

WORKING PAPER **283**

Why the Development Industry
Should Get Over its Obsession
With Bad Sex and Start to Think
About Pleasure

Susie Jolly
May 2007

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Why the Development Industry Should Get Over its Obsession With Bad Sex and Start to Think About Pleasure

Susie Jolly

Summary

The development industry has emphasised the dangers of sex and sexuality – in relation to population control, disease and violence. This negative approach to sex has been filtered through a view of gender which stereotypes men as predators, women as victims, and fails to recognise the existence of transgender people.

In reality, pleasure and danger are often entwined – not least because for many, seeking pleasure entails breaking social rules. However, the oppressive frameworks which forbid pursuit of pleasure are not the only dangers associated with sexuality. There are other fears to do with sex such as anxieties about loss of control, merging with another, intense sensation, triggering emotions, invoking previous experiences, about not being satisfied, fear of losing the object of love or lust, fear of catching a sexually transmitted or other infection. This ambiguity is part of many consensual sexual experiences.

How should development actors negotiate this ambiguous mix of pleasures and dangers in sexuality? This question is important to many aspects of human development – such as dealing with HIV/AIDS, tackling sexual violence, and supporting more fulfilling relationships.

Part of the answer is to move to more positive framings of sexuality which promote the possibilities of pleasure as well as tackling the dangers at the same time. The promotion of sexual pleasure can contribute to empowerment, particularly but not only for women, sexual minorities, and people living with HIV/AIDS, who may have been subject to social expectations that sexual pleasure is not for them. The pleasures of safer sex can also be promoted to reduce HIV/AIDS transmission and improve health. These are important ends. However, it would be sad to reduce sexual pleasure to a means of reaching development goals. Sexual pleasure can be wonderful in itself, and indeed it can be argued that people have a right to seek such pleasures, and that an enabling environment should be created for them to do so.

Keywords: sex, sexuality, sexual rights, pleasure, gender, transgender, development, globalisation, HIV/AIDS, empowerment

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Preface

Sexuality has been sidelined by development. Associated with risk and danger, but hardly ever with pleasure or love, sex has been treated by development agencies as something to be controlled and contained. The AIDS epidemic has broken old taboos and silences, and begun to open up space for the recognition of how central sexual rights are to human wellbeing. But more is needed to take us beyond the confines of narrow problem-focused thinking about sexuality towards approaches in which pleasure and desire play as large a part as danger and death do today.

Sexuality is a vital aspect of development. It affects human livelihoods and security, wellbeing, and sometimes survival. Sexual rights are a precondition for reproductive rights and for gender equality. Lack of sexual rights affects heterosexual majorities as well as sexual minorities – lesbians and gay men, transgendered and intersex people, who are so often denied basic human rights and subjected to violence and exclusion. In some countries, women are denied a choice of partner, subjected to coercive marital sex and restricted in their mobility. Pervasive homophobia places those married men who desire other men, their male partners and their wives at greater risk of HIV and AIDS. Adolescents schooled into abstinence learn little about their bodies or their desires, and may be more vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection as a result. And sex workers are routinely denied basic legal, employment, and broader human rights. The current world climate of rising conservatism, from the USA, the Vatican and Muslim states has only served to exacerbate matters. Rare is the environment which allows people to live out a fulfilling and pleasurable sexuality of their choice and that empowers people with a sense of their right to say ‘yes’ as well as ‘no’ and enjoy safe, loving relationships free of coercion and violence.

Issues of sex and sexuality are all too often associated with silence, shame and stigma. Solutions that are framed by a discourse that problematises sex offer limited scope for transforming the way in which development actors work on these issues. It is all too easy to focus on the negatives highlighted above and to conspire with a silence within them about unruly desires, about pleasuring the senses, and about love. The shift to rights in international development discourse may offer new routes for the articulation of sexuality and development, and new opportunities for realising sexual rights. This series of working papers, funded by Swedish Sida, the UK Department for International Development and Swiss Development Co-operation, enters the debate about sexual rights from the perspective of development. Together, the papers seek to challenge orthodoxies and bring fresh thinking to the challenges of making sexual rights real.

Andrea Cornwall and Susie Jolly
Realizing Sexual Rights Programme, IDS

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A version of this paper will form a chapter in A Lind and S. Bergeron, *Queering Development: Genders, Sexualities and Global Power*, forthcoming.

1 Introduction

Wanted sex, good sex and right to enjoy sex is not something that is covered in many intervention programmes. All I can say is that sexual reproductive health activities concentrate on ABC and family planning, in other words, more of the shock tactics type of education. How do we expect young women to understand the importance of consensual sex and negotiating skills if education is only limited to prevention of pregnancy, STIs, and sex being a no go area in many societies?

(Namibian participant, Young Women's Dialogue, in International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS 2004)

... when we go beyond conventional research paradigms on African sexuality (which primarily focus on reproduction, violence and disease) to explore the area of desire and pleasure, we gain deeper insights into this complex subject matter. I believe that in the long run, by broadening the scope of our research on sexuality, we can offer fresh perspectives that support more astute strategic interventions on critical areas such as sexual rights, health education, HIV/AIDS and development.

