her to giving out messages that she was willing to be a victim again?

(Poston & Lison; 175)

The interpretation of this situation is clearly stating that the precipitating and causal factor is the 'victim' herself. There is no explanation or examination of the roles played by the 'male authority' figure through an analysis of power differentials, between a professor and student for instance. The discourse of re-victimisation and its location within individual women, keenly frames all interpretations and ignores the potential in an analysis of power. Once again, a look at 'male authority' is silenced through this discourse (which is woman-focused/ victim blaming). The absence of the significant

'other' (the male perpetrator in this case) adds further emphasis to the woman's behaviour and accountability.

These 'accounts' of re-victimisation are indeed functional in the context of referring to women survivors' in individual terms, rather than within a wider social context of male sexual 'needs' and global sexual violence (Tiefer, 1995; Hollway, 1989; Kelly, 1988). The matter remains one of personal history as the event's signifying 'raison d'être'. Therefore the construction of re-victimisation and rape is located in the individual survivor and not 'normal' women, who have control over their sexual communication who are able to visibly act against sexually oppressive acts.

#### 5.3.4. Submerging collective concerns.

In every text, the authors make their past experiences of abuse clear, and if they have not been abused (which is rarely the case) they put forward their perspective as the embodiment of the 'normal' healthy woman (Poston & Lison, 1990). To be an 'authentic' speaker is rhetorically very useful for strengthening claims to truth in general (Foucault, 1981). The texts are often embroiled in statements, such as "this is what happened to me" or "I did it, you can do it too!". If the reader is offered personal testaments to success, a notion of empathy and possible success can be created. This also can potentially strengthen the reader's feelings of membership of the group (Goffman, 1957). This discursive move can also form the basis on which to found wider political identity movements, which seek to expose the scale of sexual violence and abuse, by raising awareness through collective action and protest (Plummer, 1995; Armstrong, 1996). The reader is reassured that she is not alone in her experience, and the author can offer her authentic advice and guidance through her own autobiographical account of the healing process.

However, in Poston and Lison's text, there are two authors, one of whom is a survivor (Poston) and the other who is not (Lison). Throughout the text, Poston reminds

the reader that she has also experienced the things that many survivors' find difficult and she sees this as common to many other women in the general population. Poston's analysis at the end of this chapter on sexuality includes notions of power and gender inequality in everyday life which serves to destabilise the theme of polarisation that has dominated the text so far. She adopts a feminist discourse to frame survivors' experiences of sex and sexuality and integrates their sexuality into a larger social pool of women. A feminist discourse (examining 'power' through sex) which offers a reading of women's sexuality by acknowledging power is present in some of the texts, which attempt to narrow the gap between 'normal' sex and sex for survivors.

The explanations offered often centre around the pervasive experience of shame, guilt and secrecy and women's domination by men. Blume (1990) for example, considers women's relation to sexual intercourse and concludes "In an ideal world, this decision is hers, and not the result of pressure or date rape" (Blume, 1990:208). Many of the authors offer some consolation which positions sex as a 'mess' a 'source of anxiety' or a place 'swamped in secrecy'. As Poston & Lison consider,

Larger questions of power and pleasure inevitably intrude into discussions of sexuality. As the authors talked about the issues in this chapter with people who had not been incest victims, it became clear that the struggle survivors' face is shared by more women than just the incest survivors. Many women in the general population see "the look" and with it the suggestion of a power differential between men and women that is far from natural or desirable.....

(Poston & Lison, 1989: 182)

However, this discourse is short-lived as the two authors continue to operate to polarise abused and non-abused women by relating their political position to their personal histories and narratives. The 'differences' in their understandings of sex and communication leads to an overriding of feminist discourse in favour of a more 'general' opinion which the non-abused author offers to represent most women in the general population;

..Some women who are not incest survivors, such as Karen Lison, the co-author of this book, think that this feminist reading of the power differential with which survivors' can associate their feelings is a mis-reading of a harmless sexual message system.

(ibid; 182)

Lison is positioned as the embodiment of a non-abused woman, and the feminist discourse becomes increasingly redundant as a legitimate account as the non-abused author is not 'merely' expressing an opinion but referring to her position (as non-abused) as a means of disrupting a political message. The feminist discourse becomes located once more within the survivor and her own 'survivor' perception; the feminist reading is therefore framed as a peculiar personal account, rather than as a valid political message. The analysis of power present in the feminist discourse can comfortably remain in the territory of discussions on abuse (and how it might change perceptions of harmless sexual communication). This position is further strengthened by the continued emphasis that sexual messages are not sexually risky, as some feminists might say but 'harmless'; feminist readings are merely a 'mis-reading' from the (feminist) survivors exclusion from the sexual message system (see above).

Sharing experiences as women remains in the realm of personal narratives, where the presence of abuse in a woman's history can act as the signifier of her attitudes towards sexuality on a wider level (political opinion).

#### 5.4.0. Concluding comments.

The analysis has examined some of the ways in which self-help, although empathic, also holds dilemmas and assumptions when speaking of issues around the 'differences' between abused and 'normal' women and the way in which 'perceiving sex' is discussed (Reavey & Courtney, 1998; Kitzinger, 1994).

What I have done in this analysis is highlight how 'prescriptions' for 'perceiving sex' helps locate the constructions of femaleness and women's role in sexual relations. This can function to favour individualised explanations over politically valid concerns. Women, heterosexual activity and sexual victimisation are all subject to dominant ideals, that often focus on the woman's behaviour as 'suspicious' and men's as sexually 'reactionary' or 'uncontrollable' and therefore, understandable (Hollway, 1989; Warner, 1996; Krahe, 1997). There has also been an absence of self-help texts that address the complexity of issues surrounding women and 'race', 'disability' and 'class' where women are represented only according to their status as 'woman' (Ahmed, 1997). Moreover, this analysis can provide a way of viewing the construction of sexuality that individualise survivor problems and maintains the notion of the self needing help a priori, rather than questioning the machinations of sexual behaviour and interaction, as a whole. As Ken Plummer (1995) asserts,

..a central organising idea of therapeutic culture is the individualisation of problems. The self creates the problem and the self must solve the problem; the self should be explored and the peaks reached; the unconscious masks the problem which is an inner one...therapy stories do not often lead directly to political action, social movements or social change.

(Plummer 1995:106)

The growth of self-help and the psychologisation of women's sexual 'problems' as a result of abuse has developed as a result of 'society' not taking seriously the extent to which sexual abuse can cause long term damage into adult life. However,



the analysis of self-help texts indicates that helping and viewing the survivor as polarised from the rest of the population and treating the problems as something 'in' the survivor's perception, attitudes, beliefs etc. are also constraining for both 'normal' and abused women, in terms of maintaining restrictive sexual 'rules'. Furthermore, Kitzinger (1993) points to the danger of subverting radical feminists' concerns in favour of personal stories which meet therapeutic concerns only. In doing so, child sexual abuse and its 'effects' retain an 'internal' and 'individualised' status which never moves beyond the 'personal'. She argues that this can create a culture which 'formulates' women's sexual 'problems' and makes sense of them by viewing their 'experience' and 'responses' as unhealthy, or as clearly 'reflecting' the traumatic past (a popular method in clinical psychology - Crellin, 1998).

The sometimes straight-forward account of how abuse manifests itself in women's behaviour reduces their experience of life to an abuse effect, rather than seeing that as a part of a wider picture. As Levinas (1979) suggests (cited in Crellin, 1998: 178) "[I]n our efforts to understand things, we run the risk of 'totalizing', that is reducing everything to the 'graspable' and circumscribable". In the case of child sexual abuse, it is tempting to make 'obvious' the effects and differences caused by child sexual abuse. However, in doing so, we also make female sexuality is citational in terms of culturally available references to it. In this way, the 'truth' about the effects of child sexual abuse reproduce, rather than challenge male sexuality, power and the authority given to the 'personal'. This in turn may render relations of power, discursive strategies which allocate agency and responsibility and resistance, opaque - social and historical constructions of sexuality oblique.

As with other popular texts on sexuality, such as Gray's (1995) manual, supposedly clear 'differences' between men and women are expanded upon to further reinforce gender and sexed behaviours and then connecting them to people's psychological states (inner worlds). With men, he claims, regular sex will further his anxiety 'as a person, and as a man' where 'his little imperfections will begin to get bigger and bigger in his eyes' (Gray, 1995:31). Men and women's 'ideal' behaviours become

essentialised through sex and positioned psychologically within a heterosexual matrix, where men 'do' sex and women take responsibility for it (Kelly, 1996; Potts, 1998). In contemporary discourses around sexuality and its relationship to the 'self' and 'health' is an activity which is gender saturated and produces gender, as we have seen from texts on child sexual abuse. The extracts provided in the analysis show how quasi-objective language positions survivors within this abnormal sexual profile, separate to other women, but not separate from the ways in which women become sexually implicated (giving signs to men, submitting to male power etc.).

Self-help needs to be inclusive of political and gender issues, in order to acknowledge power, not just in terms of the abuse itself, but in all sexual discourses which locate subjects within them. Having read a number of self-help for survivors of child sexual abuse, my feeling is one of support *and* confusion; my confusion would surround the question of 'who I am' and 'where I fit in' in relation to other sexual beings. The problems of linking behaviours as a result of *being a survivor* would become clearer only to the extent that one would be able to position oneself as different, the benefits of which are questionable and socially myopic.

The final empirical chapter addresses issues around sexuality through the voices of women who have encountered sexual abuse in childhood. The aim of this chapter is to see how discourses of sexuality and childhood sexual abuse are used by women to story the link between their experiences in childhood and their identity as women in the present. The nature of the accounts is, therefore, somewhat different from the previous two chapters and my treatment of the 'text' shifts from exploring 'discourses' *per se*, to exploring discourses in life narratives. As the women narrated their lives and experiences, they offer more of a context for discourses of sexuality, and express how they 'identify' as sexual women, and women with a difficult history.

## **Chapter six. Survivors' accounts: a discourse analysis of sexuality and identity.**

This empirical study is based on five semi-structured interviews with women who identified themselves as survivors of child sexual abuse. At first, I viewed this study as a way in which to offer women who had 'everyday' lives a voice in the academy. This was particularly important considering the mass of quantitative studies (eg. Becker et al, 1982; 1984; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1981; Tsai, Feldman Summers & Edgar, 1979; Steele & Alexander, 1981) which often only 'documented' problems or symptoms of women survivors. There are political stakes in citing child sexual abuse as a cause of women's sexual identity - as a failing to express their sexuality in a heterosexualised and 'regular' way, or a 'sign' that they need to confront their past (Kitzinger, 1994; Reavey & Courtney, 1998; O'Dell, 1997)

Their identities as women, and as survivors, have received scant attention from academia generally, apart from in radical feminist literature which positions women's identities within a central definition of patriarchy, and therefore, fixes identities at this central axiom (Warner, 1996; Reavey & Warner, 1998). Representations of women survivors, (who are not suffering from mental health problems or sexual disorders) are often only seen in self-help texts or remain invisible or they retain a general level of being vaguely 'different' from women who have not experienced abuse (Levett, 1995; O'Dell, 1997).

The notion of 'difference' is often employed to indicate how 'abnormal' and devastating child sexual abuse can be, in terms of development and/or the lack of ability to maintain a stable/strong self and identity (Leibman-Jacob, 1994). As chapter six indicates, the tendency among self-help texts (Poston & Lison, 1989; Bass & Davis,

1988; Finney, 1990; Blume, 1990 & Kunz, 1989) to polarise 'normal' and 'abused' women in order to highlight the 'effects' of abuse is a powerful rhetorical strategy used to emphasise the 'damage' done by abuse. In line with the feminist post-structuralist epistemology (outlined in chapter three), attention has been paid to the ways in which survivors construct their own and others' sexuality and identity (sexual identity) in relation to their understandings of themselves as survivors of child sexual abuse and 'women'. I will be examining the way in which women position *themselves* in discourses of sexuality and identity.

A discourse analytic approach (see earlier chapters: Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993) was employed in order to explore how various versions of meaning surrounding adulthood sexuality in relation to past events of abuse in childhood are constructed in texts (in this case constructed by women survivors). By looking at people who are 'adults' and who 'lived' with their experience for a long time, it has been possible to discern and elucidate "the different ways in which people ascribe meaning to, and make sense of their situation" in the present, as women and as survivors (Crossley, 1997: 73). The other aspect of the analysis was *how* and *when* discourses were used, and how they shifted across contexts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1996). In this way, discourses are not viewed simply as 'things' which are drawn upon; they are treated as dynamic because of their propensity to shift across contexts (we shall see this with the psychoanalytic discourse).

#### 6.1.0. Therapeutic and social psychological stories of women speaking.

Speaking about past abuse in childhood is promoted in terms of 'enabling' women to 'free themselves up' and underpins many versions of what is seen to be a surer route to catharsis and potential recovery (see earlier chapters). Similarly, many feminist projects have concerned themselves with the 'consciousness raising' potential of social research, under the guise of 'sharing experiences' and enabling women to speak without the disciplinary aid of the research 'expert' (Bristow & Esper, 1984). Telling stories, for

women has become a way in which 'the truth' has been offered, confessed and offered as an absolute testimony.

The benefits of 'speaking out' therefore are at the centre of the therapeutic ethos, where therapy can 'cite' women's pain, secure the speaking and begin the recovery process. Often this process precludes 'an outside' and promotes 'inner' enlightenment (with the exception of some feminist therapy) assuring 'unsituated' speech and a pre-discursive 'woman'. In social psychology, the only study I could find on child sexual abuse and the construction of effects on women were attribution studies that highlighted how women who had been abused were neither more or less likely to attribute blame internally or externally, thus, rendering data inconclusive and contradictory (Aiosa, *et al*, 1991). In this study, I would like to contend the therapeutic claims of 'inner' problems in order to situate women's accounts as 'social' activities.

The analysis presented below suggests that women survivors are speaking from a position within a feminised discourse, one which is culturally and socially produced and which functions to reassure, rather than refute feminised positions in guilt, shame and reinforced victimhood.

## 6.2.0 INTERVIEWING SURVIVORS

### 6.2.1 The interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured around pre-set questions that were used to guide participants (Appendix 5). The questions were formed with the aim of addressing issues around how women talked about the ways in which abuse had impacted on their life, in terms of their sexuality, sexual identity, relationships and general well being. The questions were only used to guide participants; if a participant chose to talk about another related issue, they were left to do so.

### 6.2.2. Identifying participants.

A non-clinical sample was used in order to see how women survivor's accounts operated in settings away from institutions or professional evaluation. Issues surrounding participant vulnerability and support back up could not be easily addressed for participants who may have needed more support or guidance than I could have offered. I am not a clinical psychologist and have no experience interacting with service users, on a professional level.

### 6.2.3. The participants.

Five participants were interviewed. The sample was deliberately small (time afforded only small numbers), as I wanted to examine issues of sexuality and identity in-depth. All of the women were between the ages of twenty six and forty five. They were all white and educated (all but one had entered higher education). Three were 'working' class women, the other two were 'middle class'. Four of the women identified themselves as heterosexual (one woman had also had a relationship with a woman), and one identified herself as a lesbian. One woman was married, one woman had been married twice and was now divorced and three of the women (one was the lesbian woman) had never been married and were currently single.

### 6.2.4. Recruiting participants.

In order to be able to speak to women about their experiences, I believed the best way would be advertise my project. If women wanted to be involved after having read a short description of the research aims, they would be able to respond in their own time. A poster (see Appendix 6) was displayed in the women's toilets at Sheffield Hallam University, in order for women to write down the address and phone number more privately. I asked for university permission to do this, and there were no objections from university staff. I was concerned for a while about the possible problems involved

in putting the poster in the women's toilets (interpreted as 'seedy' etc.) A friend (and survivor) assured me, however, that the subject matter might always evoke negative reactions despite the location. Another poster was put in a women's counselling and therapy centre in London, where a friend worked as a counsellor. Five women responded to the posters (four in Sheffield, one in London); two from Sheffield and one from London were eventually interviewed. In addition to the poster respondents, I approached two women who I knew personally (one by telephone, the other volunteered after hearing about the research). Most of the women responding to the poster telephoned me, asking to arrange a suitable time to meet. One woman (who had seen the poster) approached me after a seminar (which I was teaching) asking if she could come and see me to talk about sexual abuse. After we talked about the research, she wanted to be interviewed there and then.

#### 6.2.5. Interview location.

Most of the interviews took place at the University campus, in a private room which could be locked (in all cases, the door was locked so as to ensure privacy). There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, I began by asking the women whether they preferred to have the door locked; in all cases they did. Another reason was the fear of being interrupted by students or by any of the secretarial staff who could easily gain access to the room. Whilst appreciating that locking the door could be construed as not necessarily being a safe environment for any participants, the decision to lock the door was negotiated by myself and the participant, as an agreement that could be reversed at any time. One woman was interviewed at her home in London on her suggestion.

Problems did arise when keys were needed for the room: this often caused a degree of intrigue amongst some of the secretarial staff (who knew the research was about child sexual abuse). One woman, for example, commented on one individual who had come to see me on another matter: on this occasion, she wished to know whether they were one of my 'victims' because she knew him and 'just' wondered. I was aware that the women who were students at the University or who worked in the same building

might have felt uncomfortable with this situation and discussed this with them before hand. If questions were asked by any of the staff, I often lied (because they would ask why I needed the room on other unconnected occasions) in order to deflect attention away from 'the interview' (see chapter seven - reflexivity).

#### 6.2.6. Consent

A consent letter was used to inform participants of the research topic and aims. I also stated what the overall research aims were and asked them to give their consent before the start of the interview (protecting the research as well as the participant see Appendix 7) The form reassured the participant that they were welcome to pause or move onto another subject at any time during the interview or withdraw completely. They were then thanked for their participation.

#### 6.2.7. Brief personal sketches of the participants.

Pseudonyms were used to represent the women. Personal sketches were taken from the transcript material and conversations with participants. This was requested by some participants (who had knowledge of psychology) who felt that they wanted to have their lives put into some sort of context. This exercise is not a romantic gesture directed at those 'poor' survivors, nor is it a 'claim to truth' about this certain 'sample' of people - i.e. that their lives have been hard and damaged. More than anything these sketches have been included at the request of participants, and offer a 'position' which cites women as speaking subjects e.g. as women, as wives, women with an occupational background and women who have invested their sexuality in certain forums (which again is not a testament to their 'real' sexuality.) The other issue pertinent to the inclusion of history sketches is one of respect. One participant wrote to me expressing how the research offended her. She felt that her life was decontextualised and simply a position in discourse. We discussed this, and she felt it was appropriate to include a brief synopsis (see chapter seven for a full reflexive discussion of this).



1. Sara.

Sara was 34 years old when I interviewed her. She is heterosexual. She is a Ph.D. student in psychology and a very close friend of mine. She has been married for ten years, and is presently very happy in her relationship. She was abused from the age of six by her grandmother's neighbour. She visited her 'nan' most weekends, to relieve her mother who was having problems with her brothers. Her 'nan' sent her to the neighbour to get some rest in the afternoons. Her reluctance to go to the neighbour was overshadowed by the anger she would evoke if she refused. Sara was depressed and had many problems at school. She was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in her teens, and remained within the system for several years. She was given treatment for depression and schizophrenia, the latter emerging as an incorrect diagnosis. She attended psychotherapy sessions for five years; her depression and problems in relating diminished and she says she feels as if most problems have been resolved, although she cannot overcome the shame of being a survivor.

