

Generation Sex? The Management of Sexuality in Everyday Life

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Abstract:

Considering the intersection between managerial discourses, sexuality and contemporary cultural resources such as lifestyle magazines, this paper reflects critically on the extent to which the discourses and techniques associated with the management of bureaucratic organizations have been incorporated into the (self-)management of sexuality and sexual relations. Locating its concern with sexuality within critical social theory (Marcuse, 1956; Gramsci, 1988) the paper develops a critique of the work of those who emphasise the postmodernization of sexuality (Simon, 1996) and the informalization of management (Wouters, 1998). It argues that contemporary cultural discourses on sexuality, permeated as they are by references to managerial imperatives such as efficiency and effectiveness, serve to arrest the inter-subjective aspects of eroticism (Bataille, 1962; Rose, 1994) and to reduce sexual relations in the contemporary era to yet another aspect of the 'reflexive project of self' (Giddens, 1992). It is argued therefore, that the managerial burden, as it applies to sexuality, has shifted from being governed according to an ascetic ethic to a self-management of sexuality as an aesthetic aspect of everyday life, one which is more akin to pre-modern than post-modern values (Foucault, 1979) yet which remains firmly embedded within and driven by the accumulation imperatives of modernity.

Introduction

When they looked at one another their glances, speaking of the secret they shared, drew them together, deepened their feeling for each other and made it less ordinary, more intimate, as their secret set them apart, as it were, from everyday life.

(Balzac, 1955 [1883]: 168).

Sex manuals ... which imply the infinite plasticity of pleasure, ... are dangerously destructive of imagination, of erotic and of spiritual ingenuity.

(Rose, 1995: 63).

This paper explores the various ways in which the discourses and techniques associated with the management of bureaucratic organizations have come to be incorporated into what is perhaps one of the most personal and intimate aspects of everyday life, namely sexuality and sexual relations. It draws on various contributions to contemporary critical theory and critical management studies and particularly on the work of Habermas (1984, 1985), in an attempt to consider the influence of managerialism on what Bauman (1998) refers to as the 'cultural processing of sex'. Specifically, its aim is to reflect upon the extent to which the 'everyday' utilization of managerial discourses may be understood in relation to a liberalization of sexuality, guiding the management of the reflexive project of the sexual self (Giddens, 1992) and the pursuit of a proliferation of sexual possibilities in an era of so-called postmodern sexualities (Simon, 1996). It argues, conversely, that the management of sexuality constitutes a notable example of the managerial colonization of everyday life, signifying not only an intensification of 'Fordist sexuality' (Gramsci, 1988) but also a dangerous destruction of imagination and ingenuity, as Gillian Rose puts it.

Critical Management Studies and Sexuality

Critical Management Studies (CMS), inspired largely by critical social theory, organization studies and also contemporary feminist theory, has recently begun to interrogate systematically the philosophical assumptions which underlie the imperatives and techniques of management (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). In their recent review of CMS texts, Sotorin and Tyrell (1998) identify a number of related themes as characteristic of this approach, including: a critique of instrumental rationalities; a suspicion of the performance imperatives of systemic modernity; an emphasis on critical reflection; and a commitment to interpreting and intervening in relations of oppression. Similarly, Fournier and Grey (1998) identify an anti-performative emphasis, a series of de-naturalizing tendencies and a high level of reflexivity as characteristic of CMS.

In particular, recent analyses of work organizations and their management from which CMS has begun to evolve have raised broad questions concerning the management of subjectivity and the scope of organizational power to shape social identity. Themes such as the emergence of an increasingly instrumental attitude towards the self - what Fournier and Grey (1998) term the managerialization of society - have been raised, as has the erosion of traditional boundaries between business and personal relationships, since many service organizations in particular require workers to turn relatives and friends into customers and to treat customers as if they were friends or relatives (Leidner, 1999). Where critical management studies is particularly useful, in this respect, is in providing a theoretical framework within which to explore the relationship between the workplace and 'everyday life', and within which to understand the various social and cultural forces which shape and influence the subjective experience of this relationship, as it is manifest for instance, in sexuality and sexual relations.

Attempting to work within the analytical framework provided by the thematic concerns of CMS outlined by Sotorin and Tyrell (1998), this paper begins with a broad consideration of the relationship between everyday life and the management of the self, going on to consider the ways in which the management of sexuality in the everyday lifeworld has been shaped by the intersection of modernity and postmodernity. It then focuses on the extent

to which, in line with an intensification of the imperatives of Fordist sexuality (Gramsci, 1988) and a Taylorization of sex (Jackson and Scott, 1997), managerial discourses have begun to colonize contemporary cultural resources such as men's and women's 'lifestyle' magazines, self-help books and advice manuals, as indicated by the extent to which contemporary 'lifestyle' magazines are permeated by concerns with efficiency: '10 seconds to a 10 minute orgasm' (Cosmopolitan, April 1996); and effectiveness: '7 easy steps to orgasm heaven' (New Woman, March 1997); imperatives traditionally associated with managerialism. On this basis it is argued that, in line with an intensification of the capitalist imperatives of modernity and with an 'over-investment' in sexuality (Foucault, 1979), even in our ostensibly 'private' lives the organizing forces of managerialism are increasingly apparent. The paper ends by relating the management of sexuality in everyday life to the broader concerns of critical management studies, focusing in particular on the broadly Habermasian assumption that subjectivity is grounded in communication, and concludes that the bureaucratization of sexual relations is indicative of the extent to which 'the rational organization of everyday social life' (Habermas, 1985: 9) is developing apace.