(Tamale 2005: 18)

There is a myth that the development industry¹ is not engaged with sexuality – and some fears that if it does engage with these intimate areas of our lives, it will do harm. In fact, the development industry has always dealt with sexuality-related issues, although usually only implicitly, and negatively, in relation to population control, disease or violence. More recently the need to respond to HIV/AIDS, and the increasing legitimacy of human rights approaches in development, have created spaces for more open discussion of sexuality. Huge progress has been made such as in the Cairo Convention (1994) which understands reproductive health to include that 'people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life' and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) which asserts women's rights to 'have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality'. However, the focus is still usually on sex as a problem, in relation to risk, vulnerability, ill-health and violations of rights, and on how to say 'no' to risky sex, rather than how to say 'yes' or even ask for a broader range of safer sex options (Klugman 2000; Correa 2002; Petchesky 2005).

This paper starts with a look at how development representations of the dangers of sexuality have been combined with stereotypical representations of gender with very problematic results. It then moves on to examine the realities of the imbrications of pleasure and danger in peoples lives, looking at how gender combines with other power dynamics to play out in a variety of sexual cultures. Lastly the paper considers why and how development should promote the good sides of sexuality.

1 Here I use the term 'development industry' to mean all those involved in giving or spending international development funding. This includes United Nations agencies, donor governments, recipient governments, international foundations, consultants, non-governmental organisations, activists and development studies institutions – including the Institute of Development Studies where I work.

2 Development representations: bad sex and gender stereotypes

The development industry has emphasised the dangers of sex and sexuality. This negative approach to sex has been filtered through a view of gender which stereotypes men as predators, women as victims, and fails to recognise the existence of transgender people.

2.1 Women as victims of bad sex

Within the development discourses of sex as a problem, women are positioned as victims of bad sex, in line with Mohanty's analysis 'Under Western Eyes' of victim representations of 'third world women', which, although written in 1991, is sadly still relevant. In her now renowned piece Mohanty considers a series of writings by 'first world' feminists on subjects such as female genital mutilation and women in development. The texts she considers consistently define women as objects of what is done to them, and as victims of either 'male violence', 'the colonial process', 'the Arab familial system', 'the economic development process', or 'the Islamic code'. An image is constructed of a homogenous and victimised population of third world women. Mohanty recognises that this homogenising includes sexuality, erasing 'all marginal and resistant modes and experiences. It is significant that none of the texts I reviewed in the ... series focuses on lesbian politics or the politics of ethnic and religious marginal organizations in third world women's groups' (Mohanty 1991: 73).

A powerful current version of this discourse treating women as victims is about women's absolute vulnerability to HIV/AIDS due to male violence and economic coercion. For example, at the time of writing the most frequently downloaded news story on the UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) HIV/AIDS portal reports that the HIV/AIDS pandemic:

... has killed more people (mostly women) than World Wars one and two and the Gulf War combined. Some of the reasons identified as the causes of the high prevalence of HIV infections in women include the cultural practice, which gave men the exclusive right to decide when, how and why to have sex with women in or out of marriage. Indeed these cultural practices are reinforced by the dependence of women on men for their needs, both financial and material. Women in this kind of situation, mostly in the developing countries, are subjected to sexual violence in the event they decide to postpone sexual intercourse for a moment for reasons of health, safety or tiredness.

(Dowuna 2005)

This piece does reflect important aspects of reality. It is true that many women are pressured into unsafe sex by violence or economic dependency. And I do not in any way want to undermine the hugely important work against this violence and coercion. However, the emphasis on violence and gender inequality as the causes of unsafe sex gives only gives half the picture. There's an underlying idea here that

men have total power in sex while women are just trying to impose damage limitation while we lie back and think of England² or some other appropriate patriotic love object (and that women only ever have unsafe sex because we lack power to negotiate with male partners, never due to our own desires). Do women really have no desire, agency or room for manoeuvre? Do women have no pleasure or hope of pleasure in sex?

Sylvia Tamale has challenged portrayals of African women as simply victims of sexual oppression through her research on the *Ssenga* – a tradition among the Baganda people in Uganda where the paternal aunt takes on a role of educating her nieces about sex. Tamale's research shows that while the institution of *Ssenga* can reinforce patriarchal power over women's bodies, it can also present new opportunities for women to challenge control of their sexualities. Many *Ssengas* in their contemporary form promote messages about women's autonomy and economic independence, and some instruction includes lessons in oral sex, masturbation and female ejaculation. Tamale also notes the pleasure-enhancing effects for both women and men of the extension of the labia minora,³ which the World Health Organization has lumped together with harmful forms of female genital mutilation (Tamale 2005).

The danger of the discourse treating 'women as victims of bad sex' is not just the crushing of any space for discussion of women's pleasure. Dangerous convergences take place between certain feminist positions aiming to protect women from sexual violence, and conservative forces concerned with women's chastity. This has already been observed in several instances: feminist anti-pornography activists making alliances with right-wing groups in the US in the 1980s (Rubin 1984); some Indian feminists' images of Indian women as chaste and vulnerable to sexual exploitation echoing the Hindu right's portrayal of virtuous Indian womanhood (Kapur 2005); and the 'unholy alliance' between some feminist groups and the Bush administration in the mobilisation against prostitution and trafficking (Crago 2003). Such discourses around protecting women from exploitation – sexual and otherwise – have also been drawn upon by US neo-conservatives to justify the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (Petchesky 2005).