2. Helen

Helen is about forty to forty five, heterosexual, and has been married twice. She is a psychology undergraduate. She was abused by her best friend's father from the age of eight. She has also been raped twice as an adult. Her second marriage was emotionally abusive and ended in divorce. She did have sexual 'problems' during her second marriage, which she linked to her husband's lack of concern for her emotional and sexual well being. She was raped several times by her husband (although they did not discuss it, and she says she did not realise this until afterwards). She has had a fear of men in authority, and attributes this to her abuse.

### 3. Mary

Mary is twenty eight and heterosexual. She is a psychology undergraduate. She was abused by her brother from the age of eight. Mary was also raped when she was sixteen, by a friend of her brothers who knew about the abuse. She was raped again by an ex-boyfriend and was a victim of domestic violence for over two years. She embodied the distress of her abuse for several years through self-mutilation, which has now stopped. She is happy to sort out her past experiences of abuse alone, and her problems with sex and sexuality have been with intimacy, but she says she is happy with sex in general.

### 4. Teresa

Teresa is around forty five and she is a lesbian. She fosters children who have been sexually, physically and emotionally abused. She was abused by her father and brothers from the age of four, the family environment was violent and her father was a fan of military violence and weaponry. He was an important man who had credence and respect from everyone. She feels as if she died when she was four, and feels as if her capacity for intimacy is affected by this. She believes people will not want to know her if they knew about her past, and what she sees as her 'dark side'. She has had flash backs during sexual intimacy, but has no other 'technical' problems with sex. She speaks publicly about the abuse to social work students, and is hoping to write a book about her experiences.

### 5. Lucy

Lucy is about thirty six and defines herself as heterosexual, although she has had a relationship with one woman. She is an actor in children's theatre. She is a mother, and spends a lot of time looking after her thirteen year old daughter who is disabled. She was abused by her brother from the age of eight until eleven. She had out of body

experiences when she was abused, and feels as if much of the shame and confusion around abuse issues derives from the pleasure she experienced with her brother. She wants to work through this confusion through attending counselling sessions. She has recently left her partner who was not prepared to make a commitment to her, and who would also use pornography to fuel his sexual fantasies and activity.

### 6.3.0. The interviews.

#### 6.3.1. Carrying out the interviews.

Each interview began with an informal chat about the research aims and questions. I allowed ten or so minutes before initiating a formal beginning (which was marked by switching on the tape recorder). I gave them my name and some extra information (what I did etc.) in order to offer a degree of self disclosure. It was hoped that this would ensure a more balanced interaction. The participant may be less likely to feel as if they were 'confessing' their life history to a neutral or faceless 'expert'. This was particularly important for those participants who had never spoken about their abuse to another person. The disclosure of some personal information on my part (which was limited, as I could not 'share' experiences of abuse, even though some women wanted me to) was also used to decrease some of the power differentials that could potentially exist (and inevitably do) between what is seen as the 'neutral or objective' observer and the 'subjective' observed (see Reflexivity section for a fuller discussion of the interviews).

At the end of the interview, the woman and I initiated a 'winding down' stage, where we talked about their feelings towards me, the interview and the questions asked and issues raised. The women were asked whether there was anything they would like to add, or if there was something that was not covered by the questions. I also checked that all the women felt comfortable before leaving, and that they did not feel vulnerable or upset. As I am not a trained counsellor or therapist, I felt that addresses and telephone numbers of local centres (therapy centres, rape crisis, counselling - see appendices) for women should be offered, although no woman felt the need to take them. At the

winding down stage, I did not offer advice, I simply made sure that all women felt that they had been listened to, and could contact me at any time if they needed to talk about the interview, or anything relating to the issues addressed. Before leaving, I thanked them for taking part, and reassured them that if they wanted a copy of the transcript or any other details relating to the analysis, they should just get in contact with me. My main overall impressions of the interviews and the questions used can be found in the reflexivity section (Chapter seven). All of the women said they were comfortable with my approach and found the interview generally helpful.

### 6.3.2. Ethical considerations and reflexivity.

There is always a power dynamic in the research process, in terms of the definitional boundaries of the research 'thesis' (procedure and analysis) and in the context of the interview process itself, where the participant is positioned as the 'confessor' or primary respondent, leaving the researcher free of scrutiny and observation (Bhavnani, 1988). Reflecting on our research process is, therefore, vital if we are to carry out research in a way which respects the participant, as an equal participator in social experience (Parker, 1994).

Interviewing women survivors was initially treated as problematic by the Research Degrees Committee at The University, as it felt that I would be putting women at risk. This is a problem which I took very seriously indeed, as I too was concerned with 'protecting' women from further distress. I was further troubled by my lack of experience in dealing with sexual abuse survivors: if the interview was too distressing I was unsure that I would be able to cope and became anxious about my role as the only person to benefit from these women 'confessing' all. My vulnerability afforded by this situation impacted on my feelings of competency as a researcher which was in part fuelled by the lack of power I was ascribing to others (see Cotterill, 1992). After a while I began to reflect on my position regarding women survivors (see chapter seven) wherein I was assuming right from the start that these women were still 'victims' of

abuse. By this I mean that I assumed that they were unable to carry out an interview according to their volition, when it was clear that they could respond to an advert knowing what was involved (as all interviewees were debriefed before hand). The best thing I could do on an ethical and reflexive level was be aware that i. the participant and I would both be creating and negotiating the interview process and ii. that the participant is not a naive teller, and the researcher the expert listener (Bristow & Esper, 1984:493). Abandoning the hierarchical dichotomy of the expert/subject relationship (theoretically at least) relieved certain fears that 'my' questions would 'cause' potential damage. A certain 'critical awareness' of my experiences (as a non-survivor) revealed my position to be one of 'caring guardian' or 'mindful protector' rather than 'just' a researcher.

My dilemma became one of how to represent these women from a number of ideological positions, where I shared their experience as a woman and wanted to deconstruct their accounts as a discourse analyst. Both positions were also challenged by my feminist 'values' (Gill, 1995), where my 'gender' and 'knowledge' came together as a reflexive and academic argument against gender essentialisation. One of the most important ethical-reflexive issues under the duration of the interviews and analysis was that of empowerment and what I believed could be achieved by 'giving a voice' to women in the context of social research (see chapter seven). This issue is still unresolved for me, but in the process of my research, I hoped to have offered a space for women to offer a story in an academic context, where they felt heard and experienced a sense of friendship from the interview. Also, by recognising my own role in the knowledge finalised by the researcher and the manner in which I eventually represented the women was central to the ethical-reflexive dimensions of the project (Cotterill, 1992).

#### 6.4.0. Approach to analysis.

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed (following specified guidelines; see appendix VI) using a tape recorder and transcribing machine. The transcripts have not been included in the appendices, because of confidentiality and

because some of the women attend the university. During the interview, some of the women talked about themselves in a way that described their life in Sheffield and their current status (as a student at the university or member of a group). One of the participants gave long descriptions of her appearance, her clothes and favourite music. I felt it appropriate, therefore, not to include the full transcriptions. Analysis then proceeded through several stages to arrive at an analysis of discourses. A Foucauldian 'type' of discourse analysis (informed by post-structuralist concerns) (Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993) set within a feminist framework was primarily used to approach analysis. Before the analysis has even begun, a conceptual framework has established itself amidst the questions asked by the research etc (Parker, 1992). Once the process of interpreting the data was underway, I followed Parker in his use of the post-structuralist maxim, that "[t]here is nothing outside the text" (Parker, 1992:7).

Performativity theory also informed the analysis, where attention to the ways in which gender, sexuality and heterosexuality was 'cited' and 'reiterated' at certain moments offered insight into the ways in which 'gender' (femininity and masculinity) was performed with-in the text (Butler, 1990; 1993). The aim was to establish the more abstract patterns of discourse in the text, setting it in a historical/critical context in order to establish 'how' women's sexuality and identity was 'put into discourse' (see chapter four). The localised discursive patterns (ways of speaking) were also of interest, as they illustrated the way discourse could be taken up in an unstable manner, and contradicted or resisted by its users.

The transcripts were read several times, and passages relating to sexuality and identity were underlined and notes were made in the margins. There were, of course, many themes, which could have been developed, but for the sake of depth (and furthering an understanding of how survivors' constructed their sexuality etc.) the theme of sexual identity took precedence. The process of selecting the passages was carried out by hand, which relied solely on personal interpretation, requiring constant reflexive work, re-reading and personal vigilance (a full account of this process is found in chapter seven). Many extracts fitted into more than one theme and could not easily be

categorised. The transcripts were colour coded according to each theme (still retaining all of the themes, in and outside of sexuality and identity) and the passages relating to sexuality and identity were cut from the transcript and pasted into a separate word processing file.

The created file then formed the basis of analysis (although the final interpretations were read against the original transcripts). Each passage was labelled (as participant one etc.) and given a number, so it could be identified more easily.

The process of identifying themes was carried out once more, by readings the edited text again and again in order to establish discursive categories within the larger theme of 'sexuality and identity' i.e. promiscuity, further sexual victimisation, relationships and choice of partner etc.

The different ways in which this theme was talked about formed the final basis for identifying discourses i.e. choice, autonomy, sexual culpability etc. This process relied on reading the text several times, making notes about recurring themes on separate sheets of papers and finally selecting the extracts and allocating them a category. Once a discursive theme had occurred in more than one participant's talk, their name and extract number(s) was put under the theme heading: the extracts selected for analysis were identified according to their relevance to the final discursive categories. The recurrent discursive patterns drew upon available stories of i. choice ii. popular notions of femininity iii. adult re victimisation as a consequence of survivorship and iv. masculinity and femininity as positive and negative features (see figure one).

Discourses were then identified more fully in the discussion: they were discussed in terms of their implications and relevance to wider issues in the relevant literature and in practice (Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). (see figure 1, chapter four)

#### 6.5.0. Analysis

The following analysis of the interview transcripts concentrated on the way in which women talked about issues to do with sexuality and identity, for example, how

they saw themselves in the here and now, and how they related this to the past. After breaking down the transcripts into sections, certain ways of speaking about sexuality in adulthood were particularly striking e.g. the way women positioned and implicated themselves in the 'sexual' aspect of the abuse, and attempted to find meaning in their actions throughout their development into women. I focus on this aspect of their talk heavily, as I see this as a key way in which 'linear' sense is made of their past and present, but results in clinical preoccupation with self blame and reproach. Gender construction plays a key role in representing women's sexuality and the lack of available ways of speaking positively about women. The way in which women position themselves in relation to men reproduces pervasive notions of male rationality, strength and their lack of vulnerability. This presentation of masculinity demonstrates the gendered vulnerability women positioned themselves within, which links to wider social practices.

The analysis concludes with a discussion of the ideological ramifications of certain constructions and dominant discourses surrounding women, sexuality and child sexual abuse. The discussion will also address the consequential 'nature' of this data, in terms of its bearing upon everyday reasoning and personal experiences of survival.

#### 6.5.1. Brief Summary of aims.

The following analysis of the five transcripts is an interpretation of the ways in which women construct themselves as adult sexual women who have a history of child sexual abuse. Both researcher and the women interviewed knew that references would be made to child sexual abuse as a 'formative' story used to make sense of their talk about their sexuality and identity as adult women. Therefore, the emphasis was precisely on this story of abuse; the interpretation made about their sexuality would draw heavily upon this abuse narrative. The following analysis focuses upon the discourses women draw upon to position themselves. This analysis is one interpretation (many readings of the transcripts are potentially available) which relies on the questions asked, the focus of the thesis and the agenda set by the researcher (see chapter seven). In this respect the



analysis is partial and open to other readings. The vital component of any analysis is to offer a coherent account, offering the reader as much information as possible, and most of all to be reflexive about 'how' the data is organised, collected and understood. The analysis presented below suggests that women survivors are speaking from a position within discourses *as* women; I would argue that they are culturally and socially produced and reinforce positions of guilt, shame and victimhood.

Therefore, rather than conceptualising the effects of abuse on women through discourses of 'difference' (being different from other women), I argue that gendered narratives of femininity produce psychological spaces, for which abused women construct notions of blame, responsibility, and female accountability for sex. Secondly I argue that personal stories of abuse are based within the mutual production of socially constructed discourses of sexuality and power and individually situated experiences of survival.

The following analysis details how the women survivors:

1. take on (at least some) responsibility for the original abuse;
2. self-pathologise in terms of (unconsciously) 'choosing' subsequent traumas,
3. reject and implicate (their) gender within the 'masculine'.

#### 6.5.2. Dis/locating blame within the individual

One common feature of all the women's talk about sexuality was its lack of separation from the abuse experience. None of the women detached themselves from the story's (abuse story) shaping force in their development and subsequent adult relationships, they all invested in it as a way of understanding their 'problematic' behaviour - promiscuity, rape, lack of intimacy etc. There were similarities across the interviews in terms women's talk about shame and feeling responsible for, not only the abuse, but later abuses e.g. bad relationships and their men's behaviour. This is a well known story in most of the abuse literature that claims women repeat the patterns which they formed in childhood because they did not learn 'straightforward' rules (Herman,

1981; Russell, 1989; Poston & Lison, 1990). In the first section the analysis illustrates some of the ways in which i. sexuality is understood, in children as well as adults ii. how this translates in specific ways to making sense of their present sexuality and iii. how discourses used to represent the child's 'part' in the abuse inform the women's understandings of themselves as gendered beings, but also as psychoanalytically driven people. I will start by illustrating how women talk about blame in relation to children. I will then move on to sexuality in adulthood in order to show how child/adult representations of sexuality differ but are also reliant on one another, and to which particular end. Issues around how certain discourses are used to position women will be also be discussed in relation to the analysis.

The following extracts raise the issue of self-blame and responsibility for sexuality as a child as discussed by Helen and Mary (in separate interviews). They are both heterosexual and have both been raped in adulthood and have experienced domestic violence by long term partners. They both talk about why they feel shame about aspects of their adult sexuality, which is where they draw upon their experiences as children. They then go on to talk about why they think they blame themselves for the abuse and shame surrounding their sexuality in the present.

Mary, for example, begins by talking about her relationships as an adult, and the relation this bore to her experience of abuse and perceived participation.

#### **Extract 1:**

**Mary...**now I understand why I got involved in this sort of relationships, hopefully I've stopped doing it (laughs)... because I felt I deserved it...and I felt like I did something to encourage my brother, and something to encourage all other blokes who've been abusive to me...you know, like it was my fault, I must've done something [P yeah] it frightens me, because I see so much of niece in me...because she's so happy and confident, she's got a figure and she's only six, and she's got a little waist and stuff like that...because I see her messing around and and I think, is she flirting? [P yeah?]

## **Extract 2:**

On beginning the interview, Helen brings up the issue of 'having' a victim identity, which others can see

**Helen** I feel as though I've got a sign around my neck that says victim, but possibly I can fight against that.

**Paula** Yeah? yeah...and er why did you feel that there's a sign around your neck?

**Helen...** Because of things that have happened to me in subsequent years...erm...two failed marriages...and the sort of thing that runs through your mind is, why me?... and then the thing is, you start wondering, what did I do, I mean I was eight years old, I wasn't sort of sexually developed or anything, I was a little child, and I didn't know what sex was [P Well, no...] you know, oh okay, we know little children masturbate, you know, I never really connected it with anything, it's, it's, and it's what did I do? And I know I didn't do anything, I was just there, I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Both extracts illustrate how both women story their adult lives in relation to sexual abuse, and more specifically their sexual relationships, through marriage, or men generally. For example, Mary considers this in terms of her adulthood as well where she talks about the abuse as a precipitation to further abuse, and locates this within herself 'and something to encourage all other blokes who've been abusive to me, you know, like it was my fault'. This presentation of adult behaviour is also talked about with reference to the child.

Both women talk about sexual development, in terms of finding the reason for being abused as children. The women construct a 'reason' for the abuse in the child's 'actual' body and sexual activity (physical parts, flirting, masturbation) without reference to the abuser.

This occurs in Helen's account of being 'sexually developed' (Helen) or in Mary's in having a waist, and 'stuff like that'. However, it is interesting that Mary transfers possible provocations to reason for 'abuse', onto her six year old niece 'because I see much of ... me in my niece'. She then proceeds once more to locate problem and danger signs in the child's behaviour, where she expresses her worry at her niece's

physical signs of femaleness (her waist, having a figure). By constructing 'sameness' in her niece and her behaviour, Mary can reason as an adult, about the activities of the child. Her use of another child to speak about abuse (or the danger of it), therefore, separates her from her own past and actions, in order to find 'meaning' from her adult perspective - is the child sexually attractive, or behaving in a provocative way?

In both accounts, the reason for 'doing something' to 'encourage[e]' the abuse is found in the development of the 'sexual' or lack of it (in Mary and Helen's accounts). It is in the (in)visible "sexual" parts of themselves that they find some reason and/or responsibility. This is clear for Mary, when she describes her niece 'messaging around' and wonders whether 'she is flirting' and therefore maybe encouraging abuse. This activity of allocation (of reason and/or blame) in the text focuses upon the "sexual" bait (that the child maybe offering), rather than creating a visible perpetrator.

The perpetrator is visible at certain points during the interview (see below) though often the construction of blame (for the abuse and his behaviour) focuses on mitigation, rather than blame. The sexual bait is in the form of a developing sexual body, a female with sexual characteristics that, in themselves, activate a perpetrator's interest. These sexual characteristics help eliminate or re-inforce the victim's culpability (even though in Helen's case she still feels that there is something about her that causes abuse to happen). Mary, for example carried on to talk about the reasons for being abused and asks whether it was her "sexual chemistry" that she "gave out". Such reasoning by these women is part of a wider discourse, surrounding victimology, and the characteristics of a victim and his/her behaviour which may precipitate an attack. In these extracts, a cited reason for abuse is located in the victim's behaviour and/or physical characteristics (female sexual development). In this case, the sexualised female is talked about in terms of its 'sign' for sexual advances and abuses. However, in Helen's account, she finds no sexual characteristics, and therefore, can say that "I was just there, I was just there in the wrong place at the wrong time".

The important thing to notice is the absence or presence of sexual characteristics and /or sexual activity on the part of the child. For example, it is clear

that Helen is trying to find something about herself as a child, or about other children. She demonstrates this by including the notion of little children masturbating or knowing what sex is, as a possible reason. She is looking for 'signs' but finds none, although she still locates blame for later victimisation in herself, and reproduces the notion that there is something about her that leads men to attack. The vital point is that, it is not important to assess whether or not there was something sexually attractive etc. about the female child. The 'truth' in this case does not matter or figure in the construction of blame and responsibility. What is important is the discursive move both extracts reveal - i.e. the *location* of responsibility and thus sexuality.

It is, therefore, noticeable to interpret 'where' they talk about the story of abuse and their adulthood and how they search for reasons for the past to inform themselves of the present, to indicate when responsibility is hers and when it is not. We often find that the reasons for allocating responsibility in children and adult women are not dissimilar (in the body, provocative behaviour and the woman and child's level of sexual activity; see Krahe 1997).

