

Scally, Dorothy Butler (2000) *Personal sexual story: a radical vehicle for transformative learning in adult education*. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5184/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

**PERSONAL SEXUAL STORY:  
A RADICAL VEHICLE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE  
LEARNING IN ADULT EDUCATION**

**by**

**Dorothy Butler Scally**

**submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
to the  
University of Glasgow**

**March 2000**

**Department of Adult and Continuing Education  
Faculty of Education**

**© Dorothy Butler Scally, 2000**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies personal sexuality as a significant and crucial site for transformative adult learning. Personal sexuality is shown to be an important adult problematic vital for individual and social transformation. Adult education of the radical/transformational tradition professes to respond to adult learning needs through a process of liberative critical reflection. However, the thesis shows that personal sexuality is an adult learning domain which, in fact, is largely overlooked both in theory and in practice by adult education.

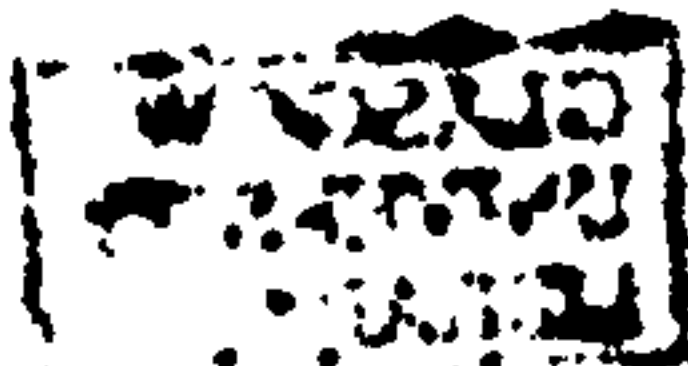
The study is cross-disciplinary. Its theoretical framework is drawn from theories of transformative learning in adult education together with psychological, sociological and feminist theories of personal development and social relations.

Based on original, qualitative case study fieldwork, the findings from the personal sexual stories of seventy six participants reveal a hitherto secret and complex swathe of interconnecting learning strands. These strands are shown to operate throughout different life transitions and extend to encompass the next generation and the wider community. The issue of communicative competence in relation to personal sexuality emerges as central to participants' relational concerns, learning agendas, intergenerational educational roles, work roles and to their capacities for transformative action.

Major themes in childhood and adolescent learning reveal patterns of sexual repression and oppression as *de facto* key constituents in the psycho-cultural construction of personal sexual identity. These themes show that the culture of sexual silence, initiated in childhood learning, is maintained in adult relationships of intimacy and contributes to further embedding oppressive gender relations in the socio-cultural fabric to the detriment of both sexes and of society. Major themes of adult sexual experience are identified as relating to a) self-image and sexual self-esteem; b) the challenges of intimate partnerships and changes in relationships; c) parenting and the inter-generational tendency to reproduce personal sexual learning.

The thesis makes the case that personal sexuality is an area of subjugated knowledge and a radical vehicle for personal development and social transformation; that personal sexual stories provide significant biographical opportunities for the exercise of adult education's transformative role in making visible hidden and unquestioned assumptions oppressive to women and men and society. The process by which this is achieved is delineated through positioning personal sexual story as a personal and political research project in the adult education learning environment.

While not resolving issues of debate between liberal/humanistic and social constructivist theories of sexuality, the development of the argument moves progressively to demonstrate how society, in particular through discursive practices, engages in the construction of sexuality at the deepest levels of the psyche and, thereby, shows the limitations of a unidimensional individualistic approach in addressing the personal sexual oppressions revealed in the empirical research.



The distinctive outcome of the research is that it identifies transformative adult education as an effective intervention at both a theoretical and a practical level in relation to personal sexuality, thereby transcending without necessarily resolving academic debates.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a story about stories. Stories need spaces for their telling. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow, and to the Centre for Adult and Community Education, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, for giving me space for the story to be told.

I am profoundly thankful to Maria Slowey, Professor of Adult and Continuing Education, who welcomed me to Glasgow and to its pleasures both within and without the University. Maria's personal and academic hospitality enabled me experience the best of two worlds: to feel at home and abroad at the same time. I am also thankful to the staff members in the Department who consistently communicated an interest and belief in the project. Alison Neave ensured that the life-line 'between here and there' stayed connected at all times. My warmest thanks to her for the encouragement, humour and unfailingly positive response to any and all queries and anxieties. I am grateful and honoured, also, for the Paulo Freire studentship awarded by the University.

I join the ranks of the many who feel indebted to Liam Carey for his commitment to liberating knowledge through liberating the learner. As one of those learners, I am deeply grateful to Liam for his transformative intervention.

Phil McCarthy and Maura Geoghegan willingly agreed to facilitate a personal development course in order to contribute to the research. I am most appreciative of their contribution and of their interest, enthusiasm and belief in the project.

Liz Ryan-Larragy built a library to house the vast numbers of books she kindly loaned me and which made an immense contribution to the work; Valerie Judge introduced me to the best ciabatta sandwich in town while teaching me the intricacies of a relational database; my sincere thanks to both.

I am profoundly good-fortuned in having the experience of both a local and a global supervisor! Anne Ryan, far above and beyond any call of duty, acted with extraordinary beneficence as my 'on-site' supervisor in Ireland. With the utmost encouragement and trust, Anne and Maria Slowey unfailingly affirmed the project, mercilessly challenged my horizons, unstintingly clarified problems and generously celebrated milestones. Heartfelt thanks to two remarkable friends.

I am forever in debt to the women and men who, with courage, generosity and trust, told their stories for this study so that more stories could be told. Our work together has forged affections and connections which will endure. It is a privilege to be part of their histories as they are of mine.

My family weathered a demanding climate during this research. Jean's 'mothering' of her mother during the latter days of writing was very much welcomed. John's expertise in ordering 'chinese' enabled greater concentration on producing the intellectual soup. There is no going back, John! My very particular thanks to William, the card up my sleeve for the final read - and for the fruitful sojourn in the National Library!

My special thanks to Maurice Reidy, mentor and friend, who helped to make this road by walking every step of the way and to whom this thesis is dedicated.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<b>PERSONAL SEXUALITY: A TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PROJECT FOR ADULT EDUCATION</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction to the research	1
Research questions	6
Research process and content	7
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
<b>TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING FOR ADULT SEXUALITY: SETTING A CONTEXT</b>	<b>11</b>
Transformative learning for adult personal development	16
Personal sexuality: a personal developmental project	30
Cultural context of research participants' sexual learning	48
Transformative learning and adult <i>sexual</i> development	55
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
<b>ENABLING SPEECH: FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>60</b>
Choosing a qualitative methodological approach	61
The role of the researcher in this study	66
Research participants: an overview	72
Contracting for participant collaboration	75
Composition of research participant study groups	76
Gathering data: 'methodological keys' for data access	87
<i>Personal development course in sexuality</i>	89
<i>Questionnaires 1 &amp; 2</i>	91
<i>Journals</i>	94
<i>Participant evaluations of personal development in sexuality as adult education provision</i>	96
<i>Interviews</i>	96
Management of Data	101
Evaluation of research design	104

<b>CHAPTERS FOUR, FIVE AND SIX</b>	
<b>SEXUALITY AND THE CULTURE OF SILENCE: A THEMATIC OVERVIEW</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
<b>LEARNING TO BE SILENT: SEXUAL LEARNING IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE</b>	<b>109</b>
Parental silence in childhood sexual learning	109
Puberty: gendered sexual scripting and separation of the sexes	121
Child sexual abuse	146
Sexual learning in childhood and adolescence: summary of findings	167
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	
<b>SUBJUGATED AND SEPARATED BY SILENCE: ADULTHOOD AND PERSONAL SEXUALITY</b>	<b>170</b>
Self-image and sexual self-esteem in adulthood	177
Self-image and sexual self-esteem in adulthood: summary of findings	201
Partnership and intimacy: challenge and change in intimate relationships	203
Partnership and intimacy: summary of findings	218
Sexuality and fertility	220
Sexuality and fertility: summary of findings	249
Parenting: the intergenerational cycle of sexual learning	251
Parenting: the intergenerational cycle of sexual learning: summary of findings	268
Adulthood and Sexuality: summary of findings	272
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	
<b>BREAKING THE SILENCE: THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES</b>	<b>275</b>
The centrality of sexuality to the person and to society	277
The relevance of adult education in personal sexuality for work	290
The appropriateness of the adult education environment for the topic of personal sexuality	294
The relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality	307
Perspectives on the relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality: professional adult educators	315
Perspectives on the relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality: professional psychotherapists	329
The potential role of adult education for personal sexual development: summary of findings	342



**CHAPTER SEVEN**

**OVERCOMING SILENCE: PERSONAL SEXUAL STORY: A VEHICLE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING** 345

**Personal story in transformative adult education and linkages with personal sexual story** 346

**Personal *sexual* story: a transformative learning project in adult education** 365

**Personal *sexual* story: a critical research project in transformative learning** 377

**Personal *sexual* story in transformative adult education: a potential catalyst for social change** 386

**APPENDICES** 389

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** 470

**LIST OF TABLES**

<b>TABLE</b>	<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>TABLE 1</b>	<b>Overview of groups of case study participants</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>TABLE 2</b>	<b>Study group 1</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>TABLE 3</b>	<b>Study group 2</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>TABLE 4</b>	<b>Study group 3</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>TABLE 5</b>	<b>Study group 4</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>TABLE 6</b>	<b>Study group 5</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>TABLE 7</b>	<b>Study group 6</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>TABLE 8</b>	<b>Study group 7</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>TABLE 9</b>	<b>Study group 8</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>TABLE 10</b>	<b>Personal sexual story: a transformative learning process in adult education</b>	<b>378</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

<b>FIGURE</b>	<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>FIGURE 1</b>	<b>Methodological triangulation</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>FIGURE 2</b>	<b>Researcher’s interactive role in data acquisition and interpretation</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>FIGURE 3</b>	<b>Interdisciplinary engagement in transformative learning through personal sexual story</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>FIGURE 4</b>	<b>Fieldwork Methodology</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>FIGURE 5</b>	<b>The transformational dynamic between personal and political spheres through adult education in personal sexuality</b>	<b>351</b>
<b>FIGURE 6</b>	<b>Personal sexual story in adult education: a dialectical learning spiral</b>	<b>374</b>



## LIST OF APPENDICES

<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Profile of case study participants</b>	<b>389</b>
<b>Appendix A<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Research participants' occupations</b>	<b>394</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Personal development course in sexuality:outline</b>	<b>395</b>
<b>Appendix B<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Time schedules for personal development courses in sexuality</b>	<b>396</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Questionnaires 1 &amp; 2: Groups 1 &amp; 2</b>	<b>397</b>
<b>Appendix C<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Questionnaires 1 &amp; 2: Groups 3, 4, 5</b>	<b>414</b>
<b>Appendix C<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Questionnaires 1 &amp; 2: Group 6</b>	<b>428</b>
<b>Appendix C<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Questionnaires 1 &amp; 2: Group 7</b>	<b>440</b>
<b>Appendix C<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Questionnaires 1 &amp; 2: Group 8</b>	<b>453</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>Interview schedule: participants</b>	<b>466</b>
<b>Appendix E</b>	<b>Interview schedule: adult educators</b>	<b>468</b>
<b>Appendix F</b>	<b>Interview schedule: psychotherapists</b>	<b>469</b>

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **PERSONAL SEXUALITY: A TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PROJECT FOR ADULT EDUCATION**

### **Introduction to the research**

This research focuses on personal sexuality as an adult problematic which demands to be addressed in transformative adult education. It interrogates the topic as an adult learning task encountered by the generality of people and, as such, is distinguished from individual psychotherapeutic problems requiring professional psychotherapeutic remedial responses. In the context of this research, the emphasis shifts from a view of personal sexuality as either functional or dysfunctional to a view of personal sexuality as a developmental, reflexive learning project situated in a historical context of culture and society.<sup>1</sup>

The research is an exploration of the role of transformative learning in adult education in relation to what Foucault (1978) and Giddens (1991, 1992) describe as a sequestered dimension of human experience, that is, personal sexuality. By personal sexuality is meant the biological, gendered and enculturated experiences and expressions of being a woman or a man.<sup>2</sup> By transformative learning in adult education is meant the critically reflective process on individual and social experience

---

<sup>1</sup> The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, 1995-1998, offer a specific cultural context for the fieldwork. This is beginning to change somewhat due to increasing inward migration of people from other cultures.

<sup>2</sup> Personal sexuality includes the affective, erotic and generative energies, understandings, experiences and expressions of self which are central to inter-personal and social relationships. In the context of this study, 'personal sexuality' acts as an inclusive term incorporating personal sexual and gender experience.



leading to wider, more open, just, inclusive and differentiating perspectives, and the impetus to act for personal and social change (Mezirow, 1996).

The study is the outcome of an extended period of reflection and questioning, precipitated by working with women and men in relation to their experiences of sexuality and intimate relationships and to their educational roles as adults and as parents in this regard. As an adult education practitioner and a trainer of marriage and educational counsellors, it became evident to this researcher that personal sexuality was a significant dimension of life-experience largely unaddressed in the ordinary processes of adult learning.

Initially, the insights gained and the difficulties encountered in designing and implementing training programmes for counsellors in sexuality and related issues such as family planning and parenting led to a more general critical questioning about personal sexual experience and its effects on personal development and intimate relationships. A series of questions emerged. These queried the processes of sexual learning, the role of pre-adult learning for adult sexual experience, adult learning needs in relation to adult intimate relationships, and the learning interventions, if any, in adulthood, helpful to such relationships. For example, amongst the people prompting the questioning, difficulties in constructive communication on personal issues of intimacy, or on physical and emotional sexual experiences, or arising from hegemonic assumptions about sexual partnership, were prevalent. This practical experience led to the hypothesis that such difficulties might be problematic for a wider constituency. An exploration of this hypothesis seemed justified. While personal sexuality may be an issue for therapeutic intervention in specific situations, it is important to register here that this study is approached from an adult educational perspective.

Psychoanalytic theory and developmental psychology indicated the validity of engaging with the hypothesis. Psychological conceptual frameworks make a vital theoretical contribution to the understanding of the intra-psychical and interpersonal developmental tasks in the course of a life. In addition, they explain the implications for people where these tasks are not adequately accomplished ((Freud, 1977; Erikson,

1965; Gould, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978, 1990). However, the practical issue of women and men's own engagement in addressing developmental concerns related to their personal sexuality, and their capacity to develop, or re-develop, more holistic enabling responses, where appropriate, still remained an issue. Furthermore, as human sexuality is central to the functioning of society, any exploration of personal sexual development implicitly carries an onus to extend the questions to include an exploration of relations between the individual psyche and the actual structural contexts in which the psyche is embedded.

Sociological discourses confirmed the importance of the socio-cultural contexts in considering personal sexual experience. These discourses indicated the validity of hypothesising that personal sexuality, as an adult problematic, is a particular site of socio-cultural construction and control in which a generality of women, men and children interact. Such discourses demonstrate how individual personal experience of sexuality is situated in and shaped by particular socio-cultural contexts and by the power relations within these contexts. These discourses draw attention to the potential for resistance against oppressive constraints within the movements and counter-movements of power relations (Foucault, 1978; Giddens, 1992). Their theoretical frameworks may be less successful in the absence of a practice for engaging with the particularities of one's own adult sexual developmental experiences.

Radical feminist theories of sexuality reflected closely some of the experiential realities expressed by the women and men in learning groups facilitated by the researcher prior to this current study. Sexuality is not only a central dimension of human development and personal identity but is also the central site for gender oppression, viewed by a number of radical feminist theorists as the most significant and comprehensive form of all oppression (Millett, 1977; Rich, 1976; Firestone, 1970; Brownmiller, 1976). Radical feminist theories on sexuality and reproduction constitute powerful arguments for women's struggle against patriarchal relations. However, as Ryan (1997b) argues, a tendency within radical feminist theorisation towards an essentialist and universalistic, ahistoric polarisation of women and men's positions constitutes a potential inhibition to an adequate theorisation encompassing the possibility of change.



As a method for further exploring these issues, an experimental personal development course in sexuality, designed and facilitated by this researcher, was offered to a number of community based rural and suburban women's groups. Participant evaluations from these courses confirmed that, for a majority of the members of those groups, personal sexuality constituted a significant site of personal and interpersonal repression and oppression. Furthermore, it was clear that the course participants had not been previously offered an opportunity to engage with addressing these situations in a systematic manner, nor did they feel competent to do so prior to their attendance on the course.

Contemporaneously with initiating the courses outlined above, exposure to Paulo Freire's (1972) thinking and to his concept of the human being as a subject rather than an object of history stimulated a new learning process by this researcher which resulted in an exploration of the field of transformative learning in adult education. This process drew attention to the limitations of a purely humanistic, psychology based learning intervention in personal development enterprises while it affirmed the interpretative value of humanistic psychology for adult developmental learning. It broadened the perspective on such interventions to include a recognition of the structural and political dimensions of human experience. It revealed the potential within personal development in adult education for a more widely liberative and holistic learning than achievable through a solely humanistic psychologically or structurally based approach. Subsequently, a radical post-structural perspective in transformative adult education on personal development (Ryan, 1997b) offered an empathic contribution to a conceptual framework in which women and men, together, could participate in a democratic learning discourse on personal sexuality.

As emphasised above, the researcher's perspective is an educational one. It is rooted in the belief that women and men are life-long learners; that, within the conditions and conditionings of culture and circumstance, choices can be made to live within value parameters of co-operation, equity and friendship; that such a choosing could be a continuous process; it is enabled and confirmed whenever an option towards

inclusivity, democracy, justice, and forgiveness is taken individually or collectively. These options are facilitated by transformative learning in adult education.

Initial courses on personal sexuality raised questions about the relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal learning needs. The issue was whether sexual development could be significantly enhanced by the intervention of transformative learning in adult education, and whether this could be of value for social transformation. The security of a safe, facilitated learning environment, the support and challenge of shared learning in groups, and the structure of courses which maintains a focus on the topic (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991) were among the features of transformative adult education courses commending them for addressing the issue of personal sexuality. This participative learning dynamic, together with the interaction between experience and theory and the particular and the general, in such a learning environment, appeared to have potential for discovering wider and more inclusive understandings of personal sexual experience and its positionings in context and culture. Furthermore, it held out the possibility to participants of moving beyond insight and understanding towards initiating liberative change.

Participant evaluations of the personal development courses suggested an analogy between personal sexuality and literacy. Transformative adult education identified and responded to literacy needs, and continues to do so, with adult literacy programmes. At the same time, transformative adult education critiques the structures and values in education and society which facilitate the emergence into adulthood of a significant number of women and men without literacy skills. A majority of course participants expressed similar feelings to those attendant on people who are illiterate, that is, feelings of shame, humiliation and inferiority, as well as the continued practice of strategies of deception, in relation to their personal sexuality. Analogously, hegemonic assumptions about what could be called 'personal sexual literacy' in adulthood prevented the expression of learning needs about intimacy for fear of being found personally inadequate.



As a final development in the gestation of this current research, a case study with a group of sixteen women confirmed that a learning intervention in a transformative adult education environment could provide the impetus to act with greater autonomy in addressing falsely inhibiting sexual learning experiences from childhood, and to challenge intra- and inter-personal and socio-cultural repressive and oppressive assumptions and behaviours in relationships of intimacy. In other words, the participants in this case study judged their learning on the course to be the kind of ‘really useful knowledge’ that enabled them to translate insight into action, albeit on an individual basis, in that which Thompson (1996:21) describes as “*the cracks of superstructures*”.

### **Research questions**

All of the foregoing has generated the research questions of this study which are as follows:

To what extent has transformative learning in adult education a significant role to play in personal sexual development that facilitates women and men in becoming democratic subjects of their sexual histories and agents for social change?

A corollary to this question is can adult education be transformative if it does not recognise personal sexual experience as a location for learning which is central for individual and socio-cultural transformation and does not respond to it in its policies and practices?

These questions set out to explore, from an adult education perspective, a topic which is central to human experience and personal development and to the construction of relationships and culture (Foucault, 1978; Giddens, 1992).

Positioning personal sexuality in this way allows for an exploration of the topic which will make visible a gap between the remedial/therapeutic world and the educational



world and into which subjugated knowledges and learning needs crucial to individual and communal well-being will fall.

In order to address the research questions, the following hypotheses will be explored:

- a) individuals have learning needs relating to their personal sexual well-being which can only be met in adulthood irrespective of the quality of their pre-adult learning;
- b) personal sexuality is a developmental process with changing needs throughout the life-course the addressing of which, in adulthood, is central to the well-being of the individual and of society;
- c) the provision of a systematic approach to shared learning on personal sexuality in a facilitated environment is an important adult educational contribution to the individual and to society.

An exploration of the research questions and ensuing hypotheses is important because personal sexual experience is a central site for the development of values of equality, justice, democracy and, ultimately, human friendship. The social realisation of these values underpins the aims and goals of transformative learning in adult education.

### **Research process and content**

Because this is an exploratory study, and one which seeks to make visible that which may be occluded, a creative but realistic engagement with the literature in Chapter Two offers a context from which the fieldwork is initiated and to which it returns throughout the course of the study. The context consists of an intersection or interaction of concepts drawn from psychological, sociological, feminist and transformative adult education theories, as indicated earlier. This interactive inquiry is brokered to yield a multi-disciplined set of interpretative lenses with which to read research participants' histories.

Participant data and analysis in Chapters Four, Five and Six lead to a theoretical consideration of the actual process by which the topic was explored; that is, to the role of biography in transformative learning in adult education and its potential application for personal sexual development. This is substantially taken up and developed in Chapter Seven.

Having conceptually contextualised the research questions in Chapter Two, in Chapter Three, the way in which the methodology for implementing the research was developed is demonstrated. The central issue addressed in this chapter is how qualitative multiple research methods were chosen, designed and used to access 'information rich' data (Patton, 1990) in a case study of seventy nine participants, on a profoundly sensitive topic. An interesting aspect of the methodology, as illustrated in this chapter, is that its design offered a substantive opportunity for research participants to engage in their own personal development through participation in the study. To this extent, the multiple-methodological mesh had to be fine enough to allow sensitive depth data through, yet firm enough to support the participants in addressing the implications of producing it. Additionally, as this chapter shows, the participant-observer methodological approach adopted in the study had affective implications for the researcher.

The fieldwork accounts for a major element in this research. Chapters Four, Five and Six contain analyses of data garnered in the field. In these chapters, substantial space is given to ensuring that the voices of the research participant women and men are 'audible' to the reader. In themselves, these literal transcripts, although subjected to researcher selection, are substantial historical records which could form a basis for future investigations. For the present study, they are compelling voices from women and men articulating a range of experiences but not necessarily shared experiences.

In Chapter Four, the hypothesis that individual adults have learning needs relating to their personal sexual well-being which can only be met in adulthood irrespective of the quality of their pre-adult learning is explored. Through facilitated reflection on personal sexual



histories, participants identify and critique personal experiences of childhood and adolescent learning about sexuality. The significance of these experiences is interrogated in order to establish their importance or otherwise for adult relationships of intimacy. How the participants, as girls and boys, acquired their learning about sexuality, and what that learning consisted of and why, gives access to a largely privatised experiential domain.

In Chapter Five, the hypothesis that personal sexuality is a developmental process with changing needs throughout the life-course, the addressing of which is central to the well-being of the individual and of society, is explored. Patterns of change and challenge in participants' adult intimate relations are identified. The interaction of structural sexual discourses, such as within religion, the professions and the representational media, with intra and inter-personal experience and agency are explored and interpreted.

Chapter Six explores the hypothesis that personal sexual development is enhanced by a systematic approach to shared learning in a facilitated environment. Research participants use their experiences of the learning intervention constituted by the study's methodology and the outcomes of that learning, together with their previous experiences, to evaluate the role of personal development courses and transformative learning in sexuality in adult education. These evaluations extend beyond relations of intimacy to include the implications of such learning for work situations.

Additionally, this Chapter records the perspectives of a group of adult educators in the policy-making and curriculum design domain and of a group of psychotherapists on this hypothesis. Discussion centres on the appropriateness or otherwise of transformative learning in adult education engaging with such a core and sensitive issue of human experience as personal sexuality. This discussion explores the boundaries between therapy and education, the interaction between the individual and the socio-cultural in transformative learning experiences, and examines the appropriateness of personal development courses in sexuality as a vehicle for transformative learning.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, as indicated earlier, a significant conceptual contribution emerges from the findings. This is a substantive result based on the findings and the



process by which the findings were made. In the first part of this chapter, the concept of biography and of what Alheit (1995:82) terms “*biographicity*”, as a basis for personal development in adult education, is explored. In the second part of this chapter and as a conclusion to the research, a new proposition is generated from the findings and argued in relation to transformative learning in adult education and personal sexual development.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING FOR ADULT SEXUALITY: SETTING A CONTEXT

As indicated in Chapter One, the trajectory path taken in this study, and in engaging with the literature in this chapter, is one which hypothesises that personal sexuality is an adult problematic appropriate for transformative learning in adult education. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that, if transformative adult education intends the democratisation of the personal and political spheres and the generation of justice, equality and collaborative relations in a holistic and integrated manner, then it must be inclusive of personal sexuality. This is hypothesised because, as Giddens (1992) argues, sexuality is experientially central to the development of personal and institutional subjectivity and, as such, is also a central site of dynamic interpersonal and structural power relations. In other words, sexuality is a location of repressive and oppressive operations as well as a location of confluent love relations (Giddens, 1992).

Giddens (1992:30) perceives a contemporary entry of 'sex' into the public sphere, with the attendant hopes of many attaching to sexuality as the medium to freedom within a limiting civilisation. Affirming Freud's connection between sexuality and self-identity, Giddens argues that sexuality and intimate relationships are in the throes of revolutionary change:

*"The question is one of sexual identity but not only this. The self today is for everyone a reflexive project - a more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future. It is a project carried on amid a profusion of reflexive resources: therapy and self-help manuals of all kinds, television programmes and magazine articles.."*

This study specifically proposes to explore further afield than the therapeutic, self-help or media spheres in relation to personal sexuality: it proposes to examine whether or not a positive connection between transformative adult education and holistic, liberative, personal sexual development is being overlooked.

The literature explored in this chapter provides a context from which the fieldwork is undertaken. It is a context which is drawn from transformational adult education and from a number of seminal theories of sexuality in psychology, sociology and feminism. These are chosen as relevant for the following reasons:

- Theories of transformational adult education hold that adult psycho-social problems form the basis for transformative learning interventions, and that such interventions are liberatory for the individual and the community.
- Psychological theories of sexuality, in addition to offering a perspective on personal sexual development, describe how repressive psycho-sexual learning contributes to psychic distortions, forming an adult problematic which impedes adult psycho-social development.
- Sociological theories of sexuality show how structural relations impact on personal sexual experience constituting adult problematics; and how oppressive sexual relations inhibit the exercise of equality, justice and democracy.
- Feminist psychological and sociological theories situate sexual relations as a central site of repression and oppression and of liberatory possibility.

Because of the intra-psychical and intimate interpersonal dimensions associated with sexual experience, a psychological element to the conceptual framework contributes to an understanding and interpretation of these phenomena. Sociological discourse introduces the political dimension of sexuality into the discussion and offers another 'worldview' with which to construct a theoretical frame for the research. Feminist



literature explicitly offers a deconstruction of gendered sexuality within patriarchal relations. These theories are pertinent to this study in that, between them, they offer a multi-perspectived approach to the topic of personal sexual development.

A review of this complex of literary spheres is necessary because personal sexuality and the intimacies associated with it are not well represented in the literature pertaining to transformative learning in adult education as, for example, other issues of oppression are. However, transformative adult education theorises the adult as a life-long learner with the potential to become a critically reflexive, “*politicised, agentic human subject*” (Ryan, 1997b:6) contributing to the democratic and just transformation of society. Such a subject is a sexual subject, and society is constituted of such subjects and its institutions have interests in sexual organisation (Foucault, 1978).

Against this theoretical backdrop of transformative learning and the learner-subject, theories of sexual repression (psychology), oppression (sociology), and the conceptual possibility of liberation from both sexual repression and oppression (psychology, sociology and feminisms) provide a theoretical framework and parameters for the fieldwork. This is without prejudice to Ryan’s (1997b:3-5) post-structural critique of the polarisation or dualistic positioning of psychology and sociology in relation to their respective understandings of the person.

The chapter is divided into four parts:

1. part one engages with theories of transformative learning for adult personal development;
2. part two focuses on personal sexuality, theorised in psychology, sociology and feminism, as an aspect of adult personal development;
3. part three offers a perspective on the cultural context in which research participants’ learning experiences in relation to personal sexuality largely took place;

4. part four identifies elements in these bodies of literature from which connections can be made between transformative learning and personal sexuality; connections which validate the proposition that a significant lacuna exists in regard to personal sexuality in transformational learning theory and practice.

Transformative learning in adult education is subjected to much analysis and critique, and its purposes and outcomes are strongly contested within the discipline. This contestation focuses largely on the differing emphases in approaches to learning within adult education. Lovett (1988) describes these emphases as emanating historically from liberal or from radical positionings. Within this context, Tennant (1988:3), consciously over-simplistically, identifies positionings in relation to the individual and adult education as between theories which approach the person as “*largely independent of the social environment*” and those which “*emphasise the primacy of the social environment*” whereby the person is understood as a product of that environment. The liberal tradition in education is associated with humanistic psychology and education for individual development (Field, 1993:46). The radical tradition in education focuses on structural relations of oppression and collective action for social transformation (Freire, 1972; Mayo, 1995; Thompson, 1996; Inglis, 1997).