2.2 Men as perpetrators of bad sex

The flip side of the 'women as victims of bad sex' discourse is the 'men as sexual predators' one. The global feminist enterprise becomes 'white women saving

2 An old English saying and piece of advice for women reluctant to endure their 'marital duties'.

3 'Between the age of nine and twelve ... a Muganda girl would be guided by her *Ssenga* to prepare her genitals for future sex. This was done through a procedure that involved elongating the labia minora. Known as *okukyalira ensiko* (visiting the bush), this rite was traditionally performed in a clearing among the bushes where the herbs ... used for the procedure were found. Pubescent girls would "visit the bush" for a few hours every day over a period of about two weeks' (Tamale 2005: 12). Most of the women interviewed by Tamale 'spoke positively of this practice', and both men and women considered the elongated labia minora to bring pleasure to both the woman and the man, to look more attractive, and to be a stamp of the Baganda identity.

brown women from brown men'.⁴ Just as third world women are portrayed as homogenous, third world masculinity is portrayed as monolithic, heterosexual, and as perpetrating the sexual oppression of women. The multiple and diverse forms of masculinity, and differentials in men's power are ignored. Ouzgane and Morrell argue that in much of the existing gender literature on Africa, men have tended to be overlooked, taken for granted, or treated as a unified, homogenous category (Ouzgane and Morrell 2005).

In 2003, the US congress passed the 'Global Emergency AIDS Act'. Gary Barker describes how

... some lawmakers in the United States decided that African men were the problem behind HIV/AIDS and included language in the bill that called for changing how African men treat women, with funding provided for 'assistance for the purpose of encouraging men to be responsible in their sexual behaviour, child rearing and to respect women'. While many persons would likely agree with the sentiment of this statement, it is important we avoid blaming individual men and instead examine more closely how it is that social constructions of gender and manhood lead to HIV-related vulnerability.

(Barker: 4)

Some men do fit the stereotypes of sexual predator. However, where men diverge from this image, their experiences are erased. Men have been victims of sexual violence in large numbers, and sexual violence against men has been used as a weapon of war and intimidation – for example in the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and in the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat, India in 2002, yet these incidents have been under-reported and did not make the media (Petchesky 2005).

This silence on men's sexual victimisation has been dramatically broken with the stories of US sexual torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Now added to the relentless images we see of men attacking women, are photos of men being tortured, sexually and otherwise, by women as well as men. Petchesky (2005) argues that the reason sexual violence inflicted on men and by women became visible at this point, was not only because of the availability of new technologies (digital cameras, email and internet), but because US intelligence interpreted sexual violence, and treating men as feminised and homosexualised, as particularly humiliating – both within their own American patriarchal and homophobic frame of reference, and also in their understanding of Muslim and Arab cultures. As such, publicising these images multiplied the humiliation around the world. Thus while men became visible as victims, this portrayal emerged *precisely* because it served a deliberate function of showing these men as less than men. Where men retain their masculinity they remain predators not victims.

4 Spivak describes the collective imperialist fantasy that 'white men are saving brown women from brown men', which white women have gone along with (1988: 296–7).

2.3 Transgender people ignored

While women are positioned as victims, and men as predators, those who do not fit neatly into the male-female categorisations usually remain invisible in development discourses on sexuality or other issues. I will label these people very loosely as ‘transgender’, a term which I use to include a whole range of self-identifications such as tommy boys and lesbian men in Africa, hijras in South Asia, *travestis* in Latin America, ladyboys in Thailand, third spirit among native American Indians, the globalised identities of queer, trans, female-to-male transsexuals and male-to-female transsexuals, and all those who are intersex, as well as any others who identify as neither male nor female.⁵ By transgender, I refer to a gender identity, or sometimes anti-identity – as not fitting neatly into the male/female categorisations.

The reality is that many people do not fit into the ‘male-female’ sex categories. Numbers are not small. In his briefing to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2002, Bondyopadhyay (2002) records an estimate of between a half to one million hijras in India. An article in *The New Scientist* declares that up to one in every five hundred babies are born ‘intersex’ with chromosomes at odds with their anatomy (Philips 2001: 31), but this is usually hushed up. In the west 1 in 2000 babies have surgery because their bodies do not fit the accepted categories of ‘female’ or ‘male’ (Philips: 39).

Yet such diversity is erased in development discourses, including in gender and development discourses. In our insistence that gender comes from nurture rather than nature, we⁶ have been willing to leave sex, and the categorisations of male and female, uncontested in the domain of biology. See, for example, these current unexceptional definitions from the One World Action Glossary:

Sex marks the distinction between women and men as a result of their biological, physical and genetic differences.

Gender roles are the different roles that women and men, girls and boys have that often determine who does what within a society. Gender roles are set by convention and other social, economic, political and cultural forces.