The Rationalization of Everyday Life

As Crook (1998) has observed, in recent years the 'everyday' has once again begun to occupy that somewhat precarious space reserved for 'fashionable' topics in the social sciences. Important influences on recent work which Crook (1998) cites include De Certeau's (1984) concern with the 'everyday' as a vantage point from which the disciplinary effects of 'the gaze' can be deflected; Bourdieu's (1984) celebration of a popular 'anti-taste' and also Maffesoli's (1996) postulation of everyday 'sociality'. Giddens' (1992) recent work on the management of the reflexive project of the self as grounded in a transformation of 'everyday', intimate social relations is also cited as a significant influence on recent accounts. To this list of relatively recent contributions we could add Bakhtin's (1968) emphasis on the 'carnavalesque', which has been particularly influential on recent developments in organization studies (Burrell, 1992), and also Wouters (1998) analysis of the process of 'informalization' which, he argues, is taking

place in contemporary western societies. Such accounts as those presented by Maffesoli (1986), De Certeau (1984), Wouters (1998) and of course, Bakhtin (1968) all tend to emphasize the spontaneity, playfulness, sensuality, informality and heterogeneity of everyday life. Maffesoli (1986) in particular emphasizes the Dionysian quality of everyday life in his proxemic account of sociality which stresses that the everyday is far from routine or rationalized and indeed constitutes an increasingly important 'escape' route from the rationalization of the organizational lifeworld. The tenor of much of this work is a celebratory one, emphasizing that rather than the sphere of the lifeworld becoming increasingly rationalized (Habermas, 1984), bureaucratic organizations are in fact becoming increasingly subject to a process of 'informalization' (Wouters, 1998) whereby the practices of everyday life are increasingly shaping the management of formal organizations.

A more critical approach to everyday life, which relates more closely to Habermas' (1984) account of the rationalization of the 'lifeworld', can be identified in the contribution of Cohen and Taylor (1976) who have argued that various 'escape attempts' such as hobbies, holidays and social relations have become increasingly subject to rational organization, as in the case of 'package tours' for instance. (Perhaps this process of rationalization is at its most glaringly obvious in the organization of package tours to the Caribbean resort of Hedonism, a destination dedicated to the cliched pursuit of 'sun, sand and sex'). Adopting a similarly critical approach, but focusing on the rationalizing impact of the 'enterprise' culture on the management of everyday life, Du Gay and Salaman (1992) have argued that everyday life has fallen prey to the 'totalizing' and 'individualizing' effects of the imperatives of economic rationality upon which the concept of an 'enterprising self' is based. According to Du Gay and Salaman, this means that all social relations come to be perceived as exchange relations in which all social subjects 'are reimagined as customers' (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992: 622). Hence, they argue that through the discourse of enterprise the distinctions between production and consumption, between the 'inside' and 'outside' of formal organizations and crucially, between 'work' and 'non-work' based identities are progressively blurred such that we all engage in a process of self-

management. They illustrate this argument with reference to the ways in which the language of enterprise has traversed its traditional limits and has 'colonized our interiors' (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992: 629). Hence, by living one's life as an 'entrepreneur of the self', modes of existence that might appear to be politically or philosophically opposed can be brought into alignment. This is perhaps the case, for instance, in the increasingly common practice of drawing up pre-nuptial contracts.

Another interesting example of the rational pursuit of the self as an entrepreneurial project case be cited in the use of dating advertisements (and also dating agencies) for the purpose of meeting a partner. Coupland (1996), for instance, has suggested that the use of such advertisements are an efficient and 'rational' response to the contemporary organization of work and everyday life which imposes a particular configuration of modern life circumstances - time-pressured, work-centred, mass mediated. As Jagger (1998: 796) also notes, 'in recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in self-advertising as a method of meetings partners'. Hence, following Coupland (1996) and Jagger (1998) it could be argued that those who use dating agencies and advertisements 'can be seen as rational consumers engaged in a process of constructing the self and the wanted partner as products in the dating market place' (Jagger, 1998: 798).

A similar approach is also adopted by Grey (1994) in his account of 'career' as a project of the self. Grey argues that the pursuit of a career, one which 'offers a vehicle for the self to become' (Grey, 1994: 481) entails the individual's whole life, including relations with friends, family and sexual partners, becoming 'an instrumental project which is to be managed and achieved'. Hence, the self-management both in and of everyday life constitutes 'a more productive and economical form of management control than disciplinary power, with its costs and unintended consequences, could ever be' (Grey, 1994: 494-5).

Providing the philosophical basis for many of the relatively recent critical approaches to the rationalization of everyday life, Habermas' analysis stresses that the lifeworld has become increasingly subject to bureaucratic administration. The 'life world', Habermas

suggests (in an apology for his inability to define it) can be understood as ‘that remarkable thing which dissolves and disappears before our eyes as soon as we try to take it up piece by piece’ (Dews, 1986: 109). For Habermas, the lifeworld is given form, repeatedly, in our ‘everyday’ acts of mutual understanding out of which society is constituted. The lifeworld is understood to reproduce itself through three principle functions: the propagation of cultural traditions, the integration of groups by norms and values, and the socialization of succeeding generations. In his diagnosis of the fate of the project of modernity, Habermas (1984) argues that the pathologies of modern society flow largely from the ‘colonization’ of the lifeworld, as it becomes increasingly driven by imperatives of money and power. The emancipatory task of critical theory, for Habermas, is thus to facilitate the lifeworld in regaining confidence in its own consensus-generating capacity in the face of colonization by systems such as the state and bureaucratic organizations. In his account of the processes whereby the logic of scientific-technological rationality came to penetrate the private realm of ‘everyday life’ Habermas (1985) also emphasizes, therefore, the unrealized potential in the project of modernity, particularly in terms of the pursuit of emancipatory imperatives.