In a different but related way, the next extract constructs responsibility 'within' the victim. However, in this case, Lucy is talking about her sexuality as a child in relation to the part she played in maintaining the abuse, because she remembers finding sensual pleasure through the sexual contact. We shall see that issues of responsibility and blame run through this theme as well, the *presence of sexual feelings* (like the presence of a physical characteristics) are cited as blame.

### **Extract 3:**

**Lucy**...I can't remember [P yeah] but I do remember him making, no, I definitely shouldn't be talking to anybody about it...I mean the confusion for me...was, and still is, the pleasure of it, the sensual pleasure of it [P Mmm] and that's the bit that I find really hard (pause) (sighs) the hardest bit really, knowing that something's not right, or realising that something's not right, but still getting pleasure (pause) mmm (pause).

**Paula** In some ways do you feel responsible?

**Lucy** Yeah (pause) and I don't know why because, I know I can't be really (pause - more than thirty seconds- Lucy is crying) but, but somehow I can't get rid of that feeling, I mean of I think of, you know, my daughter at the age of eight, or any daughter, or any child at the age of eight, they can't be responsible for something like that [P No] but I know I do feel it...and unfortunately I know my mother thinks that, but I suppose she can't face the thought, that she was neglectful in some way.

Lucy's account of responsibility (which I introduce) has a similar feature to the other extracts, in that she locates responsibility in her own actions, through the pleasure she experienced, and the feeling that she could have done something to stop the abuse. In this account, therefore, there is a problem surrounding desire, and the ownership of a desire, within a context of abuse. For example, Lucy says she finds the sensual pleasure the 'hardest bit' because she knows or realised that this sexual 'something' was not right. However, this is a conflict in terms of this account, when responsibility is separated from her and transferred onto 'other' eight year old children, including her daughter whom she says 'can't be responsible' for something like that. Her knowing that her mother thinks this further reinforces the way in which she allocates responsibility for the abuse. The 'truth' is Lucy did not stop the abuse, and talks about her mother's recognition of Lucy's degree of responsibility.

An interpretation of this extract points to 'sensual pleasure' as a thing which, if owned or experienced can be implicated in the sexual coalition (the abuse in this case). Although Lucy's sensual pleasure was not self activated and was enforced, through secrecy, the confusion still rests with it being hers - its existence *in her* is enough to halt an examination of the abuse context (where power was exercised by the abuser and the family etc.). In addition, pleasure is fused within a discourse of consent (see above) and therefore, individual agency. Common-sense notions of provocation and consensual meaning are present in this account (if a person engages and enjoys, this must indicate full consent).

It is clear from this section that self-blame, or finding reasons for abuse occurring is far from straightforward, and is often inculcated via a range of positions, held by participants. For example, in the extracts above, it is clear that at times, women

separate themselves from responsibility, yet at other times, they find reasons for the abuse, within themselves, their bodies, behaviour and sexual pleasures. It is important to recognise the conflict within the accounts and yet to note the myopic way sexuality and responsibility is located, and how women do not seem to draw on other discourses which transcend the individual/responsibility construct. In the discussion an examination of such constructs (where there is an absence of an analysis of power) will provide a discursive background for these women's account in academic and social accounts, showing how the survivors' 'psy-complex' is produced in mainstream psychological, psychoanalytical and even 'empathic, women directed' texts.

### 6.5.3. Choosing further abuse in adulthood. Women's talk about sexual events, (sexual) relationships and further abuse.

This section looks at women survivors' talk about sexual issues with reference to their adulthood. This includes events, relationships and further abuse which may have occurred. This is important for understanding how abuse is situated in present lives, and used in order to make sense of sexuality and identity. For example, if a woman is in a bad relationship, or is raped, the tendency for most women is to look to their own behaviour for an explanation or reason (Krahe, 1988; Kelly, 1988; Ward, 1995; Doherty & Anderson, forthcoming ). There is an 'added' dimension for survivors of child sexual abuse, because there is already victimisation present in the story. This has led some writers (Herman, 1981; Jehu, 1989) (and some of the professionals in chapter four) to talk about survivors 'choosing' abuse in adulthood or giving out signals which show the abuser their vulnerability (see chapter two, three and six). This is a pervasive fiction which confines reasoning to individual features or characteristics of the victim.

Once more, the focus of this analysis is not to 'reveal' the truth or falsity of these claims but to examine how sexuality, sexual events, relationships and identities are constructed via child sexual abuse narratives. In this section, the construction of re-victimisation will be viewed in relation to how women talk about themselves and their role within it. In the previous section, the location of responsibility (whether found or not) focused on the sexual characteristics (or lack of) in the child, or the possession of

sensual pleasure. In this section, it is clear how the discursive context for constructing responsibility and sexuality shifts: the construction of sexuality in personal narratives of life events and adult sexual behaviour is removed from the purely 'sexual' (in terms of merely 'having' pleasure, or sexual features, as in the descriptions of the child).

**Extract 4:**

**Helen** I think despite the things, that, I've experienced as a result of the abuse, that I think are a result of the abuse, I think basically I'm a very strong person, and I think that I can cope with most things. [P right] Although I feel as though I've got a sign round my neck that says victim

**Paula** Yeah, yeah...and er why did you feel that there's a sign around your neck?

**Helen** Because of things that have happened to me in subsequent years...erm...two failed marriages...the way I view men generally, erm, the fact that I was raped in my adult life, and also, the initial sexual abuse that happened to me...was sort of one thing that happened when I was sort of between the ages of about eight and nine. But since then it happened again, with someone else, when I was about fifteen, and, the thing that sort of runs through mind is, why me?

**Paula** Yeah.

**Helen** And I'm, sure it isn't just me, I'm sure it happens to a multitude of women, but, you can't help focusing on yourself and thinking 'Why why?' Why me and why are they picking on me, is there something about me?

At the beginning of the extract, Helen resists identifying herself solely with the abuse, and asserts herself as a 'strong person'. She talks about 'fighting' against an identity which positions her as a weak victim. However, she then goes on to talk about her status, not as a victim per se, but her identity, 'sometimes I feel as though I've got a sign around my neck that says victim, but possibly, I feel I can fight against that.' The construction of membership as a victim, is achieved via the notion of 'visibility' and its portrayal of the victim. This depiction of victim hood does not end at visibility and she



continues to use the metaphor of the sign to story her sexual life, in terms of relationships and further victimisation. This supports an individualised interpretation of her sexuality which 'attracts' abuse and being victimised 'two failed marriages...the way I view men generally, erm, the fact that I was raped in my adult life...since [the initial sexual abuse] then it happened again...and the sort of thing that runs through my mind is, why me?' Again, it is interesting to observe the absence of any 'other': the talk relies solely on the fiction of the 'sign' which provokes further abuse.

In the next extract Mary draws upon her identity as a survivor of child sexual abuse to story her relationships and bad experiences with men with attention paid to the discourse she draws upon to do this.

#### **Extract 5:**

**Mary**....I'm just angry with him, for what he put me through, the way it has affected me, all my life, which is, I mean, it's it's it's good that its come out, erm, because while I hid the memory...erm...some of my behaviour I couldn't explain, but now I can, like, erm, I use to end up, a lot of times sleeping with blokes on first dates, because I, I was scared to death that they would rape me, and I do blame that fear of rape, because I was confused and and stuff, to what my brother did, so I think it all comes down to what he did...erm...I don't know really.

**Paula** So, in what ways specifically do you think the abuse affected you as a person?

**Mary** Like I say, that that way, and sleeping with people [P being yeah, promiscuous] on the first dates, it wasn't a case of being promiscuous really, it was cos, I mean, a lot of them did turn into relationships...once the relationships got under way and stuff, and start backing away, and stuff, and they'd just say something and that'd just set me off, and because obviously the memories weren't there, it was very really confusing, so now that I know, what was there, it explains a lot of my reactions, sleeping with people, certain fear if they say things.

**Paula** What, what do you mean?

**Mary** Erm...well, I remember...some guy I was going out with, just just some of the things that he he he'd used to say would just set me off (inaud) he wanted me to give him oral sex, and er, and I said I didn't want to, and he said "Oh, yes you do" and that just freaked me out, completely freaked me out... it was just, I don't know, I don't know what was going through his mind, erm...that I ended up (inaud) and lock myself in the bathroom, which tends to confuse them a little bit.

**Paula** What is it, I mean, you know, obviously it's clear that, you know, somebody's saying like "Yes you do" is like a problem, for I think anyone..but was it about you as a survivor of sexual abuse...?

**Mary** Memory...it it was, yeah, it just triggered back to what had gone on, and I just couldn't handle it, so I just ran, and I locked myself in the bathroom, (inaud) er,

**Paula** So did you just feel that you weren't able...to, you ran away because you didn't feel able to say just no, is that it or?

**Mary** Yeah, because I'd already said no I don't want to, and this guy that I was going out with at the time, he was, he was the sort of person, if someone says no I don't want to, he'd want them to, he would up blatantly (inaud) if I'd said anything to him, he would never be able to understand where I'm coming from...(another time) and the next morning I woke up and he was having sex with me (pause) and he assumed we were back together, and, you know, and he's tried getting back with me, er, since I've saw him as a friend, he's the sort of bloke who would never be able to understand, if I said to him "You raped me" he'd be "No I didn't" it'd be...so I stopped fighting, and basically I'd led him on, so I deserve it, and and that that led to me, being too scared to say no, erm, I mean, sleeping with someone on the first date, that ended up, I did think of myself as being a slag and stuff like that, and each time, I'd say no, no, I don't want to sleep with them on my first date, and I I don't know whether it was unconsciously inviting them in.

It is clear from the above extract that there are have been a number of abusive events that have occurred in Mary's life, including the abuse in childhood, rape at sixteen, and further rape by an ex-boyfriend. Her account also includes an event that occurred as a result of her not wanting to engage in oral sex, and being told that she did want to after all. Mary's account is structured around the abuse relating to her 'reactions' to certain things men would say, sleeping with men, being confused, and with drawing from sex, after a period of time into the relationship. The story is about abuse and her reactions to it, on an unconscious level, as she said, when the memory was not there, she

could not explain her actions. This psychoanalytic discourse, which is employed by Mary to explain events plays a dominant part in the construction of the active role she plays in instigating rape and sleeping with men on the first date.

The sexual interaction she describes with an ex-boyfriend is centred on the notion that the things that were demanded from her, would 'set [her] off' in terms of evoking memories. Memory also plays a central role in defining her 'reactions' and ability to control the situation, as she explains,

'...they'd just say something and that's just set me off, and because obviously the memories weren't there...it explained a lot of my reactions, sleeping with people, certain fear if they said things'.

Mary later positions her 'reactions' against 'they'd just say something' as 'trigger' in memory to the abuse, reinforcing the case that what she feared sex only because she was re-acting to the original abuse. A closer look at how this is done is significant for understanding the discursive context which enables her to position herself as the holder of an abuse memory and 'the reason' for events in her sexual history. For example, 'they'd just say something' conjures images of neutrality on the part of the speaker 'something' is certainly not an imperative or demand. This reinforces Mary's story of reacting to something (or anything) can only be reasoned in relation to her abuse (memory which is 'triggered'). Yet, later on she describes the 'something' which turns out to be a very active statement on the part of her sexual partner. Consider:

'...he wanted me to give him oral sex, and er, and I said I didn't want to, and he said 'Oh yes you do'. I then ask whether this was not a reaction to this particular situation, which might be offensive for anyone, but Mary continues to draw upon her abuse story and the triggering of memory.

Later on, Mary describes her clear resistance to rape, by saying no, in both cases, her attention still resides in her own actions (which are explained as a result of the abuse). At the end of the extract, for example, she asserts that even when she did say no, the rape occurred without her consent, and therefore, she concludes that 'basically I'd led them on, so I deserve it, and and that that led to me, being too scared to say no, erm,

I mean...I did think of myself as a slag and stuff like that, and each time 'no no I don't want to sleep with them on my first date, and I I don't know whether it was unconsciously inviting them in'. This is further set against the lack of discursive space for saying i. it was rape and ii not pointing to herself as the reason for its occurrence, as she says,

'he was the sort of person, if someone says no I don't want to, he'd want them to...he would never be able to understand where I'm coming from...and I kept saying no, no I don't want it, and and that that led to me, being too scared to say no'.

Mary's account, as well as focusing on her past as a cause for subsequent events in her life, draws on a psychoanalytic discourse, that positions the unconscious as the guiding force for behaviour that is not consciously desired (i.e. rape). However, her account also draws on the idea of 'real' powerlessness, when engaged in a sexual situation, where saying 'No' may not be enough, and the rape occurs regardless of verbal/conscious/visible directives *or* unconscious 'messages'.

#### **Extract 6:**

In the next extract, Lucy describes the effect of child sexual abuse on her sexuality and her sexual relationships by talking about the abuse shaping 'choice'. In this instance, sexual choice is once again linked with the original abuse.

**Paula** So, you say, you've chosen these people?

**Lucy** I'm not conscious, I don't think I went out and (both laugh) you look like you're not going to commit, but I think on some level, certainly with my child's father, I mean, yes, I know, if you met him, you'd think, yes, he's an interesting person, but you know, no way, nobody would really choose that person, unless there was something wrong with themselves, I think that's the thing, it's like choosing people with difficulties or problems...I mean I know there aren't, I know there's, we're not all marvellous beings, but some things are workable with and some things aren't [P yeah] and, yeah, I I have chosen people with terrible difficulties, and again, does that, because an attraction, that two people with difficulties, the same way that my brother, must have had difficulties, for him to have done what he did, and I think I've stuck with what I'm familiar with [P right] even though I didn't realise it (pause) I'm going to go looking for some healthy (both laugh) healthy man (both laugh) if they exist.

Although, Lucy is talking here about relationships, rather than rape, the notion of the abuse survivor deliberately ‘choosing’ pain is reproduced in this account, in

‘I think I’ve stuck with what I’m familiar with, even though I didn’t realise it’.

A psychoanalytic discourse (drawing upon the notion of unconscious ‘need’) once again gives shape to a causal link between abuse and adult sexuality (i.e. in relationships). The talk manifests contradictions but is held together by Lucy positioning herself in talk of her unconscious choice,

I’m not conscious, I don’t think I went out and (both laugh) you look like you’re not going to commit.

This is emphasised by the sexual partner being seen in isolation with her, where ‘nobody would really choose that person, unless there was something wrong with themselves, I think that’s the thing, it’s like choosing people with difficulties or problems’. Lucy’s account of her adult sexual relationships are embroiled also within her notion of the original abuse, and subsequent bad relationships. Lucy makes the connection between herself and other men, as if they were both magnets being drawn together, as difficult individuals. She, therefore pathologises herself, as someone who is familiar with terrible difficulties and therefore seeks them out. She also views her brother as someone with terrible difficulties who originally chose her. The whole account of her sexual relating is furnished by emphasising the repetitious nature of abuse, where the connection is ‘two people with difficulties, for him to have done what he did...even though I didn’t realise it (pause)’. This again draws upon psychoanalytic stories that prioritise choosing adversity through unconscious need, repetition and recognition.

#### 6.5.4 Blaming women and femininity.

We see, first of all, apart from a deliberate emphasis of femininity, that the woman in question would have liked to be a boy as a child; we

furthermore hear all kinds of complaints about men's better social position and general status...revealing how man is considered high above woman, implying that female is equated with inferior. All sorts of complaints come up, like: I don't like myself the way I am, physically, character wise, or intellectually. Only a closer look shows us that all these attitudes originate in extensive masculinity, desires and fantasies, and are connected with an intense envy of man.

(Karen Horney The masculinity complex in women 1927:148)

Existing literature discusses women survivors' 'tendency' to 'hate' men 'want to be' them or at least loathe being women. This is an idea firmly located in psychoanalytic discourses (Horney, 1927; Benjamin, 1988) which refer to girls and women's idealised identification with the father, and/or the primacy given to the penis (the phallus, which symbolises power). This portrayal of the female's identification is often portrayed as 'envy', whether deriving from direct envy of the penis or the symbolic 'phallus'. Male and female children tend to associate personal agency with the father, who is accepted as the more powerful parent. Leibman-Jacobs (1994) uses this idea with reference to child sexual abuse survivors, who she claims develop an identification with the aggressor, which results in fantasies of maleness, in turn informing the daughter's personality. She continues to argue that the re-construction of her identity as a female may become realised through fantasies of male perfection. (see also Blume, 1990). The culturally produced idealisation of masculinity becomes 'internalised' by the victim of abuse as a more intensive coping strategy.

Male idealisation did arise as a theme in some of the women's talk on identity, although it was not a subject which I had anticipated. It became clear that women's talk about femininity or their position *as a woman* (relating to sexuality and identity) was discursively located in constructions of masculinity and/or being a man. As the aim of this chapter was to look at how women talked about sexuality and identity, it became clear that this could not be achieved without paying attention to the way in which women talked about men, their identity, their position, their mode of communication, and interestingly, the way in which men were reported to 'talk' about sexual abuse as a

serious issue. Constructions of masculinity provided a vital and mutual background to examining constructions of femininity.

Research or self-help texts have often focused on abuse survivors and their straightforward 'fear' of men. (see Bass & Davis, 1988). To date, there has been no specific data on how women do this in talk which can be located in broader discourses of femininity and masculinity. This has often led some writers to suggest that women survivors' perceptions of men be skewed to the negative as a direct result of the abuse. I hope to show that examining the discursive context of 'feminine' and 'masculine' we begin to see much more than a mere reaction to a traumatic childhood, but a social practice which is embraced by culture mores.

In the following extract, Sara talks about her previous discontent surrounding her status as a woman, her body and sexual features (breasts) as the location of blame; she describes hating women for their lack of strength which she says is a projection of her hate for herself, Men, on the other hand are better positioned in society.

Sara talks about her identity, by locating herself within quite set ideals surrounding men and their status. Feelings of hatred toward the body, do not seem only locatable in the abuse. Sara clearly states that it was men "having it better" that fuelled her desire to be one of them. This included rejecting the female body, as it 'invited' abuse, but also rejecting women in general, because they are 'pathetic'. It could be interpreted that Sara uses stereotypes of femininity and masculinity to inform her account of distaste towards her own body. Being a woman, and having the sexual parts of a woman can be a place for their direction of hatred against the self and women in general. Also, there was dissociation from women, and the use of cultural stereotypes about them. Finally, males were seen to 'allowed' to express an 'image', they are seen as more real [more existential].

#### **Extract 7:**

**Sara** I really don't want these things to happen to my body... I wasn't happy to be a sexual person [P Mmm] ... I'd always wanted to be a man, and I always felt

that men had it better. [P right] And I just felt that erm, that women were pathetic, I turned a lot of my own...hate towards myself, because I did have an enormous amount of hate for myself, turned it toward women in general, and in a warped sort of way, men had it better. So, and I hated, I hated my body, I loathed it, I hated my breasts, you know, I just hated...just being a woman, I think, just all the things reminded me I was a woman...I hated them [P right] and and then, through therapy, just through being confident to be me, I was accepting of my own body (inaud)

**Paula** And do you think that hate came from the sexual abuse?

**Sara** I do I do, I do now, yes. I think, erm, yes, I can identify that with the loathing that I felt through a lot of my life really, part of my identity. And was really parts of my body would let me down, almost to blame, almost that it was my womanhood that caused this man to do what he did anyway, and so that was the prompt. [P right] (inaud) it was the women bit of me, that erm, all the girly bit of me that er (inaud)

**Paula** And do you see that, I mean, did things outside of the sexual abuse confirm that, if you what I mean, or did you get a lot to confirm that?