Lovett (1988:xvi,153,161) critiques the liberal tradition in adult education “*for its failure to respond effectively to the continuing and widening inequalities in our society.*” Liberal ideology, he contends, underpins many community education initiatives, contributing only to individual advancement and doing little to help a collective approach to problem-solving issues of poverty and marginalisation in working-class communities. Lovett argues the need for a radical approach to adult education which enables people think in terms of real alternatives and which helps people to “*dream their dreams, to construct their version of a better society out of their own experiences.*”



Thompson (1988:181-201), also critical of liberal ideology permeating education, takes up the argument for a radical approach to adult education. Noting the lack of “*radical initiatives on behalf of women*” which would challenge the patriarchal educational establishment, she is critical of liberal frameworks which tolerate a partial inclusion of feminism’s insights. In Thompson’s view, adult education’s response to feminism has been trivialised in the way that the educational establishment pays ‘lip-service’ to feminism while deflecting the application of its radical intent. Adult education, she contends, has succumbed to the hegemony of an educational system constructed and dominated by men’s power and values.

The underlying trend in the above thinking is confirmed in Mayo (1999) who expresses concern that the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism in western society and in adult education is corrupting the public benefit of adult education in the interests of the market-place.

Calling for a re-instigation of a radical approach in adult education, Lovett (1988) traces its historical roots through Horton’s Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, the Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia, the chartist ‘Mechanics’ Institutes’ in Britain and, Thompson (1996) adds, the feminist writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. Lovett points out that, traditionally, the emphasis in these educational movements was radical in that it focused on the production of “*really useful knowledge and collective enterprise*”. Expanding on the concept of “*really useful knowledge*”, Johnson (1988:29) explains that its radicalism lay in the fact that it was the people’s knowledge, produced from their circumstances, and that such knowledge “*changes the world*”. Such knowledge, he maintains, was challenging at the level that it presented alternative perspectives to educational orthodoxies. Johnson (1988) warns that education, “*up against utility with a vengeance*”, in the latter decades of the century, is moving into a reactionary phase, that is, of engaging in “*merely useful knowledge*”, knowledge which simply serves to support commerce and to adapt to what is. Thompson (1996:15-26), affirming Lovett and Johnson, reasserts adult education’s responsibility to radicalism. Radical knowledge in transformative education is more than the best of liberal ideas, she asserts, or the acquisition of practical skills, or learning for



*“individual self-fulfilment”*. Radical knowledge for transformation, Thompson argues, is concerned with the ‘really useful knowledge’ which enables social and political change to happen, in particular in relation to those who are oppressed and marginalised in society. It is within this educational context, that Thompson places critical thinking and personal agency, or what Freire (1972) terms ‘praxis’.

The literature cited below incorporates perspectives on transformative learning in adult education drawn from both the liberal and radical traditions. Sexuality, as a dimension of personal development, is central to the individual’s interests and, as a dimension of social organisation, is central to the collective’s interests. Therefore, perspectives from both the liberal and radical traditions in adult education are relevant in this study. The humanistic, psychological basis associated with the liberal tradition in education is sensitive to intimate, individual, personal learning needs; the social focus on which the radical tradition in adult education is based is sensitive to the political dimensions of both personal and social experience.

### **Transformative learning for adult personal development**

Described in Mayo (1999:13) as *“one of the greatest thinkers on education this century”*, Paulo Freire’s (1972) vision of the human being is an optimistic and compassionate one. Through his educational work in the field of literacy, Freire concludes that critical reflection on personal history paves the way to the liberation of women and men from oppression and to a transformation of society. Richard Schaul, introducing Freire’s *“Pedagogy of the Oppressed”* (1972:12) to the English speaking world, describes him as working on one basic assumption:

*“....that man’s [and woman’s] ontological vocation is to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his [or her] world, and in so doing moves towards ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively.”*

The concepts of subjecthood and identity are open to more than one interpretation (Rothfield, 1991:109-113). For example the postmodern philosophical works of

Derrida and Lacan, and of postmodern feminists such as Cixous, Irigary and Kristeva (cited in Kerfoot and Knights, 1994:76-82) have, respectively, challenged concepts of a centred subject and of a fixed sexual identity. Notwithstanding these developments in postmodern thought in relation to the contingency of subjecthood and identity, Freire's concept that the distinguishing and distinguished task of women and men is that of becoming subjects of their personal histories rather than remaining dominated as objects of oppressive elites, structures, or vested interests within society, nonetheless provides a conceptual frame for interrogating issues of oppression and liberation. In fact, Freire's philosophical perspectives are compatible, Stanage (1995) claims, with postmodernist thinking.

The initial means towards achieving personal and social transformation, Freire (1972:62) asserts, is through dialogical encounters which are "*acts of creation*": that is, acts which break "*the culture of silence*". Such discourse is respectful, non-polemical, non-impositional and communicative. Each person enters the encounter from the authority of his or her lived experience. Furthermore, Freire conceives of the educational revolutionary process as one which is 'life-loving'. His conceptual framework includes the oppressor as well as the oppressed in the dynamic of personal and social transformation.

Freire's work forms the seminal basis on which many other theorists of both liberal and radical persuasions draw. These include, Mezirow (1981, 1990, 1991, 1996), Brookfield (1986, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1998), Gould (1978, 1990), and Thompson (1983, 1988, 1996), Hart (1990, 1998), Ryan (1997b) and Mayo (1999), in their approach to transformative adult educational theory and practice.

Incorporating Freire's concept of critical reflection in his theorisation of self-directed learning, Mezirow's focus tends towards education for individual transformation as a means towards social transformation. Mezirow is critiqued by Jarvis (1983) and Collard and Law (1989) for his failure to incorporate a cultural and socio-political explication in his theorisation, thereby rendering his work less than comprehensive. Inglis (1997:14) supports this critique, arguing that Mezirow's contribution is limited



in that education for individual agency, without due regard for the operations of social-structural power relations, cannot be considered emancipatory because emancipatory education *“is a collective educational activity which has as its goal social and political transformation.”* Nevertheless, Jarvis acknowledges Mezirow’s contribution to adult learning theory and practice as accessible, practical and substantial.

Together with Gould (1978), Mezirow (1985:21) recognises that false assumptions acquired in early childhood learning inhibit adult development through the acquisition of false presuppositions:

*“...the process of socialisation makes us all heir to such distorting assumptions. Traumatic childhood events can cause us to learn specific prohibitions - never confront, never succeed, never express feelings... The inhibitory rule fades from consciousness, but it continues into adulthood to influence behaviour...”*

In transformative adult education, Mezirow asserts, learners, prompted by the limitations of previous understandings and the challenges of life transitions, engage in critical awareness in a facilitated, shared learning environment of peers. New insights are gained which lead to a broader, more differentiated and inclusive personal world view than hitherto held; that is to perspective transformation. By perspective transformation, Mezirow (1991:167) means

*“...the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings.”*

Mezirow (1996:6,7,12,13) highlighting the exigencies of the present, unpredictable, high risk society, asserts the need for adult educators to adopt a pro-active approach in facilitating adults to deal with contemporary issues of living. Learning *“what we need to learn”*, he states, is *“as a result of transforming our frame of reference”*. He points out that a subjective reframing of the premises on which presuppositions are

based is a key element in transformative learning. This is a liberative learning process for personal growth, Mezirow argues, in that it enables the individual develop greater autonomy in making choices about how to live in the world.

Gould (1978), coming from a psychotherapeutic background, recognises that there are predictable patterns of change in adult life which challenge adults to release themselves from the arbitrary constraints of childhood consciousness for effective adult functioning. He argues that unresolved internalised prohibitions from childhood learning prevent women and men from making choices appropriate to their adult needs, to the needs of up-coming generations, and to the needs of the community.

Both Gould (1990) and Mezirow (1985; 1990, 1991:138-144; 1996) make the case that critical reflection on distorted psychological perspectives acquired in early learning is important if women and men are to free themselves from the inhibiting power of these perspectives. Citing Gould, Mezirow (1990:13,17) contends that such inhibitions

*“cause a loss of function - such as the ability to confront, to feel sexual, or take risks - that must be regained if one is to become a fully functioning adult.”*

This is a learning task, he argues, for adulthood.

Strongly influenced by Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation, Gould (1990) adopts the practice of perspective transformation as a basis for the production of a computerised therapeutic learning programme facilitative of adult development. This programme, he suggests, can be used in both therapeutic and educational settings. Mezirow (1990:17) supports Gould's view that skilled educators can participate in assisting adult learners deal with conflictual life situations with the help of psychoeducational processes. Adult educators, he asserts, *“can provide skilful emotional support and collaborate as co-learners in an educational context.”*



Aware of the debate about the purposes of transformative learning, that is, whether individual or social transformation is the ultimate goal, and also aware of his critics, Mezirow (1990:206-212) argues that personal and political transformative learning is interdependent. His view is that individual transformations must occur before social transformations can prevail. Extending the concept of community to include the community of learners, Mezirow (1996:11,12) contends that, in fostering collaborative discourse in “*protected learning environments*” in adult education, adult educators contribute to the development of the capacity for engaging in effective social action:

*...community development means fostering learning communities in which people can reflect critically, discourse collaboratively and act collectively.”*

Connections between the individual learning and the learning group extend to the wider society and culture. Transformative action, he asserts, is a logical outcome of transformative learning, whether it is taken individually or collectively, in interpersonal relations or in social relations.

However, Mezirow (1990:363) claims that ultimately personal development is crucial to social transformation in that the impetus for political action and social change is grounded, initially, in individuals’ perspective transformations. This argument is supported by Fleming (1996:53) who maintains that adult education for personal development cannot but precipitate change in the learner’s manner of inter-personal relating; relating which is more participatory, inclusive and democratic as a result of the enhanced personal perspectives achieved. This, in turn, impacts on effecting change in the community.

Mezirow and, to a lesser extent, Gould, make a significant contribution to understanding both the processes and scope for transformative learning in adult education. They may be described as belonging to the more humanistic, liberal sector of the educational spectrum in that their contribution centres particularly on the individual and on intra-psychic elements of personal development. Their approach to transformative learning is important in a study which proposes to explore how

experiential sexual learning is acquired, internalised, and shapes relationships of intimacy.

However, Freire shows that social transformation cannot ultimately be consigned to liberal models of education. Transformative learning for personal development has a political dimension in that all experience is mediated by culture and context which, themselves, are products of collective hegemonic values. As Freire (1985:73) asserts, in explaining the reflective/recursive relationship between the individual and society and between the oppressor and the oppressed, *“the relationships between the dominator and the dominated reflect the greater social context, even when formally personal.”*

Lovett (1988) identifies conflict between personal and political development in adult and community education. In his experience, personal interests in adult and community education appear to supersede those of the collective; the focus tends towards individual advantage rather than communal well-being. Hart (1992:212), while supportive of Lovett's concern, makes the point that individual actualisation and social interaction are integral to each other, asserting that the severance of individual fulfilment and social engagement actually hampers the development of true individuality; it contributes to conformity and subservience as much as it contributes to the feelings and behaviour of superiority.

The argument hinges on whether or not, in offering adult education opportunities for personal development, the content and processes in the facilitation of this learning are such that they engage with the whole picture rather than with one part of it: that is, with the recursive relation between the individual and the social and the personal and the political; or as Freire (1985) puts it, between the infrastructure of consciousness and the superstructure of cultural-historical reality.

Allman (1988:109,97) describes the process of learners co-investigating their reality as one which engenders critical consciousness by which structures of oppression are exposed and may be challenged. Mindful of transformative learning as a process rather



than a commodity, she highlights the importance of the process in developing a radical consciousness for transformative action:

*“Dialectic thinking makes it possible for us to not only believe but to understand that each individual’s interest is inextricably linked with the interests of humankind as well as all other species and the environment.”*

*“But even before this reunion of critical thought with radical action, learners are prepared to relate and to live in a radically different way through the transformed communicative relations of dialogue”.*

Thompson (1996:15-26) affirms transformative adult education’s role in the facilitation of learners’ personal and political agency. Reflecting Freire’s (1972:60,61) emphasis on the situationality of human existence, Thompson defines transformative learning as grounded in

*“applying critical intelligence to what is understood from experience - in ways that re-constitute both the situation and the subject”.*

Through this process, she argues, the interrogation of structural power and its implications for individual growth and communal development is effected. Based on values of equality, justice and democracy, re-constituting the situation and the subject, Thompson holds, implies a political agency extending beyond *“competitive individualism”* and *“individual rights”*.

Connolly (1996:39,40) points out that personal development education which forefronts the emancipatory learning process transcends the problem of education for individual advantage. By forefronting the emancipatory learning process in such educational fora, both individual personal growth and the impetus for social change is facilitated, and a dialectical transformative interaction between the two is effected. Inglis (1997:13), however, presses the argument that empowerment and emancipation are to be distinguished. Education for empowerment, states Inglis, is a process concerned with *“helping individuals attain greater economic, political, and social power”* within the extant social conditions; in other words, as Mayo (1995:16) argues,

*“as the means of promoting integration and conformity in a rapidly changing world”*. Education for personal emancipation, Inglis asserts, is a process which can only take place within a learning context the goals of which are social and political transformation.

The theme of transformative learning for personal development is specifically taken up by Ryan (1997b). Ryan argues that the contextual positionings of personal experience are explicated through critical analysis and hegemonic assumptions and related structural interests are interrogated when a transformative pedagogy is adopted in adult education for personal development. Ryan’s central point is that personal development is both a personal and a political process in which adult education can make a radical intervention for individual and social transformation. Ryan’s key argument is that, to ensure this liberative realisation, the politicisation of facilitators of such personal development courses is necessary *a priori*.

Ryan’s focus on the politicisation of adult educators is grounded in the conviction echoed in Mayo (1995) and Mayo (1999:24,25,131,132) that all educational interventions are political, and that transformative adult education cuts to the roots of oppression rather than treats with the symptoms. Mayo (1999) affirms radical adult education as important *“pre-figurative work”*: a process which *“prefigures transformed democratic social relations in the wider society”*. In this process, he argues, learners voices are, importantly, heard and understood, but they are also interrogated. Personal and socio-cultural contradictions are revealed and oppressive social relations confronted in the learning group.

Within this academic discourse on the purposes and outcomes of transformative adult education, Barr (1998:78,80), recalling Freire’s emphasis on inclusivity and democracy in the production of knowledge and hooks’ holding of adult education as ‘the practice of freedom’, focuses on adult education’s role to deal *“creatively and critically”* in the democratic generation of knowledge: Barr’s credence *“in the potentially transformative power of adult education”* is superseded for her, she states, by *“a*



*belief in a more modest project*", that is, in liberating subjugated knowledges useful to those who produce it.

These perspectives on transformative learning for personal development outlined above indicate that such learning can be empowering and emancipatory. The individual is empowered, not through developing skills of better adaptation to the socio-cultural status quo, but through personal awareness of the deployment of forces, psychic and socio-cultural, which foster or inhibit individual and communal well-being; and emancipated by using that knowledge to bring about psycho-social change. Thus, transformative learning for personal development in adult education is a radical and integrative dynamic which melds 'the personal' and the 'political' in its processes.

Transformative adult education for personal development, built on the lived lives of women and men's personal histories, subjected to dialogical critical reflection in the learning group, is an experiential, communicative, and holistic learning project. Kolb (1993:148), elucidating Dewey's (1938:39, 42) theory of experiential learning, defines such learning as a transactional engagement between the objective and subjective conditions of experience:

*"a molar concept describing the central process of human adaptation to the social and physical environment.... It involves the integrated functioning of the total organism - thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving."*

A distinguishing feature of transformative adult education for personal development is that it starts from the basis of learners 'here and now' experience (Freire 1972). The value, Hart (1990:47-73) argues, of experience, as a base for transformational learning, is that, in opening up new perspectives, new understandings of that experience are discovered, thereby transforming personal frames of reference. Brah (cited in Edwards and Usher 1998:167) defines experience

*"not as an unmediated guide to 'truth' but as a practice of making sense, both symbolically and narratively, as a struggle over material conditions and meaning."*

Hart affirms personal experience as *“the original source to be critically reflected upon”* in consciousness raising, a process, originating in the women’s movement, of bringing experience into critical awareness. Women’s consciousness raising groups in the 1970s, she states, made the connection between the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’ by focusing on experience in a shared, dialogic learning situation. Noteworthy about these experiences, she points out, is that they relate to issues of ordinary, everyday life such as childhood, motherhood, work and, in particular, to gendered sexual experiences in everyday relationships. Ryan (cited in Connolly, 1996:37) contends that consciousness raising enables the learner to recognise the connections between her problems and problems in the wider social and political spheres which require collective solutions.

Hart argues positively for the transposition of the consciousness raising process from women’s groups to the broader and more general domain of adult education. In the context of the debate on the personal/political emphasis in transformative education, Hart’s focus is firmly fixed on the political purpose of adult education for social action. Nonetheless, echoing Freire, she notes the importance of learners’ articulation of experience in transformative education, and of the need for educators to give their stories appropriate space and attention, initially, without the *“pressure to act or make decisions”*. Hart’s perspective on the importance of experience is situated within a critique of the academic setting for its tendency towards abstraction and impersonal modes of addressing issues. However, alert to the danger of *“getting stuck in the personal by focusing on the individual”*, she asserts that a theoretical distance is vital to ensure transformational learning. The difference between education and therapy, she argues, is that education makes explicit, in the learning forum, theoretical understandings of culture and power relations. In this regard, Hart, Ryan (1997b) and Mayo (1999) are in agreement that it is the adult educator’s task to ensure that this happens. Ryan further argues that, in the absence of theoretical understanding of culture and power relations, the educational experience compounds the problem: educational interventions are not neutral; they either enhance or diminish individual and social well-being; and Inglis (1997), as has been shown, argues that without a



theoretical understanding of culture and power relations, the educational experience cannot be ‘emancipatory’.

In keeping with Freire’s emphasis on the significance of ‘the word’ and ‘naming the world’ for liberative learning, Hart perceives the articulation of experience as transformative action; that is, by breaking the culture of silence about privatised and occluded experience, including “*areas of deep humiliation*”, in a shared learning group, the learner’s understanding is structurally transformed at the moment of understanding his or her life.

Brookfield (1990) confirms the importance of experiential learning in adult education, advocating a ‘critical incident’ approach to transformative learning using personal experience rather than approaching experience by way of formal texts. This is important, he argues because learners have difficulty in engaging with personal assumptive domains; yet, he contends, such engagement is a central task for personal development. In making his case, Brookfield (1990:192) highlights the subversive potential inherent in experiential adult education:

*“...educators who foster transformative learning are rather like psychological and cultural demolitions experts”;*

a subversive or transgressive potential supported by Thompson (1996) and Inglis (1997).

The process of identifying and questioning personal assumptive domains disrupts the security of taken-for-granted presuppositions, Brookfield states, with the risks attendant on such a process of self-realisation. This is a radical, transgressive intervention, opening learners’ perceptions to alternative ways of thinking and living.

Brookfield (1998:127-142) reminds adult education that critical reflection is a necessary dimension to experiential learning if it is to be transformative: that is, to achieve “*the illumination of power dynamics and the uncovering of hegemonic assumptions about practice*”. Critiquing the way experiential learning is held and practised in adult education, he focuses on the educators rather than on learners by

calling on adult educators to model critical reflection on their experiential practice. This, he suggests, should be done by a) disclosing personal learning biographies, b) engaging student and colleagues in critical feedback on personal teaching practice and c) by the study of theoretical literature from “*situations outside our circle of practice.*” By so doing, he asserts, the dangers of educators making false assumptions about experience will be minimised.

Hart (1998:187-200), however, concentrates on the benefits of experiential learning as a process which elucidates subjugated knowledges from subjugated constituencies. She refers, in particular, to marginalised groups in society and to topics which are excluded from general discourse, for example, women’s experiences of life and child-rearing in public housing. Such exclusion is not simply by virtue of their being unheard but because the dominant discourses determine what will or will not be articulated. Inclusive transformative experiential learning also “*means developing a language*” so that subjugated knowledges may be elicited. This is a process requiring an empathic identification with “*the Other*” and, conversely, an ‘external’ view of self, of personal experience. Hart’s affirmation of transformative adult education as a means of accessing subjugated knowledges is also reflected in Barr (1999; 1998).

Barr (1998), as shown earlier, cherishes the space that transformative adult education can offer for enabling the democratic production of new knowledge; that is, in creating enabling spaces for the sounding of unheard voices. Critical of adult education’s affiliation with business and mainstream academia, a criticism shared by Thompson (1996:19), Barr (1999:162, 163) focuses particularly on liberating ‘*knowledge from below*’. Her primary aim is to ensure the generation of knowledge “*located in people’s real lives, histories and concerns*” by those who are excluded and which is useful to those who speak; that is to those who, otherwise, are silent and silenced. “*Really useful knowledge*”, she concludes, is knowledge

*“which enables an understanding of human experience, enhances self-respect and helps people to deal critically and creatively with the world in order to change it.”*



Hart's and Barr's positions are affirmed in Mayo (1999:147,148). Noting Freire's concern that learners' experience be articulated and heard, Mayo interprets this as an

*"...affirmation of subjugated knowledge, for the purpose not of 'colonisation' but of collective emancipation."*

What is emerging from these texts is the importance of an approach to transformative learning in adult education which seeks to facilitate the articulation of the occluded 'things that matter' in human experience, defined by those who experience them, in an open, participative, dialogic, democratic learning environment committed to critical awareness and reflection on those occluded 'things that matter', as a means of personal and social transformation.

Such an approach draws attention to transformative learning for personal development as a largely communicative learning process; that is, the emphasis is on collaborative discourse rather than on imparting technical mastery. Mezirow (1990:8, 1991, 1996:9-11), following Habermas (1978), distinguishes between instrumental learning and communicative learning. Instrumental learning is defined as a "learning to do"; *learning how to exercise "more effective control over the cause effect relationship to improve performance"*. Communicative learning, Mezirow (1990:8) defines 'as relating to values, relationship, judgement, affectivity, being and responding in relation to others. It is concerned with learning the meaning of what others communicate. It focuses on

*"achieving coherence rather than exercising more effective control over the cause-effect relationship to improve performance, as in instrumental learning."*

Mezirow (1996:9-11) makes a connection between communicative and transformative learning, describing the adult educator's "*indispensable*" task as one which facilitates learners in making their own meaning and value schemes rather than unquestioningly accepting imposed interpretations of social reality: "*This is what transformative learning is about.*" The capacity for rational and collaborative discourse is at the heart of transformative learning, he asserts. By engaging in collaborative discourse,

*“distortions in communication due to differences in power and influence are minimised.”.*

Experiential, communicative, transformative learning for personal development must be a holistic, coherent process (Kolb, 1993:139). ‘Achieving coherence’ is a *“re-membering”* of the mind and body, states Michelson (1998:217-233), who warns of the danger of an over-rationalistic approach to experiential adult learning. Michelson challenges concepts of knowledge-practices which over-emphasise the role of rationality in cognition to the exclusion of the emotions and of the embodied state. A more holistic learning perspective is specified as one which approaches knowledge *“as a product of an embodied social self-hood rather than of a disembodied mind”*.

Critical of theories which over-identify rationality as the path to learning, and reflective of Kolb (1993) and Hart (1990), cited above, Michelson (1998:228) asserts that

*“the notion of learning devoid of emotional and sensate content and the concomitant valorising of disinterested reason require a view of public life that is itself both narrow and frightening.... The re-membering of mind and body enables a very different knowing subject, a being who remembers: a being of passion, thought, activity, engagement, conflicts, and alliances”.*

Taking up Edwards’ and Usher’s (1998) interpretative metaphor of *‘location’* and *‘(dis)location’* in the context of globalisation in the postmodern world, a context in which women and men are obliged to grapple with multiple, mobile positions and positionings in relation to class, race, gender, sexuality and age, Michelson asserts the need of a knowing subject, self-located in the totality of his or her personal and political embodied experience; a subject *‘re-membered’* and *‘located’* in a particular human body and a particular social history. The body, she argues, is a *“site of learning”*. Embodied knowledge makes visible such concerns for debate and interrogation as are overlooked or suppressed in dominant rational discourses, for example, emotional and physical concerns. Michelson argues for a holistic adult education which respects the integrity of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of personal experience situated in particular socio-cultural contexts.



In the contemporary context of internationalism and of the imperatives of the market place which pressurises its servants, including education, and represses the socially marginalised, West (1998:235-249), notwithstanding the insights of postmodernism, argues the need for a holistic experiential adult learning which strengthens personal identity and agency. A *“holistic cultural psychology of human agency”*, he states, is necessary to support a learning which enables men and women hold themselves creatively and safely in a competitive, fast-moving, fragmenting environment. Experiential learning has become a *“vital necessity”* for a wide range of constituents so that each may engage in *“weaving a sense of coherent self”*. Women and men need now, more than ever, he argues, learning spaces in which to constitute a coherent identity; in which emotional and critical literacy is accomplished and a *“relaxed self-realisation”* facilitated.

The authors above show a concern that the whole person be addressed in transformative adult education; that holistic transformative learning is inclusive of the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’, is experiential and communicative and seeks to make visible subjugated knowledges impinging on the democratic well-being of individuals and communities.

### **Personal sexuality: a personal developmental project**

Mezirow and Gould argue that part of transformational education’s remit is the facilitation of learners’ critical reflection on distortions in psychological meaning, including on internal arbitrary constraints of childhood learning and the introjection of parental prohibitions inhibiting adult development. These arguments are rooted in psychoanalytic and developmental psychological theories.. A significant dimension of these intra-psychic inhibitory processes is that many of them relate to personal sexual development and, in addition, are the products of a socialisation process which transmits social values to the individual. For a more in-depth consideration of these issues, it is necessary to draw on sources other than on those of adult education.

Freud (1977:44) theorised that the process of psycho-sexual organisation takes place on a continuum of health/pathology/neurosis, and is fundamental to the psychological well-being, personal growth and effective functioning of the individual. This process begins in infancy and continues throughout the life course; hence, the significance of early childhood learning for adult development and experience.

A resistance to recognising the significance of sexuality, Freud stated, is a denial of that which is important *“in all human achievements”*. Childhood experiences and ambivalences relating to sexuality take root in the unconscious moulding both feelings and behaviour throughout life (Brecher, 1972:87).

Psychosexual experience in infancy, childhood and adolescence, Freud asserts, particularly as it is mediated within family/parental relationships, is critical in terms of its effects on the construction of the adult's self-concept, identity and on his or her capability for adult relationships of intimacy. Repression, as an intra-psychic mechanism *“to banish unpleasant memories from consciousness and make them relatively inaccessible”* (Storr, 1989:12,13), is engaged defensively to marginalise or bury those aspects of experience, in particular sexual experience, which constitute the material of inhibiting, arbitrary, internal constraints preventing personal development; such psychological constraints as are referenced by Gould (1978; 1990) and Mezirow (1985; 1990; 1991) in relation to transformative learning. Personal psycho-sexual well-being, these authors argue, is achieved through individual adult reflexivity.

The distinguishing feature of Freudian psychoanalytic theories of personal growth and development, Coward (1983) states, is that they centre-stage sexuality, reproduction, and the assumed distinctions between women and men as subjects for interrogation. Additionally, they form the basis from which further refinements in psychoanalytic theorising is developed.

The concept of personal development underpins psychoanalytic and psychological thought. For example, Maslow's (1968) theory of self-actualisation and Jung's theory of individuation (Fordham, 1953) conceptualises the individual as incrementally



progressing towards the achievement of personal fulfilment. Whereas Freud focused on the father-child relationship as central to the child's psychic development, Chodorow (1978; 1990) proposes a psychoanalytic view of personal growth which shifts the Freudian emphasis on the father-child relationship to the mother-child one. Chodorow argues the primacy of the mother-child relationship. It is the negotiation of this primary emotional bond, she states, that influences how well boys and girls develop healthy relational sexual identities. The level of progress in personal development, from a psychological perspective, is perceived as relating largely to the level of intrapsychical autonomy achieved by the individual and, in addition, Chodorow and Gilligan (1982) argue, a capacity for emotional interdependence.

In his seminal work, *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1965:255-259) maps stages of personal development spanning the life-cycle. Building on and alongside Freud's theories of psychosexual development, Erikson posits eight significant stages of human life, commencing at birth and ending in old age. Each stage presents the individual with particular growth opportunities through the accomplishment of psycho-social tasks appropriate to that stage. Erikson's theory of personal development provides for the possibility of rectifying the deficits of growth in any of the previous stages in subsequent ones. These stages of development apply across the range of normal human experience and are not confined to a pathological context.

The achievement of the capacity for intimacy and satisfying genitality is defined by Erikson as an important adult developmental task for personal and social well-being. Intimacy, he asserts, is the antithesis of isolating alienation in a relational existence. A primary requirement for the exercise of intimacy is the development of a reasonable level of self-esteem and trust. The capacity for intimacy, Erikson argues, enables the individual to tolerate difference and to bring a judicious perspective to the world. Moreover, the capacity for intimacy, "*in the meeting of bodies and minds*", enables the development of qualities of care which extend beyond the immediate concerns of self to embrace a wider constituency. A connection can be made between the development of this personal capacity and the personal development of wider, more

open, differentiated and inclusive ways of seeing the world, as characterised in transformative learning.

Gould (1978), following Erikson, emphasises the importance of addressing residual “*demonic angers*” of childhood consciousness as a function of adult growth and development. These angers, he argues, result from the pain and disappointment of denial of the child’s felt needs and wants. Carried over into adulthood, such residual angers, if unaddressed, limit love relationships and inhibit the full realisation of talents. The stress Gould places on early childhood learning is reflective of Erikson’s (1965:393] critique of “*the makers and interpreters of history*” who “*ignore the fateful function of childhood in society*”. Gould argues that the task of taking adult ownership of one’s body and sexuality is an important developmental task.