Habermas’ (1985) defence of modernity assigns a particularly critical role to the concept of ‘communicative action’ in the everyday lifeworld. Grounding his theory of communicative action in an (early) Hegelian philosophy of inter-subjectivity (see Benhabib, 1992), Habermas argues that human subjectivity evolves socially in an environment (the lifeworld) with which individuals must come to terms and in which individuals must recognize themselves. The lifeworld, in this sense, is the basis of a self formed *dialogically*, in other words, through engaging and coming to terms with others. The basis of Habermas’ account is that becoming a subject is founded on ‘the intuition that a *telos* of mutual understanding is built into linguistic communication’ (Dews, 1986: 99).

Although the ontological assumptions upon which this ‘intuition’ is based are clearly not unproblematic (see Passerin D’Entreves and Benhabib, 1996; Langsdorf, 1997), this inter-subjective philosophy is particularly applicable to developing a critical understanding of

the management of sexuality and sexual relations in 'everyday life'. It is the 'colonization' of this inter-subjective process which, it will be argued throughout the remainder of this paper, underpins the management of sexuality and sexual relations in the contemporary era such that communication, to employ Habermas' terminology, is more monological than dialogical; that is, externally imposed on an arrested sexual subjectivity driven not by an erotic ethic of mutuality but more so, by the imperatives of a rationalized 'enterprise' culture (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992).

Modernist Sexuality, Fordism and The Taylorization of Sex

In her historical-sociological account of the development of ideas about sex and sexuality in modernity, Gail Hawkes (1996) argues that given the ascetic spirit of modernity, it is not surprising that sexuality has become a prime candidate for managerial attention. This, she argues, has come to be reflected not simply in the outright prohibition of sex, but through the reordering of ways of knowing, thinking and speaking about sexuality, of what is prioritized and marginalized in modernist sexual orthodoxy (see also Burrell, 1984). At the heart of what Hawkes terms 'modernist sexuality' are three basic organizing principles. Perhaps the most fundamental and enduring is a scientific association of sexuality with 'nature'. Conceived of as a biological essence, sexuality is understood as a natural, 'pre-social' ontology, classified as the property of individual subjects and residing in the biological constitution of the body. Second, and related to this, 'modernist sexuality' can be understood as being shaped by the emergence of sexual 'types' through an enduring convergence of behaviour and identity. Finally, modernist sexuality was (and remains, Hawkes argues) shaped by the primacy of (re)productive (hetero)sexuality. Thus, a persistent presence in the construction of healthy, moral and rational, 'modern' sexuality was the privileging of heterosexuality. As a consequence of these organizing principles which served to 'modernize' sexuality:

... those manifestations of desire which were deemed to have negative consequences for the maintenance of the patriarchal bourgeois hegemony - women's sexual

autonomy, same-sex desire, expressions of youthful sexuality and auto-eroticism - were marginalized and even outlawed

(Hawkes, 1996: 3).

In the process of 'modernization' sexuality became, therefore, increasingly subject both to systematic organization and also to scientific analysis. Indeed, sexology emerged, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in a period in which scientific approaches to the management and investigation of human behaviour were dominant. Many of the central tenets of sexology, of course, sat quite comfortably with earlier pre-modern religious ideas about sex being for procreation rather than pleasure. Yet sexology (founded as it was on a claim to the enlightening power of reason), also espoused a replacement of prejudice and fear with a series of 'truth' claims to knowledge of what is 'natural' and 'normal' in terms of sexuality (Jackson, 1987). Despite a strong shift away from the positivist influence of biology, medicine and sexology, towards a much greater emphasis on the social construction of sexuality from the 1960's onwards, the essentialist ontology of sexology has

left us with a legacy of sex as unavoidable, as given, *an uncontrollable urge needing to be managed*. The belief is that we need to have sex regularly, especially in the case of men, otherwise there will be a dangerous build up of desire. (Carabine, 1992: 25, emphasis added).

Hawkes (1996) in particular has argued that through a process of sexual 'modernization' and the subjection of sexuality to scientific discourses, modernity came to be characterized by a 'sexual mode of production' (Hawkes, 1996) according to which issues of efficiency and outcome came to the fore. Modernist regimes of sexual efficiency came to replace pre-modernist discourses of physical and moral danger, as the 'science' of sex offered a blueprint for the effective and efficient rationalization of the erotic (Hawkes, 1996). The fear of sexual danger came to be replaced by a fear of sexual dysfunction, manifest in

anxieties about performance and in the efficient deployment of resources, most obviously apparent in the highly modernist promotion of 'planned sex' and the family planning movement. In this respect, Jackson and Scott (1997) have argued that through the development and deployment of a new body of 'expert' knowledge in the form of sexology, sex was rationalized in line with Taylorist principles of scientific management, so that legitimate sex corresponded to Fordist production processes involving a set of repeatable and manageable tasks with a definable outcome: (re)production. In the management of family planning, for instance, we can identify the most basic features of Fordist production: clearly defined goals, a specialist division of labour, a system of rules and regulations, and so on (Hawkes, 1996).