(One World Action 2005)

Such definitions, and policies and programmes based on this limited understanding of sex, erase the experiences of transgender people worldwide. Campuzano argues that development and colonialism have suppressed possibilities to identify outside

5 Although I recognise some individuals from these groups may reject the term transgender – for example some hijras identify as women, some as a third sex, some transsexuals identify as the sex to which they are transitioning or have transitioned. However, given the limitations of the current language available, transgender still seems the best term to use for now.

6 A note on pronouns – I tend to say ‘we’ because I consider myself, and I expect some of my readers, to be part of this large and messy development enterprise. I am not an outside critic, keeping my hands clean while critiquing what’s going on. I too am implicated, part of the problem as well as the solution.

the male female categories. He gives the example of Peru where historically among indigenous people in Peru, the distinctions between male and female were more flexible than they are today. A traditional *'travesti'* or transgender/transvestite identity and culture existed and persists in spite of the colonial and subsequent development influences which imposed a more restrictive order on gender identity and behaviour (Campuzano 2006).

Currently transgender people are likely to face particular sexuality-related issues, for example how to negotiate their own sexual interactions in societies which refuse to recognise their gender identities, high levels of rape and sexual violence from police and others, discrimination by sexual health services, as well as the fact that for certain transgender populations, labour market discrimination means that sex work is virtually the only way to generate income (IGLHRC 2001; Munro 2005).

Development policy and programming in general fail to support transgenders in these or other areas. However, the response to HIV/AIDS has created opportunities to challenge this exclusion. For example, in the National HIV/AIDS programme in Pakistan, with which I worked as a consultant in 2004, the interventions targeted at 'MSM' (men who have sex with men) then focused largely on hijras because this population was most visible to those implementing the programme. Men who had sex with men but did not dress in saris were apparently invisible to those implementing the programme, even though a gay member of our consultancy team spotted several without going beyond the hotel lobby. On the positive side, the programme did endeavour to provide some information, health services and peer education for hijras. However, the opposite has been reported in Kenya where HIV/AIDS work has made progress in including MSM, but transgender, intersex and women who have sex with women remain excluded (Urgent Action Fund 2005).

3 Pleasure and danger – bifurcations and imbrications

So development has largely focused on the downsides of sex, with women seen as victims, men as perpetrators, and transgenders largely ignored. While development focuses on the risks, in many contexts a parallel current runs through popular and commercial culture focusing only on pleasures, with glamorous sexual images in advertising, media obsession with love and romance, and pornography widely available.

In reality, pleasure and danger are often entwined – not least because, for many, seeking pleasure entails breaking social rules. In the landmark 1989 'Pleasure and Danger' Carole Vance points out how male sexual violence and the institutions and ideologies that justify it make it dangerous for women to pursue their own sexual pleasures. While she is talking about America, this is arguably common worldwide, although which sanctions are in place to deter women from such a pursuit or punish them for taking it, vary according to context – ranging from female genital mutilation (FGM) and honour killings to restrictions on mobility, and social exclusion.

However, the oppressive frameworks which forbid pursuit of pleasure are not the only dangers associated with sexuality. Vance reminds us 'The threat of male violence is ... not the only source of sexual danger' (Vance 1989: 4–5). She adds that there are other fears to do with sex, such as anxieties about loss of control, merging with another, intense sensation, triggering emotions, invoking previous experiences, and fears of not being satisfied. I would add a few more fears such as losing our object of love or lust, and catching a sexually or otherwise transmitted infection.

Without a better language to excavate and delineate these other sources of danger, everything is attributed to men, thereby inflating male power and impoverishing ourselves ... The truth is that the rich brew of our experience contains elements of pleasure and oppression, happiness and humiliation. Rather than regard this ambiguity as confusion or false consciousness, we should use it as a source-book to examine how women experience sexual desire, fantasy and action.

(Vance 1989: 5–6)

I would argue that this ambiguity is just as relevant for men and transgenders, all of whom have their sexualities and pleasures constructed by the same power dynamics that women do, even though they are positioned differently in relation to them. In this section, I will discuss a few examples of imbrications of pleasure and danger in constructions of heterosexuality, in the sexual cultures of some *travesti*⁷ populations, and in relation to public sex between men. I will look at how gender and other power dynamics interact with sexual practices to produce these imbrications of pleasure and danger.

Jeffreys has argued that heterosexuality is the eroticisation of gender inequality (1991).

Heterosexual desire is eroticised power difference ... So heterosexual desire for men is based on eroticising the otherness of women, an otherness which is based on a difference in power. Similarly, in the twentieth century, when women have been required to show sexual enthusiasm for men, they have been trained to eroticise the otherness of men i.e. men's power and their own subordination ... Women's subordination is sexy for men and for women too ... Women ... are not born into equality and we do not have equality to eroticise. We are not born into power and we do not have power to eroticise. We are born into subordination and it is in subordination that we learn our sexual and emotional responses ... From the discriminating behaviour of her mother while she is still in the cradle, through a training in how to sit and move without taking up space or showing her knickers, how to speak when spoken to and avert her gaze from men, a girl learns subordination ...

(Jeffreys 1991: 299–302)

7 'Travesti' is a Latin American transgender identity – men who generally identify as men, but see themselves as feminine, are attracted to men, and mostly work in sex work.