Erikson’s perspective on personal development is shared by Levinson (1978:323, 327), although Levinson’s approach differs somewhat. While Erikson’s primary emphasis is on intra-personal development, Levinson’s focus “*gives equal consideration to self and world as aspects of lived life*”: to the interdependence and interaction of the biological, psychological and social dimensions of personal development. In his study of men’s psychological development, he underlines the capacity for intimacy and constructive sexual relating as one of five challenging components having significance in a man’s life and growth.

The authors above are consistent in stressing the need for adults to resolve distortions in meaning acquired in childhood and adolescence for their own personal development and for the development of their children and society; that is, the need to achieve an adult consciousness in order to contribute to the evolution of values and standards in their children and in society.

The judicious perspective which enables the individual distinguish appropriately between competition and collaboration and between “*the competitive encounter and the sexual embrace*” (Erikson, 1965:256) is central, Clulow and Mattinson (1989:21-24) confirm, to sustaining intimate sexual partnerships. Society is built, they state, on



the relative stability of such partnerships. But, they conclude, a couple's successful achievement of sustained intimate relating requires a communicative competence. This includes the ability to question previously held assumptions and to negotiate personal and relational expectations; in other words, the transformative relational skill of critical reflection and communicative discourse.

However, elucidating on the role of intimacy in personal development, Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992:310-320) point out that its achievement is problematic; there is little support, they state, for the development of intimacy. This lack of support, they indicate, is evidenced in the widespread breakdown of intimate partnerships and in the number of couples seeking counselling.

From a psychoanalytic and psychological perspective, personal development, which includes personal sexuality and the capacity for intimate relations, is an adult problematic rooted in and governed by early learning. 'Unacceptable' sexual aspects of experience are intra-psychically censored and silenced, but not eliminated. The effects of repressed sexual experience return disguised and in distorted form to influence psycho-social relations. The ability to sustain intimate relationships is a vital aspect of psycho-social development.

Psychological theories can be described as pre-moral in that their starting points are from a position of accepting humanity as it presents itself. Within this frame of reference, a scientific/objective stance is adopted towards reality. These theories do not deconstruct society and culture in the way that they deconstruct the psyche.

Foucault's (1978) analysis of sexuality centre-stages culture as the arbiter of personal sexual experience. The ordinary individual, according to Foucault (cited in Kearney, 1986:296,297), is objectivized, becoming "*divided inside himself or divided from others*" through a subjugation to sexuality.

The historical portrayal of the cultural repression of sexuality, largely conformed to by Freud and by psychoanalysis, argues Foucault (1978:3,11,3), is simply a strategy for

the proliferation of sexual discourses; discourses which actually produce sexuality. Sexual discourses have been sequestered by professional and institutional interests, for example, by religion and science, which have secured to themselves and exercise an authority as 'masters' of sexuality. Sex, sexual preferences, behaviours, relations and identities are examined, sorted, classified, tagged, catalogued, ordered and regulated. Individuals are induced to collaborate in this enterprise, impressed of the need to 'confess all' to the priest, the doctor or the psycho-analyst, in search of their 'true' selves. By these processes, Foucault asserts, sexuality itself is produced. The exponential expansion of sexual discourses increases the variety of domains in which "*spirals of power, resistance and pleasure*" interact and support each other in a circulating search for knowledge/truth.

This search for knowledge, claims Foucault, is not aimed at sexual liberation; its function is intimately concerned with the exercise of power. Desire for sex is a central strategy engaged by the deployment of sexuality, whereby the individual is deceived into the belief that, by seeking to assuage that desire, that is, by the pursuit of knowledge, intellectual capture and exposition of sex, he or she is liberated.

The 'pursuit of truth', Foucault argues, is a mechanism whereby bodies are managed and controlled and populations are regulated: anatomo-politics. The 'docile body' (Foucault, 1979) submits to the admonishments and requirements of multiple disciplining professional and institutional discourses to the point at which such controls are internalised: the subject monitors itself.

Foucault's theoretical contribution to the understanding of sexuality is important. It asserts the sociological/political in addition to the psychological dimensions of sexuality; that is, it asserts the social construction of sexuality and the operation of power and resistance within this dimension of human experience. Martin (1988:7) holds that Foucault's study of sexuality is, in reality, a history of sexual discourses in which the deployment of fundamental power relations are shown to support hierarchical structures in western society.



Bartowski (1988:43-58) argues for a theory of discursive power relations which shows greater cognisance of the embodied, gendered, sexual subject than is evident in Foucault's work. Affirming the reality of sexual repression, as does Giddens (1992), Bartowski seeks to break the paradoxical discursive silence she finds in Foucault's theorisation: that is, to hear the voices of those who speak. She notes that the recipients of sexual stories, the professional listeners, dominate the arena; they repressively dictate, by their approval or disapproval, what may or may not be sexually permitted. Bartowski wants to know who exactly are the speakers, who are the listeners, and who benefits from the discourses.

The value of Foucault's history of theories, including his theory of sexual discourses, Sawicki (1988:177-191) and Faith (1994:36-63) hold, is that it is a liberatory enterprise; it shows the contingency of theories, thereby enabling a liberation from them. Drawing on Foucault, Faith argues for theorising discursive power relations as profoundly gendered, and as they relate to women's bodies. Taking up Foucault's concept of resistance as the process whereby dominant discourses are challenged, she argues for the practice of resistance in dismantling gendered sexual oppression. Resistance is fundamental to the struggle for a transformed, caring, inclusive, democratic society; it *"is itself an exercise of power, as a projection of alternative truths"*. Optimistic for the future, she calls for the continued search for and practice of strategies which resist dominant inequitable gendered discourses.

Faith envisions a better future; one in which *"subjugated groups find their voices and insurrect or generate their knowledges"*. Such knowledges relate to issues within the domain of intimate sexual relations, for example, issues of sexual violence and pornography, or in what Connell (1995:71) terms *"the reproductive arena"*.

The domain of intimate sexual relations, Giddens (1991; 1992) argues, is currently being transformed. While agreeing with Foucault that sexuality is a *"social construct, operating within fields of power"*, Giddens (1992:23,27,181) theorises the construct differently, refuting Foucault's interpretation of the repressive hypothesis. 'Sexuality', he argues, emerged when sex and reproduction were separated out from each other.

Changes in reproductive practices (contraception and extra-coital reproduction), he asserts, are responsible for a radical change in sexual relations and intimacy. These changes herald the emergence of 'plastic sexuality'; that is sexuality "*severed from its age-old integration with reproduction, kinship and the generations*". Giddens concludes that sexual repression is a "*matter of social sequestration coupled to gender power*". An example of this is evident in Ryan (1997a), whose case study research shows that children and those who teach them are positioned within discourses of sexuality in ways which remain inimical to both sexes.

According to these authors above, 'breaking the silence' in sexual discourses and reclaiming the subject and subjugated sexual knowledges is an important step in breaking the oppressive hegemonic gendered code.

As indicated earlier, psychoanalysis enables a hermeneutic of personal sexual development via an interpretation of the individual's intra-psychical and inter-personal experiences effected throughout the life course in a particular socio-cultural milieu.

Discourse analysis offers a method for examining how knowledge and power are sequestered by discourses which construct meaning and invite resistance as well as ordering compliance. It offers a way of understanding personal sexuality as socially engineered by dominant practices.

Dominant practices in relation to sexuality are gendered practices. A number of feminist theories point to a pivotal dimension of the socio-cultural context in which personal sexuality is experienced; that is, to the patriarchal relations underpinning sexual knowledges and practices. Feminist theories start from a recognition of oppression: their starting point is not from simple facts as they might be perceived but from the reality of lived human experience, that is, of gendered oppression which benefits men through the exploitation of women. In this, feminist theories begin from an overtly moral, rather than from a premoral, starting point. As indicated earlier, sexuality comprises a central site for the investigation of oppressive gender relations. Walby (1990:121) states:



*“Sexuality is a discourse...which exists outside individuals, as well as being constituted by the action of individuals.... not a private matter to be explained in terms of individual preference or psychological processes fixed in infancy but rather it is socially organised and critically structured by gender inequality within patriarchy”.*

Feminism, Coward (1983:3) asserts, *“has revealed the black holes in theories of sexuality”*. The patriarchal context is changing, she argues, because of changes in the laws of property ownership and because, in developed countries, production is no longer dependent on coherent family units. Continuing sexual subordination of women, she states, depends on ideologically constructed essentialist concepts of women’s sexual identity. The issue of sexual identity, its construction and effects on women’s *“lived, subjective experiences of sexuality”* must be interrogated, she argues, if sexual subordination is to be overcome.

Turner (1984:156) agrees with Coward that male dominance is now largely unsupported by discriminatory constraints on women, arguing that capitalism has undermined the traditional household on which traditional patriarchy is dependent. He defines oppressive gendered sexual relations as *“patristic”*, that is, as defensive patriarchal type reactions in support of male domination which is now substituting for traditional patriarchy: *“...a culture of discriminatory, prejudicial and paternalistic beliefs about the inferiority of women”*. There is, he asserts, an increase in sexual conflict *“as a result of defensive patrism and offensive feminism”* as men continue to attempt to regulate women who are challenging patriarchal and patristic oppression. Martin (1988:16), however, warns against dismissing the significance of concepts of patriarchy and oppression and the contribution made by radical feminists, in spite of the essentialist or universalist dimensions ascribed to their theorisations. Such concepts, even if fictional, she argues, allow feminists space for interpretation and speaking liberation. While some authors do critique radical feminism because of its essentialist approach to gendered sexual relations, for example, Walby (1990:118-122), Tong (1989:142,143) and Ryan (1997), they, like Martin, nonetheless affirm radical feminism’s identification of patriarchal relations as the primary source of women’s sexual oppression.

Examples of oppressive gendered sexual power relations are identified in religion (Inglis, 1997), science (Jacobus, Fox Keller and Shuttleworth, 1990), economics (Rowbotham, 1973; Segal, 1987; Walby, 1990), education (Ryan, 1997a), law (MacKinnon, 1990:213-225) and media (Faith, 1994).

Although Walby (1990:126) indicates that some women and men are resisting oppressive elements of patriarchal sexual relations, for example, in attaining access to birth control, nonetheless, personal sexual development must not be assumed as an 'equal opportunity'. In the unequal socio-cultural context of patriarchal hegemony, French (1994) asserts, women are valued as less than men, and women are controlled by men through gendered sexual power relations. However, Connell (1995) and Kimmel (1997) argue that gendered sexual power relations are also a basis for men's oppression.

Oppressive gendered power relations can be identified in many, if not all, aspects of personal sexuality. It is intended here to indicate a number of the arguments relating to such oppressive relations. These arguments centre on the issues of sexual self-image and esteem, heterosexuality, sexual preferences and desire, fertility and reproduction, child-rearing, and sexual abuse and violence (Tong, 1989; Lowe and Lowe Benston, 1991). Additionally, the socio-cultural context in relation to sexuality will be addressed. The findings from prior research, indicated in Chapter One, suggest that these issues are significant in terms of personal sexual development and the workings of relationships of intimacy. In this sense, the literature and the arguments reviewed are contextual rather than complete; they are representative of the depth and breadth rather than the detail of general debate.

A site of power relations with oppressive dimensions is to be found in idealised media representations of women, with consequent influences on self-perception and sexual self-esteem. This is significant, Berger (1972) argues, in that socio-culturally projected idealised portrayals of women and men form benchmarks for beauty and behaviour against which people, consciously or unconsciously, measure themselves and each



women. Women, he concludes, having been taught from childhood to watch themselves and to see themselves being watched, introject the culturally constructed representations which show them as helpless objects of men's power and desire.

Rowbotham (1973:110,112,113) points out that the portrayal of women in advertising and the media is male defined, constructed to represent men's sexual fantasies rather than women's realities. Furthermore, she asserts, such representations oppressively commodify women as sexual objects: *"in order to sell commodities, women are themselves reduced to commodities"*, and sexuality is commodified. Rowbotham's theme of women's exploitation in media representations and advertising is supported by Williamson (1978) and Warner (1985).

Bordo (1990:102, 1993) shows how gendered power is deployed through the control of bodies. This is achieved, she asserts, by media representations of, for example, slimness, fitness and desirability, which are introjected by women. There is a relation, she argues, between representations of androgynous women's bodies and the control of women's desire; desire which, she asserts, is threatening to patriarchy. Women are

*"more tyrannised by the contemporary slenderness ideal than men, as they typically have been by beauty ideals in general"*.

Bordo's recognition of bodily exploitation is supported by Shilling (1993:7,33) who argues that, in an increasingly complex world, feelings of impotence direct attention to that which can be controlled: *"at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one's body"*. Shilling notes that surveys indicate that a substantial number of children as young as nine years of age are unhappy about the shape of their bodies. In addition, he states, men's bodies are coming under pressure to conform to idealised images, for example, *"the muscular mesomorph"*.

Wolf (1991) argues that *'the beauty myth'* economy is the profound contemporary expression of oppressive patriarchal relations. Vested commercial interests, she argues, persuade women of the need to conform to prescribed images; men are persuaded that such images constitute beauty in women. This in turn, she argues, persuades women to

consume products, from cosmetics to surgery, in the pursuit of beauty. The eroticisation of values in media imagery of women, maintains Wolf, is a way of instilling values. Women come to know themselves, she states, as they are depicted; they come to desire to become how they see themselves so depicted; they incorporate those images as idealised versions of themselves. Wolf makes the case that “*the beauty myth*” reaches deeply into the heart of sexual relations, inhibiting the intimacy that can exist between women and between women and men. This inhibition of intimacy is taken up by Pinkola Estes (1992:201-204) who argues that socio-culturally promoted valuations of women’s bodies alienate many women from their own bodies and from those of preceding and following generations of kinsfolk. These valuations deprive women, she states, of self-confidence; such women base their worth on how they look rather than who they are.

Another site for interrogation in sexual power relations pertains to heterosexuality and the construction of sexual desire. Heterosexuality, according to Tong (1989:109-111) reflecting Millett (1977), may be viewed as the socialisation of desire in support of patriarchal relations and gender inequality; within heterosexual relations, men dominate sexually and women submit. Violence, pornography, sexual abuse and exploitation, she explains, are outcomes of this construction of heterosexuality. In the ‘normalisation’ of heterosexuality as it is experienced, Rich (1980) asserts, a compulsory form of sexual relating has been constructed. Compulsory heterosexuality, she argues, is oppressive in that it prevents women from discovering same-sex intimacy, makes them vulnerable to male violence in myriad forms, and renders lesbian relations extraordinary and vulnerable to exclusive social practices.

Kitzinger (1994) makes the case that gendered power relations determine the actual constitution of sexual desire and pleasure and how it is personally experienced. In a culture dominated by men’s thought and behaviours (Tong,1989), the eroticisation of dominance and submission (MacKinnon 1993) together with the eroticisation of women’s powerlessness, Kitzinger argues, contribute to the ‘normalisation’ of heterosexuality to the detriment of women’s development of their own sexual desires.



Walby (1990:21,109-127) is supportive of radical feminist perspectives on oppressive patriarchal sexual relations. However, she makes the case that changes, both positive and negative, have taken place in these relations; in particular, she argues, the form of control of women's sexuality has moved from the strictness of the private sphere into the greater freedom of the public sphere. What is unchanged, she states, is the continuing fact of "*compulsory heterosexuality and the "sexual double standard"*" in patriarchal sexual relations.

Women are not alone in suffering from the social construction of heterosexuality. Connell (1995:78,230) makes the case that the social construction of heterosexuality is also detrimental to men's sexual development and relationships: for example, homosexual men are positioned at "*the bottom of the gender hierarchy,...a repository for whatever is expelled from hegemonic masculinity*". The pursuit of social justice, Connell argues, will involve putting an end to

*"the stigma of sexual difference and the imposition of heterosexuality and restructuring heterosexuality on the basis of reciprocity not hierarchy."*

In this statement, Connell reflects Segal's (1987, 1994) and Jackson's (1996) call for a feminist approach to sexuality which is inclusive rather than exclusive of heterosexual preference and pleasure, and which would lead to a transformation of gender relations. A socially constructed heterosexuality, Jackson asserts, can be problematised, challenged and changed.

Fertility and reproduction is considered to be a site of gendered power relations with wide application. Vickers (1994:188-191) and Fahy, Fitzgerald and Maitre (1998) point to the significance of fertility and reproduction as a central focus for demographic, institutional, economic and commercial interests. Eschen and Whittaker (1993:107,108) and Fernandez-Armesto, (1995:697-699) draw attention to certain international agencies' concern with the world's ability to cope with an exponential, global population explosion. Fertility is also a focus of personal interest. Barry (1998:362,363) points out, for example, that today in a western cultural context

couples may seek to realise their fertile potential on very few occasions in an extended fertile life-span.

Women's role in reproduction was perceived by Firestone (1970) as a site of gendered oppression to be resolved by its substitution with technologically assisted reproductive practices. However, Rowland (cited in Tong, 1989:83,83) takes issue with Firestone, arguing that acquiescence to such a substitution cuts women off from the "*affirming power women exert in bringing new life into the world*". Thirty years after Firestone, when reproductive technology has advanced to the point that it actually can intervene substantially in reproduction, the issue for many feminists is not one of eliminating women's biological role in reproduction by yielding it to science and technology, Tong (1989:3) states, but of ensuring that women take control of their reproductive potential. Men's exclusion, by virtue of their sex, from enjoying women's reproductive power, she notes, is said to be the cause of the proliferation of reproductive technologies. In this view, reproductive technologies are a form of backlash against women (Dworkin, Corea, cited in Tong, 1989:82-84; Rowland, 1984).

Technology and medical practices combine to exercise psycho-cultural power in the reproductive domain. Capra, (1983:158,159) holds that the historical mechanistic view of health held by orthodox medical professionals encourages patriarchal, hierarchical attitudes in male doctors towards women patients and women doctors. Rutter and Rutter (1993:289, 303-305) point out that the clinical impersonality of medical interventions in infertility treatments, a process, they state, in which the person becomes "*a patient*", is accompanied by a psychological challenge to the couple's relationship. The greatest stress, they note, is caused by the clinician's control of the couple's intimate relations and "*of making sex into a mechanical procedure*". This confirms Masters, Johnson and Kolodny's (1992:136) account of medical interventions in infertility investigations. Ryan (1997:255-265) argues that science and medicine, through "*the masculinization of childbirth*" and the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology, have gained an oppressive purchase on personal sexuality and the body.



Fertility is a key domain of oppressive sexual power relations exercised by individuals, couples, institutions, and global interests, concludes Vickers (1994:188-191). Such power relations, she holds, are engaged either minimally or maximally with the control of reproductive or non-reproductive outcomes of the sexual encounter. The importance of this domain in terms of oppressive relations is highlighted by Heise (1993) in the recognition that socio-cultural values and attitudes may be the determinants of whether a child of a particular sex is allowed to live or not.

In identifying critical aspects of oppressive relations, Rich (cited in Tong, 1989:90) moves the debate from child bearing to child rearing, arguing that women's control of reproduction will not solve the issue of gender oppression. Rich's argument is that the institution of motherhood is oppressive rather than motherhood itself. *"As long as women and women only are the nurturers of children... and as long as society itself is patriarchal..."*, she asserts, the gendered division of the affective domain of a *"public 'male world' separate from the private 'female' world of the affections"* will militate against gender equality. Segal (1987), however, warns against generalisations, pointing out that when men's specific situations are examined, they do not necessarily conform to the stereotype. Men, as well as women, she notes, can be caring nurturers and enjoy parenting their children.

Responding to the issue of gender inequity in child-rearing, Seidler (1988:272,302) maintains that the role of fathers in child-rearing requires a new form of learning for men; a learning freed from the culturally oppressive constraints on men in the past. The model of father traditionally promulgated, he argues, is that of the withdrawn, rational, authority figure, not one of emotional engagement and nurture. Breaking with the intergenerational role model of fathering is challenging, he states, because it requires a quite different male self-concept. He points out that the adoption of an emotionally nurturant child-rearing role requires a shift from men's culturally inscribed assumption of male superiority, by virtue of their rationality and related instrumental identity, to an affective and interdependent way of relating. This form of communicative fathering and shared parenting, with a view to achieving a qualitative

relationship with their children, Seidler concludes, requires that men recognise and internalise the values of intimacy and relationship.

The significance of women's role in rearing and educating children and the sequestration of intimacy to a privatised women's world of mothering is echoed in Rhode (1990:211). Rhode supports the view that fathers have an important role to play in child-rearing. Reflecting on the issue of dependent care, including childcare, freedom from oppressive relations, she argues, requires policies and working structures which are sex neutral. The issue is not how society supports women's biological role, Rhode asserts, but of changing "*how highly [society] values intimate human relationships and the care-related obligations that such relationships impose.*"

In order to achieve such social transformation with regard to gender inequity in general, including as it relates to women's and men's role in parenting and childcare, Kerfoot and Knights (1994:75,76) argue that there is a need to move beyond seeking "*totalizing explanations of complex social processes*" and fusions of sex and category as is evidenced in "*women/children/home*" and "*men/job/work*"; such explanations should be interrogated in a manner which "*renders power, gender and sexuality open to critical reflection and re-examination*". Kerfoot and Knights' argument can be linked with Brookfield's (1987:227) observation on child-rearing: he recognises the difficulty of breaking the intergenerational pattern of parenting but also advocates critical reflection as a means to intervening in 'taken-for-granted' parenting patterns.

Sexual abuse and violence within the family is held by some authors to be the extreme form of oppressive power relations. Connell (1994:148), drawing from Foucault (1978), asserts that the state itself is, at the same time, both a historical and political construction and consequence of oppressive gender relations. Institutions within the state, he argues, such as the family, constitute a gendered power domain in which women are subjected to "*a socially legitimated use of force*". While the state is not the only structure of oppression, it is exceptional, Connell argues, in the extent and depth to which it can impose gendered power relations, although it does invite "*the counter mobilisation of power*" at times.



The exercise of 'institutionally protected' patriarchal power in the family is evidenced in the high level of sexual violence and abuse practised by fathers and male kin, and by those who substitute for male kin, on children and women, assert Ward (1984) and Parks (1990). This exercise of abusive power relations is hidden, Jacobs (1994:11) states, due to the "*resounding silence of the incest taboo*". She concludes, from a study of women incestuously abused in childhood, that incest is the "*most extreme form of the sexual objectification of the female child in patriarchal culture*". Drawing from object relations theory and the development of the personality (Klein, 1928; Winnicott, 1974), she argues that not alone does incest violate personal boundaries and the child's right to her own body, but it also destroys the mother-daughter bond; the daughter's primary attachment to her role model (Chodorow, 1978, 1990) is broken with consequent effects on the development of her personality.

Brownmiller (1976) argues that hierarchical, patriarchal structures provide a context in which rape and sexual violence is not just hidden but also facilitated. The myth of the 'stranger rape', she contends, maintains rape as 'male-power-over-women' within the domestic and familiar setting. A far-reaching effect of this, asserts Brownmiller, confirmed by the findings of McCullagh (1996:110), is that women cannot enjoy similar freedom to men, even in the most routine and simple aspect of everyday living. Moreover, child sexual abuse, Brownmiller states, is a paradigm of patriarchal, authoritarian, sexual domination representative of male ownership of women and children.

Jacobs (1994:136), in delineating a recovery pattern from child sexual abuse, cites Dinsmore (1991); this pattern begins with introspection, followed by naming and working through feelings, and moves to subsequent action. This is somewhat reflective of Mezirow's (1985; 1990) theory of perspective transformation, although Dinsmore is not explicit about reflection on the relationship between experience and theoretical understandings of coercive sex and abuse.

Whereas Brownmiller holds that all men are potential rapists, McCullagh (1996) contests this perspective as being unhelpful. Even if there were full reporting of rape and a broader interpretation of what constitutes rape, he argues, *“it still is a minority of men who rape”*. The sexist cultural prescription of ‘real manhood’, he indicates, with its emphasis on dominance, independence and aggression, supported by oppressive *“techniques of neutralisation and the operation of the legal system”* and the socialisation of women, facilitates sexual violence. O’Connor (1996:158,159) develops the theme of gendered inequity in the way the law functions in relation to sexual violence noting how *“the operation of the legal system”* re-victimises those who have been abused. Commenting on the difficulties encountered by victims of sexual violence, he adverts to the fact that there are *“hidden victims whose stories are seldom told”*.

The intimacy of family relationships as a site of oppressive power relations is recognised by hooks (1990:187). She acknowledges the ubiquity and particularity of domination and subjugation within the private sphere of the family:

*“Unlike other forms of domination, sexism directly shapes and determines relations of power in our private lives, in familiar social spaces, in the most intimate context - home - and in that most intimate sphere of relations - family....”*

However, she cautions against a universalist, negative interpretation of the family:

*“Even though family relations may be, and most often are, informed by acceptance of a politic of domination, they are simultaneously relations of care and connection. It is this convergence of two contradictory impulses - the urge to promote growth and the urge to inhibit growth - that provides a practical setting for feminist critique, resistance, and transformation.”*

Feminism’s exposure of oppressive patriarchal relations, and the destabilisation of traditional privileged gendered roles in the workplace, Rutherford (1988) explains, has precipitated some men into reactionary mode, for example, by participation in the mytho-poetic movement. Brod (1994:88,89) concludes that this movement is



regressive in its gendered, separatist stance. Consciousness-raising men's groups and men's therapy groups, while partly motivated by feminisms' challenges to patriarchal relations, Kaufman (1994) and Kimmel (1997) point out, also give expression to the privilege of some groups of men over other groups of men. However, they argue, men are genuinely seeking new ways of meaning, albeit frequently mistakenly, by retreating from feminism. Additionally, Kaufman (1994:148) makes the point that the price of gender privilege is high in that it involves the

*“suppression of a range of emotions, needs and possibilities, such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood.”*

Feminism, Kimmel (1997) concludes, has changed the balance between men's experience of power and their experience of pain, thereby empowering their pain to make its voice heard. This, he states, is resulting in a significant number of men joining in the work of gender transformation. However, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1997) warn, a men's movement born out of the confusion and threat experienced by men in a changing society, the purpose of which is to compensate for and counteract the women's movement, will not initiate an emancipatory process. Rather, they state, it may result in greater alienation between the sexes and contribute further to copperfastening those elites in society which benefit from a maintenance of such alienation.

### **Cultural context of research participants' sexual learning**

As indicated earlier, the socio-cultural context in which the fieldwork was conducted is one in which religious moral teaching about sexuality has had a significant impact. In the Republic of Ireland, approximately ninety percent of the population describe themselves as affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, whether or not they engage in religious practice. Church teaching about sexual morality is based on the concept of the monogamous contract, according to the Catholic Catechism (Roman Catholic Church, 1992:499-513). It prohibits genital sexual expression other than vaginal sexual

intercourse within marriage; birth regulation other than in defined circumstances by means of natural family planning; assisted reproduction other than that which aids the process of conception through sexual intercourse; abortion; divorce with remarriage. Church teaching contends that personal failure to comply with its moral teachings on any of these issues may constitute grave sin. It is within this institutional religious context that a majority of the participants of the study learned about personal sexuality.

On a world-wide basis, Parrinder (1980) and Brown (1990:446,447) point out that the sexual moral teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has historical roots in the promulgation of sexual restraint and sexual abstinence as preferred human values. This preference, Brown asserts, still lingers.

The last three decades or more of the twentieth century have proved to be a watershed for the relationship between the institutional Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and its members, in particular in relation to issues of sexuality (Inglis, 1997). For example, the Second Vatican Council took place between nineteen sixty two and nineteen sixty five. This led to a liberalisation of many religious practices and engendered expectations of further liberalisation in sexual moral orthodoxy. The encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, a re-assertion of traditional, conservative teaching on birth control, was issued in nineteen sixty eight. This led many lay-people, priests and theologians to leave the Church in protest. In the nineteen nineties, sexual scandals relating to a number of clerics, religious, and Church institutions challenged the credibility of orthodox Church teaching on sexual morality.

Dominian (1971), a Catholic lay scholar, perceived the Roman Catholic Church, world-wide, as having evolved a moral approach to sexuality which might be described as informed by the concept of 'original sin' rather than 'original blessing'. While supportive of Catholicism and of the moral values in general which the Church teaches about relationships of intimacy, he, nonetheless, argued that there was a need for a more open and understanding Church, receptive to being informed by lay experience on matters related to personal sexuality.



Fagan (1978:91) supported Dominian's call for the inclusion of voices of experience in deliberations related to sexual morality. Morality, traditionally, he stated, had been oppressively equated with sexuality; and, furthermore, the understanding of sexuality has been predominantly negative. Noting the radical developments in knowledge about sexuality and human development in recent times, he argued the need to bring this knowledge and the knowledge of experience together in any formulation of sexual morality. Excessive moralism, that is, "*to teach morality by decree*", as practised by pastors, parents and teachers, he maintained, has been responsible for much of the negativity still pertaining to sexual morality. The pessimistic bias about sexuality and the historical anti-feminism assumptions and practices within the Church, he argued, militates against women and men in terms of their personal development and well-being and their relationships of intimacy.

In the 1990's, little has changed in the institutional Church's structure and teaching on sexual morality, although many theologians and pastors have argued for change of emphasis or of teaching, for example, Reidy (1990) and Kelly (1998); and certain agencies of the Church are, anecdotally, held to mediate a sympathetic interpretation of Church teaching in their pastoral practices. However, much has changed in Ireland in the secular sphere with regard to law, sexual practices, and the socio-economic environment (Inglis, 1997). For example, contraception, divorce, homosexual relations, and the right to information about abortion have been legalised. These changes have implications for the culture of sexual morality within relationships of intimacy. In addition, women's voices are gathering momentum in their critique of the institutional Church.