**Sara** Confirm what?

**Paula** Confirm that, you know, as a woman...you were sort of, in a sense, er, an object, or did that have nothing to do?

**Sara** Right, er, I see, erm.

**Paula** Any messages that you found particularly to confirm that or?

**Sara** Oh yes, I think so, oh yes, I certainly in my upbringing and in my culture, yeah because I mean cos, women were second rate if you like, and that erm, not that we women weren't beautiful or anything, cos quite the opposite was supposedly was portrayed, in the media and stuff, but I didn't think, think that was anything about being a woman at all. Erm, but certainly in the position of women in society, if you like, and , and when I was at high school, women were discouraged from going to sixth form, because you know, they were gonna get married and have babies and weren't gonna go onto a career anyway (both laugh) not that I did anything at school anyway, but you know, and in my family as well, it wasn't so important, that I got all my exams, and stuff as my brother did, ... because it didn't matter



The following extracts illustrate how Sara talk about herself as a woman, in terms of becoming sexual through the changing body. It is clear from the extract, that sexuality is located with the body being grown up, being a sexual person. The following extracts, however, are demonstrative of a change that has occurred in Sara's life, in terms of not being a happy 'woman', and wanting to be a man, which she goes on to explain. The way in which she talks about resisting being a female is varied and flexible. First of all, she locates womanhood in the body, while also rejecting other women, because of what they are seen to represent. Women, against men are seen as pathetic which could harbour hate for the self. Yet, it is nevertheless interesting to see how this hate is embedded in ideals surrounding men and cultural stereotypes surrounding women - as pathetic. Later on the extract, however, Sara carries on to explain the reason for her dissatisfaction for women's status, when I ask whether there were any messages conforming the reasons for her thinking that men had it better. She talks then about the grounding in actual events that led her to believe that, in general, women were not held in esteem by education and the family. Women's 'function' was to be a mother, to be married and aspired to be only 'second rate'. The way she speaks about the notion of female identity is informed by other discourses of women's development, sexuality (i.e. heterosexual) and their 'function' as second rate citizens.

The location of the female body and the construction of woman in Sara's account are realised in broader discourses surrounding female identity and sexuality. The construction of 'woman' thus extends from focusing on the body (to represent women) as her account of her hate towards her own body (symbolising 'woman') cannot be separated from its connection in power relations - in this case power through representations of gender - man/woman. Hate for the body, female sexuality and idealisation of men is realised by the weaker position of women's body (vulnerability to abuse) men's better social position and women's further location in sexual 'roles' - all of which rely on power inequality. This construction of power, therefore, cannot be left out of the original construction of the 'personal' hate and rejection of the body.

The next two extracts focus on Sara and Lucy's accounts of how they cannot talk about themselves as abuse survivors. Issues for Sara included shame attached to a survivor identity. Similarly, Lucy describes the frustration encountered by not being able to talk about feelings around the abuse. Both extracts describe 'shame' and a lack of voice in social settings. What I would like to draw attention to is the discursive context of both extracts, and how notions of shame, blame and identity are real-ised in descriptions of 'talk' among the sexes. For example, male and female talk is represented as 'complex' (women) or straightforward (men). I want to illustrate what this achieves, in terms of constructing 'woman' - her identity and her position in the discursive forum of talk on emotions, child sexual abuse and the allocation of blame. This will illustrate some of the ways in which women talk about their inability to 'reveal' themselves as survivors, because of the implication this may have in others deploying a 'negative' sexual category which represents her as a certain 'type' of woman.

**Extract 8:**

Sara and I are talking about the difficulty she has found talking or disclosing the abuse in public, where she recommends that women should keep their experiences private, because of the shame attached.

**Paula** ...so, where's that shame coming from?

**Sara** ... I think most of it comes from women. [P Right] I really do [P Okay]

**Paula** What do you mean, go on I'm interested (both laugh).

**Sara** Well, erm, I mean this could be me projecting, my old memories onto women, but I I think...I mean if you hear men talk about women being erm, mean quite a large number of men think sexual abuse is wrong, of children. But if you hear men talking about women being sexually abused, they're often much more appalled by it, unless they're just pretending, but I don't think they are! [P Mmm] I think they're often much more...erm, they can't understand as much as a woman can, it seems. I could be grossly generalising here, but the men I've talked to are more, and men that don't it's happened to me, so they're not sort of reacting, trying to [P yeah yeah] look okay in front of me. Erm, just, can't get

to grips with at all, can't handle the er, doing that to children sort of thing, where as a woman, not all women, are really in to, I don't know, have a suspicion, not a, not a strong a word as suspicion, but...realise it's much more complex, I think...may be I don't know.

**Paula** Why do you feel angry at them, for knowing that?

**Sara** That it's much more complex? Well, it's probably down to this shame, blame thing, that I have a problem with, that I want women to say...no it's wasn't your fault. [P Mmm] I want women to say, the child had no...choice in it. [P right] And, men seem to say that straight out, down the line, straight up, the child was no choice, this is total wickedness of men or whatever, where as women don't seem to, they're not very, seem to recognise the complexity, and I recognise the complexity, of the situation, and it is complex...but I do want, I do want to know that the child had no choice. [P Mmm]

**Paula** Do you just think they're more, they read about it more, in women's magazines, may be they're more aware of it, what what do you think?

**Sara** Well, I see, which, yeah, that's a point because women do read much more about it, in women's magazines, and often, I mean a big issue for me, I think as well, and explain this is erm, that that children which have been on on, (inaud) sexually abused as children...I think often do, become promiscuous [P right] in their adolescence [P Mmm] and erm, then in their adolescence, you are making choices, as a child you might not have, but you are when you're adolescent and women know this, and read about this, and so...what's to stop them sort of thinking, well she was a bit, she was a bit of a slut really, [P right] so she's praps it's something to do with, perhaps she was like that from early on, do you know what I mean. [P Yeah I do, I do] I sort of, I know it's weird.

**Paula** No no I think, yeah, I think yeah.

**Sara** I mean I know that people used to think that I was a slag (laughs) [P yeah] if if they'd have known my past then I think they, been less, they wouldn't thought "Oh dear what a shame, that's why she's doing that" they'd have thought, what a slag, she was like as a kid (laughs) [P yeah] (S laughs) it sounds horrendous. I don't know, I haven't formulated my, no, I'm sure erm I'm contradicting some of my thoughts really, about it all, I don't know, I think I do think (inaud)

**Extract 9:**

**Paula** You talked earlier about, you know, the the abuse affecting your relationship, with other people, how would you say, for example, has the abuse

affected you, and the way you define yourself as woman, do you think it's affected you in that way?

**Lucy** Yes, yes, I don't take myself seriously, at all, and I don't want to, or well, I say I don't want to, I mean I think that the difficulty, is, I don't know how to, erm...it's much easier for em to think about other people...erm...and what they would like, because sometimes I don't know what I want, erm...and I do find it hard to sort of...er...well it's like in male company, I like to be one of the lads, you know, it sort of makes it easier for me...erm...P What do you mean, by by easier?

**Lucy** Erm...I feel more comfortable.

**Paula** Right.

**Lucy** Slotting in with what they do (pause) then er...then you know, like if they, if I'm amusing, I'd rather be amusing than, you know, I I worry, I don't feel comfortable about er...well...talking about...serious issues, or the way I'm feeling, that's more to the point, I mean there seems like there's a problem there anyway, in trying to talk, about how I feel, erm...and I find that very frustrating that I can't talk as a woman.

In this extract, I ask Lucy whether the abuse has affected her perception of being a woman (which I now consider to be a very leading question). However, it is interesting that her experience of not being able to speak seriously about herself and her feelings result in the desire to be one of the lads, because 'it makes it easier'. This links in with the idea that male identity, in this instance is made up of 'being amusing', not talking about feelings and serious issues, and fitting in or 'slotting in with what they do'. Similarly, in extract eight, male talk, on abuse and culpability is positioned as straightforward, and therefore, more compassionate. Male talk is seen as something easier to fathom, easier to locate, because there is no ambiguity where 'men seem to say straight down the line, straight up, the child was no choice this is total wickedness of men or whatever, where as women don't seem to'. The contrast between representations of men and women's talk is clear, where male talk seem more 'acceptable' to Sara, because it does not contain complexity, and therefore, viewed as 'blaming' the child. Sara finds it difficult to negotiate a position for herself (as do most survivors). Her

position seems unclear and she finds it difficult to find a space to talk about the abuse without resorting to feeling a degree of shame as the discourse creates a position of responsibility through talk of 'sexual choice'. Not only do women see the complexity of sexual abuse, they are located in a judgement discourse, where she adds, 'what's to stop them thinking, well, she was a bit of a slut really....she was like that as a kid'. Sara's discourse of shame is tied in with perceptions of 'choice' in adolescence, and the likelihood that abuse survivors become promiscuous is talked about; by constructing women's talk as more suspicious or complex around these issues, women's talk is implicated in the construction of the issues themselves, and in the construction of women per se. If woman is, therefore, complex, maybe there is a hint of responsibility in the abuse itself (as talked about by Sara) making blame on the individual more difficult to shift. Women are also presented as having a 'shared knowledge' around sexuality which is not shared by men (see extract). In contrast to women, men's talk is not implicated in complexity, and therefore, blaming strategies. Male talk is constructed as safe and sympathetic; they see the situation plainly - the child is not to blame, and complex sexual choices to so not play a part e.g.

And, men seem to say that straight out, down the line, straight up, the child had no choice, this is total wickedness of men, or whatever, where as women don't seem to.

The construction of women and their talk is in direct contrast. It is polarised from men's talk according to its status as knowledgeable; women know the complexity of child sexual abuse, for example, Sara talks about sexually abused children who 'become promiscuous [P right] in their adolescence [P Mmm] and erm, then in their adolescence, you are making choices, as a child you might not have, but you are as an adolescent and women know this...and what's to stop them sort of thinking, well she was a bit, she was a bit of slut really [P right] so she's something to do with it'.

In extract nine, Lucy's describes male talk is also construed as straight forward and easy. In this respect, women, at the level of talking about who they are, as a woman, and as a survivor does not seem to have an adequate vocabulary. These women position

themselves within accounts of male identity, although they may still find this an alienating experience, as Lucy says

I mean there seems like there's a problem there anyway, in trying to talk about how I feel, erm...and I find that very frustrating.

Identifying then with male identity is positioned as a cover up, in Lucy account of hiding behind male talk and identity, in a group of men (Lucy). The discourse of maleness is talked about as a shield, allowing an identity 'outside' of their secret abuse. If you behave or identify with 'male', no one will probe further, as this is not part of a male agenda. Male talk is thus positioned as straight talk. This seems particularly important, in terms of survivors of child sexual abuse, whose sexuality and identity is informed by blame, guilt and secrecy.

#### 6.5.5. Identification and femininity.

The association of traumatising events with a sense of ontological insecurity suggests that adult human beings routinely live with a more comfortable sense of ontological *security*...which derives from the early stages of childhood...the ontological secure position is one which the individual tacitly experiences him/herself as real and has a sense of inner consistency.

Crossley (nee Davies) 1997:7

In the following extract, male identity is talked about in terms of maintaining the front and fitting in with a 'global' identity around maleness. Teresa talks about masculinity in relation to her existence, and her inability to relate to herself as a woman. Following from the other extracts, Teresa's account of maleness is located in talk about the impenetrability of male identity. This extract has not been included before, as it states something 'ontological' rather than representational (sexual identity etc.).

#### **Extract 10:**

**Teresa** Yes, if people start getting close to me, then I start panicking...and its quite interesting, because before I do anything, I was thinking about, I mean I'm gay [P Mmm] and I've always got on really well with gay men... I don't feel a woman. [P right] I don't know why (inaud) I feel like a twelve year old lad (laughs)

**Paula** Right, yeah.

**Teresa** Do you know what I mean? [P yeah] because it's very strange, but I suppose if someone said to me, what are you really, I would say I'm a twelve year old lad.

**Paula** Right, and why are you a twelve year old lad?

**Teresa** I don't know.

**Paula** Right, what erm, how would you describe , if you like, cos it's, although you've been describing parts of yourself, what do you see as a twelve year old lad?

**Teresa** Well, someone who's a bit stropky.

**Paula** A bit narcky.

**Teresa** A bit narcky, you know, er, puts on a tough image, but underneath, they're soft as (?) but er, vulnerable but kind of got this tough outer shell, I suppose [P yeah] that they have to keep up, and they're desperate to keep that sort of image, otherwise you get beaten up by everyone on sight and despised by, you know, by other people you want to impress, which is (inaud) and the people you're afraid of, are really twelve year old kids, does that make sense [P yeah] who are real, because they've got the secret and you haven't.

**Paula** And what secret do you think they have?

**Teresa** Existence...twelve year olds exist.

**Paula** Yeah.

**Teresa** In my image of them, you know, (inaud) and they're out of things.

**Paula** And what about twelve year old girls? (pause) what's different from the lads (pause)

**Teresa** I've never thought about twelve year old girls.

**Paula** Right.

**Teresa** Or ten year old girls, they're in the distance.

**Paula** You don't know them?

**Teresa** Yeah, (inaud) like the (inaud) this kind of fable thing that existed (laughs) you know, where no one's quite sure.

**Paula** And is that how you feel as a woman as well, that you don't know quite know what...you're meant to be quite like?

**Teresa** Oh, I think women exist...but I don't feel like...because I know gay women, and I know them, as a gay woman, I don't have any confusion about that [P yeah] but I don't feel like I'm one of them, I mean I know I'm gay, I know intimately, because I'm obviously I'm a woman and all that, you know.

The construction of male identity is once again represented as a tough and protective outer shell. The alienation from girls and women is also a feature of this extract, which centres around her ontological insecurity - as a female, where she states,

I've never thought about twelve year old girls...they're in the distance...  
(and women) I don't feel like I'm one of them

The supposed and popular view that young males need to retain a tough outer image, in order to survive is also drawn upon,

Otherwise you get beaten up by everyone in sight and despised by...the people you're afraid of.

Boys are also talked about in terms of their greater visibility from 'everyone in sight' who pose a threat; the 'concreteness' of their identity is also established- they are 'real', they exist in terms of the stability of their outer identities and inner vulnerability. The viability of male existence is assured in this account, and other children 'twelve year old kids' pose the threat on identity. The reality of these identities through the notion that this group of male children hold the secret to existence. This construction is specifically male, as she explains, she cannot conceive of female children as equal in the reality stakes. The construction of existence and identity cannot be addressed with



sufficient vocabulary, as Teresa explained twelve-year-old girls are a 'kind of fable thing that existed (laughs) you know, where no one's quite sure'. The ambiguity surrounding female existence is set against the certainty of male existence.

It can be argued that there seems no sufficient way for Teresa to think about identifying herself as a female person. The only way she can explain herself is through this image of the twelve year old boy, his identity, behaviour and image.

Although all of the extracts which talk about male identity are different, the stability and straightforwardness and assured reality of 'man' as a category can be seen in all of them. The complexity, feeling and fable like construction of female identity is set in opposition to this. By analysing 'woman' through categories of male identity, we can see how women find it difficult to talk about female identity in any certain terms, or with any guarantee of positive identification. 'Woman' signifies complexity and blame (Sara), secret feelings (Lucy), and is absent in talk of existence and reality (Teresa).

These extracts indicate how 'woman' can be submerged by representations of 'man' or 'boy' who occupy a stable, straightforward and fixed space in reality.

#### 6.6.0 Discussion.

Constructions of responsibility, blame, choice, sexuality and identity have all been examined. By examining the discursive context from which these constructions derive, it is clear that they cannot be divorced from their location in broader discourses of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. For example, in the first section, blame and responsibility were represented through the role 'sexual features' or the possession of sensual feelings per se (in the girl child) played in understanding the reason or responsibility for abuse. The sexual development of a female was a site which potentially made sense of evoking a sexual response in a man. Women talked about there being 'signals' 'signs' visible features which provoked attack in childhood and adulthood. With reference to children, 'choice' was seen as a redundant feature. However, this shifted when women talked about their adult sexualities; a psychoanalytic discourses was then employed to explain the 'choices' they made in adulthood, including

the choice to be with unsuitable partners and the choice to be raped. In each case, women talked about their individual features which caused them to repeat patterns stemming from the abuse.

By examining the discursive context once more, the idea that their unconscious is acting on their behalf is tied up in the way in which 'woman' is constructed. For example, in describing re victimisation, the notion that there was something about them which led to an attack was part of a description of 'woman' giving signals to men - sexual signals which are present or motivated by the unconscious (led by the abuse). This interpretation of the anxieties and self-projections they have made on behalf of their sexuality further re-instates a form of introspection which by-passes the social context in which their sexual identities reside (in discursive practices) (cf. Walkerdine, 1995).

The shift to a psychoanalytic discourse was made in the context of describing adult sexual women, by talking about their 'choices' as women in relationships etc. It is clear that once women survivors become 'women survivors' rather than childhood victims (although this must not be viewed as a straight forward developmental progression; see Burman, 1995) accounts of sexuality (as past victims) are saturated with discourses of abuse 'effects', allowing causal links between the problems they may experience and their past abuse being unproblematically made. Such links, which are part of psychological discourses prioritising the individual and their background (including clinical, psychiatric, medical, legal) rely on this causal and rhetorical link between the 'abused' and her/his adult behaviours. Many women used this rhetorical link, blaming themselves for events, and justifying this with a psychoanalytic discourse (their use of psychoanalytical meanings to interpret their behaviour). However, these women did not blindly take on board this blame; the texts demonstrate the sheer amount of negotiation that took place by the women to understand where their position was and how they might resist being blamed for the abuse. However, it is still the case that the

perpetrators were often kept out of the story, allowing these women to be the central feature of the sexual/survival discourse.

Through this, some of the women were able to talk about the necessity of change and recuperation (the recovery dicta). Change was present in accounts of women taking steps to 'change' themselves and their behaviour, which they viewed as a way of combating problems surrounding the original abuse and the issues this raised in terms of their adult sexuality. Recuperation would stop "old patterns" from reoccurring or from deviant sexual activity from taking place, rather than questioning the system of sexuality itself and issues surrounding sexuality and abuse are allowed to remain an issue for psychological, rather than social change (Armstrong, 1996).

It was also very apparent from the discourses present in the women's account that there was no opposition between professional and self-help discourses of women's sexuality and identity issues. For example, the discursive construction of 'choice' with regards survivor's sexual relationships with men was heavily related, indicating the work of psychological culture in all three studies (professional, self-help and everyday accounts). The sedimentation of the ideological ('everyday', common) discourses on women's sexuality and identity (given by women themselves in this study) with professional knowledges is indeed evidenced by the similarity of all three (professional, self-help and survivors') accounts of women's sexuality, particularly the discursive constructions of choice (unconscious), representations of femininity and masculinity and the portrayal of women as visible victims.