This argument contains a convincing logic – a huge factor in relations between women and men is inequality. Unless you are a 100 per cent sex essentialist who believes biology determines it all, if you accept that sexual desires are even partly constructed by our contexts, then what else would construct heterosexuality, given that inequality is such a huge part of relations with the ‘opposite’ sex?

Heterosexual desires can only be constructed in relation to gender inequalities – they can hardly ignore them. Although how our desires are constructed will vary, desires may either mimic or react against inequalities or a combination of the two. For example, in the London sadomasochist club scene, men seeking dominant women outnumber women seeking subordinate men.⁸ Is this because more men react against the pressure to take responsibility and power in their lives, than the number of women reacting against submission? Or is it to do with how masculinities have been constructed in the British context, perhaps to do with traditional education systems of discipline and hierarchy in all-boy schools? Unearthing answers would require further research. What this example does tell us is that how desire interacts with gender inequalities varies, and we shouldn’t be surprised if a few women enjoy rape fantasies⁹ while others abhor them, given the world we live in.

Likewise, the pleasures and desires of transgender people are constructed in relation to gender inequalities and power dynamics. Kulick describes a culture in a *travesti* community he researched in Brazil as ‘having gender’ rather than ‘having sex’. In a study of *travestis* and their boyfriends, Kulick finds that although these *travestis* may orgasm at work (sex work) when they penetrate clients, they prefer to play a stereotypical ‘feminine’ role of being passive and penetrated when with their boyfriends, which they feel affirms their femininity (Kulick 1997). The *travestis* Kulick interviewed are categorical that they do not allow their boyfriends to touch their genitals, and that they do not wish to penetrate their boyfriends. They say sex with boyfriends should consist of their boyfriend penetrating them. This kind of sex does not generally bring them orgasms, but it makes them feel like women, which is what they want. This sentiment is echoed in this quote by a ‘Tommy boy’ (male-identified lesbian) in Uganda:

I have to be the dominant partner. When we are having fun I want to be dominant just because I am the one who comes and cons you. So I have to make sure I satisfy you. For me, I don’t care if I get satisfied or not because if I make you happy that’s good.

(Marci, quoted in Morgan and Wieringa 2004: 75)

Alan Sinfield cites Amnesty International’s documentation in ‘Crimes of Hate’ of extensive police and prison guard sexual violence and rape of gay men worldwide. While such torture may aim to humiliate, punish or destroy, it also implicates police in same-sex desire and action. At the same time ‘a prominent scenario in

8 Personal communication.

9 And I do mean fantasies of rape, I don’t mean women actually want to be raped.

gay male pornography and chat lines dwells upon police violence and military uniforms, punishment, bondage and assault.’ (Sinfield 2006: 316). Similar to heterosexual desire, same sex desire is constructed in relation to inequalities and oppressions.

The power relations which construct desire of course include a whole range of domains – not just gender, but also state regulation, class struggles, globalisation, and neo-colonialism, to name just a few. Race is one axis of power which constructs sexuality. Kopano Ratele coins the term ‘kinky politics’ to describe how race is a fetish which becomes sexualised. This fetishisation is part of what constitutes racism – attributing a particular importance and reality to the idea of ‘race’, connecting fear and desire.

Kinky politics follows the fetish of, and refetishises, ~~race~~.¹⁰ There can be no racism without this constant re-fetishisation ... Racism, together with (hetero)sexism, then, is what keeps us in awe, or in fear, or ignorance of black and white, male and female bodies and sexualities in this society.

(Ratele 2004: 142)

The practice of men having sex with men in public cruising spaces illustrates the imbrication of desire and danger. Due to exclusion and stigma, there are often no sanctioned spaces for sex between people of the same sex, unlike heterosexual sex which does have a place, albeit constrained. For example, it may be supposed to take place in the marital bed, at the man’s initiative, when the woman is not menstruating, etc. – although these rules will vary according to context.

While there is generally no openly sanctioned space for sex between people of the same sex, due to their relative freedom to occupy public spaces, men and to some degree transgenders, may manage to have sex in public areas. This may be quick, guilty and unsafe sex in locations such as parks and toilets, where the participants risk both sexually transmitted infections and violence from police or others if discovered.

The World Bank sponsored a ‘mapping’ of men who have sex with men in Lahore, Pakistan, which involved interviews with over 200 ‘Men who have Sex with Men’ (Khan and Khilji 2002). The study reported that while women’s contact with men is controlled and socially policed, expressions of affection between people of the same sex are easily accepted. Many men have sexual relations with each other, and finding male sexual partners is easy. Sex between men takes place frequently in cruising areas in shrines, parks, under bridges, in public toilets, or in empty buses and train carriages around stations. At the same time, such relations are highly stigmatised by society, particularly for partners who may be penetrated rather than penetrate, or who dress in a more feminine manner.

The study found negative health effects of this exclusion:

10 Race is spelt with cross-thru to indicate the fundamentally problematic nature of the very concept itself.

... much of male to male sex takes place in public environments such as parks, alleyways, building sites etc. since private spaces are not readily available. This means that time is of the essence to reduce the risks of discovery. Taking time to put on a condom increases the risk of being seen by others.