Schneiders (1991) takes up the theme of anti-feminism within the institutional Church. From a feminist theological perspective, she describes the Church as the most patriarchal and hierarchical structure in Western society. As an institution with responsibility to and for both male and female members, she points out, its regulatory authority is held entirely and exclusively by men. Decisions related to intimate sexual relations, for example, to birth control, she notes, are handed down by a male celibate

elite. Moreover, the emphasis in confessional practice on issues of personal sexuality is considered by some, she states, to be tantamount to psychological abuse.

Kelly (1998:39) recognises distortions in the Church's position in relation to moral issues, to lay people in general and to women in particular. A key contribution to a flawed sexual ethic, he argues, is made by the Church's refusal to acknowledge "*the evil of patriarchy down through the ages*" which systematically oppresses women. He calls for women's contributions to moral theology as a necessary element in the composure of a "*wise and loving*" theology and Church. Recognising the embodied, interdependency of human relations, he asserts that distortions in women's experience leads to distortions in men's experience also.

While Whyte (1971), nearly thirty years previously, argued that the Church and State were separate in the conduct of their business, Inglis (1997) shows that a historical symbiotic relationship existed between the Roman Catholic Church and the Irish State; a relationship which extended to include the political, economic, educational, health, social welfare and media spheres. In particular, in relation to issues of sexual morality, he argues, the institutions of Church and State were at one in the enforcement of a conservative sexual ethic. This sexual conservatism is exemplified by Courtney (1987:33) who describes how homosexual acts between consenting adults were held to be illegal in criminal law;<sup>3</sup> husbands could take an action for criminal conversation against men with whom their wives had committed adultery; divorce was forbidden; artificial methods of family planning were wholly illegal prior to 1979; state legislation on issues of sexuality reflected the Church's position on sexual morality.

The enforcement of a strict sexual ethic, Inglis shows, was attained through the Church's control of education and of the family. The establishment of a power alliance between the priest and the mother of the family, he argues, was central to the achievement of such control. Through this alliance, mothers were encouraged and supported in ensuring that the children adhered to the strict moral codes of Church teaching. This, in effect, he indicates, meant training the children in the repression of

---

<sup>3</sup> Homosexuality was decriminalised in 1993.



their sexuality in order that those who were required to, for economic or vocational reasons, could sustain a life of celibacy, either as unmarried or religious women and men, or as ordained men. An intrinsic element in this power complex, he points out, related to the recruitment by the Church of vocations to the priestly and religious life.

Significant changes in the moral influence of the Church, Inglis asserts, are due to the fact that women are moving out from their traditional roles and locations into the work-place, and are no longer willing to play the role of mother, as constructed by the Church, which they historically did in acting on the Church's behalf in implementing its moral teaching on sexuality within the family. Additionally, he states, the culture of silence in relation to sexuality has been broken since the nineteen eighties, thereby enabling many people discuss sexual issues in public. However, Inglis advises against under-estimating the continued influence of the Church in Irish society, and the potential which exists for a re-attraction to its conservative moral values.

Excessive moralism in relation to sexuality is not the preserve of the Roman Catholic Church alone. Money (1986) draws attention to secular anti-sexual attitudes promoted by Puritan based, conservative, political movements, and Inglis (1997:244) notes the rise of fundamentalism in reaction to postmodernism, "*the absolute against relative truth*". Such movements, Money states, seek to regulate sexual behaviour by sanction, surveillance and prohibition of what is perceived to be detrimental to social order rather than by approval and affirmation of what is contributory to personal and social harmony.

The authors above make the case that oppressive gendered power relations are exercised in various social structures and in sites of personal sexual experience; that such oppression is largely rooted in patriarchal/patristic relations; that such relations are inimical to both women's and men's personal development and to a just society in which intimate sexual relationships which are democratic and loving can flourish.

The interpretative frames drawn from the literature on psychology, discourse analysis and feminisms are overlapping and mutually complementary. From them, the following propositions may be suggested:

- that personal sexuality has both a psychological and a socio-cultural dimension;
- that childhood and adolescent sexual experiences are significant for adult development;
- that personal sexual development in adulthood is necessary for the well-being of both the individual and society;
- that personal sexuality is a site of power relations;
- that personal sexuality is a site for gendered oppression;

and consequently

- that the construction of personal sexuality is dependent on intra-psychic and socio-cultural pedagogy;
- that much sexual pedagogy is exploitative, prohibitive and repressive;
- that the achievement of adult well-being, which includes sexual well-being, is an adult task.

Psychoanalysis and developmental psychology, while they inform the norm, including education, mainly offer therapeutic interventions to those who require such help; that is, they offer individual solutions. Theories of discourses and radical feminism offer the concept of resistance to sexual oppression, that is, a social solution.

There is further evidence in the literature which indicates the emergence of a new sexual paradigm. This new situation, Giddens (1992) states, has the potential for transforming gendered sexual relations, with implications for society as a whole. The transformation of intimacy, largely wrought by women, and which is driving psychic and social change, he concludes, offers the possibility of a radical democratisation of the personal sphere. Freed from the burden of uncontrolled reproduction, women, he argues, are discovering their passions and desires, seeking sexual relationships of



mutuality and intimacy, and challenging men's control of women's sexuality. An implication of this phenomenon, Giddens asserts, is that for the first time in modernity, men are beginning to consider themselves *qua* men, and to reflect on masculinity as problematic. Sexuality is a property of a self-reflexive self, and sexual identity is a project of self-reflexivity. Sexuality is significant, Giddens (1992:181,182) contends, because it forms a connecting point between "*the sequestration of experience and the transformation of intimacy*". Sexual emancipation, he argues, is

*"...the radical democratisation of the personal. The democratisation of personal life, as a potential, extends in a fundamental way to friendship relations and, crucially, to the relations of parents, children and other kin."*

The democratisation of the personal and public spheres is reflected in the work of Plummer (1995:152). Arguing for a sociology of story telling, Plummer asserts the personal and cultural role of stories, either conservatively or radically, in organising, ordering and shaping experience in the world. Personal sexual stories, he explains, help establish identity and community; they connect past and present history in a coherent whole and open a line to and a motivation for the future. Contemporary personal sexual stories are indicative of the emergence of an intimate citizenship from which "*new lives, new communities and new politics may emerge*". The reflexive project of the sexual self, he notes, is producing new sexual stories. These stories centre around bodies, reproductive capacities, relationships, ways of raising children, emotions, representations, identities, genders and sexualities.

The foregoing interpretative frames identify the complexity of personal and political sexual and gender dynamics which are important for individual and communal well-being. They provoke the question of how women and men can engage with their sexuality in an inclusive and life-enhancing way which would contribute to a transformation of personal sexual relations in their socio-cultural contexts. The literature suggests that the democratisation of sexuality holds the possibility of radical individual and social transformation. The democratisation of personal and political experience is fundamental to radical adult education. Within this context, this thesis

argues, personal sexuality can be viewed as a potential site for transformative learning in adult education

### **Transformative learning and adult *sexual* development**

While there is a considerable body of literature in transformative adult education on personal development and gender oppression, and this includes aspects of sexual oppression, there is little evidence of transformative adult education delineating a role for making a transformative learning provision in the area of personal sexual development. However, the following shows that a number of strands appear which suggest that such a role is potentially there to be taken up.

Freire (1972) holds that a fundamental feature of transformative learning is the initial bringing to awareness and the naming of personal oppressive experience. This is critical to the process of becoming a subject of history. While Freire does not address the issue of sexual oppression, to become a subject, it can be deduced, must include the sexual dimension of subjecthood. Mayo (1999) notes Freire's acknowledgement that, at the time of writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a knowledge base about gendered oppression was not available to him. Subsequently, states Mayo, Freire declared personal solidarity with women's struggle for freedom from oppressive patriarchal relations.

Brookfield (1987:211-227) devotes a chapter in *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting* to show how critical thinking, a fundamental feature of transformative education, is important for relationships of intimacy. Helping women and men to develop the skill of critical thinking, he states, is one of the most significant contributions to the mutually rewarding negotiation of intimate relationships between partners, parents and children, and between friends. However, in this publication, while Brookfield stresses the need for men and women to bring critical thinking to bear on problems of intimate relationships for intra and inter-personal and inter-generational well-being and,



therefore, for social well-being, he does not go as far as to suggest that an adult education personal development learning forum could be suited to engaging in critical thinking about issues of personal intimate relationship.

Brookfield (1990:186-189) further develops his application of critical thinking to issues of intimate relating within the learning group. He notes that learners respond eagerly to the opportunity when invited to reflect on critical incidents with co-learners in order to examine assumptions in relationships of intimacy, contrary to expectations of resistance to such personal probing by learners. Furthermore, when offered a choice of using critical incidents to analyse issues of intimate relationship or issues in the workplace or the media, learners frequently choose issues of intimacy. However, Brookfield does not specify the area of intimate relating for consideration by the learners: learners can choose to focus on any area and any close relationship; they do not necessarily address issues of personal sexuality. Sexuality is not focused on as a theme for systematic study or research.

In 1998, in recognition of the value of personal developmental learning in adult education, Brookfield argues that adult education should not be deterred from engaging in such transformative learning; learning which is potentially painful but which recognises the person as ultimately capable of managing his and her personal issues and associated feelings.

The success of women's consciousness raising groups, at a personal and a political level, was achieved through reflection on shared individual concerns. These concerns included personal sexual experiences. Hart (1990:47-71), as was shown earlier, while warning of the dangers of consciousness raising on such topics becoming a group therapy process, affirms the transformative learning potential of engaging thus in adult education. Furthermore, as was seen, she affirms the transferability of women's consciousness raising to a wider application in adult education. Consciousness raising as a transformative learning experience is potentially effective with both women and men in relation to their respective experiences of personal sexuality.

Thompson (1988:190) in critiquing liberal adult education for its passivity in terms of resistance to oppressive gender mores in adult education, refers to 'women's sexuality' as one of the topics validated by the adult educational establishment for inclusion on the curriculum appropriate for women's studies. While Thompson's agenda is to highlight the deficiencies in the curriculum for women's studies wrought by those who would domesticate feminism by co-option, nevertheless, it draws attention to the danger of the confinement of sexuality to the educational 'women's room'. An inclusive approach to transformative learning in relation to personal sexuality would challenge the politics of educational domination; it would do so by engaging women and men in a mutually transgressive learning interaction.

Ryan (1997a:37) shows how sexual discourses contribute to gender oppressive relations between boys and girls in schools. She proposes that teachers and students of both sexes and feminist poststructuralist theorists-practitioners in education should engage in a dialectic to *"push beyond limiting essentialist beliefs about women and men"*. This argument suggests that sexual discourses, as reflected in personal histories, form a significant opportunity for the expansion of adult educational as well as personal perspectives.

While the elements in the literature above indicating the existence, already, of a potential relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality are disparate, the argument they sustain is encapsulated in the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1998:85-97). This Report points to the need for holistic forms of learning in terms of personal development, interpersonal relationships, work, and of communities. The Report (1998:86) emphasises the importance of

*"going beyond an instrumental view of education, as a process one submits to in order to achieve specific aims (in terms of skills, capacities or economic potential) to one that emphasises the development of the complete person, in short, 'learning to be'."*



*'Learning to be'*, (or learning in becoming), the Report states, is a life-long learning project and a dialectical process encompassing learning to live in relationship and in society. Education has a role in facilitating personal development through facilitating human beings

*"to develop independent, critical thinking and form their own judgement, in order to determine for themselves what they believe they should do in the different circumstances of life."*

*'Learning to be'* and *'learning to live together'* can be described as among the goals of personal development in transformative adult education. Developing critical thinking is an important part of the process of learning for social transformation. It is a personal and a political holistic project in that learning to be a subject of one's history is learning to act on behalf of others as well as on one's own behalf; to act together, collectively, for the good of all, as well as to act alone (Freire, 1972). From a transformative adult education perspective, *"learning to be"* is learning to be a critical subject in pursuit, interactively, of individual and communal well-being (Mayo, 1995); a well-being in which *"learning to live together"* is an inclusive, just and democratic experience for all.

Sexuality is a central dimension of being and of living together in relationship in society. It is subjected to both repression and oppression. As Faith (1994:39,45) asserts, *"sex affects everything and is the most profound site of power and resistance"*. As such, it may be a profound site for transformative adult education. That is what this study explores.

Within this context, the research questions indicated in Chapter One: that is,

- to what extent has transformative learning in adult education a significant role to play in personal sexual development that facilitates women and men in becoming democratic subjects of their sexual histories and agents for social change

and, by corollary,

- can adult education be transformative if it does not recognise personal sexual experience as a location for learning which is central for individual and socio-cultural transformation and does not respond to it in its policies and practices

precipitated the fieldwork for this research, the methodology for which is discussed in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ENABLING SPEECH: FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY**

As indicated in previous chapters, the research questions and hypotheses required an in-depth exploration of personal intimate experience. The choice of research strategies received careful consideration because, similarly to educational interventions, research interventions in personal, relational domains are not neutral. In addition to the ethical issue of ensuring a mindful approach to the research participants' involvement in the study, a methodological approach which enhances participant experience is important for accessing qualitative data. Enhancing participant experience does not mean adopting strategies which withhold at the level of challenge, discomfort or disruption. It means engaging with the participants in a mutually agreed learning venture, the ultimate explicit aims of which are beneficial to the individual and, ultimately, may lead to social transformation.

This chapter shows

1. the methodological approach chosen;
2. an overview of the research participants;
3. the methodological strategies used for gathering data;
4. data management.
5. evaluation of research design

## Choosing a qualitative methodological approach

An interpretative/qualitative approach was judged the most appropriate one for in-depth explorations of people's intimate learning experiences in this study. As McCracken (1988:17) succinctly puts it, qualitative research *"does not survey the terrain, it mines it."* In addition, as Marshall and Rossman (1989:11) describe, the process of a qualitative approach which

*"...values participants' perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, that views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants....."*

is compatible with the particular research topic and with the philosophy of transformative adult education underlying the thesis (Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 1990, 1985; Brookfield 1986, 1987; Hart, 1998).

Such an approach recognises the inseparability of persons, as subjects of inquiry, from their context; includes the researcher in the phenomenon being studied on the basis that no person can stand outside the world which he or she observes; regards the researcher as playing a key role in relation to the inquiry; the inquiry process as value-laden (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:8) and as a continuous developing dynamic between concepts, process, data, and analysis.

In terms of the data required, the principal objective was to access men and women's personal sexual histories. For this reason, it was decided that a process which facilitated men and women remembering, reflecting on and engaging in dialogue about their personal sexual histories, from early childhood to the present time, would afford access to what Patton (1990) describes as 'information-rich' material. By including past as well as present personal history, experience could be set in context and the historical relations between individuals, and between individuals and social structures and institutions, would contribute to understanding the life issues interrogated (Dex, 1991). Furthermore, the significant consequences for adulthood of childhood and pre-adult experience (Erikson, 1965; Gould,



1978; Gilligan, 1982; Bancroft, 1989; Mezirow, 1990; Miller, 1990, 1992) would be brought into the research frame.

It was not presumed that participants would have reflected on their personal sexual history in a systematic way resulting in an immediate facility for making in-depth, reflected contributions on their personal sexual experience in response to the research questions. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and previous researcher experience, outlined in Chapter One, suggested the possibility that research participants could be inhibited in their contribution due to previous learning experiences and socio-cultural constraints.

Even if potential participants were willing to collaborate in the study, it could prove difficult to access the desired depth of data because, culturally, there is little evidence of the significant aspects of personal sexuality being a topic of ordinary or regular conversation. On the contrary, Harvey and Gow (1994:13) indicate that society encourages people to keep most matters of personal sexuality private. Many people are intensely sensitive and reticent when it comes to revealing their personal story of sexual experience. This is true with regard to communicating with their partners, their children, their friends, and their healthcare workers (Giddens, 1992; Bancroft, 1989; Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992); it is, in fact, in part, that sensitivity and reticence which has raised the questions which have given birth to this inquiry.

In addition, as was indicated in Chapter Two, it could be anticipated that a number of research participants' personal sexual stories would include painful experiences of abuse, violation, rejection, and loss. If this emerged, the study would invite their articulation as part of the exploration of the problem. The implications of this also needed consideration in the design and methods of inquiry, in particular with regard to the availability and quality of back-up resources for the help and support of any such participants who might indicate a need for them.

A principal challenge, therefore, to gaining access to information-rich material was the engagement of participants in reflection of quality and depth on their personal sexual histories. The purpose of such reflection was to bring to awareness and articulation and,

therefore, to the study, a substantial contribution for interpretation and analysis. To achieve this, a facilitative process was needed which would yield such qualitative content.

Consideration of these issues above together with previous experience of working with sensitive personal material led to the following conclusions:

1. Given the cultural unaccustomedness to open, reflective, and in-depth sharing about personal sexual story required for the study, a strategy had to be designed to include instruments or 'methodological keys' which would serve both the researcher and participants in gaining access to such content.
2. Given the expectation that research participants would contribute from their personal knowledge and experience of sexuality and sexual learning, a collaborative relationship of respect and trust between the researcher and the participants needed to be established; and a perspective of joint venture adopted which would allow participants experience a degree of ownership of the process and outcomes.
3. Ethical issues relating to research of such a deeply personal and relational nature needed to be explicitly addressed; these issues included consent, confidentiality, protection of personal privacy, clarity of educational boundaries, and availability to participants of support external to the learning forum, if required.
4. Following on the above considerations, it was concluded that the methodology used should also provide a new learning opportunity for the participants themselves, that is, it would, *in se*, offer the participants a context for personal development and transformative learning as well as contributing to the collection of data for research.

The approach deemed most congruent with the research intention and inquiry can be described as a single 'composite' case study: that is, a single case composed of the contributions of seventy-nine participants, seventy-six comprising eight groups (groups 1 -



8).<sup>1</sup> In addition, the perspectives of two professional groups with experience relevant to the topic being explored were included (groups 9,10).<sup>2</sup> This permitted an interrogation of *"a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"* (Yin 1994:13). The individuals may be described as the primary units of analysis (Yin, 1994), with a convergence and synthesization of data and analysis from the use of multiple methods of inquiry (Reinharz, 1992:165).

A benefit of case study methodology is that it is not simply a data gathering mechanism, nor a random bundling of diverse phenomena. It is a carefully planned *"all-encompassing method"* which, while allowing for inclusion of the unexpected or unplanned, is a *"mapped"*, disciplined, defined and boundaried *"comprehensive research strategy"* (Yin, 1994:13) chosen, in this instance, to explore relatively uncharted areas of intimate human experience.

The priority in the design of the methodology was the generation of qualitative data rather than statistical generalisation. Although the case study in this research involved seventy-nine people, they did not represent a 'sample' of a population or a universe. The 'generalizability' of this case study is in its *"analytic generalization"*; that is, the case is *"generalizable to theoretical propositions..."* (Yin, 1994:37). The issues addressed in each chapter *"cover broader theoretical issues"* applicable beyond the particular case; for example, issues of personal development, gendered power relations and personal agency have a wider application than to the participants' personal sexuality. Furthermore, the concepts generated by this research are generalizable in that they provide a framework for the interrogation of other cases.

Using the strategies for accessing data in this case study, as well as generalizing to theory, it was intended, as Reinharz (1992:164) states:

---

<sup>1</sup> Details of the participants and groups are given further below.

<sup>2</sup> These two groups are composed of a) members of group eight who participated in the case study in a personal capacity (group 9) and b) an additional group of three psychotherapists (group 10).

*"to analyse the change in a phenomenon over time; to analyse the significance of a phenomenon for future events; and to analyse the relation among parts of a phenomenon."*

Moreover, an advantage of using case study is that it has a dynamic function: the methodology is informed on an on-going basis by analysis of participants' data. This analytic process contributes to the refinement of the issues emerging and of the instruments or strategies used to elicit them (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973:110).

The case study approach facilitates the exploratory nature of this inquiry but is flexible enough to include descriptive and explanatory features (Robson, 1993:41-45). It is, also, a design which, on account of its inbuilt concept of intra-study flexibility of inquiry and methods, can include some of the constituents of action research (Bell, cited in Robson, 1993:373): it offers participants a forum for engaging in praxis (Freire, 1972). This is compatible with the intention that the methodology would offer the participants a personal transformative learning opportunity.

An additional benefit in choosing a case study approach was the allowance it made for the inclusion of perspectives from a range of disciplines with a professional interest, potential interest, and experience in aspects of the research questions. The data from such disciplines effectively contributed to grounding the analysis and enhancing interpretability.

The methods of inquiry initially planned to assist both the participants and the researcher access the data were as follows:

1. an adult education course in personal sexuality;
2. two questionnaires, one issued at the start and at the end of the course;
3. individual interviews;
4. group interviews.

During the research, two other data sources emerged:

5. journals;



6. written evaluations of the course as an adult education provision.

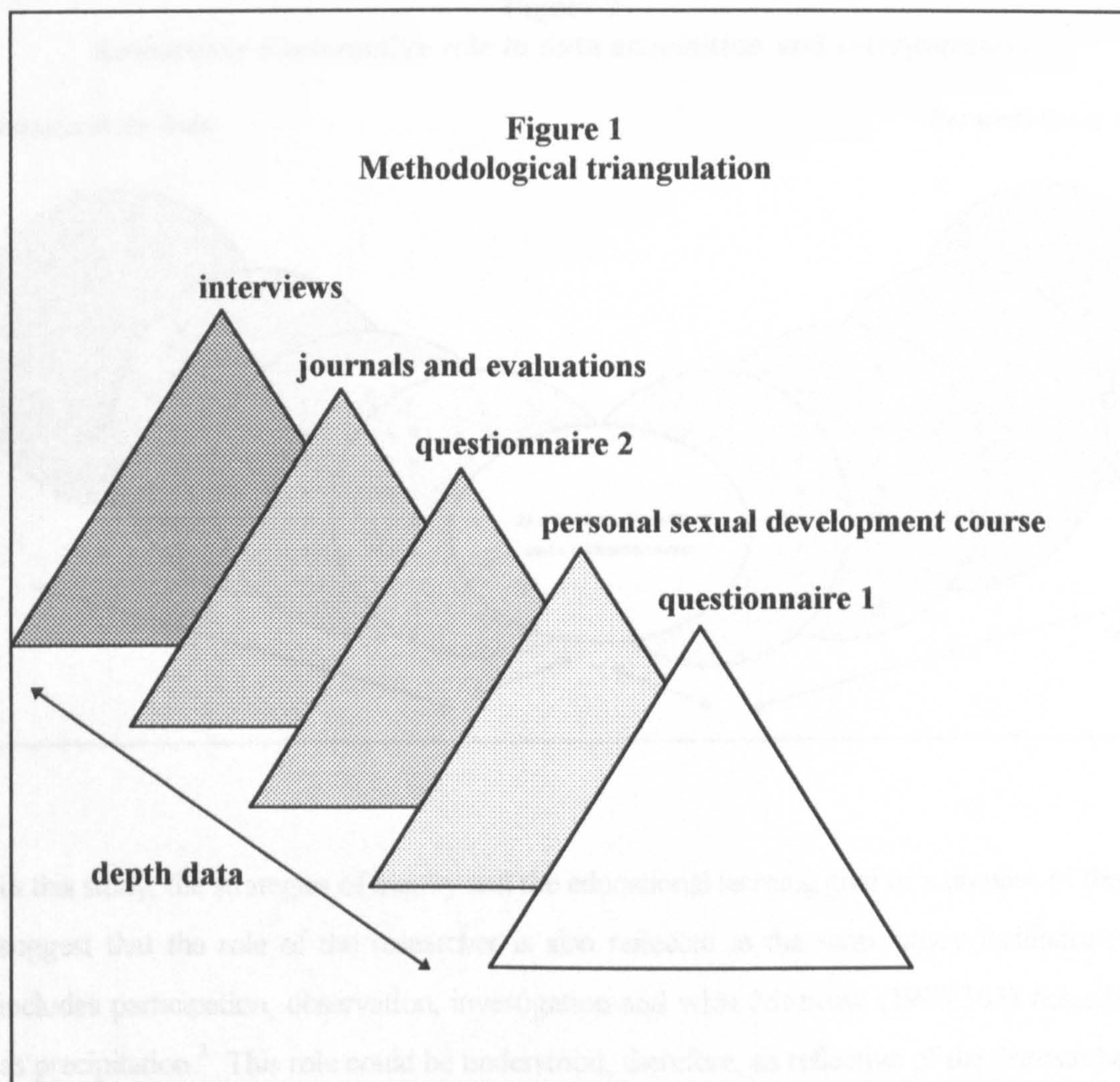
The use of multiple methods of inquiry achieved methodological triangulation, thereby strengthening the basis from which an interpretation of results was made. Kane (1985:52) argues that a multiplicity of methods of inquiry allows for methodological triangulation in order to “*verify and strengthen the validity of the research results*”. Denzin and Lincoln (1998:4) argue that “*triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation but an alternative to validation*” because it “*add[s] rigor, breadth and depth to the investigation*”. Reinharz (1992:204) asserts that triangulation through the use of multiple methods is popular with feminist researchers because it facilitates making connections between individuals and their socio-economic environments: of a recognition “*that the conditions of our lives are always simultaneously the product of personal and structural factors.*”

In all events, a triangulating approach could be said to have self-selected for this study on the basis of the requirements for exploring and responding to the research questions. These questions required multiple, flexible research strategies which would facilitate personal, frank, in-depth, self-exploratory and reflected contributions by participants for which the presence or absence of supportive evidence through cross-referencing could be established. Figure 1 below represents the use of multiple triangulating methods used in this case study to access depth data.

### **The role of the researcher in this study**

As stated in Chapter One, the researcher's work background, training and previous research in related material, using a case study methodology, formed a solid knowledge and skills base for undertaking this particular study. The researcher was familiar with the topic under scrutiny; had a thorough grasp of the conceptual framework; by training, was skilled in empathic communication (Miles and Huberman, 1984:38; Reinharz, 1992:26); and possessed of what might be described as ‘empathic persistence’. This is consistent with Lincoln and Guba (cited in Robson, 1993:195) who assert the need for researchers to have

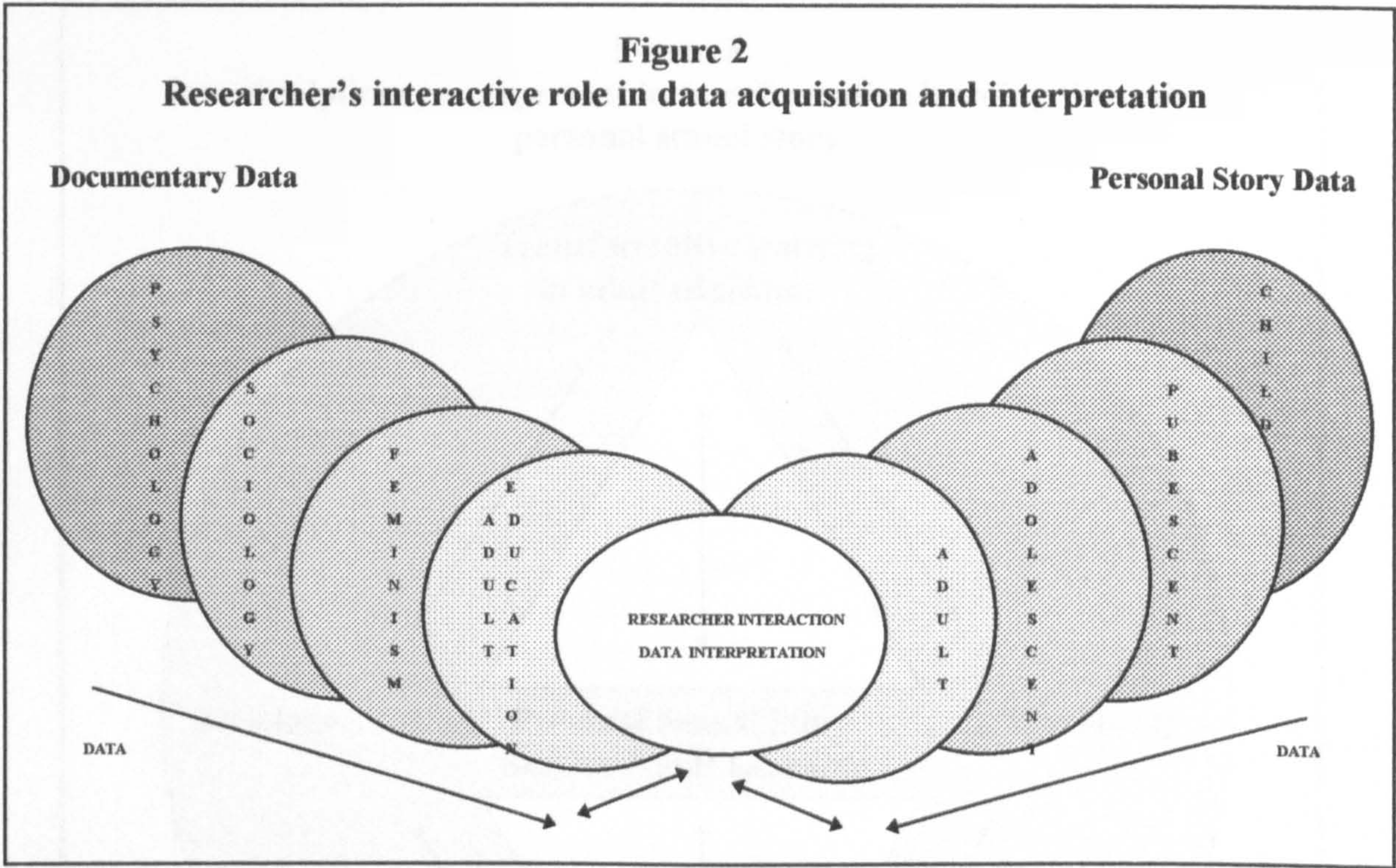




*“an extensive background of training and exposure”* appropriate for the research being undertaken.