By exploring the emergence and function of the discourses surrounding survivors' sexuality and identity, it is possible to understand how to resist them, and 'situating' psychological readings on a socio-political level. The women in this study, for example, situated their accounts of their sexuality and identity in readings of male identity and masculinity. By examining how these accounts presented men in a stabilised and positive light, challenges to the discourse shaping the women's reading of their own 'female' sexualities and identities can be addressed *at a social level* and away from the purely psychological. The analysis has highlighted the various interpretations,

meanings and devises that individuals have available to them to 'construct' issues around selfhood, agency and change. However, in this respect, this analysis has shown how certain interpretations are more powerful, as they are able to perpetuate oppressive social relations between children, women and men, through blame, individualisation and through the use of dominant discourses that construct ideas around men and women' sexuality and referents of the 'norm'. Women define themselves through the pervasive fiction that they are sexually visible, eternal victims and not least of all women who have been 'skewed' by their experience. These definitions are reinforced as internal features of women (as seen in this analysis) further situating 'knowledge' (self knowledge, professional, self-help) in the individual. The way in which life events, sexual misdemeanours centre upon the individual's guided action seal this way of speaking and pronounce it as water tight. In this respect, change logically becomes a task for individual and therapist, and the challenge to these definitions becomes ever more difficult.

A discourse analytic approach to survivors' talk illustrates how survivor's talk around sexuality and identity are located in wider discourses surrounding sexuality, responsibility and popular psychoanalytic readings of motives and messages. The vital move this analysis suggests is a political one. By examining the talk in relation to discourse, supposed 'psychological' problems can be cited in social representations and political objections to prevailing ways of understanding individual women and men and the way they are implicated in stories of child sexual abuse. This study also demonstrates how sexual abuse is not something which impacts 'tabula rasa' style. Women's bodies and minds continue to be confused, shamed and immobilised by sexual abuse in childhood due to the mutually constituted versions of femininity which exist and which women inevitably draw upon to make sense of their lives. In this sense, it is not enough to position women in a discourse of abuse, or to even acknowledge it as *the* event in a person's life; it is also crucial to ask after who speaks about such things, the function this serves and the way in which women survivors' sexuality is "put into discourse" and how this might ultimately position them (Foucault, 1990: 11).

This analysis and discussion have shown the social embeddedness of 'individual' experiences of survivorship (by discussing how women's accounts fit into broader discourses of female and male sexuality), and has illustrated how sexuality and identity are relational to discourses of 'being female' (sexual features) 'being women who cause problems' (unconscious motives/sexual signals) and are 'within' constructed versions of male and female identities.

## Chapter seven - discussion and reconstruction.

It can never be the case that there is a 'self' independent of one's cultural-historical existence.

(Bruner, 1988)

I began this thesis with the question of how women survivors of childhood sexual abuse could be located as psychological subjects in discourses on female sexuality and womanhood. The degree to which psychology, therapeutic practice and everyday commentaries on child abuse and its effects could make adequate sense of how this event affects women's sexuality were explored and examined as socially constructed knowledges on abuse and women's sexuality. The adjustments, negotiations and changes all women make on behalf of sexuality could not exclude abuse survivors, for it is the very cultural resources all women use which made sense of the *how* of their survival. It was clear from the analysis that all three studies illustrated considerable overlap in terms of the discourses drawn upon in the text and the sense that was constructed of past abuse and present sexualities.

This thesis has examined how survivors of child sexual abuse are produced through discourses of femininity and 'womanhood'. The analysis presented in the empirical chapters illustrates how the sexual identity of women survivors of child sexual abuse is fashioned in representations of male and female sexuality (according to particular versions) and psychoanalytically driven to explain behaviours and sexual motives (in the past and present). They also highlighted the inextricability of sexuality and identity, in relation to gender and sex. This chapter intends to summarise the main points of the analysis in order to discuss their implications for therapeutic approaches and everyday life. Also a reflexive journey through i. the research process and ii my own active participation in the research will generate discussion on the contribution I have made to the production of the thesis.

Before doing so, let us briefly recapture the major ways in which 'women' survivors, their sexuality and identity has been put into discourse, in order to set up an

argument for re-framing professional and everyday constructions of women and sexuality.

#### 7.1.0. Summary

It has so far been argued that the psychological effects of childhood sexual abuse are to be located in discourse (which produces the normal and abnormal). In highlighting discursive patterns, it is more possible to see the meaningful workings of how abuse survivors 'live out' or experience their lives in a socially contextualised way. The analysis of 'abuse survival', therefore, has been one of locating it *within an* analysis of wider discourses on psychology, sexuality and therapy (see chapter one). The significations of abuse survival will no doubt change as discourses shift and develop to produce different subjects of psychology and sexuality research.

In the earlier chapters of this work, I critiqued the tendency of psychological/psychiatric approaches which tended to reduce the language of 'surviving' abuse to general mental health or diagnostic categories. Part of the process of challenging mainstream texts on abuse survival involved 'deconstructing' the ineffectiveness of these approaches in their ability to capture the link between the strategies women use to survive abuse, or the problems they have as result of childhood abuse *and their identifications as women*. Part of this deconstruction highlighted how the effects of child sexual abuse are personalised or attributed to an 'inner quality' which often overshadows other factors, not least factors identifying them as women - their position as sexual beings, their gender, race, able bodiedness and social standing. The gendered way in which women might adopt a means of survival have often been neglected by psychology, or are seen to play a cursory role in mental health or are viewed only as 'pathologies of women' (Nicolson, 1992; Boyle, 1997). Feminist concerns over the effects of child sexual abuse have always been sceptical of treating abuse as a case as a mental health problem, as the 'personal remains personal' and the political becomes consumed (Armstrong, 1994). However, by describing abuse as

‘social’ (that is patriarchal) ‘women’ as a category of therapeutic concern become fixed by a social analysis of male power.

The problems raised against this feminist position in chapter three challenged the way women and sexuality were presented as a unitary category, sedimented in ‘patriarchal power’ (Reavey & Warner, 1998; Elliot, 1997).

To sum up then, by adopting the stance that explains abuse survival as a ‘personal thing’ (as in psychology) or ‘a social thing’, (as in feminism) not only creates a false distinction made between persons and society generally, but a static and unitary version of ‘woman’ is set up, a version which women may ‘identify’ with but I have argued throughout the thesis does not *in itself* exist outside of the symptomatic *usage* of discourses of women and sexuality. The consequences of this for therapy and everyday life is a performance of abuse effects *through the citing and the re-iteration of the heterosexual matrix* and within it various significations of ‘women’s’ role in this practice (see chapter four, five and six) (Butler, 1990; 1993).

In the light of the arguments raised, it is useful to consider the following statement as a practical synopsis of this research written by the author of this thesis,

It is meaningless and moreover unhelpful to locate the problems experienced as a result of sexual abuse in childhood as psychological fixtures *in women’s heads* (cognitions), *or their behaviour* (learnt, reinforced) *or their memories or unconscious* (psyche) which can be re-sculptured or re-cast de facto through therapeutic conversations. It is more useful to refocus attention away from ‘individuals’ in order to reassess how abuse effects and women’s sexuality are conjoined and performed and situated in the textuality of culture which creates the space *wherein individuals are situated and given significance* i.e. as gendered creatures. It is also important to stress the contexts of both professional and everyday accounts of CSA, sexuality and gender and how these accounts are sedimented and grounded in culturally available discourses (of which the psy-complex is a central feature).

In the course of presenting the analytical work, it was clear that the effects of childhood sexual abuse on women’s sexuality and identity were given signification through heterosexuality and its rules of normativity, where women are visible and given particular signification in relation to i. discourses of masculinity and male sexuality



(chapter four and six) ii. discourses creating a division between 'normal' and 'abused' women (chapter five) and iii. the presentation of woman as ontological - the reason for her existence and ability to speak (chapter six) and the feminine quality of being a victim *per se* (latter extracts of chapter four and chapter five). The symbolic architecture of abuse survival according to the stories told by professionals, self-help texts and the women survivors themselves is firmly discursively as female, (in relation to male sexuality and even more so, within the context of heterosexuality).

In order to rework the survival of child sexual abuse in terms of a greater awareness of its situatedness, I propose doing this through a rejection of certain terms, which are outlined below.

#### 7.1.1. Women as Victim/survivors of child sexual abuse. Rejecting gendered ontology.

So far, an examination of how versions of survival get set up by the tendency of psychology to locate survival *in* 'individual/personal' problems has been outlined and problematised. In addition, I would also argue that the notion that there is an ontological 'woman' *or* 'survivor' must be rejected in the light of the above analysis and discussion, although that does not involve rejecting the importance of gendering discourses (Butler, 1990). In therapy and treatment, I would also argue that the 'problems' potentially faced by survivors should be read as identifications in cultural discourses on gender as opposed to 'being' as if 'being' were *determined* by gender (which can be found in some feminist analyses - see chapter three). When dealing with women in therapy, 'absolute' versions of women, embodiment and femininity need to be rejected. Instead, an examination of the ways in which women take up identifications requires further work: this includes exploring how women might invest in particular versions of their past abuse and present adulthood, not as women, but as subject positions in discourse (Hollway, 1984). The task is then to contextualise those identifications in wider discourses which 'situate' the individual; enabling a personal story to be explored in a situated way, and in turn, to investigate the 'performance' of gender in survivors' accounts of sexuality and identity. This does not entail abandoning a feminist agenda;

rather it requires that feminism does not assume any fixed notion of what 'women' *are*, as if 'being' women entailed a psychological, or political essence, *outside of its signification in either practical or symbolic terms*. As Butler (1990: 136) claims,

[To suggest that] the body is a performative suggests that it has no ontological status, apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body...The displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological "core" precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity.

(Butler, 1990: 136)

Rather than assuming any kind of ontological category then, it might be suggested that a reconstruction of 'women' and child sexual abuse in epistemological terms take place. However, this proposal does not require gender to become 'lost' in terms of its importance (as is the case in clinical psychology and other forms of therapeutic practice; Boyle, 1997), it merely shifts the emphasis away from stable representations of gender to acknowledging gender as a performance and signification inputting into understandings of sexuality and identity. The 'way' people know about themselves and their relationship to the identifications they make can be situated and amenable to deconstruction (Parker, 1998). A potential way of working with individuals and discourse (which suggests working with narratives/stories) involves re-addressing the parameters of the survivor and her problem; externalising (treating the problem as constructed in culturally available discourse) her problem is way of potentially making a reconstructive move in relation to women's sexuality.

Further work will be suggested with reference to shifting the boundaries of therapeutic practice and offering a focus to professionals, self-help (groups) and women survivors, where all eyes should be on shifting discourses *as the problem rather than perceiving the individual as the problem* (White & Epston, 1989; 1991; Elliot, 1997; Swan, 1998).

### 7.2.0. Implications for therapeutic practice.

Problematising mainstream medical, psychological and therapeutic accounts of individuals (with mental health problems) is by no means an original critique (see for example Weeks, 1985; Barret & McIntosh, 1982; White & Epston, 1989; Ussher & Baker, 1993; Nicolson, 1993; 1995; Burman, 1994; Elliott, 1997; Parker, 1994; Warner, 1996; Seu & Heenan, 1998). However, I would like to add to existing arguments with some suggestions taken from the issues raised in this thesis which suggests treating problems as stories which are culturally situated and given significance (personal/social etc.) through their location in normative discourses of sexuality, gender and therapeutic texts. The approaches to therapy and political action are discussed for their potential to implement some of the deconstructive and transgressive moves which can be discussed with specific reference to the theoretical and empirical textualities of child sexual abuse, women and sexuality (as discussed in this research, and elsewhere).

There are two areas I wish to raise in relation to therapeutic approaches and self-help, i. to propose an externalisation of problems/deconstruction of their origins and maintenance and ii. redefining gender in therapy, self-help and grass roots movements. Unfortunately, it is only possible to provide an outline of how these issues conflate with therapeutic issues to provide a practical context for the questions and proposals suggested so far.

#### 7.2.1. Therapy and discourse.

The speech of the client is no longer seen as the expression of an essentially isolated individual but that their story is part of a narrative, part of a process of writing and re-writing which can only be pursued with others...the structures that seem to pin the client in place are always mutable, contradictory and open to movement, to different interpretations and the creation of different meanings. What deconstruction refuses, then, is any temptation to treat the client's self as asocial or as fixed by certain patterns. What it also encourages is the resistance of the client to the power of those who would fix their problem inside them as something for which they then become entirely

responsible or in structures out of their control by which they become entirely powerless.

(Parker, 1998: 75)

There has been growing discontent among a number of professional clinicians and therapists over the way the 'self' of therapeutic concern has been represented as something which has a 'core' a 'centre' or a 'trueness' (cf. Parker, 1998). Among them, feminist therapists and psychologists have fought to situate women's distress or their presenting problem in ideological practices which define the limits of people's thinking according to gender and other forms of oppression (such as disability, race or social poverty).

In chapter one, an outline of object relations theory (a psychoanalytic perspective) was given to illustrate the ways in which feminist approaches in therapy (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982) have offered an explanation of gender which aims to contextualise (often a familial context) the way in which gender shapes women and children's identifications, who often engage in self blame or are overly 'responsive' to the needs of others. (other males in the family or male partners).

Eichenbaum & Orbach (1982) propose that to increase women's expression of their selves, their esteem and feelings of worth, it is necessary to alter their social contexts and the arrangements of women's life (where the 'caring' domestic role is de-centred, making the nurturing and passive role less stable and imperative) which will give rise to more positive changes in their psyche and sense of autonomy. The frameworks put forward by feminist object relations theorists are useful in that they critique the social as a means of understanding why it is that so many women 'present' with problems relating to their gender and position in their sexual relationships or their family.

However, while this thesis has explored the performance of gendered discourses in texts on child sexual abuse, the presentation of women in object relations theory is overly unitary (and centres too closely on the mother-daughter relationship) and does not capture the range of narratives there are to 'story' the family, and the individual's engagement with their family and gender (Heenan, 1996). In other words,

although object relations adopt a 'feminist' discourse, it is feminist due to its starting place, where it *begins* with and *fixes* a gendered ontology, and shapes the 'concept' of women into a theoretical and therapeutic life in a unilateral/gendered way. This does not seem acceptable if we assume that 'woman' is never stable, fixed or unified and may hold a number of significations, according to her position in society, her physical and mental ability and her colour (Swan, 1998). As Reavey & Warner (1998:6) assert,

When dealing with women in therapy, 'absolute' versions of women, embodiment and femininity need to be rejected. Instead, an examination of the ways in which women take up identifications requires further work: this includes exploring how women might invest in particular versions of their past...It is time to give up 'the cure' and refuse ontology. Only then can identity be fractured, normative prescriptions resisted and new possibilities for progressive practices imagined.

In order to enable clients who have been sexually abused in childhood, the need to turn their problems inside out is ever more pressing when it is clear that their experience is structured by repertoires of shame, blame and harming. One way of achieving this is by viewing people's experiences as narratives; there is already in existence a therapy termed 'narrative therapy' (White & Epston, 1989; Elliot, 1997) which by definition views therapy as a way of unravelling the stories people bring to therapy; the story of their past life, their current situation or persisting mental health problems. The particular relevance of narrative therapy in relation to surviving child sexual abuse is the emphasis it places on situating people's 'stories' in culture and knowledge. Here, the crossover with the arguments raised so far is in need of elaboration, in terms of therapy, abuse survival and gender in terms of the questions they raise for therapeutic approaches.

### 7.2.2. Narrative therapy

I conclude by noting that narrative structure has an advantage over such related concepts as a metaphor or paradigm in that narrative emphasises order and sequence, in a formal sense, and is more appropriate for the study of change, the life cycle, or any

developmental process. Story as a model has a remarkable dual aspect  
- it is both linear and instantaneous.

(Bruner, 1986a, cited in White & Epston, 1989:3)

In terms of surviving childhood sexual abuse, the prevalence of narration is clear from talking to adults with such a history. Their attempt to make sense of their past (as we have seen) draws upon events and sequences relating to a time structure. To make sense of the present, people commonly reference the past as a site of potential clarity (Parker 1997).

Recent arguments put forward by narrative therapists have outlined how clients attending therapy seem 'stuck' by the notion that the problem or problems they are experiencing (both chronic and temporary) are attributable to something which exists inside their heads (White & Epston, 1989)<sup>1</sup>. It is clear from all three of the studies presented here that psychological theories and therapeutic readings of the effects of child sexual abuse see it as something which facilitates cognitive error, behavioural problems or creates an unconscious desire to repeat the experience<sup>1</sup> (Warner, 1996).

Thus narrative approaches, for example, have moved away from focusing on 'ontological' differences between service users or clients in therapy and 'normal' individuals who do not require the assistance of an 'expert' outsider. According to White & Epston (1989:1990) the problems which people experience (whether this is the effects of child sexual abuse or schizophrenia), it is necessary that the person and the problem is not treated as one and the same. The 'life' of the problem is the focus of therapeutic concern; how it is discursively being sustained. In other words, by negotiating people's problems *as something external to their 'mind'* it is possible to

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<sup>1</sup> Although I am going on to explain the relevance of narrative therapy in relation to the questions raised in this thesis, I am not advocating the use of any particular narrative therapy (e.g. White & Epston, 1991). There are certain issues where I am in disagreement with White & Epston (1989) in particular; one example is their discussion of family therapy as a means of successful intervention in family problems. However, due to a lack of space, I will hereafter be concentrating solely on the 'ideas' put forth by narrative therapy and discussing their potential uses for addressing issues of narration and abuse survival.

negotiate with the problem and in turn resist it as something 'away from the mind'. To explain further, they add

We believe that engaging the people who consult us in problem-externalising conversations can encourage their capacity to act for themselves in relation to problems, to act upon whatever relational context most immediately supports their problems, and to notice and actively respond to the many ways that their self-stories have been shaped by cultural prescriptions and proscriptions laid down.

(Roth & Epston 1996:2)

In terms of survivors of child sexual abuse, it has been made clear that gender identifications have played an important in both the professionals, self-help and survivors' discourse on the subject of sexuality and identity. Psychological issues such as difficulty in trusting, self-blame, problems with esteem, self-harm and/or lowered expectations of self are integral feature of abuse survival. All of these 'problems' resulting from child sexual abuse are experienced as real and are maintained by the difficulties women have in seeing a way out of blaming themselves or speaking out without fear of being viewed as a collaborator (Armstrong, 1994). This is where narrative therapists (and this involved feminist therapist who explicitly make gender a formative feature of their work) differ in relation to the treatment of clients' problems. Instead of regarding problems as maintained by cognitive scripts, behavioural reinforcement or unconscious drives, their focus is one of challenge - not only of the individual's techniques that might keep the problem alive but the cultural and historical discourses which fix it in place.

This approach is directly relevant to the arguments raised in this thesis, in that it refuses i. a gendered ontology (to describe the differences between 'correct' and 'erroneous' understandings) and ii. it stress the situatedness of people's accounts and treats subjectivity as/in knowledge and power defined according to cultural discourses and cultural textuality (i.e. subjectivity and sexuality - see chapter three). The text analogy is taken up by White & Epston (1988/89) Elliot (1997) (Parker, 1998) to stress that narrative therapy is concerned with re-authoring: in other words, the aim is to take

authorship away from people in order to disrupt the notion that they own or are responsible de facto for the problem's emergence. In refocusing and externalising the existing problem (whether it be severe guilt, low self-esteem, cutting, self destruction, sexual dysfunction) in order for the therapist and client to create a revision of the problem away from or outside of the individual, the problem must be textually perceived as *away from* and therefore, more likely to be negotiable. In this way, narrative therapists argue that the client is able to achieve 'unique outcomes' away from their former narrative of the problem. In terms of women, these negotiations, or new narrations are particularly cogent in terms of linking power, gender and subjectivity, which is what we will turn to next.