(Khan and Khilji 2002: 31)

The time constraints also encourage quick aggressive sex. A majority of interviewees report penetration usually taking place within '3 to 5 minutes', with no foreplay, no lubricant other than saliva, and rapid violent movements, the combination of which would have high risk for anal tissue damage, and indeed 10 per cent of interviewees reported anal bleeding and discharge.

The above study gives the downside in graphic form. Due to exclusion from private spaces, men have sex in public spaces. Due to stigma and shame, sex is quick and dangerous, causing ill-health. Multiple inequalities contribute to constructing the stigma which underlies these dynamics, one of which is Article 377, put in place by former British colonial administrations, which criminalises 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature', including sex between men. This law is still on the books today in India, Pakistan and several other former British colonies.

However, while public sex has obvious risks, it can also be experienced as highly erotic and affirming. Zachie Achmat describes how he enjoyed sex in toilets in Cape Town from the age of 10:

I had sex at the toilets every day, sometimes twice or three times a day. I would go to the library to get books, which I would read in the toilet, so that when something happened I would be there. Almost all the men were scared to touch me because of my age, but once they discovered I was into it, they enjoyed themselves. I had sex with anyone who wanted to: old, young, black or white, fat or thin, it did not matter. The sex and tenderness mattered, and there was lots of both.

(Achmat 1995: 333)

Another South African activist, Vasu Reddy sees public cruising grounds as revolutionary spaces:

As a concept, space may ... highlight cultural practices, such as the use of 'cottage' (public lavatory), parks as pick-up grounds, and clubs, bars and other negotiated spaces, such as cruising grounds. These homoerotic ... spaces in which gay and lesbian subcultures are directed towards sexual release, amusement and sexual pleasure, are equally imbued with meanings in a political and politicised sense.

(Reddy 2005: 2)

Achmat also identifies toilets as potentially revolutionary spaces, not just for expression of stigmatised desires – both same-sex and inter-generational – but also for a momentary breakdown of apartheid racial divisions. Although 'whites only', the toilet he frequented was used by all ethnicities: 'apartheid was destroyed in those toilets. By men who had sex with men, regardless of race or class.'

Men in very empowered positions, with long-term male partners and plenty of private space to have sex in, may still want to engage in this kind of sex – most famously the British pop star George Michael, arrested for cruising in a toilet in Los Angeles in 1998. He managed to turn the stigma around into celebration (and profit) with his subsequent single ‘Let’s go outside’. The lyrics could be understood to be suggesting having sex outside, and the video featured policemen kissing and was partially shot in a studio set constructed using mirror-tiled urinals and walls. The police officer who had arrested him took the message personally, sued for slander and lost.

Anupam Hazra, a sexual rights activist, HIV/AIDS worker and former masseur/sex worker, carried out interviews with men involved in the sex industry in Calcutta and who have sex with men (MSM). Recommendations emerging from his study included the need for the repeal of Article 377, for the provision of safe spaces for sex, open houses specifically for the purpose, non-judgmental and welcoming hourly room rental services, and improving public toilets in order to make them a better environment for sex:

Some of the respondents to the study suggested promoting public toilets/saunas as pick-up joints. It was proposed that maybe these toilets can charge more and allow a couple or more people to use the lavatory (which can be locked from inside) as sex sites. These places can also display safer sex messages and distribute condoms and lubes. But the toilets should be kept clean to make the experience pleasurable.

(Hazra 2005)

Is all this a problem or not? If sexual desire and actions are constructed by oppressions, is sexual practice itself perpetuating these oppressions, providing yet another arena in which to accept and eroticise those power relations? On the other hand, if sex acts are consensual, are the playful and horny re-enactments or reversals of the power dynamics of society a form of coping mechanism, resistance or reclaiming, a jolly way to let off steam, a way to play with or against oppressive structures, using our agency to find pleasures within the constraints in which we live?

Kulick describes the *travestis*’ ‘having gender’ rather than ‘having sex’ as fulfilling an important need and desire to live out gender identities denied them by mainstream society. However, Campuzano sees *travestis*’ sexual cultures as more problematic. He argues that with their attraction to macho and sometimes violent men, and passivity in sex, they adopt the position of the ‘hystericised’ woman. *Travestis* need a new kind of feminism to enable them to claim pleasure and power (Campuzano 2006).

Can an attraction to the oppressor undermine them by putting them in the position of lust object – as George Michael succeeded in doing with the police officer who arrested him? And what are the implications for women attracted to macho men? Are they being hysterical? Are they asserting their desires? Can they disarm these men by making them objects of their lust?

Whether the imbrication of pleasure and danger is a problem or not is the subject of much theoretically sophisticated debate arguing from all sides (Vance 1989; Sinfield 2004; Sinfield 2006; Jeffreys 1991). I will not here attempt to add to the

theoretical debate. Instead, I note that explorations of how people experience these imbrications throw up a diverse range of feelings and stories, as shown by the tales of sex in toilets cited in this section. Certain people at certain moments experience the imbrications of pleasure and danger as a problem. At other moments or for other people these imbrications are felt to be joys or opportunities. Starting from this understanding of the interrelations of pleasure and danger, I proceed to consider the practical question of what to do.