A systemic modernist organization of sexuality should therefore be understood within the context of its socio-economic evolution. In particular, as Gramsci (1998) argues, sexuality and its management should be understood in relation to Fordist accumulation imperatives. Gramsci emphasizes the extent to which Fordism demanded a mode of regulation that extended well beyond the immediate site of production (into a colonization of critical analysis in the Ford Sociology Department, for instance), so that sexuality became sublimated to the interests of calculative rationality (Marcuse, 1956). Gramsci (1988) has highlighted the extent to which the Fordist regulation of sexuality and of sexual behaviour occurred in the formation of a civilized 'sexual habitus', what he refers to as 'a process of psycho-physical adaptation to specific conditions of work ... not something 'natural' or innate, but [which] has to be acquired' (Gramsci, 1988: 281). He argues that the formation of this sexual habitus was a necessary element in sustaining the mass production techniques of Fordism, which required that sexuality be mechanized and excluded from the sphere of work organizations. Just as the activities of workers in the work process must be shaped carefully towards a given end, so their appetites outside the workplace must reflect the prevailing ideology of ordered rational action: 'the truth is that a new type of man demanded by the rationalization of production and work cannot be developed until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it too has been rationalized' (Gramsci, 1988: 282). Gramsci suggests, therefore, that a distinctly Fordist sexuality was a necessary correlate of mass production, one which was characterized by 'a new sexual ethic'

(Gramsci, 1988: 282) of regulation and rationalization, of sexual asceticism, 'assimilated ... in the form of more or less permanent habits' (Gramsci, 1988: 288).

In sum, an important feature of the spirit of modern capitalism was a sexual asceticism (which was obviously not absolute in the sense associated with a monastic existence), but one which was mediated through rationality; a reordering or prioritizing of aspects of human behaviour (Burrell, 1984). Surrender to sexual desires was perceived as disorderly and irrational. This bourgeois sexual economy presented itself as the paragon of morality, characterized by a sexual ethos of thrift and discipline. Sexuality thus became designated as ripe for managerial intervention, as

... something not to be trusted and not to be left to its own devices, something to be mastered, subordinated so as to be readjusted to human needs. Something to be held in check, retrained, transferred from the state of shapelessness into form - by effort and by application of force. (Bauman, 1990: 165).

Sexual Postmodernization and The (Reflexive) Management of The Sexual Self

Relatively recent approaches to sexuality emphasize the extent to which a modernist ascetic ethic underpinning the management of what Gramsci terms 'Fordist sexuality' has given way to a postmodernist aesthetic ethic, according to which (modernist) values of thrift and self restraint, of saving oneself rather than 'spending', have given way to a slow yet consistent process of sexual post-modernization (Simon, 1996). Postmodern sexualities are seen to be characterized by a progressive disengagement of the modernist association of sexuality with reproduction (Hawkes, 1996). Postmodernist approaches also emphasize the proliferation of available sexual identities as 'life-style' choices and not as essential expressions of a sexual 'nature'. 'Sexual postmodernization' (Simon, 1996) is also understood in terms of a rejection of the science of sex, in favour of a performative ontology, based on process, paradox and play. A postmodern sexual ontology is seen to be 'far more rooted in the poetic than the physical or biological' (Simon, 1996: 148),

characterized by an intense pluralization, individuation and a multiplicity of choices. For Simon, sexuality is an aspect of social life which is increasingly multiple, fragmented, diffuse and contested, forged out of the contingent circumstances of choice, pluralism and complexity that ultimately link together in the creation of a sexual self (Giddens, 1992).

Where those of a postmodernist persuasion differ from a more critical understanding of this dissolution into sexual pluralism which focuses on the increasing scope for commercialization and commodification (Weeks, 1985), is that in the potential chaos of perpetual change postmodernists claim to identify enormous possibility. In the separation of sexuality from religion, from traditional familial structures, communities, and other 'repressive' aspects of everyday life such as restricted forms of communication, a space is seen to emerge for new kinds of sexualities, and thus, of sexual subjectivities. Postmodern sexualities are understood to be characterized by 'a de-naturalization of sex' (Simon, 1996: 30), by self-consciousness and reflexivity (Giddens, 1992), by the proliferation of a plurality of meanings, acts and recursive identities (Plummer, 1995), and by pastiche and an indeterminate blurring of boundaries (Gergen, 1991). A postmodern sexual ontology is also understood in terms of 'panic sex' (Kroker and Kroker, 1987), according to which sexual relations can be understood to provide timely relief from the kind of PMT that comes only once a millennia. Following the relatively recent proliferation of 'lifestyle' magazines offering a multiplicity of sexual alternatives the perception is that, as Plummer has put it (1996: xv), 'a supermarket of sexual possibilities pervades'.