The research demanded a dynamic approach to both documented theory and experiential narratives. Figure 2 below indicates the role of the researcher in building a thesis based on the interaction between interdisciplinary conceptual knowledge and research participants’ experiential knowledge.



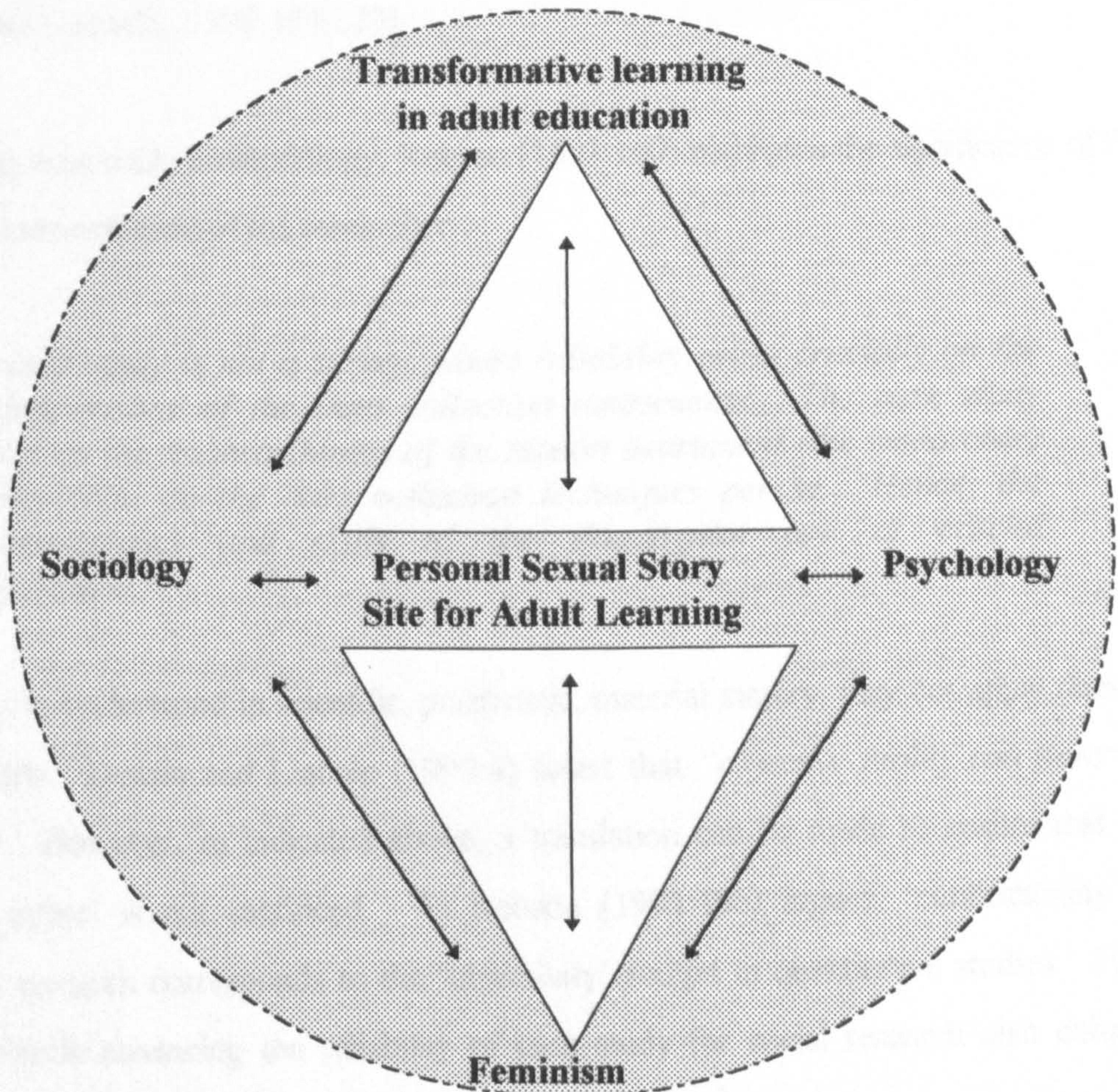


In this study, the strategies of inquiry and the educational learning goal of a number of them suggest that the role of the researcher is also reflected in the term ‘study facilitator’; it includes participation, observation, investigation and what Mezirow (1990:365) describes as precipitation.<sup>3</sup> This role could be understood, therefore, as reflective of the “researcher-as-bricoleur” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:4); that is, as multi-skilled in methodological strategies, sufficiently familiar with a variety of theoretical perspectives for freedom of movement between them, aware of the contribution personal perspectives play in shaping the research process and aware of the political contours of research narratives. This was important in a research process, the goals of which were two-fold: a) the making of new inter-disciplinary conceptual linkages and b) the provision of a transformative adult education opportunity to the participants. Figure 3 below illustrates the multi-disciplined interaction planned towards achieving these goals.

<sup>3</sup> Mezirow refers to the active precipitation of transformative learning by the educator when learners are drawn to interrogate the underlying reasons for their experience and worldview.



**Figure 3**  
**Interdisciplinary engagement in transformative learning through**  
**personal sexual story**



The design in this study intended the role of the researcher to be one of the strategies or 'methodological keys' to assist in accessing and acquiring the data. The role was envisaged as pro-active in facilitating participants in their collaboration in accessing the data and identifying the significant themes for analysis. It intended the participation of the researcher in all aspects of the fieldwork; that is, from extending the invitation to the participants to designing and implementing the strategies for accessing and acquiring the data outlined above.

A primary researcher task, therefore, was the establishment of a relationship of collaboration and mutual trust with the participants. Furthermore, the researcher, as group facilitator for the adult education personal development courses in sexuality, used permission-giving skills and strategies to 'name the un-nameable', that is, to enable



participants to risk revealing intimate experiences and learn what was significant for them in this regard. It was envisaged as an active role, participative, purposeful in pursuit of data; purposeful also in the protection of participants' interests (Marshall and Rossman 1989; Clandinin and Connelly, 1998:169,170).

In discussing case study methodology, Robson (1993:160) highlights the significance of the relational trustworthiness of the researcher:

*"A case study is not a survey, where reliability relies crucially on the characteristics of the data collection instruments. The case study relies on the trustworthiness of the human instrument (the researcher) rather than on the data collection techniques per se. Hence, the characteristics and skills of the investigator are of crucial importance."*

Objectivity, as understood in scientific, positivistic, material inquiry, may not apply directly to case study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998:4) assert that "*objective reality can never be captured*". However, as indicated above, a translation can be made to ensure that the 'scientific intent' is not sacrificed. As Robson (1993:406) argues, 'confirmability' in qualitative research corresponds to the 'objectivity' sought in quantitative studies. Thus, the safe-guards enhancing the reliability of case study for social research also enhance protection against an inappropriate effect of researcher bias.<sup>4</sup>

Awareness by the researcher of personal bias is a first line of defence against its potentially corrupting influence. An additional defence lies in the research design, with its multi-methods of inquiry and subjection to regular, critical, external monitoring. These processes provide adequate safe-guards for the reliability of the outcomes. Another form of relational bias was potentially present in this study; that is, 'participant bias'. The strong facilitative role of the researcher held the potential disadvantage that it might encourage participants to offer contributions to the study which they perceived would meet the researcher's needs. It was important to be explicit about the issue of bias, from time to time, throughout the research process.

---

<sup>4</sup> See p.104 for evaluation of research design to ensure reliability of this study.

Gadamer (1975:238), in *Truth and Method*, insists, when discussing hermeneutics and prejudice,

*"..... a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's quality of newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter of the object nor the extinction of oneself, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing, is to be aware of one's own bias so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings."*

In this study, it was considered that the role of the researcher contributed to the reliability of the outcomes, given that safeguards were in place. Moreover, in the context of socio-cultural exploration of human experience and the hermeneutic challenge in analysing personal history, and interpreting the meaning the subjects attribute to it, a single, empathic, company-keeping, participant interpreter/researcher was considered to be of more positive than qualified benefit. The advantages anticipated in relation to this role of the researcher were

- a) consistency of approach;
- b) familiarity with the methodological material and processes;
- c) first-line access to and familiarity with the memberships, processes and outcomes of the case study which would assist in the cross-connection of case study data and recognition of emerging concepts, new material, questions, linkages, distinctiveness, and differences.

Consideration was given to engaging others to assist in the work-load of the case study which would include a significant time commitment in terms of facilitating the personal development courses intended to be common to all participants. In view of the innovativeness of the methodology and the time and commitment practicalities, it was difficult to identify case study facilitators who had the necessary time, training and skills to join in the investigation. However, two such colleagues were available to facilitate one



personal development course which took place in a rural town. These colleagues were trained previously in the personal development course on sexuality and had the skills Robson (1993:163) indicates to be necessary for acting as group facilitators. In addition, their participation and interest in the study provided a critical forum for de-briefing and process evaluation. The researcher facilitated the remaining seven of the personal development courses as well as conducting all study investigations.

The gender implications of the research being conducted on issues of sexual intimacy by a woman with groups of men and women was noted. This issue was made explicit in the groups and the participants invited to explore its implications, in order to ensure as much transparency as possible.

### **Research participants: an overview**

What was being sought, initially, were people who would be willing

- a) to collaborate in a substantial research project on the potential impact of adult education on personal sexuality;
- b) to take part in an adult education personal development course on sexuality.

For this reason, the practicality of engaging and availing of appropriately sized groups already formed or about to be formed for personal development work, though not necessarily so for the purpose of the research, suggested itself. In addition, the division of participants into groups offered an effective facility for the preliminary management of data collection and analysis.

In the event, the choice and number of people for the study contained elements of both opportunism and selection. It was opportunistic in the sense that advantage was taken of the availability of groups already in existence and accessible to the researcher. There was selection in the sense of pursuing heterogeneity among the groupings in order to include a range of people from different backgrounds. However, as the study was conceived to be,

largely, exploratory, there was no definitive template which determined who should be included. The factors supporting inclusion in the case study were as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- availability of groups of men and/or women crossing a spectrum of age, status, social class, education, employment and experience, willing to participate;<sup>6</sup>
- commitment of such women and men to an intensive and time-demanding research methodology;
- a number of women and men who had made particular choices about their sexuality which differed from the norm;<sup>7</sup>
- an additional number of women and men with particular experience and professional backgrounds bearing on the research questions;
- accessibility of such groups to the researcher.

See Table 1 below for a listing of the groups invited to participate in the study.

Table 1	Groups of Participants for Case Study
Group 1	Nine women, participants on community based personal development course
Group 2	Six women, participants on community based personal development course
Group 3	Eleven women, four men, mature students on course in adult education
Group 4	Thirteen women and two men, mature students on course in adult education
Group 5	Six women and two men, mature students on course in adult education
Group 6	Five women and five men, on in-career personal development training course
Group 7	Four women and three men, academic staff from a university department
Group 8	Three women and three men, on in-service training as voluntary marriage counsellors
In addition to the participation by the primary research groups above, the professional opinions of two groups (9 and 10) were sought on the issues under research, that is, the opinion of the group of academic staff in group 7 above and that of a group of three psychotherapists.	

<sup>5</sup> Rationale for factors supporting inclusion in the study is developed below, pp.76-86.  
<sup>6</sup> In the event, there were no participants over the age of 60 and the profiles of race and ethnicity were homogenous.  
<sup>7</sup> In the event, there were a number of participants who had chosen to live a celibate life.



The theme of sexuality does not attract an equality of expressed interest in men as it does in women (Dickson, 1985; Keen, 1992; Giddens, 1992). Moreover, the researcher's professional experience indicates that men are less likely than women to avail of opportunities to attend personal development courses. There is evidence of this in the ratio of men to women, for example, participating in transformative adult education courses as demonstrated in the gender composition of groups three, four and five above. This ratio is representative of the general pattern of students taking adult education courses in the university (Connolly, 1997:41).

Four attempts were made to invite both established and non-established, all-male, personal development groups to participate in the research. Dickson (1985) and Keen (1992) both assert that own-sex groups are the way by which men can and should work on the theme of personal sexuality. In each case, refusals were received, either because the men rejected the proposal on the grounds that the groups were not sufficiently well established to withstand participation in research on personal sexuality or because the groups did not materialise.

However, in view of the total cohort of participants, and of the intention to synthesise the results of all of the participants, it was considered that the smaller number of men participating would

- reflect a reality in 'real world' research and offer material for reflection and analysis in the study;
- be, in part, compensated by optimising on the number of men present through the use of the research strategies; and
- be at least adequate for study purposes, the number of men participants being 25% of the total, affording 19 primary participants.

## **Contracting for participant collaboration**

The invitation to participate in the research occurred after the initial convening of each of the groups (groups 1-8) for the purpose of attending personal development courses in sexuality. These group members had made a choice to pursue an adult education personal development course in sexuality for their own purposes; participating in a research project was not their primary motivation. The two groups invited to contribute to the research because of their particular experience and expertise in the topic (groups 9 and 10) were specifically invited to do so and were convened for that purpose. For clarity's sake, groups 1 to 8, consisting of the seventy-six participants, will be referred to, when necessary, as 'primary study groups' in order to distinguish them from the triangulating groups of 'professionals', 9 and 10. Unless otherwise indicated, the term participant is used throughout the text to refer to membership of the primary study groups. On occasion, as required, the term 'primary participant' will be used to distinguish the seventy-six members in groups 1 to 8 from the membership of triangulating groups 9 and 10.

The reasons for deferring the invitation to the primary groups to participate in the research until after their courses began were two-fold. Firstly, it was decided that having each group gathered together face-to-face with the researcher would offer a better environment for raising the issue of participating in a research project. Specifically, the potential participants would see the researcher prior to making decisions about participation or non-participation. This 'sighting' was intended to defuse any threatening mythologies about such persons and such work. It engaged the researcher and potential participants in interpersonal, communicative dialogue. Questions could be asked. Explanations could be given. Benefits could be explained. Suggestions could be received. A model of researcher-participant mutual inter-relating could be demonstrated, encouraging collaborative engagement in a worthwhile project.

Secondly, as Robson (1993:33-34,470-475) outlines, any research, but particularly this type of study relating to deeply personal issues of human sexuality, requires a rigorous attention to the ethical issues involved. This face-to-face encounter facilitated personal attention to issues of consent. It created the opportunity to underline the participants' freedom to



withdraw at any stage from the research. The protection of the participants was assured as well as a clear understanding of the implications of collaborating with the work, including the challenges or 'risks' brought about by personal exploratory work. The researcher was in a position to address issues of confidentiality, not simply researcher confidentiality but also group confidentiality, of anonymity and of the appropriate boundaries to be maintained by everyone.

An important element in this discussion was that it enabled the troubleshooting of issues which might arise for individuals during the course of the study. It was made clear, for example, that resources identified by the researcher would be available should any member need help or counsel in processing material which might arise for them.

The process of contract negotiation discussed the researcher's responsibilities to the individuals and to the groups and included noting possible implications of participation in the study for families and the wider communities of the membership. It outlined the possibilities for debriefing and feedback. The process of contracting for collaboration in the project, in itself, contributed positively towards the establishment of a relationship of mutual trust between participants and researcher and to participants' willingness to collaborate.

Importantly, whether any or all of the men and women who applied to attend the courses on personal development in sexuality chose to participate or not in the research, the courses would have continued as scheduled. This was made clear to the groups at the outset in order to respect their primary intention and to remove any undue pressure to participate. Two participants in group 5 chose not to participate as a matter of preference.

### **Composition of research participant study groups**

Appendix A gives a summary personal profile of the seventy-six primary participants, in terms of sex, age, partnership and work status, education, and previous experience of personal development courses. This profile assisted in customising aspects of the research

strategies, and in exploring whether or not particular differences in outcomes could be related to particular differentials in these matters. For example, and not exhaustively,

- difference in sex was important in terms of exploring gendered learning about sexuality;
- difference in age was of interest to see if any qualitative difference in experience of learning about personal sexuality emerged between different age groups;
- status, both partnership and work status, were significant in terms of how they affected relationships of intimacy. They also could influence how particular elements in the course would be structured in order to be inclusive;
- the parenting status of the participants could indicate an outreach in which assumptions acquired in personal sexual learning might be influential;
- educational achievement was of interest in order to see if any important distinction in sexual learning emerged from different educational paths; it also could affect course learning methods and research strategies;<sup>8</sup>
- involvement in the community was of interest in that it could indicate elements of potential participant educational outreach;
- participation in previous personal development courses might show that personal sexuality was already part of their adult education learning process.

The basic profile of the eight groups is tabled below together with each group’s distinguishing features:

**Table 2 - Study Group 1**

Sex						Male 0	Female 9
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	0	1	1	6	1		
Marital status	Single					0	
	Married					6	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					3	
	Religious/Ordained					0	
Children						Yes 9	No
Education	Primary level					8	
	Intermediate level					1	
	Second level					0	
	Third level					0	
Employment*						Yes 2	No 7
Community service*						Yes 6	No 3

\*Employment refers to paid work: \*Community service refers to voluntary community activity

<sup>8</sup> For example, it was important to try to establish whether or not participants were literate.



All members of study group 1 had participated in personal development courses previously, although none had attended a course on sexuality; the main reason given was that such courses were not available.

The key features of the participants in group 1 can be summarised as follows:

- a) the members were 'ordinary' women from a socially deprived suburban environment.<sup>9</sup> Their formal education was limited.<sup>10</sup> They were mature learners for whom personal development courses were the first attractive systematic learning opportunities which had become available to them in their local communities;
- b) as the first group to enter the study, these participants had a special role in assisting with the refinement of the strategies used to access information. In addition, they provided the researcher with a thematic base line, as it were, with which to scan, explore, critique, and develop with the other groups.

The voluntary, non-professional, convenor of the group, having heard about personal development courses on personal sexuality facilitated by the researcher, requested that such a course be offered to the community.

Thirteen women attended the opening session. Two, a mother and daughter, did not return. The issue of participating in the research project was not raised in the opening session. Two more women were obliged to withdraw during the early part of the course because of ill-health.

---

<sup>9</sup> It could also be said that this group of women were also extraordinary in that they were engaging in community adult education.

<sup>10</sup> In Ireland, the school leaving age was raised from fourteen to fifteen years of age in 1974. Children could remain in school at primary level until they reached fourteen.

**Table 3 - Study Group 2**

<b>Sex</b>						<b>Male 0</b>	<b>Female 6</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>&lt; 25</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>		
	0	0	4	1	1		
<b>Marital status</b>	Single					0	
	Married					6	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					0	
	Religious/Ordained					0	
<b>Children</b>						<b>Yes 6</b>	<b>No 0</b>
<b>Education</b>	Primary level					3	
	Intermediate level					3	
	Second level					0	
	Third level					0	
<b>Employment</b>						<b>Yes 1</b>	<b>No 5</b>
<b>Community service</b>						<b>Yes 2</b>	<b>No 4</b>

Two-thirds of the participants of study group 2 had attended personal development courses previously. None had attended a course on sexuality, the main reasons given was that they were unaware of such a course or that it was not available.

The key features of group 2 were:

- a) the participants were younger in age than those in group 1, drawn from a rural town, geographically situated miles apart from one another, in contrast to the suburban, closely-knit, local community group of participants in group 1;
- b) two members of the group had never participated in a personal development/adult education course previously.
- c) the personal development course in sexuality was facilitated by the researcher's colleagues. This allowed for the inclusion of the colleagues' observations and experience with the group and of their evaluations in the overall critique and development of the research process.

Initially, nine women applied for the course. Three withdrew prior to the course commencement; one because a relative intended to participate and she considered it would be more beneficial for both if they did not share the same course; one because of ill-health;



and one withdrew after discussing the nature of the course content and process with the facilitators.

The group was convened, through local advertisement, by two of the researcher's colleagues. While the facilitators of the course for group 2 attended to the distribution and collection of the questionnaires, the responsibility for contracting with and briefing the group and the data analysis rested with the researcher. In addition, the interviews with members of this group were planned to be carried out by the researcher. These facts had implications for the management of group 2 which did not pertain to any of the other groups.

In order to achieve qualitative material on personal sexuality from members of this group, the researcher was obliged to address, particularly, the issue of her relationship with the group. This was achieved, in consultation with the facilitators, by visiting the group on three occasions during the personal development course. Two of these occasions included a social as well as a work element, that is, being present for coffee breaks and accepting the invitation to the course closure lunch.

Study groups 3, 4, 5:

These groups, together, comprised of thirty eight mature students, thirty women and eight men, attending adult education courses at a university. The participants were post-graduates taking a higher diploma course in adult and community education and undergraduates undertaking a diploma course in continuing education.

As part of the requirement for both diplomas, the students were offered a variety of optional courses from which to select a number to attend and from which to choose to complete a number of course assignments. The researcher applied to the university to offer the personal development course on sexuality as one of the options available to students; this offer was accepted.

The participants' primary objective was their personal development as men and women within a context of studying about adult education and community development. Their contribution to the study would be primarily from their personal perspectives. However, there was the additional value added dimension to the study from these groups in that

- a) they were adult learners choosing to learn about adult education;
- b) a number were already experienced in, or would be engaged in, adult education with a wide variety of individuals and groups in their local communities.

Therefore, their contribution would include that of the student and, in many cases, practitioner of adult education.

An added feature was the range of age, education and occupations within these groups which broadened the scope for data collection and analysis.<sup>11</sup>

As with groups 1 and 2, the invitation to collaborate in the study took place after the personal development course had commenced, facilitated by the researcher. The invitation was extended to the groups at the end of the second session. The timing of the invitation allowed for the groups to have settled, engaged in the preliminary work of the course, and begun to develop a rapport with the facilitator. Because this course was part of a the wider learning agenda of a diploma course in adult and community education, care was exercised to ensure that group members understood they had the freedom not to participate in the research project; and that such a refusal would not be detrimental to their academic goals, or, indeed, to the research project itself.

After the contract for participation had been outlined, members of the three groups stated their interest in the research, were reassured about the protective boundaries and, with two exceptions, declared themselves willing to participate.

---

<sup>11</sup> See appendices A and A<sup>1</sup>



**Table 4 - Study Group 3**

Sex						Male 4	Female 11
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	1	6	3	5	0		
Marital status	Single					5	
	Married					9	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					0	
	Religious/Ordained					1	
Children						Yes 7	No 8
Education	Primary level					2	
	Intermediate level					1	
	Second level					2	
	Third level					10	
Employment						Yes 14	No 1
Community service						Yes 10	No 5

Two thirds of the membership of study group 3 had attended personal development courses previously but only one had attended a course on sexuality. A substantial majority indicated the reason for non-attendance at a personal development course on sexuality was because such courses were not available.

**Table 5 - Study Group 4**

Sex						Male 2	Female 13
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	0	5	6	3	1		
Marital status	Single					1	
	Married					13	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					0	
	Religious/Ordained					1	
Children						Yes 12	No 3
Education	Primary level					0	
	Intermediate level					1	
	Second level					5	
	Third level					9	
Employment						Yes 13	No 2
Community service						Yes 12	No 3

Similarly to study group 3, two thirds of group 4 had attended personal development courses previously but only one had attended a course on sexuality. A substantial majority also indicated that non-attendance at courses on sexuality was due to their unavailability.

**Table 6 - Study Group 5**

Sex						Male 2	Female 6
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	0	3	2	3	0		
Marital status	Single					2	
	Married					4	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					2	
	Religious/Ordained					0	
Children						Yes 6	No 2
Education	Primary level					0	
	Intermediate level					1	
	Second level					2	
	Third level					5	
Employment						Yes 6	No 2
Community service						Yes 7	No 1

Four members of study group 5 had participated in personal development courses previously but none had attended a course on personal sexuality: a majority indicated that non-attendance at a course on sexuality was because such courses were unavailable, while two members indicated that they had not felt the need for one previously.

**Table 7 - Study Group 6**

Sex						Male 5	Female 5
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	0	0	4	5	1		
Marital status	Single					1	
	Married					2	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					0	
	Religious/Ordained					7	
Children						Yes 1	No 9
Education	Primary level					0	
	Intermediate level					0	
	Second level					0	
	Third level					10	
Employment						Yes 10	No 0
Community service: Information on community service not established for this group.							

All members of study group 6 had undertaken courses in personal development previously, including a module on personal sexuality. The members of this group were, or had been, employed as teachers in second level education. They had undertaken additional training in counselling to assist in their teaching/student support roles; this training included a module on personal development in sexuality. The group engaged the researcher to provide further



training in this area, thereby providing an opportunity to invite the members to participate in the research.

The anticipated value-added contributions to the research of this group were that

- a) the celibate majority would add an enriching dimension to the findings in that they had made a particular decision about living their sexuality in a manner different to that of the majority and
- b) their experience as professional educators of peri-pubertal and adolescent young people.

Table 8 - Study Group 7

Sex						Male 3	Female 4
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	1	2	4	0	0		
Marital status	Single					2	
	Married					4	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					1	
	Religious/Ordained					0	
Children						Yes 2	No 5
Education	Primary level					0	
	Intermediate level					0	
	Second level					0	
	Third level					7	
Employment						Yes 7	No 0
Community service: Information on community service not established in this group.							

Five members of study group 7 had attended personal development courses previously but had not attended a course on personal sexuality because of non-availability of such courses. One member indicated prior non-attendance at a course on personal sexuality because of discomfort with the topic; one member did not feel the need for it. The invitation to the members of this group to participate in the research was two-fold:

- a) to contribute from their personal experience similarly to members of the other groups;

- b) in order that an input to the study would be made by a number of men and women who were providers of education for adult educators, research adult critical learning needs, contribute to policy, determine curricula, and have a political role in educating funders and providers of adult education. This latter input (b) was explicitly sought in a separate group interview (group 9), as indicated earlier.

The value-added dimension of this study group, apart from the group members being leaders/influencers in the field of transformative adult and community education, was the range of professional disciplines which were contained within the membership. Each member had a particular experience and expertise relevant for critiquing the conceptual framework underpinning the research and the research processes; that is, the group membership included specialist skills in research, gender studies, counselling, group work, personal development in adult education, community development, and the provision and co-ordination of out-reach community based programmes in adult education.

Table 9 - Study Group 8

Sex						Male 3	Female 3
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	0	0	3	1	2		
Marital status	Single					1	
	Married					5	
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed					0	
	Religious/Ordained					0	
Children						Yes 5	No 1
Education	Primary level					0	
	Intermediate level					0	
	Second level					2	
	Third level					4	
Employment						Yes 6	No 0
Community service						Yes 6	No 0

Study group 8 comprised of three women and three men based in Northern Ireland. The members had received training as voluntary marriage and pre-marital education counsellors



for their local communities, and attended the course in personal sexuality as part of their in-service training.

The value added dimension of this group of participants was that they had experience of working with adults in respect of their intimate relationships; this would add to their personal contribution to the research.

Study groups 1 - 8: primary participants:

An important element in the research design and methodology was that all group membership above shared the common ground of participating in the researcher designed adult education course in personal sexuality with its systematic reflection on personal sexual histories. They contributed to the study, primarily, from their personal insights as men and women.

Groups 9 and 10:

Groups 9 and 10, as stated earlier, were invited to give their professional opinions on the subject matter of the research. Group 9 was composed of those adult educators from the university academic staff who had participated in the research as members of group 7. Group 10 was composed of three trainer psychotherapists, two women and one man, two practising solely in the capital city and one, in the main, practising in a rural town.

In addition to their experience of working therapeutically with clients in relation to issues of intimacy and sexuality, as trainers in psychotherapy, the members of this group had experience of facilitating student-therapists in personal development as well as in teaching psychotherapeutic theories and practical skills.

### **Gathering data: ‘methodological keys’ for data access**

A fundamental requirement for this research was a process which would facilitate participant and researcher to access, reflect and dialogue on the topic of personal sexual history. The requirement was, as it were, for a set of ‘keys’ to open doors; doors both to the information itself and to a personal ease and familiarity with the material which would enable its reasonably uninhibited articulation. At the outset, the keys planned for use in the case study to achieve these goals included as follows:

- an adult education course in personal sexuality;
- two questionnaires;
- a number of individual and group interviews.