### 7.2.3. Gender , subjectivity and therapy.

The analyses of discourses identified in the professional, self-help and survivor discourses in the empirical chapters indicated the gendered and heterosexualised nature of interpretations made on behalf of understanding the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality. Some professionals markedly referenced male sexuality alternatively either as a protective haven or natural aggression which fed into women's sexual choices or vulnerability. In the self-help texts, there was little or no reference to male sexuality, or the context of heterosexuality at all (or the message was contradictory and incomplete). In these texts, women and their sexuality was focused upon and scrutinised for its difference and its visibility, although the context in which women lived their life was not integral to the explanation of sexual survival. The survivors (in chapter six) who spoke of their sexuality and identity spoke of the connection between gender in childhood and gender in their adult lives; in other words, they narrated gender according to the connections they could draw upon to 'construct' their sexuality in a particular way i. visible ii. attracting iii. dangerous and iv. expressed their difficulty with speaking about issues because *they were women*, or because they did not identify with being a woman at all.



In all three studies (professional, self-help and survivor) the performance of gender in discourse structured the narrations of women's lives and their sexuality. They are part of the common stories told about women and one which give shape to 'normal' women's lives and for those women who have had abusive experiences. This suggests treating gender as identification, rather than *an internal or ontological feature of that woman*, or as a 'sign' of being essentially female.

Offering women survivors the choice of other narratives of gender or simply other narratives regarding their situation (sexual or otherwise) is a positive way of unbundling the way individuals might attribute the problem as something they 'are', rather than something they 'have'. Some feminist therapists have begun to address the issue of re-shaping narratives, away from viewing women's problems as 'essential' features of 'being' women, or 'having' a feminine spirit (Marareck & Kravetz, 1998). Instead, these feminist therapists and academics focus on the stories, deconstructing the interpolation of gender and self embedded in the synarchy of power and knowledge (White & Epston, 1989; Curt, 1994).

This has affected the way some feminist therapists work around the language their clients use and the necessity to deconstruct in order to scrutinise its origins and power, as Swan (1998:31) stresses,

The process of how discourse and particular practices of power act to construct certain meanings around our lives and the events which take place in them can be understood in terms of stories and narratives...[w]hat we remember, what we forget or dismiss as chance, how we understand our experience, what it means to us, for ourselves, our relationships with other ... are all considered in the metaphor of storied lives.

In deconstructing the narratives which survivors of child sexual abuse bring to everyday life, therapy and to places of action (political action), it is never acceptable to leave their beliefs about their 'self' undeconstructed. In this way, the stories which women have about themselves, (which they use to survive in a social world) creates the conditions whereby they feel potentially unable to 'talk freely' 'think *straight*' or act in a 'reasonable' way. I would argue that the behaviours, thoughts and feelings women

engage with as a result of 'being sexual abuse survivors' are locked into an existing story of gender; a story which is notoriously difficult to resist, especially when there is a constant reminder that an abuse survivor is 'different' or confined to secrecy. Walker (1998) asserts that survivors find it difficult to associate their individual experiences of sex away from something 'they did' or participated in (especially as the abuse of children does not require constant force).

This 'disassociation' from the workings of power can be extended to the lack of recognition of the wider connections between power and sex in adult heterosexual relationships, and our understandings of heterosexuality and its 'life' in the family and the standing it has ideologically (as natural, normal and desirable) (Walker, 1998). The identifications which women survivors can make *as women* can aid understandings of why they continue to feel as if they are isolated, and their confusion over sexuality and their relationships. Narrative therapies are useful in this way, as they acknowledge the relationship between knowledge and power (self-knowledge etc.) and the impact of knowledge (sexual, psychological, medical) linked to the inevitable creation of self knowledge in therapeutic and everyday life. The challenge for feminist and narrative therapists is, therefore, to recognise and take apart

the internalisation of certain ideas about the self which circulate within  
a given culture.

(Elliot, 1997:58)

This includes aspects of behaviour, thoughts, moods, feelings and creates a dialogue between the client and the therapist which nurtures a problem solving aspect to the therapy, which ultimately entails a disruption of her problem for re-location in power/knowledge structures (in discourse) (Elliot, 1997). The questions raised by this thesis include ones which challenge the individualisation of women survivors experiences of abuse and their adult sexuality in order to situate their lives as subject positions in discourse: discourses which contain, fix and produce them as gendered subjects. These questions are the starting place: needless to say, this thesis has raised more questions than provided 'solid' recommendations for practice. The task at hand is to act upon knowledge-power relations and achieve more grounded and situated

outcomes for women, by providing them with grounded analyses of professional discourse and work with political and pragmatic outcomes in mind.

However, the remaining task of this chapter is one of reflection, where I will return to the makings and context of the empirical work and the potential draw backs of the approach I adopted. In this way the reader will have the opportunity to engage with the problems this thesis has raised and the problems experienced when carrying out the investigation as a discourse analysis.

### 7.3.0. Revisiting the 'process of production': a reflexive account of the research process and its implications.

Discourses viewed in [a] recursive manner suggests that meaning results not from language itself, but from institutionalised discursive practices which constrain its use and pre-empt alternative uses and meanings.

(Madigan & Law, 1992:45)

In this section, I reflect back on the research processes which have evolved, changed and been re-shaped at every stage of this research project (reflexivity). No PhD thesis finishes as it started originally, as it hoped that the data is allowed the freedom to 'speak' and re-direct the research as it forms. Partly this process of 'evolution' is directed by the texts themselves. However, it is also related to the growing skill of the researcher to 'articulate' her concerns and 'tell her story' with greater clarity. Certainly, the research has arrived at a new place in this last chapter because of the way my vocabulary, enhanced knowledge of feminist psychology and discourse analysis has developed and progressed. Therefore, my ability to 'reflect' on the 'process' is clearer, less 'charmed' by the potential use of discourse analysis and more reflective about its 'purpose' as a critical and political tool.

However, before furthering the reflexive process, it is first of all necessary to outline what we mean by reflexivity in order to contextualise the experiences I encountered and their significance in the production of the thesis as a whole. Being reflexive, ultimately requires critical distance from the research and methodological

approach used in the process, whilst locating oneself firmly in the production of knowledge. The areas I would like to address concerning the research process (as well as my personal experiences) include

- i. Reflexivity and the process of doing feminist psychological research: theoretical, political and personal reflections
- ii. Reflections on procedure (functional reflexivity)
- iii. Discourse and intervention.
- iv. The potential disadvantages of post-structuralist theory and the use of discourse analysis in feminist psychology.

#### 7.3.1. Reflexivity and the process of doing feminist qualitative research: theoretical, political and personal reflections.

Reflexive work has grown in importance over the last decade, although it has been present in much feminist work before this time (see Oakley, 1980). Qualitative researchers especially note the relevance of acknowledging one's position in the research process, or how the research positions the researcher (Bhavnani, 1993). In this section, I provide a political position on reflexivity which has developed directly from the work I do as a feminist researcher in the field of sexuality and child sexual abuse, in academic settings and everyday commentary on these issues (Reavey, 1997h). Definitions of reflexivity often refer to 'situating oneself' in the research; to engage in self dialogue (Babcock, 1980) or to highlight the limited structures of thought, in the case of this research, this would be in relation to knowledge produced in psychological and social science (Colie, 1966:7).

Reflexivity can also be discussed according to what Wittengstein refers to as 'the proper method of philosophy called for [in] the examination of all experience, from an ecological perspective' (Natanson, 1974b:241). If one is to move away from traditional social psychological approach which tend to create a distance from participants by presenting empirical data as objective knowledge away from the way in which it has been generated. The reflexive alternative is to some extent equivalent to a 'counter-transference' (Parker, 1994) a 'recognition' or 'affiliation' with the

participant's discourse and accepting that there is 'no *essential* difference between the psychological processes of scientist and lay-person' (Wilkinson, 1986:493). The political requirement of reflecting on the critical and political 'function' of the research would also call for an explanation of how the research

[provides] a political position (in which we have an understanding of the wider circumstances in which the statements are made) [and an] understanding of relationships and how they are reproduced in discourse.

(Parker, 1994; 544)

In this way, an acknowledgement of the 'pragmatics' is laid bare, and 'how' we would like to use our knowledge is situated in our concerns over power (e.g. revolutionary politics, feminism, Marxism, (Parker & Spears, 1997)). Of course, power dimensions set up by the research situation still remain. I am a white and educated woman conducting research for a PhD. This in itself can be read as a testament to expertise, 'greater' knowledge and insight which has an inevitable impact on how research participants respond to the situation I have a part in creating (see chapter four and six for further discussion of researcher-participant dimensions).

Reflexivity is a continuing process stretching from the initial questions emergent from the research, the political and theoretical motivations for carrying out a particular approach (questionnaires, Q-methodology or discourse analysis) the data collection, analysis and 'conclusions' (which are never final or immutable).

The approach adopted I have used in order to reflect on my own research draws on several forms of reflexivity, outlined in Sue Wilkinson's paper (1986) on the role of reflexivity in feminist psychology. The reflexive modes she refers to include many aspects of the research process (both procedural and ideological), including 'personal' (my own identity as a researcher) 'functional' (the practical and processional aspect of the research) and 'disciplinary', reflexive critical reflections of the methodological approach adopted.

These personal and theoretical reflections then require 'situating' this research in the initial 'politics' of the research aims and ii. the potential incongruence between methodology and practice, drawing on Burman's (1991) argument on the limits of

discourse analytic work *as* a radical approach. The latter address is a reflexive move in itself and is not the same as a reflection on 'method' or 'procedure' but a question over '...the extent to which discourse analysis can sustain a theoretically acknowledged position...[where there is a potential danger of] radical projects [turning] to more traditional approaches' (Burman, 1991:326). My experiences of researching a 'feminist' topic has been laced with frustration and anxiety about the 'science' of doing qualitative and discourse analytic research which in this case has overtly political concerns. This process has entailed having one's identity as a feminist researcher put to the test in a scientific community that stresses 'objectivity' and neutrality. In order to address these issues, first let us turn to personal reflections involving the research process and the construction of my identity as a feminist researcher.

### 7.3.2. Feminist research and the political ramifications of feminist positions in academic and everyday life.

Addressing issues of child sexual abuse and female sexuality, as a clinician or researcher means recognising and considering wider cultural definitions of not just the 'objective' issue of the topic, but also the 'subjective', reactions to you, as a professional woman and as a 'feminist'. Through this process, a greater understanding of the machinations of resistance to an issue ensues, and a greater awareness of how everyday interpersonal levels can inform us of the ways in which dominant discourses are nurtured in a variety of ways.

In this section, I would like to address the aspect of how a perceived level of personal involvement in a research topic can act to have an adverse affect on the political activities and implications of the research<sup>2</sup>.

For example, the ways in which people receive a researcher of a contentious subject enables a greater understanding of the political ramifications of wider discourses of child sexual abuse within everyday interpersonal contexts. Although there are many

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<sup>2</sup> Part of this chapter is based on a published paper in *Feminism & psychology* (Reavey, 1997c). I am grateful to Celia Kitzinger for her editorial contributions.

examples of this, I will draw upon three everyday commentaries which I have encountered over the last three years, in order to illustrate how interpersonal exchanges can inform research which in turn helps us to see how people thought of those connections in the first place. Otherwise, as Steier asks, when addressing the notion of standardising research for its own sake 'even if we choose to use the discourse of the standard observer, an important aspect of our research could be...What stories of our own must we deny to become a standard observer?' (Steier, 1991:180)

I aim to show that focusing on my own story of interactions with other people, has expanded the possibilities and scope of my research questions.

### *Perverts and terrible things.*

This is a common commentary delivered in many different forms yet making the same sorts of suggestions, whether dressed in academic language or every-day talk. This is not simply a candid response that functions to express a straightforward attitude towards child sexual abuse. When presenting my research to people, I purposely emphasise that the research is about women and their sexuality, mentioning therapy and language and then child sexual abuse. However, the response by some academics and people generally has been to exclude my focus in order to insert their own account of the focus of the research i.e. perverts and children. Another cogent problem is the belief that I must surely get depressed by the research and by perverts who do such terrible things, as if these issues were the major problems. The problem with these types of responses is the subsequent inability to acknowledge the main focus - that is women, adult female sexuality, not the 'perverts' or those 'poor children'. The personal/political ramifications of this response are that people are choosing not to listen to the main focus of the research, which is women.

The words child - sexual - abuse dominate and story the research around a whole host of other 'gruesome' tales that prioritise accounts of men and damaged

children. Although this offers insight into the wide uses of mainstream psychological discourses, the effect of this commentary is silencing the research aims.

I have spent a long time with certain individuals talking to them about my political views and offering alternative accounts to their preferred interpretation of my research; women surviving successfully and women making active choices about their lives and sexuality. These alternative accounts, however, are often looked upon with disbelief and disinterest as the preference for pessimism surrounding abuse and damaged women lingers on.

### *Personal motivations.*

An important aspect of being a feminist and a qualitative researcher is viewing subjectivity as a positive and an informative part of the research process. However, feminist concerns, in particular, are not often received well in practice.

Being involved in a research project on sexual abuse led to a number of assumptions about me as an abuse survivor and having a vested interest in the research. Armstrong (1996) makes this point with reference to the backlash against mothers speaking out against incest, where certain experts have commented on the 'pent up hostility' and 'pathological release' which fuels the obvious vengeance that professionals who are on the mothers' side seek. (see Armstrong, 1996: 144) In my case, caution and sensitivity was eschewed by concerned academics who recommended counselling in order that the 'right' support be offered to a student who may be vulnerable to what she may find when she searches for the answers. The feeling of being protected was mounting, yet I still did not think that other people would comment on my perceived 'involvement' directly - I thought that this feeling was from within me- but it became clear it was not and they did.

An example of this comes from a telephone conversation I had with a psychiatrist who was supervising another female student who was researching female sexuality and child sexual abuse. He mentioned that she was a survivor herself and then



readily made the comment that ‘well, we’re all in this game for the same reasons aren’t we?’ (meaning we are all survivors). After nearly falling off my chair with shock at such an assumption, I sat and reflected a while about the comment and my feelings towards it. After a little deliberation, I recognised how embedded this feeling really was, as it seemed familiar ever since starting the PhD. Recognising that people are going to assume something about me as a woman researching sexuality relating to past abuse was a valuable forum for understanding how research can become (in) validated.

When we understand how and in which ways others focus on our past history as a driving motivation to research a topic, it enables us to also acknowledge their resistance to the knowledge we offer which is designated on a discursive level, whether academic or every day. Thus, another personal/political ramification is that the personal is treated as an overt political statement as to why your life (not your interest in academic research) has taken this path. This allows for an overarching theme to develop which positions you as an object for the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’. This utilises conjection rather than raising questions about your role as a credible voice in academic research. Being accepted as a feminist psychologist has tensions of its own, when you add that you are adopting a ‘non scientific’ qualitative approach, the tensions are even more evident and potentially debilitating as science neutrality were seen to be a last hope.

### *Personal bravery*

Although, this response is perhaps the most common, and the least offensive, it is nevertheless informative to take note of the ways in which people characterise you and the meaning they impute to your actions as a feminist researcher. This has been explored by other feminists, for example, Widdicombe (1995) asserts that an analysis of discourse on a more mundane level enables us to recognise the kinds of assumptions that are being made in order to inform the question at hand. Reflecting on other people’s subjectivity enables me to recognise why they see me as brave and in turn why I have

found it difficult not to feel somewhat patronised by these reactions. It is difficult to articulate the exact reasons as to why this response is as problematic but I will aim to reveal one or two problems that have arisen as a result. Reading the autobiographies of women who have experienced violence or been neglected, used and silenced as children and adult women are never easy. Often, feelings of anger and frustration over the stories that these women tell do bring tears and sympathy. However, it is not personal bravery that fuels the research, it is a determination to reveal how these women can be potentially silenced in social and therapeutic settings and the injustices committed against their bravery - not mine.

In this way, your research might be in danger of not being perceived to be about the countless women who are being abused and silenced every day - it is instead reduced to a personal odyssey that is non-threatening. If people see the 'child' aspect left out of the equation, there seems no appropriate mainstream 'adult' discourses readily available to really promote women's autonomous experience (or if there is, its usually to do with 'damage' or being 'messed up'). That's why I think that the bravery aspect usually comes back to me - the problem is that my research fades into the background once more and my exchanges with people become strained and too reliant on suspicion. This research aims to show how an argument based upon a refusal to accept mainstream psychology can potentially transgress it. In mainstream psychology, people's reactions to your 'bravery' may function to lend support to a scientific structure that regulates research to be objective. However, in recognising this reduction of feminist research, we can potentially transgress it by offering reflexive and constructive accounts of personal involvement.

*That happened to me too - related responses to a number of other feminist research projects.*

The wider applicability of my experiences to other areas of feminist research can be found in other feminist's recollection of other people's comments on their work

and perceived personal investment. The 'that happened to me' response is thus an important site at which feminists can draw upon each other's experiences for a greater awareness of how vast and varied the personal/political machinations of everyday interactions are.

After having spoken to a number of feminist researcher's, there are further salient points to be raised about the process of doing feminist research that can also be found in biographical accounts of research. Wilkins (1993) in particular asserts that the advice given about not taking research personally perpetuates the myth of abstract, disembodied knowledge where there is an obscuring of the researcher's agency and the their ways of knowing. In addition, she describes the intellectual cover up of different and difficult experiences which could be a useful resource for connecting researcher's by making known which social and emotional resources they draw upon. Other feminists have offered a wide range of accounts, including problems of being undermined if a degree of personal interest (in child sexual abuse) was perceived to be involved and actual derogatory comments about their methodology and research capabilities. One feminist researcher I have spoken to about this issue recalled a response to her research from a relative along the lines of "It's hardly surprising that you chose to study incest...given what went on between you and your father".

Another clinician I interviewed as part of my research advised that students in clinical training had accused her of being some kind of pervert or a weirdo for even having an interest in child sexual abuse and/or sexual matters in general. The experiences of women who have been sexually abused is part of a greater social problem, but it is necessary to recognise how feminist research crosses into some of these problems, and is embedded in them.

Some of these observations I have made about my own research can be applied to a range of feminist topics in psychology and a number of other disciplines. The openly perceived 'reactive' nature of feminist research is something that many of us are aware of and constantly act against, within our discipline or in a more overt political arena. However, being aware of the discursive construction of feminist research interests

will strengthen feminist work. Whatever one's approach, it is sometimes useful to be aware of the reactions of other people to feminist research within an everyday context. This can be read as an over sensitive response to other people's interpretations of our research, it could, however, more usefully be seen as actively using these comments to create a fuller understanding of how people in academia and in general receive feminist work, and how this may reflect other social issues. It is important that such reflexive observations should be included as research on the political ramifications of feminist research in general.