Emphasizing this sexual proliferation as a defining feature of late-modernism, Giddens (1992: 1-2) argues that the gradual social and economic liberation and individualization of women, the demise of ideologies of romantic love and the separation of sexuality from reproduction have all been instrumental in promoting a new form of intimacy: the 'pure relationship'. Pure relationships presume 'equality in emotional give and take' (Giddens 1992: 58) and an 'opening out of the self as a precondition of active, confluent love' (Giddens, 1992: 62). In other words, the notion of the pure relationship is meant to represent a democratic form of intimacy which is supposedly typical of certain features of modernity, such as contractual relations, for instance. As Mellor and Shilling (1997: 181)

have noted, in Giddens' analysis 'pure relationships are entered into as the result of individual judgements in terms of a person's own life plans'. The pure relationship is shaped by what Giddens calls 'plastic sexuality'; that is, sexual pleasure severed from its integration with both reproduction and obligation. Sexual transience is seen as the guiding principle of the (self-) management of the pure relationship, plastic sexuality - the 'infinite plasticity of pleasure' to which Rose (1995) refers - and confluent love in the late modern era, in an analysis which is predicated on the view that intimacy is above all a matter of emotional communication in a context of erotic equality. Giddens (1992) argues that such intimate equality indeed characterizes the late-modern era, an era in which, he argues, 'the biological justification' for heterosexuality as 'normal' has lost its foothold. Giddens (1992) argues, in this respect, that late modernity has released sexuality from the confines of a single hegemony and replaced it with 'sexual pluralism', a sexual identity defined and structured by individual choice.

Giddens account resonates with the approach taken by Beck (1993) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 4), who emphasize that 'reflexive modernity' opens up a vast market for advice books, magazines, counselling and therapy on how to 'build, undo and reconstruct relationships, bodies, selves and sex lives'. Wouters (1998) argues similarly, in his detailed analysis of self-help manuals and women's magazines since the 1960's, that in the past there was a lust-dominated sexuality for men and a romantic love or relationship-dominated sexuality for women which has shifted, especially since the 1960's, so that notions of feminine passivity have been replaced by a higher expectation of active sexual pleasure. Wouters (1998) reminds us that, in this respect, sexuality in the contemporary era of 'informalization' requires more skilful and flexible emotional management than has been the case previously.

Seidman (1989: 295), who also champions the emergence of a postmodern sexual ethic 'as a domain of pleasure and self-expression ... erotic choice, experimentation and diversity', argues that critics of the liberating potential of sexuality have not grasped the shift in sexual ethics which has occurred in parallel with the shift towards a reflexive, postmodern

sexual ontology. This shift, he argues, is signified by a change from a morality centred on the sex act to one centred on the communicative context; in other words, whether the erotic exchange is consensual and reciprocal, involving mutual respect and responsibility. For Seidman, 'this involves a significant opening towards erotic pluralism and an ethic of tolerance' (Seidman, 1989: 299). In a similar vein to Giddens (1992), Seidman argues that the humanizing, anti-instrumental character of contemporary sex manuals signifies a discursive shift towards a libertarian sexual ethic, underpinned by a 'post-romantic sex ideology', an 'erotic pluralism' and a 'tolerance of non-procreative sexualities' (Giddens, 1992: 307-9).

Also focusing on the evolution of a post-romantic ideology, Angela McRobbie (1996: 172) argues that in contemporary lifestyle magazines repetitive (reflective) codes of romantic love are giving way to a more critical (self-reflexive) emphasis on sex and sexuality which, she argues, suggest a 'knowing' tone of parody grounded in a micro-politics of resistance. Throughout many of the contemporary 'lifestyle' magazines aimed specifically at women, terms such as 'slut', 'tramp' and 'slapper' all undergo ironic reversals and are made to re-signify (Butler, 1990), implying the evolution of what McRobbie (1996: 188) terms 'a knowing sexual subjectivity'. McRobbie argues that a limited range of images have given way to more 'choice' in terms of lifestyle and, especially, the self-management of sexuality. She argues, therefore, that contemporary 'lifestyle' magazines allow considerable scope for a reappraisal of the pleasures of femininity and masculinity to the extent that 'the poles of feminism and femininity no longer exist as fiercely opposed alternatives' (McRobbie, 1996: 175). McRobbie argues that sexual representations in lifestyle magazines now breach the boundaries of what, in the past, has been considered appropriate, particularly in terms of gendered sexuality. So prominent are these themes, she argues, that they overshadow the stylistic differences between magazines of vastly differing titles, 'creating a whole field of sex which is significant in its distance from the old world of boyfriends, orgasms, and living together' (McRobbie, 1996: 185). Taken together, these themes suggest to McRobbie the emergence of 'a new form of sexual subjectivity, based round knowledge and self-

reflexiveness ... in a social environment where the politics of sexuality - though by no means resolved - are at least part of everyday life' (McRobbie, 1996: 192). In short, as she puts it (1996: 193), 'the ironic space in magazine discourses offers possibilities for critical reflection'.

So, what McRobbie appears to identify in contemporary lifestyle magazines is a discourse which declares the death of sexual naivety, producing 'a space for great reflexivity and critique'. (McRobbie, 1996: 188). Does this new field of creative, self-reflexive and critical sexuality which McRobbie celebrates as potentially liberatory exist in the pages of so-called 'lifestyle' magazines? If so, how does it relate to a politics of emancipation? Does it simply signify a re-appropriation of sexuality as a way of recuperating potential critique if, as Foucault suggests, power is most effective where it is productive, generative and apparently generous, a danger of which McRobbie herself is ultimately only too aware.