4 How should development negotiate the imbricated pleasures and dangers of sexuality?

Fantasies of dominance and subjection should be regarded as unsurprising transmutations of prevailing social relations of domination and subordination. Hierarchy is neither an aberration nor a misfortune of desire, but integral with it ... The task, then, is to find ways of making hierarchy, in our sexual and personal relations, productive of pleasure and other rewards of intimacy, and productive also of insights into the psychic economies through which we handle the triumphs and humiliations that the system bestows – while maintaining also the credibility and integrity of our political engagements.

(Sinfield 2004: 58 and 77)

How should development actors negotiate the imbrication of pleasures and dangers in sexuality? This question is important to many aspects of human development – such as dealing with sexual violence, supporting fulfilling relationships, promoting safer and more satisfying sexual interactions.

4.1 Tackling exploitation and inequalities

Part of the answer must be to tackle exploitation and inequalities in general that blight so many lives as well as construct our sexualities. The new development dogmas of participation, empowerment and accountability can help here. By participation and empowerment I mean considered and democratic processes, struggles and movements to enable people (particularly people with less power) to voice and act upon their desires and priorities. By accountability I mean putting structures in place to ensure that institutions listen to the desires voiced.

Tackling exploitation and inequalities in general, whether material, emotional, global or local, is vital to promoting consensual sexual relations rather than violence and abuse. It can also create new possibilities for people to imagine, feel and act upon their desires. I expect in a fantasy world free from exploitation, much sex would still be powerful and include power games and gender or other role-play. However, where these took place it would be due to greater freedom to develop and act out individual desires and fetishes, rather than due to a lack of consent or to limited options.

Another part of the answer is to shift beyond the negative approaches to sexuality that treat women as victims, men as perpetrators and ignore transgender. Hand in hand with recognising that sexuality is imbricated with violence, risk and danger, we can celebrate the pleasures of sexuality to positive effect. The positive effects can include empowerment and affirmation, and greater safety in sex.

4.2 Promoting sexual pleasure to empower and affirm

I have argued so far that negative approaches to sexuality risk being disempowering, reinforcing gender stereotypes, crushing space for discussion of women's pleasure, and converging with conservative discourses around sexual morality. There is evidence that positive approaches to sexuality which include spaces for talking about pleasure can engender confidence and an ability to make positive decisions, while scare tactics and stigma leave people feeling disempowered and less able to assert themselves (Philpott 2006).

A study of American adolescent girls (Tolman 2002) found that some were paralysed with fear of the dangers of having sex, both in terms of their reputation, and in relation to the risks of pregnancy and disease. One such girl explained that she did end up having sex with her boyfriend because he wanted it, although she felt no desire. When she discussed it with him afterwards, he insisted that she had wanted sex. She was confused, and agreed that maybe she had, maybe he knew her better than she herself did. In contrast, girls with a more positive view of sexuality were more assertive. One girl who had had and enjoyed sex, encountered a boy from her school who tried to pressure her to sleep with him. She forcefully resisted and succeeded in deterring him. She was quite clear that she didn't want sex, because she knew what it felt like to want sex. If you are not allowed to imagine or discover what it feels like to want sex how do you know if you don't want it? Does consent have any meaning if you are only allowed to say 'no'? If you are only allowed to say 'no', you have to say 'no', even when you mean 'yes'. This is going to be confusing for adolescents of any gender.

McFadden (2003) argues that many African women are fearful of considering the possibilities for sexual pleasure because of patriarchal concepts of women's sexuality as 'bad' or 'filthy'. She sees sexual pleasure as a life-giving force which can fuel liberation on both a personal and a political level, and calls for African women to reclaim their sexual energy and power, both for their own pleasure and in order to challenge the patriarchal practices which oppress them. Pereira (2003) challenges McFadden's essentialist and homogenising understanding of sexuality, and calls for research into the understandings of sexual power and pleasure by African women and men in all their diversity. However, she too sees the potential of sexual pleasure as empowering, or at least that this idea is worth considering. She suggests further exploration into how sexual power can be used as a political resource, and into the relationship between change regarding sexuality and change in the economy, society, and politics.

Vasu Reddy sees the relationship between the liberalisation of sexuality, and empowerment and affirmation, as mutually reinforcing. He describes how the Durban lesbian and gay community centre supported and empowered gays and lesbians and declares:

An effect of this empowerment, I believe, is ... our celebration of sexuality and sexual cultures that associate sexual pleasure with affirmation of our identities.

(Reddy 2005: 1)

Sadly, for the majority of our society, African homosexuals constitute 'improper' bodies and homosexuality a 'subversive' pleasure ... Such thinking confirms that for us, sexual pleasure cannot be detached from the urgent need (and responsibility) to mobilise, educate and continue with our liberatory project.

(Reddy 2005: 6)

Practical initiatives are already under way to empower people through promoting possibilities for sexual pleasure. Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR, Turkey) has since 1993 run training courses on human rights for women in community centres in 35 cities in the least developed and most conservative areas in Turkey. This four-month training aims to empower women in a broad sense. It includes three modules on sexuality that talk about 'sexual pleasure as a woman's human right'. These modules come in the 9th and 10th week *after* the women have already built up mutual trust, and had space to discuss sexual and other violence. According to WWHR's director, Pinar Ilkcaracan

So far we've trained 4000 women and these modules are among those that women value most. Not one woman has said she didn't like talking about sexuality. On the contrary, most say they want to spend *more* time talking about it!