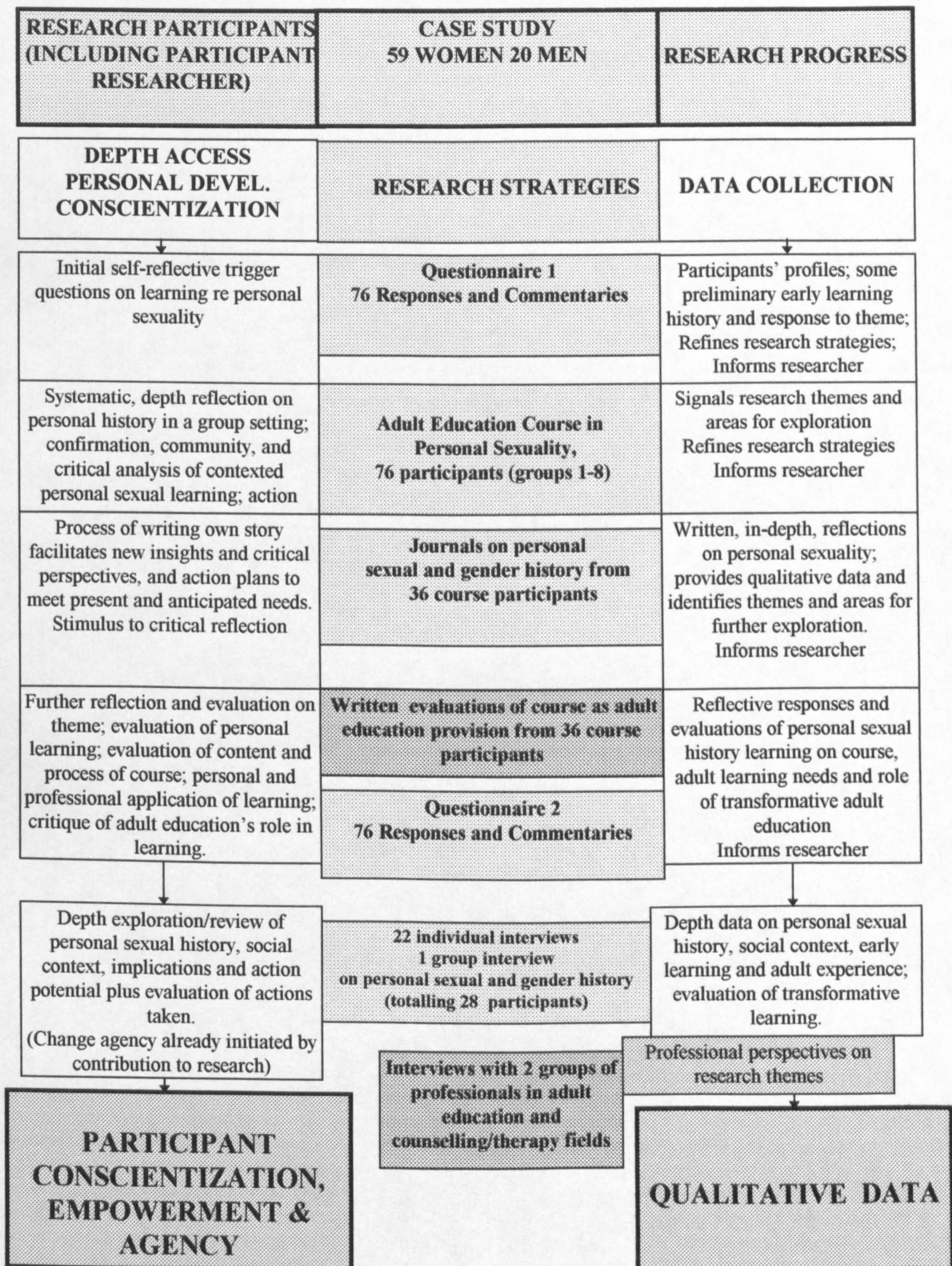
As outlined above, during the course of the research, two new keys offered themselves from a majority of participants in groups 3, 4 and 5. These were

- journals reflecting on personal experience, written during the course on personal sexuality and
- written evaluations of the course as a transformative learning provision in adult education, after its completion.

Figure 4 below indicates the methodological keys used to access data by numbers of participants and the anticipated contribution to data and to the participants’ learning.



**Figure 4**  
**FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY**





In qualitative research, piloting research strategies requires access, establishment and the gaining of trust with the pilot group on the part of the researcher. The pilot group inevitably become part of the research in their own right, with their own unique features. Such a group requires the approach, content and process which the mainstream groups of participants require. Robson (1993:164), in relation to piloting qualitative research strategies, argues that

*"there is no substitute for involvement with the 'real' situation, when the feasibility of what is proposed in terms of time, effort and resources can be assessed."*

However, for the purposes of this study, there was, in effect, an approximation of piloting work already achieved; a 'real' situation. The case study outlined in Chapter One, the precursor to this research, had similar requirements with regard to qualitative, in-depth exploration of similar material (Butler-Scally, 1993). The strategies used in that particular case study included the use of a personal development course, questionnaires, and interviews. These methods of inquiry, appropriately adapted, formed a major part of the strategic plan for this work.

Study groups 1 and 2 also offered an opportunity to further check the methods. For example, some modifications to the questionnaires for the sake of clarity were suggested by these groups and implemented.

### ***Personal development course in sexuality***

A researcher designed personal development course in sexuality (appendix B) was chosen as a central key in the overall plan in accessing participants for the study and data. The course, while flexible enough to encompass the exigencies of the different groups, such as time availability and differences in social and professional backgrounds, contained a core content and process common to all groups.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> See appendix B<sup>1</sup> for course time schedules for the different groups.



Group participants were facilitated to reflect on their personal learning experience of sexuality through their life stages from early childhood onwards. This was enabled by the use of a multiplicity of learning methods; these included guided reflections, journaling, drawing, role play, theoretical and informational inputs and group discussion. Participants were encouraged to explore with one another, in the group, what and how they learned about personal sexuality in childhood, adolescence and adulthood; from whom and in what socio-cultural contexts. They reflected on the effects of that learning on their self concepts and behaviours and on their relationships; on whether or not their learning needs were met or unmet, and on the implications of this. Their interpretations of experience were examined in the light of alternative theoretical understandings. Current learning needs were identified and new behaviours or actions, from such reflections, were considered.

There was a particular value in the design of this course. It enabled participants to access personal experience through a process which 'began at the beginning', that is from earliest memories. This facilitated reflection on the significant issues, events and experiences, and on the construction of personal history relevant to the topic. It facilitated engagement in a critical analysis of learning patterns, socio-cultural pressures, motivations, conflicts and assumptions in relation to their personal sexual histories and learning needs in adulthood. From theoretical perspectives of human growth as developmental (Erikson, 1965; Levinson, 1978; Gould, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978, 1990), and susceptible to structural and gendered power relations (Foucault, 1978, 1979; Tong, 1989; Radtke and Stam, 1994; Connell, 1995; Inglis, 1997, 1998), and from an adult education perspective which views personal relationships as a setting for critical thinking and transformative learning (Brookfield, 1987:211-227; Ryan, 1997), an exploration of personal adult sexuality and related learning needs, including early childhood learning, was explored through critical reflection on personal sexual histories situated in particular socio-cultural contexts.

An additional aspect to the personal development course was that, although in practice flexible enough to accommodate the introduction of unanticipated topics, its structure, nevertheless, acted as a preliminary data reducer by providing a general framework and maintaining relative boundaries for the in-coming data. This, of course, held the possibility of limiting or excluding interesting data which might otherwise emerge. On balance,

however, maintaining boundaries was necessary because of the breadth and the interest of the topic.

### *Questionnaires 1 & 2*

Two self-administered, group customised questionnaires<sup>13</sup> were used with the eight primary groups in the study: one was given to the participants at the beginning of the course in personal sexuality, the other, after the course had been completed.<sup>14</sup>

The use of the questionnaires was multi-purposed:

- a) to establish base-line data on the participants;
- b) to stimulate reflection on the material of the questions;
- c) to collect data related to the research questions;
- d) to confirm, or otherwise, data acquired through the other forms of inquiry used and between participants;
- e) to elicit any substantive line of inquiry overlooked by the researcher;
- f) to provide the researcher with back-ground information to 'feed' the conceptual processes of research design and interpretative wholeness;
- g) to establish willingness to be interviewed.

The questionnaires used in this inquiry, in order to fulfil the purposes emphasised above, included closed, multiple choice and open questions. Furthermore, in almost every case,

---

<sup>13</sup> see appendices C, C<sup>1</sup>, C<sup>2</sup>, C<sup>3</sup>, C<sup>4</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Appendix C shows the questionnaires as they were presented to the research participants. For reasons of spatial economy, the remainder of the questionnaires have been condensed. However, each questionnaire, in fact, allowed similar space for responses as evidenced in appendix C



the questions invited the contribution of a comment or explanation should the respondent so wish.

Robson (1993) and Kane (1985), in discussing the structuring of questionnaires, flag a 'researcher beware' sign. Both make an argument in this regard for the use of closed questions. As Kane (1985:76) warns

*"Open-ended questions will greatly increase the work of analysis because the replies must be categorised and coded after the questionnaire has been administered."*

Robson's (1993:243) warning is similar in kind to Kane's but with the added salutary reflection that

*"The desire to use open-ended questions appears to be almost universal in novice researchers, but is usually rapidly extinguished with experience."*

On the other hand, Marshall and Rossman (1989:83,84) simply note that questionnaires

*"typically entail several questions that are open-ended or have structured response categories."*

Robson (1993:247) qualifies his own caution about the use of open-ended questions, going as far as asserting that

*"the open form is preferable (e.g. when not enough is known to write appropriate response categories; and in the measurement of sensitive or disapproved behaviour)." [emphasis added]*

As indicated above, the questionnaires positively encouraged participants to expand on responses to questions. While it was recognised that this structure would add significantly to the work of the researcher, it also was intended to add significantly to the richness of the

material acquired. In consequence, it met Robson's concern about the potential risk of data from questionnaires being "*superficial*".

In the questionnaires for this research, the closed questions were used to establish facts; for example, to find out whether or not a participant had attended any courses on sexuality previously.

The multiple choice questions were used to gain a measurement of intensity or frequency or quality from the participant; for example, to establish the participant's view of the amount of reflection given to the issue of early personal sexual learning prior to attending this course.

The open questions (and this included the invitation to comment or explain appended to many of the closed or multiple choice questions) were used to encourage the participant to offer his or her own experience, opinion or perspective, with the least amount of interference or influence; for example, to discover if the participant had difficulty relating to particular others because of the way their sexuality was expressed.

This research has a strong exploratory focus. The questionnaires were not primarily for statistical purposes, although many of the questions have a statistical contribution to make in the synthesization of the case study results and analysis. The questionnaires were primarily another tool for assisting participants in accessing a level of self-knowledge which would enhance the qualitative depth of the data. The more freedom the participant had to reflect back into the study his or her opinions, experiences and understandings, the richer the data and material for analysis would be. Thus, the format of the questions was constructed to encourage disclosure rather than enclosure.

Both questionnaires contained a core set of questions which were given to the participants of all of the primary study groups. However, in view of the particular experiences of the membership of some groups, additional questions were asked. For example, the staff members of the university department (study group 7) were asked for their professional opinion on the provision of adult personal development courses on sexuality and whether



or not such a provision should be part of the normal repertoire of transformative adult education.

Two of the study groups, groups 1 and 7, opted to complete the first questionnaire *in situ* when they were distributed during the early part of the personal development course. The remainder of the groups chose to take the questionnaires away and return them at a later date.

Thought was given as to whether or not participants should be requested to answer the second questionnaire *in situ* at the end of the course or be invited to return it at a later date. The former option offered the advantage that the researcher would access the questionnaires without the problem of following up participants who failed or forgot to mail them back. The disadvantage of this option, however, was considered to be a qualitative one; it would allow little time, in the circumstances, for reflection on the questions, answers and invited comments. It was decided to ask participants to forward the questionnaire by a later date.

There was little real difficulty in the collection of the questionnaires, apart from the need to write and/or telephone reminders to a small number of participants.

### ***Journals***

As stated earlier, the journal was not initially contemplated as a method of direct inquiry but came as one of the rewarding surprises of the research process. In study groups 3, 4 and 5 (the mature students of adult and community education), the participants were asked by this researcher, as personal development course facilitator/tutor, to keep an experiential journal throughout. This was intended to enhance the process of recalling and critically reflecting on personal sexual history. It was also to facilitate integration of the learning achieved in the group.

As the participants in these particular groups were attending the course, primarily, as an option for the higher diploma in adult and community education or the diploma in

continuing education (see page 80: 'Study groups 3, 4, 5'), they were free to choose or not to choose, without advising the course tutor, an assignment from this course for the purposes of the academic requirement. In other words, the participants were in possession of choices about

- a) selecting optional courses from amongst several;  
and
- b) from among the options chosen, selecting from which optional courses attended he or she would submit a prescribed number of assignments.

Within the personal development course option, there was a considerable choice of assignments offered. Within this range, there was also a substantial degree of flexibility given to the participants to construct an assignment in a way which would reflect their particular interests. One form of assignment offered to the participants was a written evaluation of a personal development course in sexuality as part of the curricula of adult education, to be accompanied by the journal they had kept throughout the course attended. It was emphasised that the journal would be read by the course facilitator/researcher alone as a means of establishing a degree of engagement with the work of the course. The evaluation part of the assignment constituted the substantive content for academic grading. Thirty six participants submitted this form of assignment.

In reading the participants' journals and evaluations, the researcher became aware of a richness of material therein pertinent to the inquiry; of the resource they offered for determining lines of further inquiry, and as confirmatory evidence of data from other sources. It seemed desirable to attempt to include this new source/resource under the 'umbrella' of methodological approaches approved by Schatzman and Strauss (1973:14), Marshall and Rossman (1989:11) and Reinharz (1992:200-213).

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) affirm journals as both a powerful method for individuals to make sense of their experience and as valuable field text resources. Richardson (1998:345) describes writing as "*a way of 'knowing' - a method of discovery and analysis*".



Joseph Lukinsky (1990:214, 215) describes journal writing as *"an introspective tool"*;

*"..a tool for connecting thought, feeling, and action - a synthesising tool that works from the inside out and from the outside in."*

Given the deeply personal material contained in many of the journals, some of which had not been articulated by the authors previously, it was essential a) to give the authors every possible freedom to refuse their admittance to the research process; b) to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for those who agreed; and c) to reassure the authors of the physical safety of the journals and their safe return.

All of those requested for permission gave it. For many, it was not given lightly. Ultimately, the relationship of trust developed over the course of time between the researcher and the participants, together with the ethos of mutual engagement in and commitment to what they believed was an important and worthwhile enterprise, empowered the gifting of such personal journals in the service of the research.

### ***Participant evaluations of personal development course in sexuality as adult education provision***

In addition to the journals, the participants concerned agreed that their course evaluations could be used for the study. In interpreting the data contained in them, it was borne in mind that the evaluations of the content and process of the personal development course in sexuality were given to the researcher qua course tutor as course assignments. This could have influenced their construction. However, the material contained in them was confirmed through the second questionnaire, the interviews and the data obtained from participants in all groups. This material was considered to make an important contribution to the data.

### ***Interviews***

As a strategy of inquiry, the interview was crucial in that it offered the most focused, in-depth opportunity for exploration of the topic between participant and researcher. In particular, the interview is an intimate experience bringing with it the permissions that such

intimacy affords: that is, of probing with the participants' *"lived experience in its purest and rawest form"* (Atkinson, 1998:74). The researcher's previous experience of interviews on the topic of this research confirmed the value of the process and, also, the possibility of the unexpected which could challenge assumptions.

The assumption was made that, by the time the research participants had completed the two questionnaires and the course, sufficient reflection on personal sexual history would have been achieved to have opened doors to depth material in response to the research questions. It was also assumed that sufficient data and analysis would have been achieved from the questionnaires, the researcher's course observations, and from those of the participants, to note any adjustments needed to the interview plan. The task, as conceived at this point, was to intensify the focus on the research questions; to qualitatively expand on the in-coming data.

While Marshall and Ross (1989:82) describe the interview method of data collection as *"...an interaction involving the interviewer and the interviewee, the purpose of which is to obtain valid and reliable information,"* Atkinson (1998:58, 59-62) points out that, in life story interviews, *"reliability and validity are not necessarily the appropriate valiative standards."* Interviews on life stories are highly subjective as are interpersonal encounters between the interviewer and interviewee; alternatively, *'internal consistency'*, *'corroboration'*, and *'persuasiveness'*, he asserts, confirm the reliability and validity of the story. In this case study, in which personal sexuality is the topic, this criteria can be seen to be met in the coherence of the substantial verbatim accounts recorded in Chapters Five, Six and Seven and in the supportive data from the other methods of inquiry.

Robson (1993) and Marshall and Ross (1989) suggest that researcher bias is mitigated by the accompaniment of the interview method with other methods of inquiry such as, for example, those used in this study. However, as Fontana and Frey (1998:47,48) point out, it is now accepted that the researcher is not immaterial or invisible and any form of research will bear, as it were, his or her subjective *'researcher imprint'* as well as those of the participants.



The alternative to the extremes of total interviewer control and total informant control can be found, Robson (1993:240) suggests, by using what is known as the *"focused interview"*. The focused interview allows for some mutuality to exist in the process in that it is an

*"approach which allows people's views and feelings to emerge, but which gives the interviewer some control.."*

In the particular situation pertaining to this research, to the topic, to the relationship between the participants and the researcher and to the participants and the research enterprise itself, an approach was needed which would be respectful and yet facilitatory of the task. Kahn and Cannell (1957:149) describe interviewing in the following way:

*"The interview is a kind of conversation; a conversation with a purpose."*

This approach suggested itself as a good mission statement for the process in that it reflected interactive mutual intent towards a defined goal.

It was decided that the appropriate interview method would take a hybrid form of semi-structured-focused interview. This form of interview allowed the interviewer to maintain focus on the topic as it related to the inquiry, and with a schedule for flexible use (appendix D), but also allowed the participant a role in determining what constituted relevant material for the interview, which was important for the exploratory dimension of the study (Reinharz, 1992:18).

As a research method, the interviews proved to have a significant effect in further embedding an affective and generative relationship between the researcher and participant in the research process. For example, a number of participants used the interview to articulate issues hitherto un-named and to explore or rehearse plans of action emerging from their reflections; a small number subsequently wrote or telephoned the researcher to expand on or to ensure clarity about their input, or to update the researcher in relation to significant life events. The researcher also followed up a number of participants in order to clarify meanings or to respond to transitions communicated by participants.

It was decided to interview between twenty and thirty participants. This number was adequate to provide 'depth data' and manageable within the researcher's time frame. With the purpose of exploring the themes emerging from the questionnaires, the course, the journals, and the course facilitators' observations in greater depth, attention was given to the choice of interviewees, that is, to issues of balance in terms of themes, counter-themes, gender, age, status, education and employment, and particular skills and experience. The objective was to have interviewed across the range of these variables to seek convergence or non-convergence of data from those different personal features and contexts named above. This involved significant examination of the data already supplied. Limitations were imposed on the selection of participants for interview in terms of their willingness, relative ease of accessibility and availability within the research interview time-frame.<sup>15</sup> In the event, twenty-two interviews of primary participants were accomplished and one group interview. The group interview took place with group 8 because of geographic and political considerations for the participants and the interviewer.<sup>16</sup>

The time allocated to the actual interview was between one and two hours, with an option for additional contact, should either participant or researcher so require. The group interview extended to three hours. Actual interview time was embedded in 'social time', that is, in reconnecting with the participant and sharing life events since last meeting, so total time per participant was extended. This was an important part of the process, not as an engineered 'tool' of interview methodology but as part of the affective and moral relational commitment entered into in the research process; a process which engaged in exploration of women and men's personal experience. The goal of the interview was the achievement of a collaborative conversation in an environment in which the participant and researcher could speak openly about sensitive issues and respond undefensively to probing. The participant was facilitated in this process and focused by an empathic management of the flexible interview schedule.

---

<sup>15</sup> A number of participants were geographically scattered across the country and located at a considerable distance from base. This partially shaped the choice of interviewees in that if two participants appeared to meet the particular criteria for a particular interview, the geographically closer to base participant received first request. Nevertheless, a significant number of participants who lived over one hundred miles from base were interviewed.

<sup>16</sup> Due to the conditions of conflict in Northern Ireland at the time of the fieldwork, it was deemed prudent to limit travel.



Consideration was given to where the interviews should take place. It was decided to avail of 'neutral' ground, where possible, rather than individual's homes or offices. This helped avoid interruptions which could be disconcerting in the context of intimate self-disclosure. Access to conveniently located, comfortable, small rooms suited for the purpose was acquired for most of the interviews, due to the fact that the researcher gained access to premises of a geographically spread national counselling organisation and from the university. However, in a number of cases, it was necessary to conduct the interviews in participants' homes or workplaces.

Invitations to interview were made by the researcher either face to face or by telephone. This enhanced the personal element of contact with the interviewee. It also allowed for discussion about the use of a tape-recorder during the interview. While some interviewees expressed nervousness about using the tape-recorder, fears were allayed when the 'pause' button was pointed out to them; that they were in control of their own material during the interview while accepting that it would be interpreted and analysed by the researcher; and that nothing would be used which they wished to exclude. In the event, all of the interviewees expressed the view that the actual interview had been a learning experience for them and a small number requested a copy of the tapes for their own benefit. These were supplied.

The interview schedules for the group interviews of professional adult educators and psychotherapists differed from the interviews with the participants in that their aim was to acquire particular professional evaluative views on the topic of the research (see appendices E and F). These interviews were completed within a one to two hour time-frame.

All interview material was transcribed from the tapes by the researcher. Consideration was given to engaging a professional transcriber to perform this task. Given the sensitivity and intimacy of the material involved, it was decided, in the interests of confidentiality and participant reassurance, that the task would be confined to the researcher.

## **Management of Data**

Attention is given by contemporary specialists in the field of qualitative research to taming the process of data management and analysis. This is achieved by creating and defining methods for introducing order, structures and systems whereby data can be effectively managed and the resulting analyses have validity, reliability and evaluability or their equivalents (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Yin, 1994; Robson 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

Each participant in the study, that is, each unit of analysis, was given a pseudonym and coded by number, sex and age group. In addition, status was included as follows:

S = single; P = married or living with a partner;

Sep = separated or divorced; R = religious or ordained.

Each participant quote is referenced in the text by the above code. In addition, the source of the data is referenced in the text as follows:

(Q1) = the first questionnaire, distributed at the beginning of the research;

(Q2) = the second questionnaire, distributed at the end of the personal development course;

(J) = journal, and evaluation of course as an adult education provision

(I) = interview.

For example, (36:M:25-34:P) indicates that the participant cited is coded as number 36, is male, aged between twenty-five and thirty-four, is married or in partnership, and (I) after the quotation indicates that the data was obtained in an interview.

Drawing from 'grounded theory', each data segment, as it emerged from the fieldwork, was examined, coded and categorised (Strauss, 1987). The fact that the primary participants in the case study were divided into eight groups suggested that, as an initial



data management strategy, the data from the membership of each of these groups which had undergone preliminary categorisation could form a data bank. Within each of these banks, the initial data categorisations constituted a number of files, each file containing a category.

The files were subdivided and/or new files added as required. When in-coming data was suggestive rather than definitive and, therefore, unsuited to definitive filing there and then, it was stored and coded as material for further exploration and examination.

The data files from the eight data banks, together, yielded the thematic files for the substantive, synthesised, analytic work of the case study. These thematic files expanded with the arrival of new data but, ultimately, contracted as themes clustered, linked or merged, forming the substantive patterns and key topics presented in the study.

Initially, the two questionnaires offered preliminary categories for in-coming data and the means for a preliminary classification index. For example, the category coded as 'early sexual learning source' was classified under twenty-four headings, four of which were 'father/positive', 'father/negative', 'books/positive', 'books/negative'.

As each new piece of data was examined, judgements were made as to its relevance. If it appeared irrelevant or not appropriate for this particular inquiry, it was 'stored', thereby achieving further data reduction. If, on the other hand, it was relevant to the inquiry, it was filed and became material for analysis and comparison with the material within the data bank and within the other data banks. For example, it might have matched a theme in several or all data banks, thereby adding weight to the import of that particular theme; or it might have contradicted a theme in several or all banks, thereby creating a new sub-file for inquiry or a note for future reference.

As each new piece of data was gathered, examined and analysed, it entered a process spiral of interactive inquiry, informing the ongoing study and other methods of data collection of issues for attention or further exploration. Part of that process spiral resulted in the data setting off further theoretical inquiries, for example, the potentiality of biography in

transformative learning. The interaction brought more interpretative lenses into the analytic frame, thereby enriching the analysis. This process was implemented throughout the study with all data collected by the various strategies: it was a largely organic rather than a tightly structured process.

Periodically, memos (Glaser, 1978:81-91) were recorded as a method of organising, integrating and summarizing inputs and concepts. This activity performed the valuable function of withdrawing the researcher from data immersion thereby creating sufficient distance to gain a conceptual overview of work in progress.

The computer, despite its limitations for conceptual level work (Richards and Richards, 1998), was important. Akeroyd's (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:42) concern for the ethical issue of potential loss of computerised personal and private material was borne in mind at all times. All data from the questionnaires, including qualitative commentaries, were written into a researcher designed relational data base programme. Data retrieval and extrapolation of the categorised material from the seventy-six primary participants, by group or in total, was thus facilitated under coded headings and some statistical analysis was simplified and expedited. The word processor was invaluable for recording, coding, categorising and filing data related to themes emerging from the fieldwork, thereby assisting in making patterns visible. However, for this researcher, there was no substitute for the constant reading and re-reading of the texts of the questionnaires, journals and interviews for presentation and interpretation. Much time was spent in what might be described as participant-empathic evaluation of the presentation of data to ensure as far as possible its accurate rendition and placement in the study text. A mental question accompanied the writing: 'if x participant were here now, would he or she agree that this is being handled accurately and fairly?'

From the commencement of the study, there was an on-going dynamic between the emerging data, the research questions, the literature and the interpretative and analytic activity which informed and reformed the topography of the research terrain. While the task of data analysis and interpretation was the researcher's responsibility, interpretative contributions were also provided by the sources themselves. The critical reflection on



issues of personal history, that is the transformative learning process (Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 1990; Brookfield, 1986) which was engaged in by the participants, made it possible for them to contribute to the analysis in their interaction with the researcher. Hermeneutically speaking, the text, the source of the text, the context, and the researcher, together in a moment in time, critically interacted with each other in the historical process in which Gadamer (1975:245) points out *"history does not belong to us, but we belong to it"*. This is the actual interpretative or hermeneutic aspect of this study.

As indicated in Chapter Two, the theoretical framework informing the interpretative lenses for this research draws from psychoanalytic theories of human sexual development coupled with theories of social relations, especially as concerned with the individual and intimacy. Psychoanalytic theory and developmental psychology contribute concepts for interpreting intra and inter-personal relations of intimacy and personal growth. Theories of social relations offer concepts for interpreting the constructions and contexts of these relations. Feminist theories, and, in particular, radical feminist theory, provides a focused lens for analysing the social construction and politics of gendered sexual experience. In this study, these conceptual lenses are embedded in a theoretical framework of transformative adult education which supports the personal and political potential of personal development in adult education for individual and community well-being.

### **Evaluation of research design**

A key concern is to ensure the soundness of the research design in order to protect the integrity of the study and of those who collaborated in it.

To ensure design soundness in this study, care is taken a) to present the issues clearly in the text, b) to explain the theoretical framework informing the research and c) to detail the research processes. The data was gathered from multiple units of analysis and multiple sources. The dependability of the study was assisted by this triangulating use of multiple strategies for data gathering together with the triangulating use of specialist groups 9 and 10. In addition, there is a critical triangulating function in the triad of literature reviewed,

the fieldwork and research supervision. Triangulation enhances research dependability (Robson, 1993).

As the research strategies are clearly documented within the text and, where appropriate, the instruments used are appended, the research design is potentially transferable to other situations, thereby contributing to the validity of the study. This is consistent with Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) who indicate that the task of the researcher is to make available

*"a data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers".*

In addition, the findings generate a transferable theoretical vehicle for use in further inquiry, as evidenced in Chapter Seven. This transferability assists in validating the research design (Yin, 1994:37).

The data is presented in detail in the text and with much literal transcription to ensure that the reader can confirm the congruity of the interpretations. This meets Robson's (1993:406) concern that the data should be adequately presented to show that the findings flow from it. In addition, the study was subjected to on-going supervision by two academic supervisors. The supervisors, while they did not see, hear or read all raw data nonetheless maintained such interrogative scrutiny on the research processes as to act, almost, as equivalents of Halpern's (cited in Robson, 1993:406,407) research auditors.

An evaluation of the research design confirms that the selection of methods of inquiry for the topic was appropriate; and that the research was executed in a rigorous manner, the outcomes of which are defensible on the grounds of dependability, transferability and confirmability, thereby assuring its credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:294-301).

The topic for the study, that is, personal sexuality, and the subjects of the study, these are the men and women participants, required a qualitative and interpretative approach. The literature on qualitative research methodology recognises its value and appropriateness for social inquiry but fences this view with cautions about undertaking such research. These



cautions concern methods of data collection and management, dangers of researcher and/or participant bias, and issues of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The inquiry methods used for this study, that is a case study approach with the employment of multiple units of analysis and multiple methods of data collection, together with the detailed reportage of the processes in setting up, establishing and conducting the inquiry under academic supervision, have produced reliable data for analysis within a clearly defined theoretical framework, thereby meeting the above criteria.

In addition, the actual processes of inquiry have provided the participants with transformative learning opportunities as active contributors to democratic 'intimate citizenship'.

## **CHAPTERS FOUR, FIVE, SIX**

### **SEXUALITY AND THE CULTURE OF SILENCE: A THEMATIC OVERVIEW**

The outstanding recurring theme expressed by the participants, explicitly and implicitly, throughout the findings, is one of need for a non-judgemental, non-therapeutic, non-exploitative learning forum in which to reflect and dialogue on their experience, as adults, of being sexual. According to the findings, there is little evidence of participants having learned to speak on the topic of personal sexuality. By speech is meant genuine self-disclosure to others in a dialectical engagement. By 'genuine self-disclosure', the participants mean giving voice to the 'real' in their personal experiences of sexuality rather than to socially permissible 'sanitised' accounts. For the lay person, they assert, such speech as exists on personal sexual story is still largely limited to the specialist areas of the therapist's room, the doctor's clinic, or the priest's confessional. Furthermore, it is inhibited also within these spaces, because such speech as does exist is largely structured by professional and disciplinary ends. This is reflected in Bartowski's (1988) concern to hear more than is reported by the listeners.