Sexuality and Managerialism in Contemporary Cultural Resources

Gramsci (1971), Foucault (1977) and Bourdieu (1984) have all emphasized the hegemonic significance of 'experts' and 'cultural agents' - intermediaries who intervene into the relationship between culture and subjectivity - in colonizing potentially critical discourses and in practising cultural 'closure' as a result. In particular, Gramsci's (1988) analysis of Fordist sexuality clearly relates to his conception of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971): the willing assent of the masses engineered through 'everyday life' beliefs and practices. Rather than visible, traceable control by elite groups, the gatekeepers of hegemony (including, of course, Sociologists in the case of the Ford Sociology Department) are deemed to produce a variety of cultural forms that partly express and partly shape values, actions and meanings, thereby reproducing hidden forms of domination. The key site of hegemony, for Gramsci, is the myriad of everyday activities and experiences that culminate in 'common sense' assumptions, thus concealing or 'mystifying' the interests of dominant groups whose definitions of 'reality', norms and standards appear as natural and normal,

rather than as political and therefore contestable. This aspect of Gramsci's work is recalled by Foucault (1977) in his account of the ways in which 'experts' operate as controllers of both cognitive and normative discourses. Bourdieu (1984) also emphasizes the role played by cultural agents in shaping 'cultural capital'. His concept of 'capital' is particularly useful in terms of understanding the ways in which contemporary cultural resources such as lifestyle magazines relate to the management of what Gramsci (1988) referred to as a Fordist 'sexual habitus' and enables us to conceptualize investment in the self as the site of 'sexual capital'. The concept of sexual selves as investors in 'sexual capital', guided by the advice of 'experts', is particularly useful in enabling us to grasp, for instance, the extent to which as Denise Grady (1999: 1) observed in a recent article in the New York Times which focused on Viagra trials, 'disappointment in the bedroom, once considered part of life's normal ups and downs, has become the next frontier ... another enemy to be conquered'.

As Hochschild (1994: 2) has noted, like other commercially-based 'advice givers', the editorial collectives of lifestyle magazines and the authors of self-help books act as 'investment counsellors', recommending to readers of various types how much and in whom to 'invest'. Hochschild cites the role played by 'advice givers' as indicative of a more general trend towards the management of emotional, sexual, and social relations according to what, drawing on Weber, she refers to as a 'commercial spirit of intimate life'. She uses this term to refer not to the exchange of aspects of the self (time, space, embodiment, for instance) for money, but to refer to the cumulative impact of the cultural norms governing personal relationships that accompany advanced capitalism. Lifestyle magazines appear to contribute to the spread of this commercial spirit, at least in part, by linking their 'advice' on investment strategies to inspirational images and ideas (conveniently provided by advertisers in the form of increasingly popular 'advertisement articles' which not only entice readers to purchase particular products or services, but also 'advise' on their use).

Further, contemporary lifestyle magazines are filled with language more usually associated with the texts of management gurus such as Peters and Waterman (1982) and Ouchi (1981). Readers are invited to ensure that their sex lives as 'well planned', 'efficient' and 'effective', as the following extracts indicate: 'train yourself for really ambitious sex' (Cosmopolitan, January 1997); 'sex, like a successful retail business, depends largely on location' (Men's Health, November 1996); 'great sex - 20 ways to perfect your style' (Company, August 1995); 'lessons in love - your 15 minute foreplay schedule' (Men's Health, August 1998); 'how to take a woman to orgasm - every time' (Men's Health, November 1996); 'how to deliver in the bedroom' (Men's Health, March 1998); 'how to achieve world class love-making' (Cosmopolitan, April 1997); 'get more sex - how to boost your investment in your love life' (Men's Health, June 1996) and, of course, 'sex - the best investment you'll ever make' (Men's Health, November 1996). In assessing potential return on investment in 'sexual capital', Men's Health (April 1999) invites its reader to test their sexual knowledge on the 'Orgazmatron' (a self-assessment questionnaire which quantifies levels of sexual 'performance'). One particularly noteworthy 'investment tip' offered by Men's Health (June 1996) is to 'start a new relationship with a new pack of condoms'. Well worth the (emotional and financial) investment, they claim.

A strong theme, particularly in Men's Health and in Cosmopolitan, is the need to reconcile the demands of work with investment in 'sexual capital': 'it's hard to get down to it when you're still casting an eye over the year-end results at 10pm. We explain how to streamline your love life' (Men's Health, June 1996). (Note: it is the love life and not the working day which gets the 'streamlining' treatment). On a slightly more reflexive note, Men's Health (June, 1996: 89) has recently asked its readers

why is it that recent surveys seem to indicate that people have far less sex than the average person might imagine? Has sexual mystique flown out of the bedroom window leaving sex much less sexy that it once was? Or could it be that the 90's

lifestyle leaves little room for passion?. How do we make our lives more sex friendly? Read on.

There is certainly no shortage of advice on how to manage this tension effectively and efficiently: 'a combination of work, stress, city living and kids can leave little room for hanky-panky ... ways to make your love life more sex friendly' (Men's Health, June 1996); 'sex, next Wednesday, guaranteed - 50 ways to make yourself (instantly) more attractive' (Men's Health, November 1996); '7 ways to guarantee more sex' (Men's Health, January/February 1998); '50 ways to tell if you're onto something special in the sack'(Elle, September 1998); 'how to have the sexiest, most relaxing and most productive hour of your life' (Men's Health, November 1998); '10 minutes to better sex' (New Woman, September 1996) and surely the most efficiency-driven of all? 'Right first time sex - 20 ways to stop wasting time' (Men's Health, September 1997). In a similar tone, Men's Health (June 1996) also prescribes for the couple who's life is 'so frantic they rarely meet' that they 'get out the Filofaxes at the beginning of each month and arrange mutually convenient dates that take priority over everything'. Similarly, Marie Claire (April 1998) emphasizes the importance of 'appreciation in between the pressure' of managing the tensions between work and a sex life: 'it shouldn't be too time-consuming to write a thoughtful note or cook a nice meal for two - such demonstrations can all contribute to the sex-friendly ethos to which we all aspire'. Also in Cosmopolitan (July 1998): 'a timetable too full to include sensual delights must be reviewed as a matter of urgency'. In sum, in managing a great sex life, 'good planning is essential' (Men's Health, June 1996).