(cited in Jolly 2006)

Sexual pleasure is sometimes seen as men's prerogative,¹¹ the stereotype being that in heterosexual sex, men will selfishly take their pleasures without giving enough attention to what the woman wants. However, the pursuit of pleasure is in reality not without obstacles for most men. Gender norms influence how and where men are supposed to take their pleasures; for example, in many cultures, men are not supposed to enjoy having their nipples or anus touched. Taking pleasure in tenderness and intimacy may also be discouraged by ideas about what it takes to be a proper man. The 'Association of Men Against Violence' formed in 2000 in Nicaragua not only works with men to tackle violence perpetrated by themselves or others, but also, through workshops, encourages men to discover the pleasures of tenderness, intimacy and equality in both sexual and non-sexual relations.

Such initiatives which give space both to tackling violence and danger, and to promoting the possibilities for pleasure, are most attuned to the reality of the mix of pleasure and danger in people's lives.

11 There is, however, another stereotype which suggests that men are responsible for giving women pleasure, that this is part of the expected sexual 'performance', and they should know how to do this without being told.

4.3 Promoting the pleasures of safer sex

there are increasing indications – from developing as well as developed countries – that public health outcomes may benefit from a greater acceptance of positive sexual experiences ... greater comfort with one's own body will enable greater ability to communicate wishes to others, and to be less 'pressured' into unwanted sexual relationships.

(Ingham: 1)

Sexual pleasure can be affirming and empowering. It can also help motivate safer sex. A study involving participant observations with over 100 men who buy sex in Mombasa, Kenya, conducted in bars, shebeens and night clubs where sexual transactions are made found that:

The most important conclusion ... is that men who pay for sex do so because it is pleasurable and many men do not find the male condom pleasurable. Therefore messages targeted at men who have sex with sex workers may not be 100% successful if they only emphasize the benefits of condom use as disease control.

(Thomsen *et al* 2004: 231)

In a focus group discussion with sex workers taking part in a DFID-funded¹² HIV/AIDS project in China, several participants said that while some clients treated them like 'meat', which was insulting, they enjoyed sex with the clients who were cute, clean, polite or 'high quality'. The sex workers were more likely to relax and so find the experience enjoyable if the clients were using condoms, as this diminished the risk of contracting a disease. Some programme activities created opportunities to discuss how pleasure can motivate people to have different kinds of sex – some safer, some unsafe, and sought to promote the pleasures of safer sex (Jolly with Wang 2003).

Pleasure is clearly one motivation for sex, and depending on the situation, may lead to or be enhanced by either safer or less safe sex. Several initiatives are already attempting to promote the pleasures of safer sex. The Pleasure Project (2005) has mapped 27 initiatives around the world which use pleasure as a primary motivation for promoting sexual health. These include programmes which eroticise male and female condoms; sex-positive books for teenagers; work with churches to improve sex among married couples; erotica designed for HIV-positive people; and pleasure and harm-reduction counselling for sex workers.

12 The UK Department for International Development.

5 Final reflections: pleasure for pleasure's sake

People have a right to pleasure, desire, sexuality, as well as a right not to experience these if they don't want to. How can we tell if these rights are being realised? We don't need to measure sexual pleasure, which would be quite difficult! Instead we can measure rights, and there has already been a lot of work done on how to do this.

(Armas in Jolly 2006)

The development industry has emphasised the dangers of sex and sexuality. This negative approach to sex has been filtered through a view of gender which stereotypes men as predators, women as victims, and fails to recognise the existence of transgender people. It is time to go beyond this negative and gender-stereotyped view of sexuality, to recognise that pleasure and danger are imbricated in the ways people experience sexuality. We need to move to more positive framings of sexuality which promote the possibilities of pleasure, as well as tackling the dangers at the same time.

The promotion of sexual pleasure can contribute to empowerment, particularly but not only for women and marginalised groups. The pleasures of safer sex can be promoted to tackle HIV/AIDS and improve health. These are important ends. However, it would be sad to reduce sexual pleasure to being a means of achieving development goals. A variation on the 'lie back and think of England' becomes 'take your pleasure to help meet the Millennium Development Goals'.¹³

Sexual pleasure can be a wonderful thing in itself. Correa calls for sexual rights to be considered as an end in themselves, affirmed in relation to eroticism, recreation and pleasure, under a framework of development as freedom as suggested by Amartya Sen (2002). Not everyone wants sexual pleasure, some people are not interested, asexual, or have decided for whatever reason that they will not pursue such pleasures. It would be presumptuous and harmful to assume everyone should be seeking such pleasures. However, for those who do wish to pursue these, an environment which enables this pursuit should be fostered, by challenging the exploitation and inequalities which construct and channel our desires and actions, and promoting rights to seek and explore those pleasures and delights which take our fancy.

13 The Millennium Development Goals are currently among the highest profile goals for most government's actions on international development.

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