The results show that the participants' meaning perspectives,<sup>17</sup> in the absence of a shared forum about fears, needs, expectations and experiences in relation to their sexuality, remain static, imprisoned in an inner landscape of imposed silence.

As the following chapters will reveal, the major areas of concern expressed by the participants were:

---

<sup>17</sup> "The structure of assumptions that constitutes a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience." (Mezirow (1990), p.xvi.



1. the effects of pre-adult sexual learning on adult personal sexual development;
2. self-image and sexual self-esteem in adulthood;
3. partnership and intimacy: challenge and change in intimate relationships;
4. sexuality and fertility;
5. parenting: the intergenerational cycle of sexual learning;
6. the role of a transformative learning forum for personal sexual development.

In Chapter Four, the focus is on the participants' experiences of childhood and adolescent learning about sexuality, now recalled; experiences which highlight a theme of silence about sexuality in relation to their personal developmental learning.

In Chapter Five, the focus is on the participants' experiences of sexuality in adulthood and in intimate sexual relationships; and on the problematics of interpersonal communication on issues of intimacy.

In Chapter Six, the focus is on the participants' perspectives on the potential role of adult education in facilitating transformative learning in relation to personal sexuality in order to break the culture of sexual silence. Included in this chapter are perspectives and commentaries on this topic by a group of adult educators from a university department and by a group of practising psychotherapists.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **LEARNING TO BE SILENT: SEXUAL LEARNING IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE**

Participants' recollection of their childhood and adolescent learning about being a sexual person can be summarised under the following headings:

1. Parental silence in childhood sexual learning.
2. Puberty: gendered sexual scripting and separation of the sexes.
3. Sexual abuse.

#### **Parental silence in childhood sexual learning**

A striking aspect of the experiences of early learning is the level of pain felt and expressed by a majority of participants about that which they perceive as parental silence in the face of their need for knowledge, support and affirmation during the pre-adult years of sexual development.

*"I think that what I would have welcomed in childhood was a gentle, sensitive, open approach to sexuality that didn't make of sexuality something that is run of the mill - that recognised something of the deep, intimate, and unsafe part of me that sexuality is to do with - that recognised that, but that also opened that up a bit and helped me to feel a bit easier with it." (36:M:25-34:P:I)*



This assertion applies to the years of early childhood as well as to the pubertal transition stage when, as girls, they began menstruating and, as boys, they began to have sexually motivated erections and nocturnal emissions. Irrespective of age, sex or status, a majority of the participants carry painful memories of either an absence, altogether, of parental response, or of an inhibited one which conveyed discomfort with the topic and with their children's sexual development.

James (23:M:45-54:P) reflects the experience of the male participants in the upper age group. His memories of childhood are happy ones. The family was a "close" one. He felt loved but, nonetheless, felt there was something missing.

*"I still can't understand why I should feel that there was a lack of encouragement and the feeling that I wasn't that important as a person."(J)*

James perceives his parents as having avoided attending to his needs as a developing sexual person although, in every other way, they were loving, devoted parents.

*"There was never any reference [to sexual matters] at home. It seemed to be a taboo subject. My parents were uncomfortable and avoided the subject like the plague. I had no sex education of any description."(Q1)*

However, he recognises this lack of explicit attention, this parental avoidance and silence, as a significant negative communication.

*"On reflection, my Mam and Dad's messages, although unspoken, were probably the most powerful of them all. Unwittingly, through not discussing any matters relating to sex, they were making for a very difficult and negative chain of events. Given the chance, this is one element of my past that I most definitely would change."(J)*

James' experience of parental silence in relation to his sexual education is echoed by a majority of the participants, although their family histories differ.

Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) has a different personal profile to that of James. He is aged twenty-nine, a generation younger than James. Dermot's memory of parental attention to his sexual education is similar to that of James. The only explicit attention in relation to the sexual development of boys and girls and men and women, he recalls, was given to him by his father. The content and quality of this attending left him, in childhood, feeling bereft of a response to deeply felt personal needs.

*"I remember that when the issue came up with my parents.... my father indicated that I would learn it on the street corner where he had." (I)*

Ian (12:M:45-54:P) reflects the primitive quality of parental attention to his learning needs, resonant in the findings, when he recalls his father introducing him to the topic at age eight:

*"My father introduced me to the term sex when I was eight, approximately, taking me out to the fields to enumerate the number of bulls and heifers. He explained the [anatomical] terms." (J)*

The experience of parental silence is common to both sexes as well as to different age groups.

Brenda (34:F:35-44:P) recalls no parental attention being given to her sexual education when she was growing up. She considers this to be the cause of her lack of confidence and self-esteem as a young adult.

*"Sexuality - sex was not mentioned in our home except when we, as children, laughed about it while exchanging what little information we had. It left me feeling stupid, vulnerable and open to abuse." (Q.2)*

Rachel, (53:F:45-54:R) has strong memories of parental silence about sexual matters.

*"My mother was a very private person and never communicated with me as regards growing into womanhood, body changes, etc. I was a boarder in secondary school in Northern Ireland which was a pretty closed system, and any learning relating to sexuality was done through my peers. The fact that sex or sexuality was never mentioned in the home and that all information was obtained by myself and through*



*friends left me with strong feelings about sex and sexuality as being 'wrong' and 'sinful'." (Q2)*

Parental silence can be remembered as total in that issues of sexuality were never adverted to at all by either parent; or the silence can be remembered as the silence of a limited, incomplete, and/or negative response to the child's sexual development.

Mollie, (9:F:25-34:S) remembers receiving a little attention from her mother regarding her sexual development. However, in common with the others who remembered receiving a little attention, the attention was limited and carried overtones of disapprobation.

*"My mother explained about the changes happening in my body, i.e.. periods, but that was the extent of our conversation." (Q2)*

Margaret, (24:F:35-44:P) remembers, with sadness, the sum of her mother's intervention in her sexual learning when she told her about the 'facts of life' at age ten:

*"Yet, I feel that it was left at the facts and that very little was done to develop or explore it after that, except the usual list of 'don'ts'." (Q2)*

The experience of parental silence, which gave rise to distress for so many of the participants, was not equated with unhappy family life. Madeleine (26:F:25-44:P) speaks of her childhood as happy and her parents as caring. In reflecting on her early years, she contrasts what she experienced in her family with that of others:

*"How many of them would have stable backgrounds; would have seen their first ten years as free of conflict and happy? I am very lucky to have such wonderful parents, who struggled to rear eight of us, who loved us and passed on their values." (J)*

However, as she reflects on the next decade of her life, she conveys an important qualification to her experience of parental care. In relation to her sexual learning, another picture emerges:

*“The subject would have been taboo at home; the thought that my parents actually did manage to produce us would seem almost a miracle as no outward show of affection was ever given to us; we just arrived, I suppose.”(J)*

Parental silence about sexuality is perceived by the participants as two-fold in character; a) the absence of communication and b) communication that is inadequate in content and negative in tone.

It has been stated that one of the factors contributing to the sexual revolution of the nineteen sixties was an increased openness to sexual discussion and expression (Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny, 1990; Rubin, cited in Giddens, 1992:9-13). With the exception of one participant, this openness does not apply to any of the participants who were children during the decades of the nineteen forties through to the nineteen eighties. Their experience does not reflect a liberalisation in discourse taking place between parent and child. Rather, the findings suggest that parents of the participants engaged in what Ehrenberg and Ehrenberg (cited in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:211) define as repressive or avoidant behaviours in relation to teaching their children about personal sexuality. The participants' experiences are consistent with the Irish socio-cultural context, described by Inglis (1998:156,157), in which parents lack the communicative competence to speak about sexual issues.

The findings show that seventy-four participants perceived their parents as having given little or no attention to their children's need for parental communication about their developing sexuality, two participants receiving some attention. This majority did not recall experiencing a form of parental company-keeping that was pro-active and positive in attending to the provision of appropriate knowledge, both physiological and psycho-social, about their sexual development; nor did they recall experiencing affective psycho-social support for their personal sexual learning needs.

Even the basic 'facts of life' were withheld, as reflected in James', Dermot's, Ian's, Brenda's and Rachel's circumstances; or they were dealt with in an inadequate, perfunctory, and emotionally disabling manner, as in the circumstances of Mollie, Margaret and Madeleine. Only one out of seventy six participants indicated that her



developing sexuality was attended to in an open and discursive fashion by her parents. The overall experience was one of parental silence, taboo. This is reflective of Giddens's (1992) assertion of the continuing reality of sexual repression for many, from Victorian times to the present day.

The findings show that, as children, participants received explicit knowledge about sexuality and about their own development from sources other than their parents. The bulk of pre-adult explicit learning was experienced as coming from their peers, from school-yard conversations and from the media. Where explicit learning was acquired from parents, it was, in general, the mother who was responsible for it. This is consistent with the findings of Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992).

Participants did not experience parental silence as a positive or, even, a neutral force in their lives. Rather, the silence bespoke embarrassment, fear, anxiety, discomfort and danger. This was not simply the case in family circumstances where social intercourse was strained or limited; it was so where conversation, openness and discussion characterised the family group. Aine (18:F:35-44:P) recalls:

*"My early learning was totally insufficient. The whole subject was surrounded by secrecy. I don't recall a family discussion around sexuality even though everything else was discussed at the dinner table."* (J)

Parental silence is experienced as a loss, at best, and, at worst, a seriously damaging commission of disregard. This has significance for the child's future adult development and emotional and social relationships. The life-course is sexual (Freud, 1977; Erikson, 1965; Gould, 1978; Bancroft, 1989; Giddens, 1992). Where parents abdicate their responsibilities for educating their children about this core dimension of their development, a negative sexual socialisation process is likely, affecting the children's sense of self-esteem and self-worth<sup>18</sup>. This, in turn, has serious implications for their adult relationships, in particular, relationships of intimacy. Furthermore, it creates

---

<sup>18</sup> see Forward cited in Giddens (1992:104-110) in relation to 'toxic parenting'.

foundational difficulties for their future roles as parent-educators, as is indicated by the participants who are themselves parents or in parental roles in their professional lives.

Parental silence engendered feelings of exclusion, isolation, shame and confusion about sexuality. These feelings, experienced by their children, may reflect parents' own emotional states regarding their sexuality (Bancroft, 1989:171,172).

Silence is a powerful form of communication (Foucault, 1978; Freire, 1972), as James reflects above in his account of parental inattention to his sexual learning. Parental behaviour is a primary source of learning for the child. As Ehrenberg and Ehrenberg (cited in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:211) state:

*"Although we may not like it, children are born sexual beings, and parents, whether or not they are aware of it, are constantly providing lessons in sex education. This response does more to mould that child's mature sexual behaviour than all the information or misinformation parents may provide."*

To enter any social group and experience silence as greeting conveys a lack of welcome for the newcomer. To enter a family in which silence is the greeting for personal sexual development and learning needs suggests a lack of welcome for the sexual being one is. Such unwelcome in the family of origin is threatening to personal survival (see Maslow, 1968)<sup>3</sup>. The feelings engendered by such responses are shame, embarrassment and guilt. These feelings act as a control on the self, both in terms of sexual expressiveness and, also, in terms of personal being-in-the-world. Such feelings undermine personal empowerment; they control personal sexuality.

Forty-nine participants in the research are parents. Discomfort with discussing the issue of sexuality with their children emerges as a concern linked to their early learning. Karen (30:F:35-44:P) recalls an experience during the personal development course:

*"The three women and myself talked briefly about our own personal experiences of puberty and our first period. Then, for some reason, we*

---

<sup>3</sup> Maslow, in defining a hierarchy of human needs, indicates that the need to experience personal security and shelter supersedes affective relational needs. To be unwelcome in the social environment upon which the individual child is dependent can be construed as threatening.



*found ourselves in our roles as mothers, discussing when was a suitable time to tell our children about sexuality, or should I say to talk to our children about sexuality. I felt quite worried as the women all agreed that children should be introduced to sexuality by age ten. I thought about my twin daughters and their twelfth birthday next summer. I realised that I was too embarrassed to tell them the details about procreation.*

*As a child, I had felt embarrassment every time my mother produced those dreadful books from her handbag, 'My Dear Daughter'. She was embarrassed and I was embarrassed, and I just wanted to scream at her not to bring up that subject. I listened to the women and secretly consoled myself that maybe by the time I had finished the sexuality course, I would feel better about discussing sexuality with my girls." (J)*

Karen reflects the experience of a majority of these parents. Her early learning about sexuality, rather than experienced as joyful, exciting and full of optimism for her future in adult relationships, was overladen with negative messages. This is a continuing source of difficulty for her in adulthood. She remembers her parents as doing their best, but

*"when it came to matters sexual, the subject was a complete 'no-no', a taboo subject. By the time I reached the age of sixteen, I would say now, in hindsight, that there were complete blockages in my lower body. Muscles were constricted and contracted out of fear and shame.....I just internalised too many of their [parents'] inhibitions and hang-ups." (J)*

This is the context in which Karen contemplates addressing her own children's need for learning about their developing sexuality. As yet, her ambition is simply at the level of providing her daughters with the basic information, in other words, basic physiological facts. Caught in the grip of inhibiting negative emotions engendered by her personal sexual learning experience, her hope is that she will "*feel better*", as a result of the course, in broaching the topic with her daughters<sup>4</sup>. This is a reproductive cycle of silence (Mahon, Conlon and Dillon, 1998:82), which will be considered in Chapter Five.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Feeling better" as a result of taking a personal development course in adult education is an issue which is taken up, in a consideration of transformative learning on such courses, in Chapter Seven.

The pattern which emerges suggests that explicit attention to education about sexuality, when it occurred, was solely technical in type. It lacked the communicative learning dimensions (Mezirow, 1990:8) which the participants indicated they needed in order to be able to comprehend the complex world of personal sexuality and relationships of which they are inhabitants.

This need for communicative, or what might be described as ‘appreciative’, learning from adults is reflected by Tessa (56:F:35-44:Sep) when she explores how her experience of learning about sexuality might have been different.

*“What would have made it better for me; well, information; very clear information. And the subject broadened; not just the biological, not just the physical, but what was going on around the feelings inside that’s going with it. That would have put me at ease. I think it’s the parents responsibility. But, obviously, they weren’t equipped themselves to do it.”(I)*

This absence of communicative learning, common to all of the participants, is expressed by Betty (27:F:25-34:P) when she describes how she acquired knowledge about sexuality:

*“For myself, the subject of sex was never talked about at home or in school. As a child I remember having a lot of confused thoughts but having no one to talk things over with. Many issues were clarified through jokes at school or by passing around books that helped describe the mechanical aspect of sex. The only issue ever mentioned, even with my sisters, was around periods which, in our home, were called ‘friends’. Everything was kept very discreet..... My mother was kind to me and handed over the relevant books [but] was never able to talk openly to me. My father, I’m sure, was unaware and would never be involved in these issues” (J)*

Once again, the theme of silence about sexuality is apparent in the narratives as well as the limitation of communication to *“the mechanical aspect of sex”*. Within that theme, the differentiation of roles between the parents, in Betty’s account, is evident; the mother being the parent who engages, however, marginally, in the task of



addressing the child's sexual learning need; the father assumed to be aloof from such 'private' and 'domestic' matters<sup>21</sup>.

Damien (7:M:25-34:P) describes the confusion experienced as he grappled with his learning needs about sexuality. As is evidenced by the recalls of so many of the other participants, in the absence of adult participation, his struggle was in determining not only how his learning needs could be met but what, in fact, his learning needs were:

*"Confusion! Conflicting information! Somebody said 'you can't put it inside somebody unless it's floppy and I thought 'how's that possible?'; and I remember thinking that, you know, the idea when you're using a spatula or something; and all these really weird ones; one of the weirdest ones was... 'once women get married, they have to have sex every day or they die'. It's like this little time-bomb thing, when people say 'I need you'. That is what they mean, actually like, 'in the next hour, I'm going to die', you know; and not figuratively but actually. And all these little bits of information, and there being no index to check it... we didn't have the information; we didn't know what was true."(I)*

He recalls taking the initiative with his parents when in search of learning about his sexuality, the outcome of which he compared to that which he later received in second level schooling.

*"They [adults] didn't know how to tell us, or want to tell us, or couldn't even have a clear line on what we should be told. So everything was a reaction. They [parents] didn't have a vocabulary to talk about it either. And, finally, when they were pushed to the limit, they'd give you mechanical information, as they would in secondary school when we moved on. But they didn't have a better handle on it than anybody else. (I)*

He describes the confusion he felt and the compulsion to engage in sexual activity.

*"I had no idea about relationships. I had the idea that ... girls were increasingly attractive and there was this thing called sex which one had to have and... you would say or do anything to encourage this to happen. But beyond that, I had no idea... there was this tremendous*

---

<sup>21</sup> The differentiation in parental roles will be returned to later in the text.

*drive to do something, but no sense of what it was about, or the context, or the language or anything. No.”(I)*

James also expresses the concern about entering a world of sexual expression, recognising it as a contingent world in which outcomes can be positive or negative:

*“Sex was a great challenge to me in that, would it be a failure? If so, what would be the consequence? There is risk taking, a journey into the unknown and the results it might have, the long term effects.”(J)*

Dermot sums up the distinction in his learning between instrumental/technical learning and communicative learning, describing the three ways in which he experienced learning:

*“One was from my brother; and I remember learning the ‘brute’ facts of sexuality from him in a very insensitive way. It was brute and it was factual and it was based on his experience, but it certainly wasn’t respectful of himself or another person. So I learned the basic facts of sexuality from him and it wasn’t... it certainly was a good experience in that, well, at least I knew, from a very early age, I knew what to expect to meet, but I don’t think it was very helpful.*

*The second way in which I learned about sexuality was from the Christian Brothers [an order of religious involved in schooling] who found it very difficult to impart that knowledge to us, and doing so in terms of pleasure equals sin, and very genitally focused and, you know, that kind of thing. Again, I didn’t feel that was at all helpful or healthy”(I)*

The third way, indicated earlier, was when his father, atypically, referred him to the street corner for his education. In summary, Dermot recognises these learning situations as inadequate and lacking in affectivity.

*“I kind of knew at a very early stage what sex was about but what was unhelpful...[in the learning]... was, it was about sex and not about sexuality.”(I)*

In each case of the foregoing participants, and this applies to the group as a whole, the information acquired was not complete, it was not accurate, it was distorted and it did



not equip the learner with the factual knowledge needed to begin to approach an understanding of personal sexuality. Furthermore, where it occurred, it was invested with negative overtones. This is not learning as described by Mezirow (1996) but, rather, a caricature of it. It is easier to outline the 'bare facts' on how things work, and how to make them work, than to discuss the complex experience of being sexual in relationship. According to the participants, where any information was offered, the easier route was taken.

It is noteworthy, in the findings, that the issue of sexual performance and performance anxiety arises in a number of accounts given by men participants when recalling their adolescent years; "what to do" as a sexual person rather than "how to be". This anxiety, common in men, is reflective of cultural values, learned by boys in childhood, which enshrine a passion for manipulation, regulation and domination (Kimmel, 1997); a culture which values the use of human beings in an instrumental way. It is critiqued as a male determined value system (Fiorenza, 1991) and it can be detrimental for a majority of men as well as oppressive for women (Keen, 1992:193; Kimmel 1997).

Performance or functional anxiety in boys, expressed by the participants, is also consistent with Kimmel's (1997) concept of homosocial pressure associated with the status of manhood in the United States of America and, by extension, in western cultures; anxiety relating to pressure to 'prove oneself a real man'. It is not, therefore, surprising that the type of education about sexuality which exists in a male value dominated culture should focus on instrumental type learning rather than be inclusive of communicative learning. 'Performance' in this culture is associated with technical ability, mastery and instrumental expertise.

The participants in the study express a sense of loss in relation to their sexual learning and in the desire to have had attention paid to their personal sexual development. They indicate that sexuality cannot be treated solely as a performance based activity, pre-determined, predictable, manageable and capable of being taught in a once-for-all way using the 'banking' concept of education (Freire, 1972). The type of learning which they seek is suggestive of the Aristotelian concept of knowledge as 'phronesis' (Dunne, 1993; Gadamer, 1975). Education for personal sexual development, based on

the concept of 'phronesis', calls for an irreducible, contingent, experiential, discursive and personal approach to sexuality; such an approach is necessary for a holistic learning that affirms the presence and the growth of individuals and the society in which their sexual story interactively unfolds.

### **Puberty: gendered sexual scripting and separation of the sexes**

The advent of puberty and the adolescent years is accompanied by a new intensity in relation to personal sexuality. The findings show that the participants, as girls and boys, experienced different inputs into their sexual self-understanding from the adult world. What appears at this stage, in participants' personal development, is a gendered separation of the sexes through the scripts or messages received. Notwithstanding the fact that gender learning was already experienced by them in early childhood, nevertheless, the form of gender learning about difference, at the pubertal and adolescent stage of their development, was acute in its action. For a majority of the participants, it signified a brutal separation of the sexes by means of their sexual learning.

Reflecting on their experience of that period of their sexual growth, the issues emerging from a majority of the women participants are as follows:

- a)      menstruation as an emotionally and socially negative experience;
- b)      excessive moralism in relation to sexuality and sexual behaviour with which a majority of the women participants felt burdened during their pre-adult years;
- c)      responsibility for sexual behaviour assigned to the girl.

The major theme emerging from the men participants is one of confusion and isolation in pubertal and adolescent sexual development. However, it is interesting to note that,



in the case of the men participants who entered religious or ordained life, their experience approximates more closely with that of some of the women participants (see below, p.144).

The advent of menstruation heralded the beginning of a new phase in the women participants' histories. This event initiated a surge of imperatives and prohibitions from adults.

As Anita (17:F:35-44:P) recalls, a significant concern was the issue of secrecy. There was the secrecy of the silence, already named, surrounding sexual topics; there was also the secrecy associated with the fact of menstruating. In particular, there was an imperative that any evidence to suggest that menstruation was taking place be hidden:

*"The secrecy surrounding the whole area of periods is crazy when you look back at it from this distance. The subject was never referred to; never mentioned in front of my Dad. I remember sneaking into the kitchen late at night when he was out and furtively disposing of used towels in the Aga."* (J)

Madeleine (26:F:35-44:P) considered that she was well prepared by a teacher in school for the onset of her first menstrual period. However, reflecting on the experience of other women, she states:

*"The experience was not so good for everyone - the secrecy around it was common, as was embarrassment etc. It was, and still is, something hidden, not spoken about, which is crazy as it is so natural and what makes me a woman."* (J)

Nevertheless, as an adult woman, she still experiences the secrecy aspect of menstruation, feeling discomfort at admitting that she menstruates, even to other adult women:

*"I experienced something of that embarrassment in Delphi this summer when I was short-taken and totally unprepared. I had to get tampax from one of the others, but it really is one of these things one endures and does not speak about."* (J)

Anita's and Madeleine's experience highlight the secrecy surrounding the fact of menstruation; the imperative to keep it hidden.

Janet's (5:F:45-54:P) experience highlights a sense of reprehensibility about menstruation and the imperative to stay away from the opposite sex. Janet recalls the onset of menstruation as a distressing experience. Her picture of herself at that time is a poignant one:

*"....dancing with a pair of dancing shoes on, a ribbon in my hair, and tears running down my face."(J)*

Janet was not prepared by anybody for the onset of her menstrual periods:

*"I was in complete ignorance of puberty, having had no preparation. I remember crying and asking my mother if I would still be able to dance, dancing was my whole life then, as I thought I was going to die from this awful physical experience." (J)*

The response she remembers receiving was one which added to her confusion and made a connection between menstruation and contamination:

*"My only memory of an explanation from my mother about this physical happening was 'Don't let boys go near you'. I wasn't given any explanation as to why boys shouldn't go near me. Maybe my mother thought I would be divinely inspired. I thought I had developed something like the plague."(J)*

Cecily, (20:F:25-34:P) is one of the younger participants in the study. She is aware of her comparative youth in relation to many other participants:

*"Sometimes within this group I feel that I am of a different generation." (J)*

However, being of a 'different generation' does not mean that Cecily feels less inhibited by the fact that she menstruates than the other participants. She acknowledges difficulty with the idea of referring to her experience of menstruation



with men present, even today. This reflects the feelings of embarrassment which accompanied the experience of her first menstruation:

*“I remember my period coming in the middle of my history class and I couldn’t leave the class because I would have had to explain why I needed to leave; my teacher was male.”(J)*

The menstrual imperative to secrecy had already been imprinted on Cecily, and this imperative to secrecy was reinforced by the fact that her teacher was male. Even prior to her first menstruation, Cecily had learned that such matters were to be hidden from men.

Both Barbara (15:F:<25:S) and Aileen (19:F:25-34:S) express feelings of alienation in relation to menstruation.

Barbara, the youngest participant, being under twenty-five, asserts that the connection between menstruation and fertility upsets her:

*“I do not feel they [menstrual periods] are part of me. I am not comfortable with the fact that I can have children.”(J)*

Aileen had never appreciated that menstruation was “*natural and good*” until she had reflected on it in group while participating in the personal development course in sexuality used for this study. The advent of puberty and menstruation engendered “*myths, taboo and fears*” which she now recognises are “*absolute nonsense*”:

*“The discussion focused on the feeling we, as girls, have about our period, feelings of secrecy, of being dirty, the names we called our periods, ‘aunt’, ‘friend’, ‘curse’, to name but a few. The real learning for me was the way the whole subject of periods was distanced/separated from me as a young woman and, still, as an older woman, wishing it was happening to somebody else, and still a feeling of being dirty.” (J)*

A small minority of participants recall the onset of menstruation as a positive experience. This is contrary to Rutter and Rutter’s (1993:232,233) observations which

suggest that a majority of girls have a positive experience of menstruation. The positive feelings engendered by the experience tend to have resulted from peer identification; to be the same as the other girls. There was a sense of arrival when the first menstruation occurred (Weideger, 1978). Aine (18:F:35-44:P:) recalls:

*“It was two days after my fourteenth birthday. I was very tall for my age. Lots of girls in my class were already menstruating. I really believed that it would never happen to me. So, when it arrived, I was thrilled. I was ‘normal’.* (J)

Only one participant describes the onset of menstruation as an occasion for celebration within the family; she received a new pair of shoes to mark the occasion.

The pattern of experience emerging from women participants in relation to adult attention to the onset of menstruation, while inclusive of occasional exceptional features, such as the purchase of new shoes, is largely negative. There is little evidence of adult/parental accompaniment of their daughters’ sexual development at puberty that was both positive and inclusive of the psycho-social as well as of the physiological aspects of their sexual maturing. This finding is set in the context wherein the participants perceive parents as having the responsibility of sexually educating children. It is in a context wherein they, themselves, as parents or adults who care for young people, are the educators.

Once again the theme of silence pervades the experience of participants: the silence of secrecy imposed on the experience of menstruation. This is reflected in the fact that hearing women speak of their experience of menstruation on the personal development course in sexuality was a new learning experience for the men present.

The over-riding experience of the onset of menstruation, for the women in this study, is one of suppression; suppression of knowledge of that aspect of sexual growth and development which is commonly held (although not always accurately) to herald womanhood (Weideger, 1978:167; Laws; 1990: Plummer, 1995:127). Secrecy admits of shame. That evidence of menstruation should be kept secret from boys and men suggests something shameful. The words the participants use, accompanying the need



for secrecy, include those denoting dirt and uncleanness. This holds true for them in the private sphere, amongst women, in the family.

In the public sphere, these words are echoed in the media and advertising. In recent times, advertisements for sanitary towels and tampons have proliferated in the media. This is popularly seen by many as a liberalisation of women's experience. On the contrary, the management of menstruation is represented in the media as the management of potentially contaminating substances (Costello, Vallely and Young, 1989:69-77). Words such as "protection", "sanitary", "safe", "clean", "hygienic", "invisible", are used to reassure women that their menstrual experience can be properly contained and hidden: kept a secret. This secrecy reaches its apotheosis in the form of reassurance that the experience of menstruation, providing it is managed in a particular way, will, in fact, not be experienced; that women will not feel that they have a menstrual flow; a flow that is transmuted from blood to blue water on the television screens. They will be 'safe and dry'.

Janet's (5:F:45-54:P) appreciation of her first menstruation, "*I thought I had the plague*" (J), is subliminally confirmed in the public expression by these advertisements.

The accounts of a majority of the women's experience of menstruation draws attention to a two-fold silence: there is the silence of no speech; there is the silence of manipulative speech. The public speech of some contemporary advertising is a form of silence. It 'sanitises' women's menstrual experience by altering its reality under the guise of improving the quality of women's lives. It is manipulative speech that silences experience. It presents the natural as unnatural under the guise of goodwill (Pinkola Estes, 1992:435).

What emerges from the findings in relation to menstruation, as recorded by a majority of the women participants, is the fact that the participants, as pubertal girls, incorporated a negative set of messages about their sexual identity. The cultural imperative to keep hidden from the male world such a fundamental aspect to their identity and development as menstruation placed them, at once, or confirmed them, in

an unequal position in relation to boys and men (Laws, 1990). Martin (1990:75) points out that the construction of menstruation as 'failure', that is, "*failed production*", is a cultural metaphor for women's bodies.

A significant theme in the findings is that of excessive moralism. By excessive moralism is meant a system of moral discourse that is not grounded; that takes off at a tangent from reality; that centres on one aspect only of a complex whole and makes that one aspect its only concern, excessively so. This theme is more evident in the women participants' recall than it is in the men's. The exception to this, as indicated above, is to be found in the recollection of the men who are Roman Catholic priests or Religious and this will be addressed below.