Throughout lifestyle magazines, particularly Men's Health, there is a drum beat of performance anxiety, however: 'great sex [it is never just 'good'] - be (much) better than the average man' (Men's Health, May 1996). 'Be a Professor of Sex - are you performing at your peak?' (Men's Health, July/August 1997). Failed sexuality (or 'bad sex' to use the correct magazine terminology) is addressed (as a matter of urgency) in the language of self-improvement and entrepreneurialism, as the following extracts suggest: 'what

constitutes bad sex? What it is and how to avoid it' (Men's Health, March 1996); 'compared to bad sex, death and taxes are a doddle' (Elle, August 1998); '10 ways to conquer impotence' (Men's Health, September 1996) and, of course, 'fast, highly effective methods of preventing premature ejaculation' (Men's Health, March 1997) features prominently as a theme in many issues of Men's Health. Such magazines claim that techniques involving the management of the sexual self can come to the rescue of any unfortunate individual who is 'counselled' in a way which assumes a fundamentally shared commitment to dominant discourses on sexuality (namely, the rational pursuit of 'good sex').

By apparently pushing back the limits of what can and can't be discussed, the producers of contemporary sexual discourses are, in many ways, able to present themselves as radical sexual pioneers promising, for instance, '42 brand new sex tips that even Bill Clinton won't have heard of' (Men's Health, November 1998), when in fact they continue to be limiting and controlling. In particular, magazines such as *New Woman* and *Cosmopolitan* borrow notoriously from feminist discourse, implying to their readership a genuine (emancipatory rather than simply commercial) commitment to the equal (sexual) worth of men and women. Such 'glossy' lifestyle magazines as these (usually referred to as 'women's magazines' or more colloquially as 'slag mags', but which also attract an increasingly large male readership) seem to proceed from the belief that women's sexual needs are not being met. What self-proclaimed 'feminist' lifestyle magazines and advice books appropriate from feminism, however, are simply the sound bites and buzz-words. Hence, rather than an emancipatory ethic of mutuality, contemporary sexual relations appear to be managed (at least discursively) according to a 'paradigm of performance' which demands that women as well as men share in the performance anxieties once reserved for men alone. Within this paradigm, as Hochschild (1994: 15) puts it, 'the spirit of commercialism ... instrumentalizes our idea of love and commercializes it'. Lifestyle magazines and self-help books certainly propose that sex should play a more central role than it has in the lives of women especially, and that women should rid themselves of ideas about the importance of asceticism. However, it seems that within the discourses of

enterprise which guide individuals in managing the sexual 'career of the self' (Grey, 1994), potentially critical and emancipatory discourses such as feminism are 'colonized'; that is, they are incorporated into those cultural resources which are currently particularly influential in guiding the commercialized management of everyday life.

Critical Management Studies and Sexuality in Everyday Life

On this basis, it could be argued that those currently celebrating the advent of the 'informalization' (Wouters, 1998) of sexuality and its management are perhaps peaking rather too soon, and in so doing, appear to ignore the potentially de-humanizing effects of an instrumentalized hedonistic ethic which is driven more by performance imperatives than a genuine ethic of erotic pluralism and mutuality. In particular, such approaches to everyday life as those which were considered at the beginning of this paper seem to overlook the arresting affects of our 'over-investment' (Foucault, 1979) in sexuality which, as Foucault puts it, burdens sexuality with new expectations. In this context, far from being an aspect of pleasure and play, sexuality assumes responsibility for securing our sense of self, as 'good sex' becomes an important marker of 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984); that is, of maintaining a privileged position in a social hierarchy of self and others.

Hence, in the current context of the colonization of sexuality by managerial discourses, the freedom to pursue our sense of self through genuinely inter-subjective, erotic relations devoid of performance imperatives and processes of rationalization, is largely denied to us. The idea that western societies have undergone a process of sexual postmodernization operates, therefore, in a narrow historical framework which deflects attention away from continuities such as women's continued familial dependence, from their exploitation as sexualized, low paid workers; from intensifying regimes of bodily appropriation; from the continued primacy of heterosexuality and also, as has been argued here, from a managerial colonization of sexual relations. Such themes can be identified clearly in contemporary cultural discourses on sexuality, particularly in 'lifestyle' magazines.

The aggregate effect of this managerial colonization of sexuality, it could be argued, has been entirely commensurate with the atomisation of the individual and not, as Giddens (1992) suggests is the case, with the evolution of 'erotic equality' and emotional communication in a process of sexual postmodernization. As Mestrovic (1997) in particular has argued, ways of escape have been rationalized and McDonalized, leaving little room for an 'authentic' or irrational experience of everyday life. Even sexuality appears, at least discursively, to have lost its spontaneous connection with eroticism through the contemporary prioritisation of the reflexive (cognitive and individualized) project of the self over and above embodied sensuality and the pursuit of an erotic fusion of selves based upon a conscious refusal to limit ourselves within our individuality (Bataille, 1962). As Mellor and Shilling (1997) have put it, the extension of a formal rationality to aspects of everyday life which modernity designated as 'irrational' appears to have contributed significantly to a proliferation of banal associations in contemporary life. So where does this leave us, and what role can be identified here for Critical Management Studies?