### 7.3.3. Reflections on procedure (functional reflexivity)

Whilst demonstrating in the above section that attributions of 'personal' involvement can produce political ramifications, this section of 'personal' involvement looks more at 'involvement' in terms of the stages of interviewing and analysing. This includes, reviewing some of the procedures which could have been carried out more effectively. This section is aided by a research diary which noted thoughts, feelings and changes needed at all stages of the research process. The first thing noted was the assumption I held about 'what I would find' in the interviews with professionals with the aim to explore the basis of the assumptions I held and the impact they have had on the questions compiled for the interview schedule. This is not to make the reader sympathise with a 'dreadful' plight but to highlight the problems encountered when adopting a crude ideological doctrine (which is what I was doing with 'feminism' at first).

A radical feminist raises stance raises a number of problems with therapeutic approaches for women who not do comply with heterosexual standards (including survivors of child sexual abuse) (see Perkins & Kitzinger, 1993: Armstrong, 1994). I still agree that therapy should be recognised as only one way of dealing with child sexual abuse (alongside political action). However, I began to realise that therapy did not 'operate' unilaterally. Therapy, in itself, is not *the* problem (as some have claimed in the past; see Masson, 1992) or is *necessarily* antithetical to feminism: enablement in

therapy itself is not the enemy if a person feels they require outside help. After a time, then, I began to see the futility in separating ‘social’ factions (feminist) and individual (therapeutic/psychological). The point was to locate the ways in which the social and individual were mutually constructed to ‘produce’ certain discourses on women and their survival (both psychological and sexual). Instead of applying a feminist doctrine *as if it were true*, greater attention was paid to the positions of the woman survivor in a number of discourses *which might function to reproduce particular versions of women which were exclusive and constraining or only partial explanations*.

After dispelling the images of hooved therapists (with a red tail forming an arrow at its tip), I began to reflect on what it was I ‘set out to do’. Instead of replacing therapeutic discourse with a ‘feminist’ one (as if it were unitary) I began to see that my task was one of ‘locating’ survivors in wider discourse not ‘discovering’ de facto ‘bad’ discourses. As Parker (1992) wryly remarks when referring to his mock title ‘Discovering discourses’, if we set out on a voyage of discovery, we have not fully grasped the part that discourse analysis can play in investigating the vast array of meaning which goes into providing a model of the person. A ‘functional’ reflection concerning the questions raised in the interviews with professionals (and this could be applied to the interviews with survivors as well; see chapter 6 for further reflexive analysis) are still relevant but ‘of their time’ (see appendices) when I did not fully grasp what I wanted to achieve by analysing discourses. The questions I set out with were perhaps over directed and too specific, requiring ‘answers’ that were too closely tied with a limited number of questions.

A better way of extrapolating accounts (which would have afforded a greater number of choices for participants) perhaps would have been to use a Q-study. (Curt, 1994). After reading about this way of forming stories (which requires participants to ‘sort’ accounts provided by the researcher on cards) I may have reworked a schedule which would have included a greater range of accounts and a greater diversity of people. One drawback of qualitative research in general is the lack of time afforded to carry out and analyse several hours’ worth of transcript material. In short, discourse analysis is not

academically or temporally economical: it is labour intensive (Gill, 1993) and makes it difficult for the research to warrant more general statements about a community or practice from the empirical work alone (Burman & Parker, 1993:156).

This can prove difficult in academic terms (to be heard *and* published) and when it is required for certain political uses. To sum up, the most important 'critical' point to make regarding the use of discourse analysis is the ever present potential for researchers to believe they have found the 'critical nugget'. This is due, in part to the 'method' of data collection (the interview) which only allows the interviewer and participant to negotiate between themselves to create the finished product. In this, there is always the potential danger of foreclosing alternative and multiple readings of a greater *range* of stories to emerge; stories which individuals can 'choose' from and sort according to their agreement or identification with.

Another problem with the professional interviews was the careless discrepancy between those participants who had been fully debriefed and (by being sent the questions beforehand) and those who were solely debriefed over the telephone. Although I was careful to advise all participants that they may want to discuss things before meeting, there could have been more consistency when it came to advising a prior reading of the interview script (although decision was ultimately left to the participants to decide whether they had the time).

These organisational and procedural errors could have been due to my inexperience as a researcher, and the vulnerable position I encountered on occasions alongside older and more experienced professional people. With regards the self-help texts and interviews with survivors, the problems I faced comprised balancing 'voices' with analysing discourses. Although I still feel that women's voices are a vital part of any 'feminist' project, their 'authenticity' should be nevertheless locatable and situated, and, therefore, relative to the discourses and knowledges that shape them. This may be criticised alongside other more 'post-modern' outlooks for being immobilising or non-radical. However, it is in the language itself that change can be affected and mobilised, if it is used as a way of disrupting notions of 'essential' women (Gergen, 1992) and used to

highlight the contradictions people use to justify 'common-sense' approaches or psychological theories and challenges to evidence-based clinical practices (Burman, 1991).

Changes and enablement can come from shifting discourses. Discourses are organising principles which set up i. the identifications women make with themselves *as women* in relation to their experiences of child sexual abuse and the identifications negotiated between themselves and others (their therapists, partners, families etc.) (Haraway, 1992). This approach not only de-stabilises the notion that there is a unitary 'woman' (which psychological and some feminists discourse propose) and disperses the locuses of power, from 'inner'/individualised' problems or 'male' power (as in patriarchy) and allows resistance from many directions and angles. Thus, 'treatment' and even politically 'binding' knowledge may be mobilised *not because it is true* but it does a job of constituting partial identifications as 'essential' and 'whole' (Haraway, 1992).

Reflexively, this has implications for critical social psychology and discourse analysis as it promotes a more relativist reading. I will illustrate this problem by reflecting on the interventions that are possible with the use of discourse work, both from the angle of more critical realist approaches to discourse, and the more relativistic claim made on behalf of advocates of relativism and argumentation (as the only possible route in any discourse). In the following section, I move on from 'functional' reflexivity (as above) in order to discuss the positive political potentials of discursive work (and post-structuralist theory) which also locates my position in relation to feminist work and post-structuralist arguments.

#### 7.3.4. Discourse and interventions.

There are many ways interventions can be made by analysing discourses, and there is a wide body of research demonstrating how 'action' can be translated from text analysis, in settings as diverse as educational policy implementation (see Marks, 1993) to self-help books for depressed people (Allwood, 1996) to exposing inequalities in

South Africa (Levett, 1996). Examples of discourse work represent the many ways of approaching 'discourse' from critical action research to Discourse Action Models (Doherty & Anderson, 1998; Edwards & Potter, 1995) which challenge existing ways of speaking to promote change - in thinking and policy. The latter model (DAM, for short) would not promote its 'findings' as a revelation of 'truth' but would examine the consequential nature of the 'act' of speaking in particular ways, by exploring how talk functions and varies in relation to practice (law, mental health, rape and racism). Talk in itself is regarded as a form of social action,

...[D]iscursive actions [are] performed in everyday life, as constitutive part of activity sequences that involve interpersonal or intergroup issues such as blame, responsibility...DAM topicalizes these activities rather than attribution *per se*.

(Edwards & Potter, 1995;89)

The merits of such an approach are clear; by intervening in dominant categories within the 'psy-complex' an attempt at destabilising static regimes and oppressive practices can be illustrated (see Gough & Reavey, 1997). However, the difficulty some researchers adopting a discursive approach have encountered, (especially those working within a political framework) is the propensity to focus on language alone (Curt, 1994).

In this thesis, I believe that this is the only position I can defend in terms of the theoretical framework adopted and the arguments I have proposed against gendering ontology and working epistemologically. In being reflexive about 'what I have done' entails revisiting my position which examines how power operates (both positively and negatively) through discourse in relation to women (which identifies with the feminist position) and how discourses and identifications are not unitary, but *produce* rhetoric which *acts as if it were true* (therapy, self-help, political identity politics: O'Dell & Worrell, 1998; Reavey & Warner, 1998). By accepting that there are several positions which can be taken up in discourse, this does not mean that both individual and collective action is not possible. I identify with many feminist arguments, and would raise them *as a means of challenge*. However, what I cannot accept is the propensity of some discourse analysts on the one hand to argue for 'nothing outside discourse' whilst



practising ontological gerrymandering around the subject of material power over discourse (Willig, 1995; Parker, 1992). People's 'being in the world' is considered to be 'no less' painful, debilitating, or 'real' because it is discursive (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

While I would still argue a case from a feminist standpoint (i.e. situating my account as an argument for change and challenge) I am doing so by arguing that gender is an epistemological performance, practised in knowledges (which are intimately connected with power). I have found it virtually impossible to find an example of discourse work, adopting a critical realist stance which poses a significant challenge and which promotes change 'outside language' or textuality (Curt, 1994). Those who have tried to criticise relativism's claims have not in fact transcended them, but often tantalisingly raised questions over the difficulty of holding a relativist position *and* a political one (Burman, 1991:331).

A politics of value can be achieved *without* making any realist claims *outside* of the argument put forth or outside of a critical disruption (Curt, 1994) (i.e. an argument *situated* in discourse, textuality or tectonics). All academic work is based upon argument; that does not mean that arguments should not be good or 'reason-able' but acknowledged for their 'situational dependence' in discourse, textuality or tectonics (Billig *et al*, 1988; Curt, 1994). Lather (1990: 75) for example stresses that

If the focus is on the procedures which take us as objects and involve us in systems of categories and procedures of self-construction, relativism becomes a non-issue. If the focus is on how power relations shape knowledge production and legitimisation, relativism is a concept from another discourse, a discourse of foundations that posits grounds for certainty outside of context, some neutral, disinterested, stable point or reference.

Discourse analysis can be taken up and used in this way, in order to achieve a 'pragmatic' outcome, as a critical and functional knowledge faction.

#### 7.4.0. Disadvantages of post-structuralism and discourse analysis for feminist psychology.

There are many potential benefits accrued in the adoption of a 'feminist post-structuralist' framework to the study of subjectivity, sexuality and power relations. There are other advantages of engaging in epistemological scepticism when dealing with mainstream 'claims' to truth (Edwards & Potter, 1990). However, a brief discussion of the potential draw backs is required if a full and open acknowledgement of my own position is to be declared.

First of all, a criticism raised against post-structuralist/modernist approaches has been that such approaches propose an anti-humanistic reading of women's experiences (Gavey, 1989). Thus, feminists have argued that feminist post-structuralism does not offer any 'explicit' theory of the subject 'which focuses on subjectivity as experience', where the understanding of this experience is viewed as grounded in specific socio-cultural contexts, rather than looking solely at various subject positions taken up in discourse' (Ahmed, 1996:5). Many feminists have turned 'to the text' in order to distance themselves from the static identities formed by earlier feminist work or as a way of applying a critical 'method' towards exposing the theoretical underpinnings of modern psychology. However, in doing so, the 'subject' of many emancipatory and liberal discourses have been 'replaced by a provisional, contingent, strategic, construed subject' (Lather, 1990:79).

A way of responding to those who challenge the dissemination of 'identity politics' (Jackson, 1994) Lather suggests that maintaining a heuristic, rather than ontological, category of woman is beneficial in 'speaking women' rather 'being women'. The proposed connection between 'politics' and 'discourse', however, is problematic. As Burman (1991) suggests, there is nothing 'radical' or 'liberatory' *about* discourse analysis per se as discourse analytic work can just as easily be applied by the far Right. The mistake potentially made by discourse analysis is viewing it as an *inherently* critical approach, rather than being reflexively aware of the way it is being used *in* social worlds, *including* the world of psychology (Burman & Parker, 1993:166).

The key problem for feminist post-structuralism is its affiliation with relativism, as it could be viewed in psychology as just ‘another perspective’ which can be taken or left at the margins. Women's resistance to and challenge of existing frameworks would necessarily take the form of discursive interventions which may or may not be accepted. Thus, one problem a feminist discourse analysis faces is its commitment to a psychology as discourse (and with the tendency towards relativism) and the feminist concern with political commitment (Gill, 1995; Burman, 1991; Parker & Burman, 1993). Rather than agreeing with a relativist or critical realist account without reserve, the argument in favour of a discourse analytic approach to child sexual abuse, women and sexuality emphasises the way it can be taken up *strategically*: it enables the ‘interested’ researcher to trace the way in which the object of enquiry is constituted in discourse and the way this ‘functions’ as a form of resistance *to* or a reflection *of* ideologically and/or materially based practices (Parker, 1992). As a feminist researcher who is concerned with the ways in which discourse acts *to construct objects* my ‘value’ is clearly directed at how the power to speak may be exercised or immobilised according to how those constructions emerge. Thus, I would support Foucault's claim for investigation, that what is needed is to

[A]ccount for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue briefly, is the overall discursive fact, the way in which [things are] “put into discourse”.  
(Foucault, 1990:11)

This can include ‘value’ and ‘resistance’ by disrupting the very patterns of discourse which ‘keep’ systems and people in their place. There is still a lot to do in the area of sexuality and its signification through discourses of child sexual abuse; for example, future work in the area of sexual health could focus more on specific sexual problems, such as dyspareunia, vaginismus in order to examine how these problems are understood by professionals and how therapy intervenes to treat them ‘as sexual

problems' away from the meanings they hold for the individual and for women more generally.

#### 7.4.1. Is discourse analysis disrespectful of participant speech and subjectivity?

One of the main problems in carrying out a 'discourse analysis' on people's personal testimonies is the tension between portraying 'authentic' accounts of people's experiences *and* analysing the 'discourses' (which construct the objects of which we speak) that people use to construct their personal account of that experience. Discourse analysis is disrespectful of 'authentic speech' because language is considered as constructive rather than reflective (of 'reality'). The goal of 'capturing' experience (or what 'really' happened) is embedded within a modernist framework which has been extensively and persuasively criticised by poststructuralists (see chapter three for a more extensive discussion). Yet, this subordination of the 'emotional' or 'personal' does not satisfy some feminists, for example, especially those influenced by psychoanalysts such as Hollway (1984). However, although criticisms of using discourse analysis in a deterministic fashion are legitimate, agency, subjectivity are not overlooked by the form of post-structuralist work that I have offered so far (see chapter three). The difference according to post-structuralist writers, such as Butler, Harding and Haraway is that the 'emotional' and 'personal' is already, always 'situated' in discursive networks that produce subject positions and *contain* forms of subjectivity and agency. This position can still serve feminist goals, without recourse to totalising categories, such as the purely personal (as in some psychological accounts) or the purely structural (as in unitary version of structural patriarchy). As Ransom (1993: 134) highlights,

Feminists who have been drawn to Foucault's work have been concerned to extricate him from the charge that in his development of

a constitutive conception of discourse, necessarily linked to power, he dissolves the agency of the human subject and replaces it with a passive conception. Broadly, this charge sees Foucault's work as problematic in focusing on discourses and the production of subject positions, viewing it as unable to account for the place of human experience and consciousness in acting to change the world. It might be argued that the prime mover here is discourse and the human agent simply a *tabula rasa* on which society writes its order.

This consideration is both important when acknowledging the role that discourse analysis can play in psychology and feminism, especially when the latter position *prioritises* women's experiences when theorising subjectivity, politics and emancipation. The charge that discourse analysis ultimately scrutinises subjects is difficult to dismiss, but this scrutiny can be framed as positive also – in terms of making visible the oppressive positioning of women/survivors within discursive webs. It is also worth emphasising that the person analysing discourses is neither nor absent from this process, albeit in different ways from the survivor (see Reavey, 1997). However, by emphasising the 'constructed' nature of our bodies, subjectivity and desire (as in post-structuralist feminisms; Butler, 1990; 1993; Harding, 1987), it appears on the surface as if there is no room for 'authentic' speech about ourselves and certainly no space for research free from presuppositions, as heralded by a phenomenological position in psychology (Ashworth, 1997). Furthermore, this thesis has argued in favour of 'situating' all experience in culturally available discourses and argued against viewing people's accounts of their sexuality as pre-discursive, essential or 'authentic'.

Although this argument still stands, there are problems with this position. For example, whilst carrying out the interviews with women survivors of child sexual abuse, I encountered fierce opposition from one participant (via a detailed letter) who felt as if 'discourse analysis' would disregard her experience of sexual abuse, because it did not treat her account of abuse as a direct or 'true' representation of what took place. She

argued that by analysing her ‘discourse’ I would be decontextualising her story of her past and setting it in a feminist discursive context that would not truly represent how she felt about *her* experience. Her view was that my feminist position would not represent her experience, it ‘replaced’ it with an alternative and overarching political position, one that she did not necessarily agree with. By looking at the participant’s opposition in more detail, it is clear that her objection mirrored one of the biggest tensions for feminists claiming to ‘represent’ women’s experiences and yet potentially reducing that experience to a mere object in ‘discourse’. This ties in with the notion that she became just an ‘object’ of a feminist discourse because she fitted into the category of ‘survivor of child sexual abuse’ and an ‘object’ of feminist concern. In this sense, she felt as if her agency, her autonomy and her voice had been consumed and replaced with something that was out of her control, and in turn had simply overlooked the *phenomenology* and the intricacy of her experience and of her survival.

First of all, I turn to the objection to discourse analysis that states that ‘authentic’ speech is somewhat ‘lost’ by analysing ‘discourses’ as opposed to people’s authentic experience. In doing so, I will return to a Foucauldian argument and a position upheld by Butler and many other queer theorists e.g. concerning the nature of authenticity, agency and discourse. First of all, as I responded to the participant who raised objections, I would argue that authentic speech is to begin with a ‘construction’ laid out in humanist discourses and in notions of the ‘free individual’ (Heckman, 1990). For example, the foundations of this thesis argues against disempowering the subject, either by situating the survivor in discourses of liberal individualism or in deterministic discourses that exist in sexology, psychology or biology. By destabilising overarching or essentialist thought about what it means to be a social agent, this does not mean that agency or real experiences disappear or become meaningless against the backdrop of

post-structuralist thought or by analysing discourses in research. Instead, as Ransom (1993: 135) states,

...the social and historical constitution of the subject is not a limit on women's agency but the precondition for women taking action. It is because, and not in despite of, our embeddedness in discursive practices that political action is possible.

As Foucault argues, where there is power, there is also resistance to subject knowledges and positions. By moving away from the notion of 'essential woman' or her 'authentic speech,' a discursive feminist position makes 'agency' and 'speech' possible, but only before realising that women's accounts always and already exist in discursive practices which are always open to challenge. At no time can any person claim to be speaking 'authentically' or 'truthfully' (in a unilateral way), otherwise, there is always a risk of foreclosing knowledge.

However, once again, caution must be exercised over this position, because if we agree with Foucault and Butler on agency, authenticity and power, there is a risk of becoming 'analysts' who claim to be able to 'oversee' people's subject positions, and it seems from a position of 'neutrality' (due to the analytic perspective that involves sanitising speech and breaking down themes and discursive categories). By this, analysing any object in 'discourse' (in this case, the 'survivor' of child sexual abuse) can lead to a 'scrutinising' of that object but only in relation to its 'position', its 'otherness' in that discourse. For example, it is clear from this thesis that it is possible to scrutinise what it means to be a survivor of child sexual abuse from a feminist discursive position. However, by beginning *with* and ultimately concentrating *on* the particulars of the discursive category of 'survivor' (which this thesis has begun with), the 'survivor' *becomes* the scrutinised as the eventual 'neat' analysis of 'themes' or 'discourses' concerning her life, her treatment and her experience are generated through

‘examining’ her story. The survivor’s ‘life’ becomes deconstructed, her sexuality, her subject ‘position’, over and above the richness of her experience as an agent, a detailed subject with a wide range of potential experiences and positions in the world. Starting with the category of ‘survivor’ in the first place can totalise the analysis of the discourse of survival and reinforce women’s position in this category.