Many of the contributions to CMS which draw in particular on Habermas' account of the colonization of the lifeworld (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992) can assist in the development of a critique of the managerial discourses to which, as has been argued throughout this paper, contemporary sexualities are currently subject. Such an approach emphasizes the need to develop 'an organization science capable of changing organizational processes ... to minimize the 'objectification' of organizational actors' (Steffy and Grimes, 1986: 326). This approach to a critical analysis of management techniques and imperatives is consistent with Habermas' emphasis on the need to unify theory, practice and praxis in order to liberate social subjectivity. When, in the relationship between organization theory and practice, communicative action is displaced by purposive-rational action, based upon an instrumental-technical application of theory to practice, critique is systematically withdrawn (as has been argued here is the case in contemporary cultural discourses on the management of sexuality, for instance). In the words of Habermas, theory is then reduced to 'techne', or to instrumental activity which results in the 'alienation' of the subject from

the process of 'becoming'. From this perspective, the management of sexuality in everyday life can be understood as a site of 'strategic mediation' (Hancock and Tyler, 1997) through which the inter-subjective process of 'becoming' is arrested. In terms of the theoretical evolution of CMS and the application of its thematic concerns outlined above, the Hegelian philosophy of inter-subjectivity on which Habermasian contemporary critical theory is based can perhaps be seen as a useful analytical framework within which to understand the logic of contemporary managerial projects both within and outwith (but driven by the imperatives of) work organizations. Within this framework, the process of becoming a subject in contemporary work organizations can be understood to be one in which the process is *more reflective* of organizationally-prescribed and externally imposed norms and values than *self-reflexive*. This is suggested, for instance, in the normative promotion of new forms of work organization in Tom Peters' (1997) book 'Circle of Innovation' in which loyalty to a particular organization is 'out' (as are formal organizations themselves) and self-management of the relationship between work and everyday life is 'in' through 'the creation - and maintenance - of a BRAND CALLED YOU' (Peters, 1997: 6). (In terms of sexual relations, the concept of 'branding' - suggesting, as it does, ownership of a commodity - is interesting in this respect, as it resonates with cultural references to places where people might seek out potential sexual partners as 'cattle markets').

As Gillian Rose (1995: 63) has remarked 'love-making is never simply pleasure'. Rather, eroticism ideally embodies the capacity to reject (albeit temporarily) the linear purposiveness of a rationally-ordered social life (of 'a brand called you'). As Bataille (1962: 24) puts it, 'the unity of the domain of eroticism opens to us through a conscious refusal to limit ourselves within our individual personalities'. Of course, erotic relations are made up of a cluster of rules and role expectations (of mutuality, for instance), yet these are formulated and enacted according to a negotiated communicative eroticism, to borrow from Habermasian terminology, which places an emphasis on dialogicality and self-entrustment. Eroticness is a process of self-creation and a space within which the mundane existence of everyday life can indeed be escaped from, yet which, in my view at

least, has become increasingly subject to external mediation which hinders this inter-subjective experience of mutual escape. So-called sexual postmodernism and the 'informalization' of everyday life imply, as Bauman (1998: 21) emphasizes, a burden of liberation according to which greater freedom of choice turns out to be yet another pressure to perform, requiring a 'controlled de-control' not dissimilar to that which characterizes the tempo of the 'informal' aspects of contemporary workplace participation. This suggests, therefore, a need to think (once again) more critically about the management of sexuality in everyday life than postmodernism and a celebration of 'plastic sexuality' (Giddens, 1992) allows us to and to focus on the need, as Bataille (1962: 241) puts it, 'to find a place for the disorders of love-making in an orderly pattern covering the whole of human life'.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper it has been argued that the incorporation of management discourses and techniques into contemporary sexuality and sexual relations appears to erode the exalted and 'special' status of sex, reducing it to yet another rhetorical aspect of the 'reflexive project of self' (Giddens, 1992). Erotic sex, as Rose put it, is clearly about much more than just pleasure: it is a way in which individuals can express themselves and can find an inter-subjective release from the fragmenting and alienating outcomes of the contemporary organization of work (Marcuse, 1956). However, through the incorporation of managerial imperatives, discourses and techniques into those cultural resources which guide the reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1992), sexuality has also become yet another aspect of everyday life in which the work ethic reigns supreme. In other words, it seems that the idea of 'performance' has intruded into the most intimate, inter-subjective aspect of our lives. We are encouraged to talk freely about sexuality, but with this apparent openness has come a corresponding performance imperative which suppresses the eroticism of sex. A proliferation of 'lifestyle' magazines, aimed at both men and women, instruct us that it is no longer enough to be 'doing it'; we should be 'managing it', 'working at it', 'improving it' and so on. In the post-Fordist sexual era of adaptability,

versatility and reskilling, therefore, the continued proliferation of expert knowledges makes it difficult on the one hand, for us to be the authors of our own sexual scripts and, on the other hand, to engage in the ethic of mutuality within which erotic sex is embedded, so that 'in the place of the unselfconsciousness of mutual love, ... a hateful self-regard is unleashed' (Rose, 1995: 67). The danger appears to be that we confuse the unleashing of this hateful self-regard with sexual emancipation and end up merely pursuing yet another aspect of the work ethic disguised as hedonism.

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