As a feminist psychologist, my aim is always to include a wide and complex experiences held by women and it would be a mistake and a deeply problematic move to presume that analysing discourses and ‘categories’ of women without recognising that such an analysis could be read as a scrutiny of those women, and a way of positioning them as ‘other’ – as victim, or the unfortunate oppressed is not a potentiality. However, in defence of this thesis, it has not been the case that the discursive category of ‘survivor’ has been accepted unproblematically, as throughout, the argument has been that when we talk about survivors of child sexual abuse, it is vital that their position in wide discursive practices is recognised, and that ‘all’ subjectivity is held within culturally available discourse. Once I had discussed this position with the participant, she was reassured. Her view was that ‘situating’ her experience meant overwriting it or disregarding it completely, so that her account of her experience would merely act as a testimony to the ‘truth’ of feminist beliefs about women’s oppression. However, I explained that I would argue that *no* knowledge, category of ‘speech’ or ‘person’ is fixed or stable and incontestable, because of the propensity of meanings, knowledges and power to change. Her reply to this was that although she did not agree with this position, she no longer felt that ‘discourse analysis’ was a *necessarily* disrespectful way to approach an interpretation of people’s accounts.



#### 7.5.0. Professional and everyday constructions of child sexual abuse, women and sexuality: revisiting the psy-complex and its discursive formations.

The title of this thesis is child sexual abuse: professional and everyday constructions of women and sexuality. It should be apparent thus far that the '*and*' in between professional everyday should be read as forming a conceptual link between these constructions.

However, in this section, I would like to briefly spell out how the mutability of these constructions affect the reading of the thesis and its implications for professional *and* everyday life. Furthermore, as a critical feminist psychologist, I wish to make clear the position I have taken in regard to the journey of this thesis into academic and political settings.

Psychology as a discipline and practice is one of the discourses available to construct senses of self and sexuality in everyday life. Therapeutic/professional and everyday ways of envisioning the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality have been deconstructed to reveal the connections between professional and everyday knowledge within structures of power/discourse. In this sense it clearly aligns itself with the aims put forward by a critical psychological reading in two ways. First of all, in deconstructing professional discourses I illustrated how everyday/ideological knowledges of women and sexuality structure the boundaries set by academic and professional discourses, wherein a critical feminist reading is needed. Secondly, with regard to a critical reading of the self-help literature and the accounts of the women survivors, one of the aims was to 'study the forms of surveillance and self-regulation in everyday life and the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice' (Parker, 1999: 14.

The ways in which psychology and therapy riddle culture (Parker, 1999) and help to set the limits on everyday people's understanding of their life choices, sense of themselves and their ways of solving life's problems have been a key focus of these thesis.

Many writers on the interplay between everyday knowledges and psychology as a discipline have emphasised how the psy-complex is constrained by everyday /ideological construction of psychological objects of knowledge. Furthermore, several critical psychologists and sociologists (Rose, 1989; Parker, 1997) writing on the subject have critically noted the power of the discipline of psychology and psychoanalysis (of which therapy is a part) to provide 'everyday' people with the tools to analyse their selfhood, motivations and desires. Of course, therapy is only one of the ways in which survivors of child sexual abuse construct their sexuality and identity, but it is *has* become a key way for people in Anglo-American culture (see chapter one). This thesis has demonstrated this by highlighting how both the professional, self-help and everyday constructions of women and sexuality draw from each other, providing a sedimentation of one another's interpretations (psychoanalytic, of femininity and masculinity, sexual choices and the visibility of the victim). Similarly, the dominance of oedipal tales in heterosexual family formations in the West (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984) have the semblance of stability as do male and female power couplings in heterosexual relationships that interpenetrate into everyday and professional discourses. Self-help and individualistic readings are not enough (Haraway, 1991). Situated knowledge on abuse, and feminist visions of gender and power incite critical and deconstructive readings, with an eye to create politically sensitive and ethical academic praxes. The discursive techniques that render the survivor of child sexual abuse an object of every and professional/therapeutic knowledges will continue to circulate in different ways, using altered discursive regimes. Yet this does not obscure the perpetual reality of the

workings of power, through the techniques of government provided for us, which invite to follow through the process of

...self-inspection, self-problematization, self-monitoring and confession, [it is here] we evaluate ourselves according to the criteria provided for us [wherein]...we adjust ourselves by means of techniques propounded by the experts of the soul. The government of the soul depends upon our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of person, the unease generated by normative judgement of what we are and could become, and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy by following the advice of experts in the management of the self

(Rose, 1989: 11)

The survivor of child sexual abuse and her sexuality have become an object of therapeutic concern and every day worry. The 'normative judgement' in this case is heterosexualised interpretations of unconscious 'choices' and motives of survivors and the contemporary experts of the self are the therapists, psychiatrists and counsellors whose job it is to make better the wrongs of the past. In therapy as in any other psychological intervention, we have to remain critically reflexive of the 'situatedness' of the discursive tools we adopt to re-shape survivors lives in the process of therapy. Similarly, in everyday life, the ways in which the survivor's sexuality and subjectivity become individualised or pathologised (often by the survivors themselves) have to be located in cultural forms of self-regulation (Rose, 1989).

The implications for this thesis are pertinent to both psychologists who wish to make sense of child sexual abuse and those who wish to provide services for the victims and survivors; both settings (academic and professional) are intertwined with culture and both influence the way in which culture might deal with abuse. Psychology's vision must be critically reflexive and aware of its historical and political situation. Although child sexual abuse and its effects are very much part of therapy speak at the moment, this may change. In years to come its survivors may resist being psychologised or as

gender tales are told differently and identifications shift, so might our interventions as feminists and critical psychologists. Similarly, professional bodies in psychology and therapeutic centres are affected by political manoeuvres and so our means of resistance to psychological and ideological power may change focus and tack (Parker et al, 1995). I think the crux of the matter is to never become complacent about knowledge, the location of power and the strategies we use to intervene.

#### 7.5.1. End concerns

Try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all - For that is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say 'Now I know how to go on', ... In the sense in which there are processes (including mental processes) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process.

(Wittgenstein, 1958: 154)

The issue which required understanding in the case of this thesis was the situatedness of child sexual abuse and the way the 'effects' are understood, in relation to sexuality, psychology and therapeutic approaches. The textual nature of child sexual abuse was critically interrogated in terms of 'how' the effects of child sexual abuse on women's sexuality were reinforced *as fixed properties of gender or heterosexualised behaviours*.

The process of analysing discourses (and their performances) illustrated the situatedness and gendering activity when child sexual abuse and its effects are discussed in professional and everyday life. This has led us to focus on women and sexuality within the 'tectonic conditions of plausibility for certain understandings ... [which emphasise] the inseparability of 'power/knowledge' (Curt, 1994: 165). In the case of our knowledge of abuse effects and academic and therapeutic writings on the subject of women's sexuality, the power of contemporary discourses of sexuality (to conjure what is psychological or to depict the truth of the self) have been discussed both in relation to the power of discourse to fashion and shape the effects of abuse and to specify the connection between gender and abuse survival.

By examining the 'construction' of abuse effects in professional and everyday discourses of women and sexuality, there is a sense that access to the organisation of sexuality in 'psychological ways' (in this case the 'negative psychology' of abuse survival) can also be uncovered to an extent. Therefore, not only have we deconstructed discourses of child sexual abuse, women and sexuality, this thesis has also illustrated the 'poly-textual' of sexuality *per se* (one which can be taken up and used in multiple ways) (Curt, 1994). We could expand on this notion in order to further add that viewing the psychological effects of child sexual abuse as something 'mental' should be discarded altogether in order that we concentrate on the way *discourses act* rather than how people re-act towards a traumatic experience *as if that was the point at which the mental process began*. As Curt (1994: 197) stress, all behaviours and cognitions (the favoured object of psychological knowledge) can always be read and re-read in a diversity of ways, the implication of which requires empirical research to engage in the textual nature of psychological 'things' rather than the 'vehicles' (people) through which textuality and (as they argue) tectonics get played out and expressed.

In this way, it is still possible to be extremely vigilant about engaging in problems which 'matter' to us (politically and academically), but the focus is on understanding, power/knowledge. and pragmatics, rather than separating 'the individual' from these concerns; the individual (as a textual form) *is* integral to the concern of challenging cultural discourses, as reproduced in psychology, therapy and everyday life (White & Epston, 1990). It is hoped that this thesis will enable a critical reflection of the ways in which women survivors are identified as survivors of childhood sexual abuse *and as women* who signify as sexual beings in a range of public and social discourses. This thesis has raised questions and problematised the discourses which construct women and their sexuality through professional and everyday understandings of child sexual abuse which contribute to the creation of the conditions in which 'doing' gender, sexuality and survival are brought into being and lived out in particular social and historical moments.

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## APPENDIX 1

Paula Reavey  
Post graduate student  
Health Research Institute  
Collegiate crescent  
Campus, Sheffield, S10  
2nd December 1996  
0114 2532541

To whom it may concern,

I am a second year post-graduate research student in psychology investigating the links between child sexual abuse and psychological/sexual difficulties in adulthood. In particular, I am concerned with looking at the ways in which professionals facilitate the recovery from sexual problems and/or marital difficulties and mental health problems in the light of sexual abuse.

I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to ask whether or not you would consider talking to me about your work. You have my reassurance that all information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

I would be grateful if you could fill in the slip at the bottom and place it in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope letting me know if you wish to take part in the study. Alternatively I am happy for you to contact me by phone.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Paula Reavey

-----

**Please delete as appropriate**

I would/would not like to take part in this study.

I require/do not require more information about the project before meeting with you.

## APPENDIX 2

Sheffield Hallam University  
Collegiate Crescent Campus  
45 Broomgrove Road  
Sheffield S10 2DJ  
0114 25323541

Dear Diane,

having spoken to you on the telephone a few weeks ago, I have finally got round to writing that small paragraph about my research, to be included in your newsletter, if this is still OK. Many thanks for your support with my project and if you have any queries, please feel free to contact me.

Best wishes,

Paula Reavey.



Title of research: Child sexual abuse and the professional construction of female sexuality.

Child sexual abuse is an issue that many women in the past (and present) have felt unable to talk about, even though it is a common aspect of many women's past life experience. Research on the lasting effects of child sexual abuse have also tended to focus upon the psychological or psycho sexual 'damage' that is manifest in women without a critique of the ways in which such knowledge's of the effects and 'symptoms' of child sexual abuse are constructed by the various professionals who come into contact with such women. There is, however, a growing body of feminist work that has challenged popular and common sense notions of abuse effects and has moved away from the idea that you only have to look at the problem that women face sexually to see what terrible damage their past abuse has caused.

The work that I am undertaking has sought to uncover the various perspectives/assumptions/ideals that professionals hold about female sexuality, in relation to sexual abuse in childhood and also about 'normal' female sexuality in order to discuss the far from neutral approach that professionals undertake in their work. This work is also aiming to see how female sexuality is positioned within a cultural nexus that defines 'woman' as a particular sexualised being.

In doing so, I am aiming to show how the abuse survivor has come to symbolise a sexual type, a type that is artificially separated from the rest of society who enjoy a healthy hetero/sexual lifestyle. Such a separation is based upon value judgements that rest within a wider heterosexist discourse and not on the 'neutral' observations of the 'psy' professionals who come into contact with women who have survived abuse. This is a political point that must be addressed by professionals if they are to offer the right service for women survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Many feminist therapies and counselling services already offer such a critique of the traditional approaches and have therefore come further in their endeavour to provide a non-judgmental, non sexist way of aiding women's survival.

This is why I am asking for anyone from the rape and sexual abuse counselling service to come and get involved, if you just want to write with your opinion or ideally if you would agree to an interview that would ask you to express your ideas about sexual abuse, its effects on women and their sexuality. All information will remain confidential and I will be willing to travel any distance to include your voice in this research.

Thanks

Paula Reavey  
Sheffield Hallam University - Collegiate Crescent campus  
Health Research Institute - 45 Broomgrove Road  
Sheffield S10 2DJ  
0114 2532541

## QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FOR PROFESSIONALS

(addressed to each professional)

The following questions are concerned with drawing on your own ideas and practices surrounding the treatment of present sexual health in relation to child sexual abuse. The questions do not require any standard answer as the interview aims to be very flexible, making sure that you feel free to talk about your work in a more open way. If there is anything you are unsure of, or do not feel able to answer, please feel free to abstain from the question and move on to the next one. Thanks for taking part.

[1] Tell me about work.

[2] How is your work/perspective put into practice?

[3] What do you think are the long term effects of child sexual abuse?.

[4] Do these effects differ according to the gender of the client?.

[5] Is there anything specific about women's recovery process, or do think men and women will experience similar sorts of problems?

[6] What does sex mean to women who are survivors of sexual abuse in childhood?

[7] Why do you think sexual abuse affect adults in this way - which model of the person gives the most shape to your ideas about the long term effects.

[8] Do you think that sexual abuse in childhood will affect the sexual practices of women in adulthood?

[9] How and why does this happen?

[10] Does an understanding partner resolve many difficulties?

[11] Would you causally link sexual dysfunction in adulthood specifically to sexual events that took place in childhood?

[12] Do you think that there is a common factor underlying the different types of sexual problems that in particular women with a history of sexual abuse face?

[13] How do you know when a woman is functioning sexually, what markers are there in the recovery process that indicate a sexual well being? In other words, what would you consider to be a healthy sex life?

[14] What do you think are the main reasons for the fairly wide spread occurrence of sexual abuse in our society?

[15] What is it about sexual abuse in particular that differs from other forms of abuse, such as physical or emotional abuse in childhood.?

Thanks once again for your participation in this interview.

## Appendix 4

### Transcriptions.

1. [ ] bracketed minimal speech within another person's dialogue eg. [Paula...right, okay] This indicates that another person is still talking, with brief utterances from the other.
2. (laugh) Parentheses plus various expressions indicated the mood of the voice - laughter, tears, anger, sadness.
3. ... indicated a short pause in the dialogue.
4. (Pause) was used to represent more than a 5 second's pause between utterances. (long pause) was used for pauses over fifteen seconds.
5. If a particular word was stressed it would be underlined to indicate the emphasis.

In addition, the appropriate grammar (commas, full stops) were used to make the text, readable as text, which had sentence structure, but which mirrored how the person spoke initially. Although this transcription coding is not as detailed as some qualitative researchers' recommend (see Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) I did not feel it necessary to use such elaborate codes, which can sometimes obscure the text and keeping the text readable was a primary aim, when I was trying to gain a sense of the texts as a whole.

### 2) Texts, discourses and objects

'Talk', for discourse analysts is viewed as a social activity. Whilst some qualitative approaches view talk as something which may 'reveal' an underlying 'realness' about

the person, and therefore, be trapped in a positivistic dimension (Henwood & Pigeon, 1993) discourse analysis views talk differently. When people talk, from this analytic perspective, they are said to be forming objects. Talking is thus treated as “if it were an object” rather than as sound piece to some really real object, out there in the world. Objects, are thus always defined within the object which is discourse. In a similar vein, due to the representational nature of discourses, which are treated as producers of the real, an analysis of them involves seeing what is being constructed as an object (in this case, the sexuality of a female abuse survivor) and then detailing what they are.

After this, it is necessary to consider the ‘nature’ of their object as something which exists within the person’s talk - what they are saying thus becomes a site for which we can locate the object and analyse how it is constructed by ‘people’ as well how it reproduces and represents reality as an object - talk is therefore an object - a discourse. In the case of the present study, this meant examining how the object (women survivors sexuality) was referred to, and treating the professionals and the women survivors’ talk as discourse which constructed the named object - sexuality and its related components.

(b) The way in which I accessed the ways in which participants constructed objects involved several readings of the texts. This occurred during transcription and several times after. Once, I had a feel of the transcripts (and self help chapters) I began making notes on the major themes (which emerged within the structured themes imposed by the researcher and interview questions). The major themes were those which occurred frequently across interviews, so for example, in the survivor study, one such theme was masculinity, which was then eventually included in the analysis. Once the major themes were identified, a colour was assigned to each theme, after which was the coloured pen was used to ‘highlight’ a passage if it was relevant to that theme. Some themes were highlighted by different colours, as they fitted into more than one theme category. Once

all the transcripts were coded, each coloured passage was cut and pasted into its edited theme file - e.g. blue passages were put into their blue file, representing mental health and so on. After this process of editing, the themed documents were re-analysed, in order to identify the more specific objects in the text. Again this entailed making notes of the things which were frequently raised by participants or text. These then came to be seen as the objects under scrutiny, which required an analysis of how they were constructed - through which discourse e.g. psychoanalytic, familial or discourses of masculinity. The final analysis, therefore, was one which selected passages of text that illustrated the various ways in which categories within sexuality were understood and constructed (see chapter five, six and seven, for more detail). Plainly, then, the task of locating objects is a fairly systematic one, involving the meticulous breaking down of original transcript data, and the segregation of themes chunks or passages of text. Needless to say, this process involves a fair amount of selection, depending on the focus (in this case, sexuality and identity).

## APPENDIX 5

### QUESTIONS FOR SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE.

Could you tell me about yourself and what you do.

Would you identify yourself as a survivor?  
Why and how?

How do you think sexual abuse has affected your experience of life?

How do you view yourself as a sexual being, do you think sexual abuse has had any impact on your sexuality?

Have you had any difficulties with sex and sexuality? What did that entail, how do you deal with sex?

Is there anything that you doubt about yourself?

Have you had therapy?

What were your experiences of therapy? Did it help? In what ways?

APPENDIX 6

*If you have ever been sexually abused as a child...*

*...would you be interested in taking part in PhD research which is exploring issues of identity and sexuality?*

*If you are interested, please contact:*

*Paula Reavey  
Health Research Institute  
45 Broomgrove Road  
Sheffield S102DJ  
Telephone, 2532541.*

*All information will be held in strictest confidence.*

*Thanks.*



## LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

This research is concerned with the ways in which women who have been sexually abused in childhood experience sexuality and identity. All material from this research is held in strictest confidence and pseudonyms are used.

This research is interview based, which means you are free to speak about issues in an open and fairly unstructured way. There are questions, but these are used only as a guide for discussing relevant research areas.

During the interview you may touch on very personal accounts of the past or you could decide that this is not relevant. If at any time the interview becomes difficult, please feel free to say that you wish to move on, postpone the interview or just take break.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask me, before or after the interview.

Thank you once again for taking part.

Paula Reavey.

I have read all the information and am willing to take part in this research.

Signature

## APPENDIX 8

### CONTACT NUMBERS

If you feel that you may need to talk to someone further about some of the issues that have been raised during our session, there are good counselling services available in Sheffield. Unlike me, these women are trained specifically to deal with issues arising from sexual abuse and related (or unrelated) problems.

(Free services)

University Counselling Service - Jane Andaine - 25323864

Sheffield Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Service - 2447936

Alternatively, you can speak to your GP who may be able to refer you to a Women's therapy centre, or a clinical practice which will also be free as part of the NHS service.

Best wishes.

Paula Reavey.