Laura (38:F:35-44:Sep.) reflects an experience of excessive moralism promulgated, she perceives, by the Roman Catholic Church. This experience led her, in adolescence, to believe that her sexuality was potentially a destructive force, not alone to herself but also to boys and men. Responsibility for the regulation of sexual behaviour was situated definitively in the girl's/woman's domain. Her value as a spouse lay in her unsullied sexual status.

*"The Church and school played a vital role in my attitudes. Both were interlinked, as I attended the Mercy Sisters for my education. All messages were very negative. Sex was dangerous, wicked, and evil, outside marriage. It was wrong and sinful. Women had the power to lead poor, unsuspecting men astray! Men only wanted to marry virgins, someone pure and untouched, unsoiled."* (J)

Laura experienced her parents, in particular her mother, as reinforcing the negative attitudes to sexual behaviour conveyed in school:

*"Sex..... was dirty and something which men did and women endured... No such thing as pleasurable, that was something that was made up lately to sell newspapers; and if you find it pleasurable, then there is something wrong with you. It's abnormal."* (J)

A further prohibition impressed on Laura the dangerous nature of her sexuality and sexual behaviour in terms of her fertility:



*“Don’t get pregnant and bring shame on the family. Nobody in ‘our family’ ever got pregnant outside marriage; and, for God’s sake, stay clean and pure or no decent man will want you.” (J)*

Laura learned from the significant adults in her life that her sexuality was the route to personal failure; to failing herself, her family, as well as to failing God. In order to counteract this burden of excessive moralism, Laura, with her friends, joked a lot about sex, *“making light of it”*. However, this did not diminish the dilemma brought about by her early heterosexual experiences:

*“I experimented, as a young teenager, fourteen to eighteen years, to a very small degree; at the time it was a huge step, groping in the dark and french kissing and, lo and behold, enjoying the experience! This caused moral problems for me; imagine enjoying being kissed after all I had been told. Beware! Beware!” (J)*

The moral problems experienced by Laura are reflected in Caroline’s (57:F:45-54:P) recollection of the association of sex and sin, and the danger of the opposite sex, at approximately fifteen years of age:

*“When I was in secondary school, you were brought to confession once a month by the nuns in the school. And they’d say to you before you went, ‘did a boy touch you?’; and you had to think ‘did he touch you?’. And, if he did, ‘tell the priest in confession or else you can’t receive Holy Communion on the Sunday morning.’” (J)*

Caroline found the emphasis placed on the sinfulness of sexual expressiveness painful and the experience of confession humiliating:

*“So you had to go to Church..... and wonder ‘did he or did he not?; will I confess or will I not?; if I don’t, I’ll get excommunicated from the Catholic Church’; knowing no better..... I came out, [from the confessional] and I’m sure my face was scarlet and I said ‘now, I’m clean again and now I can go to Holy Communion on Sunday morning.’” (J)*

The consequences of deviating from the sexual prescriptives of the adult teaching world were profoundly frightening, as Anita (17:F:35-44:P) describes:

*“My Mum’s message to me was.... sex was to be engaged in by married couples only, and any sort of sexual behaviour was sinful. I would go to hell and burn for eternity if I had sexual intercourse before marriage.” (J)*

Madeleine (26:F:35-44:P) reflects on the far-reaching effects of excessive moralism in adolescent learning about sexuality which were falsely inhibiting in her adult relationships. Referring to her marital relationship, she asserts:

*“I am angry about the ‘sin’ element and the damage it has done; the trouble it caused between my husband and myself. What should be natural and wonderful, and very often is, all my narrow attitudes have made a strain and a problem.” (J)*

The dominant picture emerging is one of oppressive loading of the adolescent girl with moral warnings, prescriptions and imperatives. This is in contrast to a moral sexual education which is based on a valuing of the goodness of sexuality and sexual relationships; a valuing which seeks to affirm the adolescent in his or her sexual goodness while enabling him and her to make responsible choices congruent with that goodness, Reidy 1990; Ohanneson, 1983; Dominian, 1975).

Sexual behaviour, eternal damnation, mistrust of the opposite sex and personal responsibility were inextricably linked in the sexual scripts received by a majority of the women participants, as adolescent girls. Emma (28:F:25-34:P) explains:

*“In school, the nuns talked about keeping away from boys; once boys are warmed up, they can’t stop themselves, so don’t start anything in the first place.” (J)*

Responsibility for the sexual encounter and outcome was assigned to girls. Boys and men were considered to be incapable of exercising judgement in relation to their sexual behaviour. This is painfully reflected in Janet’s recounting of her early sexual learning which set the tone for her sexual self-understanding in the years ahead. She recalls an incident of sexual play with a little boy which left a stark imprint on her:



*"It was just that he put his hand up under my skirt, and I had huge guilt about that, because my mother came across it and she hammered me, you know. I was the bad one. That, today, and I'm fifty now, and I'm a long way down the road, was [as] stark in my mind as it was then; that kind of feeling that I was bad and I was guilty. The worst part of that was putting responsibility on me." (I)*

The injustice and harshness of her mother's reaction, in particular, the placing of responsibility on her alone for what appeared to be a grave breach of moral behaviour, gave rise to feelings of gender hostility in Janet. In addition to learning that the play in which she was willingly or unwillingly engaged, was excessively morally wrong, she learned that she had sole responsibility for behaviour of this kind with members of the opposite sex. This resulted in a distorted perception of sexuality and alienation from the opposite sex in her adolescent years:

*"When I had a problem, even a tiny one of a sexual nature, I could not discuss it with my mother.... The whole subject of sexuality and fertility was taboo. I never knew why. I got occasional vibes that sex was something to be endured by a good Catholic woman; a duty to be endured but never enjoyed. Gender hostility was definitely nurtured in a very subtle way." (J)*

The responsibility for sexual behaviour and outcomes, assigned to girls, is sharply focused in relation to pregnancy, as Betty (27:F:25-34:P) who is twenty years younger than Janet reveals:

*"I identified with the association around girls taking responsibility for sexual contact. This was a strong message I received from my mother, and instilled in me fear of sex as opposed to something to be enjoyed. Lack of clear information also created a lot of fear in me as a teenager. There was a huge fear about pregnancy. It was certainly the worst possible thing that could happen, and it was my responsibility totally." (J)*

Sally (59:F:25-34:Sep) is graphic in her description of how she experienced the burden of responsibility placed on her in relation to fertility. She highlights how gender difference operated in her family of origin:



*"I was told I could get pregnant. And, if I got pregnant, I was told.... if I came home pregnant, my bags would be waiting at the door. But, if my brothers came in having got a girl pregnant, they'd bloody well..... but yet, me as the girl, it was my bags would be waiting at the door."*

*"I can honestly say, the only difference my mother made between us was to do with our sexuality. As regards living and your daily life, you were treated no differently. Whether you were a boy or a girl, it didn't matter. You got in and you did what you had to do. But, when it came to sexuality, when it came to things on the television, programmes on the television, then there was the difference. All of a sudden, just because my body was changing, I was treated differently. When it came to relationships, it was almost grinned at if one of the boys came in and said they had a girlfriend. I wouldn't dream of telling them I had a boyfriend. There would be murder. So then I noticed, I am different. I am being treated differently." (I)*

While Emma (28:F:25-34:P) recalls an emphasis on 'purity' and restraint from touching *"certain parts of your body and to pray to the Virgin Mary, if in doubt"* (J), she highlights the powerful exemplar of parental behaviour, indicated in Ehrenberg and Ehrenberg (cited in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:211), which she experienced as positive, overcoming the excessively moralistic messages she was receiving:

*"Somehow, I think my parents expressed a different message through their behaviour; a more positive caring message." (J)*

However, she is still attempting to dismantle a gendered imperative to sexual passivity and responsibility:

*"The outstanding message I got was that you don't discuss sex or anything remotely related to it with adults; that boys know the score and women are passive. It's this passivity that I still have difficulty overcoming. Girls were the ones who have to take control of sexual activity, but the only control was to get it to stop. Girls have no control over how the activity begins, (even from waiting to be asked to dance at the disco; girls couldn't ask but they could say yes or no), or how it progresses. There was only one form of action - STOP!" (J)*

These cameos of women participants' sexual scripting in adolescence show the association, in early learning, between sexual expressiveness, uncleanness and sin.



Words such as ‘dirty’ and ‘wicked’ characterise sex and sexual behaviour, unless it is sanctioned by marriage. Transformation of intimate sexual behaviour into something good and pleasurable in marriage is not promised in these scripts. What is promised is permission, in marriage, for women to engage in behaviours which they had been taught were gravely wrong and deserving of punishment, either temporal or eternal.

These women participants learned that sexual expressiveness, in adolescence, was immoral; that the sexual energy which urged them into an active seeking of relationship with boys was dangerous. Furthermore, they learned that members of the opposite sex, whom they would seek in relationship, were dangerous in themselves; a threat to their (the girls’) continued acceptance and approval within the family and society; a threat, even, to their acceptance and approval by the men who might become life-long partners in adulthood. The imperative was to silence the body and quench desire. Personal sexuality was embedded in shame.

Shame is a powerful, inhibitory emotion. Its root is in anger. It is “*rage turned against self*” (Erikson, 1965:62,63); rage with both the judging public eye and the internalised judging eye of the self (Foucault, 1978). With regard to self-identity, Giddens (1991:63-69) points out that shame bears most directly on it:

*“...because it is essentially anxiety about the inadequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography.... Shame is the negative side of the motivational system of the agent. The other side of shame is pride, or self-esteem: confidence in the narrative of self-identity .”*

The women participants’ accounts of excessive moralism highlight the danger in this learning; a danger of personal identification with that which is shameful. Such identification leads to an experience of being sexually ashamed of oneself and shamed by being oneself. The response is a culturally induced repression; repression, by girls, of the sexually seeking ‘shameful’ self.

In addition to the dirty, unclean images ascribed to sexual behaviour, the women participants, in general, were given the responsibility for ensuring control of both their

own sexual activity and that of boys. The control of sexual morality, in Ireland has traditionally been vested, by religion, in the women's domain (Inglis, 1998). The socially fostered myth that boys cannot control their sexual impulses and behaviours (Dickson, 1985:123-133; Keen, 1992:193) is one of the underpinnings of this relegation of sexuality experienced in countries other than Ireland.

The findings show that fear of pregnancy in adolescence, for a significant number of women participants, was powerfully inhibitory. The visible outcome of engaging in sexual behaviour, designated by excessive moralism as a shameful, inferior and despoiling activity for girls, is pregnancy. Pregnancy exposes the 'shame' to public scrutiny. The capability of conceiving and bearing children belongs solely to girls and women. It is one of the most powerful capabilities in human experience (Vickers, 1994; O'Brien cited in Tong, 1989:78-81). It is the ultimate biological outcome of sexual expression as it relates to its reproductive dimension. By instilling in adolescent girls a fear of the social consequences of pregnancy, as a method of controlling their sexual behaviour which a significant number of the participants indicated was the case, a network of subliminal connections is made between sex, fertility, pregnancy, shame, inferiority and gender. Women's receptive and life-bearing power, in the act of sexual intimacy, is marginalised.

In allocating to the girl the apportionment of shame, responsibility, and fear of public exposure, excessive moralism plays a significant role in the discriminatory sexual separation of the sexes which takes place in adolescence. The separation adverted to, in this instance, is that which is established by the different learning the men and the women in this study experienced in relation to their sexual development. This will become clear below, when the findings from the men participants and contrasts with the findings from women participants are addressed.

The situation is rendered more complex by virtue of the fact that the type of learning outlined above takes place in a socio-cultural context which also promotes the ideal of marriage: of a monogamous, life-long, sexual relationship with a partner of the opposite sex. As Aileen (19:F:25-34:S) succinctly summarises:



*"Sex was wrong.... 'sex is disgusting and dirty, and you should keep it for the one you love.' This was the gist of it, but it about sums up my interpretation growing up." (J)*

This double message places the girl/woman in an impossible position. On the one hand, she has learned that to be sexually active is shameful and sinful and that the opposite sex is not to be trusted; on the other hand, she also learns that her ultimate relational goal is to enter into a commitment to have a sexually active relationship with a member of that 'untrustworthy' opposite sex.

A second double message exists in the proposal that, in order to achieve the marital goal with a 'decent' man, it is necessary for the girl/woman to maintain her sexual integrity, defined as being physically untouched and untouching<sup>22</sup>. At the same time, advertising and media promote unreal images of woman's eroticised and objectified bodies as that which men seek and desire (Rowbotham, 1973; Williamson, 1978; Warner, 1985; Bordo, 1990, 1993). The dilemma is captured in the conundrum 'to be nice is to be good; to be good is to be sexy; to be sexy is not nice'.

There is a third, more subtle double message in the learning the women participants experienced in relation to fertility. These participants were clear that the prohibition against pregnancy outside of marriage was firmly and regularly underlined throughout their adolescent years. This prohibition was expressed directly and explicitly in some situations, implicitly and indirectly in others. The prohibitive methodology used was the inculcation of fear: fear of family and societal disapproval and ostracism. Not only was fear of becoming pregnant instilled, but the responsibility for ensuring that it did not happen was clearly assigned to the girl. This message contrasts sharply with a later socio-cultural expectation, in adulthood and specifically in marriage, that women be fertile and have children. This cultural 'imperative' is evident in the Roman Catholic Church's teaching about marriage and family, fertility and family planning (Inglis,

---

<sup>22</sup> Rubin, cited in Giddens (1992), while asserting that her study showed that today girls are more liberated in their sexual behaviours than older women, nonetheless noted that a number of young affianced women indicated their need to prevaricate about their earlier sexual experience with their future husbands. Walby (1990) holds that the 'double standard' still prevails in sexual relations.

1998; John Paul II, 1981; Paul VI, 1968). From a prohibition against pregnancy in adolescence supported by fear of personal and social consequences, the girl, now a woman, in adulthood, is expected to cherish and show her fertile capability. What is clearly evident is that the women participants in this study were expected to make a paradigmatic shift from one set of internalised assumptions about sexuality and fertility to a contrasting one. This is a major reversal. The assumption of the automatic achievement of this shift without educational support is noteworthy.

In summary, adolescent learning about sexuality, for women participants of the study, did not affirm them with a sense of sexual goodness. Rather, excessive moralism laid a porous foundation for sexual relating through which underlying introjected shame and guilt seeped, thereby damaging sexual self-esteem and personal well-being.

Accounts by male participants in the study of their adolescent experience in relation to personal sexuality reflect, overall, a common theme of confusion and isolation. Whereas the women participants detailed specific experiences of adult involvement in and responses to their sexual learning and development and in particular the involvement of their mothers, the men participants' recall of adult engagement was more diffuse, less concrete and less obviously inhibitory. Their adolescent experience of sexual development, therefore, was more acutely felt as one of silence, absence and abandonment to their own meaning constructions as opposed to one of excessive moralism, prescription and prohibition. In addition, as indicated earlier, the issue of 'performance' appears as a dominant issue in their recall.

Damien (7:M:25-34:J) is an example of the men participants who remember the experience of puberty and adolescence as confusing and frightening. As indicated by him earlier, his experience of parental and adult attention to his sexual development was one of silence. Although articulate and open in style, he found he had some difficulty in speaking about his memories of the adolescent years:

*"My parents told me nothing. An older, more knowledgeable, teenager explained details of sex to me in my early teens. .... I'm surprised at how uncomfortable I feel about this area of disclosure."*  
(J)



He describes his way of coping which resulted from his sense of confusion, isolation and experience of the 'adult world of silence' in relation to his sexual development:

*"[I took on] the role of outsider and eccentric, at this point in my development, going further and further into my own personal mythology....." (J)*

Damien found the explanations given by his peers about sex and the opposite sex baffling, as he attempted to understand his own development and what would be expected of him in adulthood. Part of his recall is the emotional turmoil of that period of his life; of the need for approval and love which he felt was missing from his parents' care of him as a developing male. Within this context, he embarked on a "*passionate pursuit*" of relationship with girls for the next decade which he remembers as compulsive and disordered, recalling :

*"....how my absolute, compulsive, neurotic openness in my late teens, early twenties, frightened so many girls away..... I had to be in relationship. I couldn't be on my own. When I was on my own, I mooned and schemed and dreamed myself into the next one. I frightened off some really nice girls with my creepy intensity and complete self-consciousness." (J)*

Summing up, he offers an image reflecting his adolescent experience of fear and isolation:

*"[It] is summed up by the drawing I did of me at the threshold of sexual awareness. The drawing depicted a faceless figure standing beside a multi-coloured whirlpool. At the centre of the vortex is a tiny dark figure who has been sucked in. (J)*

Damien's picture of himself at puberty is echoed by Paul (21:M:35-44:P). Paul has memories of a happy childhood as the youngest of eight children. His parents were strict but "*the security of a large family made up for it all.*" However, reflection on puberty and the adolescent years revealed a previously unaddressed area of experience which was painful for him to remember; specifically, the memories he has of his ignorance and the unanswered questions of that period.

*“The need for positive information was always there. I even remember the science teacher in school skipping over the part of the course on the reproductive system. Whatever expectations I had for a formal sexual education through the system had now passed. The actual finding out of certain facts proved humorous and, at times, disgusting.” (J)*

He attributes his feeling of inhibition on the personal development course in sexuality to his early learning experiences:

*“This is the first time since my teens that I looked back and gave some considered thought to my development as a sexual person. Part of my inhibitions in participation in the class lay in this whole area of the former years. Parental involvement in my obtaining of information was nil” (J)*

James (23:M:45-54:P) is specific about his experience of puberty and adolescent sexuality. He remembers the trials of having frequent erections at inappropriate times, and his embarrassment as he tried to conceal them. He remembers, with some amusement, the ingenious uses to which whatever was available to him was put on these occasions:

*“....things like the different uses, on a bus, for a lunch box, or a school bag, in order to hide an embarrassing moment..... [this is] the male’s dilemma, in the sense of how easy it was to obtain an erection, particularly at that early age when the demon had a mind of its own. The difficulty was what goes up easily, does not always come down with the same ease and can cause an awful lot of embarrassment in a young man’s life.” (J)*

These difficulties were compounded by the absence of adult accompaniment to his sexual development: *“There was just no one there.” (J)*

James further expands on his experience:

*“Then there was the situation where wet dreams arrived, which were inevitably accompanied by a mixture of feelings of guilt, confusion, pleasure, anxiety, and a million unanswered questions.” (J)*



Erections and spontaneous emissions were not, in themselves, negative experiences;<sup>23</sup> it was the absence of communicative company and conversation which attended these experiences that resulted in the feelings of ignorance, fear, confusion and isolation on the part of a majority of the men participants. From their accounts of puberty and adolescence, it is clear that the outstanding remembered dimensions of those experiences are less concerned with adult disapproval, prohibition or excessive moralism (in contrast to the experiences of the women participants), and refer more to an experience of aloneness during this critical stage of personal development; an experience analogous to entering strange and unknown territory without a map or a guide but, nonetheless, as an adventurer.

James' reference to the guilt that he experienced from having pleasure-related nocturnal emissions is echoed by Cormac (72:M:45-54:P) in recalling adolescent masturbation:

*"My adolescence was spent in mortal sin and accompanying guilt, self-rejection and morbid fascination."* (J)

While these two men participants are specific in relation to feelings of guilt in adolescence, it is interesting to note that, in contrast to the women participants, none of the men participants adverted explicitly to having had a sense of culturally induced shame in relation to their pubertal sexual experiences. This should not be interpreted as meaning they did not feel shame. It may be that they did not; on the other hand, it may be more difficult for men to own, publicly, to an emotion intimately connected with personal adequacy and esteem. Kimmel (1997:231) argues that boys' gender identities, in patriarchal cultures, suffer from "*chronic uncertainty*." Admitting to feelings of 'shame' might be experienced by men as dangerous, counter-cultural risk-taking if, as Giddens (1991:64-68) asserts, it is culturally expected that men are, metaphorically, 'masters of the universe'.

---

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that the spontaneous seminal discharge is not subject to any of the same hygiene/protection regimes surrounding menstrual discharge, even though clothes and bedding, in both cases, are affected.

In addition to feelings of confusion and isolation, a majority of the men participants express peer competitiveness and performance anxiety as part of their pubertal and adolescent experience. This is exemplified in the accounts by Tim (71:M:45-54:P), Cormac (72:M:45-54:P) and Martin (73:M:35-44:P).

Tim's memories of puberty and adolescence are charged with tension; the tension between the confusion, isolation and novelty of his developing sexuality and the pressure to compete, in terms of sexual performance, with his peers:

*"I can go back to when I was a teenager and the difficulties that I had because I had no information at all; and to be lying there and wondering what is happening to you; and being frightened and yet being thrilled, you know, the bravado of that when you meet your fellow compadres in this - and it's all about how, sexually, I am; and it's like a points scoring exercise. .... To be and stay with your peers .... I didn't know whether I was coming or going. But you see, with my peers, they would never know about my confusion. And if someone was saying 'yeah, I've done it so many times', it was important to stay in the pecking order with them; whereas, in reality, I hadn't a blind bull's notion." (I)*

Whereas the women participants recall the burden of responsibility being placed on them with regard to moral sexual behaviour, control of sexual activity and the avoidance of pregnancy, the responsibility experienced by a significant number of the men participants, as adolescents, is one of 'knowledge through practice'. As Tim recounts when describing the learning he picked up about 'what a male should be':

*"You should know every button to press. You should be able to perform. You should know anything that needs to be known. You should be a fount of energy and wisdom. You should know it all. But where he gets it from ....?" (I)*

Cormac corroborates Tim's experience, recalling how he felt the pressure to know and to perform:

*"There's a demand that you should have experienced a whole repertoire of sexual events when you're really not ... it's nonsense. Still, you're in this game where everyone's pretending to have done the devil and all. If all the young men that I knew as a young man had*



*done all the things they said they did, the population of Ireland would be fifty million. It couldn't possibly be the way it is. There was this whole macho ... to be a man at all was to have been super-macho."* (I)

Martin wryly reiterates the learning that boys and men should excel at sexual performance but does not confine it to sexual activity:

*"[To be a man] is to do everything, perfectly, all the time, with no exception."* (I)

The emphases emerging from these women's and men's recollections of their pubertal and adolescent sexual experiences are, arguably, contrasting ones. The focus for the girls was on relational issues; for example, keeping menstruation secret in order not to be offensive to men; being 'pure' in order to retain value for a future marital partner; avoiding pregnancy, in order not to shame the family;<sup>24</sup> controlling sexual activity in order to contain boys' 'irresponsible sexuality'. The focus, for the boys, was on self; for example, the rights or wrongs, guilts and pleasures of masturbation; the self-measurement against the peer group in terms of sexual knowledge and activity. It is as though the women participants' sexuality, as it developed in adolescence, was commandeered in service of others' interests, whereas the men participants' sexuality remained in service of their own interest.

In contrast, also, is the sense of sexual repression emerging from the girls' histories as opposed to the sense of struggle for expression of the boys' histories. While not minimising the men participants' bewilderment and difficulties in negotiating their adolescent sexual journey, nor the false constraints which shall be shown to accompany them in their adult relationships as a result of that experience, nevertheless, there would appear to be less obstacles placed in the way of a self-affirmatory experience of personal sexuality and agency than is the case with the women participants.

---

<sup>24</sup> An interpretation of the family as a patriarchal institution (see Coward, 1983; Jacobs, 1994) suggests that the father is the governing authority in the family to whom other members are in service, the principal servant being the wife/mother. Such an interpretation suggests that the underlying meaning of avoiding 'shaming the family' is an avoidance of 'shaming the father' or 'the father's house'. In that case, the relational issues focused on by the girls, cited above, all referred to attending to males or to male institutions.



In addition, in this study, it would appear that an equation can be made between girls' sexuality and their fertility and an equation between boys' sexuality and sex. In other words, post-pubertal girls are deemed ready to have babies; post-pubertal boys are deemed ready to have sex. Without wishing to prove too much, nevertheless, the findings intimate what could be thought of as a socialisation of girls' and boys' sexual development in adolescence which confirms the former as being ready for becoming mothers, the latter ready for becoming lovers.<sup>9</sup> Or, and this may more closely reflect the reality, girls are deemed ready to become sexual receptors (pregnancy) while boys are deemed ready to become sexual actors (sexual performance). This dualism in the transmission of sexual and gender learning was viewed by the participants as detrimental to the fostering of heterosexual relationships of mutual sexual intimacy, as the girls focus was directed towards fertility and motherhood and the boys' focus, consistent with Kimmel (1997), was directed towards sexual performance and conquest.<sup>10</sup>

The accounts of the men emphasise the male gender role issue of competitiveness, technical expertise and mastery. Their narratives of adolescent sexual experience resonate with overtones of apprenticeship, including the anxiety of the apprentice expected 'to do a man's work'. It can be argued that this is as much a homosocial task as a heterosocial or homo/heterosexual one in the context of a patriarchal type culture (Kimmel, 1997:231; Bancroft, 1989). The objective of sexual performance, and the frustration of uncertainty and confusion accompanying this task, could be said, initially, to bear more on boys' search for status among peers than on the establishment of a relationship with girls. Performance based objectives reflect the dominant cultural

---

<sup>9</sup> In the western cultural context of this study, adolescent girls' and boys' sexuality is largely assumed to be heterosexual. No such assumption has been made in this study. Nevertheless, it is recognised that any substantial engagement with homosexual issues is absent.

<sup>10</sup> This dualism is evident in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992:212,213). While taking pains to encourage an even handed approach to sexual and gender education, the authors appear to reinforce a dualistic approach. In choosing to emphasise, in the same exhortation, the need for boys to be informed about menstruation and girls to be informed about erections, they highlight that which, in girls, is a marker of fertility, and, in boys, that which is a marker of sexual arousal. While it might be argued that menstruation and penile erections are the most visible or concrete outward signs of sexual differences experienced by adolescent boys and girls and, therefore, worthy of special emphasis by educators of young people, it can be argued, and in the view of this thesis, it ought to be argued, that both boys and girls should be educated about sexual arousal in each sex and both boys and girls should be impressed with the processes and realities of their fertility.



male values of competition and conquest (Connell, 1995). These are values associated with war, work and sport; such values are inimical to relationships of equality, mutuality, respect and intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Keen, 1992; Miller, 1978).

A feature of the participants' childhood and adolescent biographies is their perception of the role played by parents.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the responses in questionnaire number one, the mother, as shown earlier, consistently features in the women's accounts whereas the father features little.

While the mother may have played a role, however marginal, in the pre-pubertal sexual education of these men as boys, with the arrival of puberty and adolescence, that role virtually ceased. This is consistent with Chodorow's (1978, 1990) theory that, in adolescence, a boy's search for male identity entails a painful, emotional disconnection with his primary love figure, mother, in order to move towards the father figure role model and the sphere of men.

Within a gendered context such as outlined here, relationally, the mother is distanced by the boy in his search for gender identity. In such distancing, where models of manhood are culturally constructed to reflect patriarchal values, that is, male domination and female subordination, the mother is likely to be excluded from an engagement with her son's sexual development. Where such models are culturally constructed to reflect patristic values (Turner, 1984), that is, male power without responsibility, the implications of the gendered separation of the sexes in adolescence may, in fact, reflect Giddens (1992) and Kimmel's (1997) concern about the contemporary escalation of male violence against women.

---

<sup>11</sup> At the commencement of the study, In questionnaire 1, participants were asked to rank in order of importance the five most significant sources of positive and negative learning about sexuality as a child and adolescent. Fifteen sources were indicated and an option to add a category not already listed. Overall, forty-eight of the seventy-six candidates questioned indicated 'mother' as a source of learning: twenty-nine positive and twenty-one negative ratings; two gave both positive and negative ratings. Between rank orders one and two, fifteen ranked 'mother' as a positive source of learning and nine ranked 'mother' as a negative source. Although forty-eight participants ranked 'mother' as a positive source of learning at this stage in the study, this response was not sustained in the findings. Only fourteen of the seventy-six participants included 'father' in their overall rating. Between rank orders one and two, one participant ranked 'father' positively and two ranked 'father' negatively.

The men participants' recalls of the role of father in their adolescent sexual learning was explicit. Tim angrily remembers that his father never addressed with him the issue of his sexual development during this stage of his life journey:

*"Me, as a male child, I got no .... none .... no sexual information at all .... until the day before I was to get married. I was twenty-two at this stage. [My father said] 'I suppose I'd better say something about the birds and the bees'; and I said 'at this stage, don't bother'." (I)*

The experience of parental absence from boys' learning about personal sexuality contributes to the feelings of isolation expressed by the men participants in the study during this developmental period of turmoil. Moreover, the non-engagement of the father with sons' sexual learning reinforces intrapersonal emotional disconnection resulting from the boys' psychological need to detach from mother at this time. This cycle of emotional deprivation is further ensured by the peer group's demand that personal vulnerability be hidden in order to show oneself to be a man (Kimmel, 1997).

As Tim reflects:

*"You can't be weak in your sexuality. You have to be strong. And, if you're weak, well then, you're not a man. So you're caught; caught and fastened and stapled together. You can't get out of it. .... It's like we get caught in a trap, and it's a self-perpetuating trap that we can't get out of, and we need something to allow us come out and to experience our other side that is there...." (I)*

In such an environment as outlined by Tim, values of emotional intimacy are quickly 'kicked out of touch' to the detriment of the sexually developing adolescent boy. However, this peer group perception of what is meant by being a man, sexually, is not only an adolescent myth; it is the learning boys receive from their gender role models, that is, from their fathers, from other men and from culturally supported male constructed images of manhood (Kimmel, 1997).

The experience of the majority of men participants was one of parental absence in relation to their sexual learning with resultant feelings of isolation and confusion. However, as stated earlier, they did not appear to experience excessive moralism in



their pubertal and adolescent sexual development to the extent that the women did. An exception to this latter fact can be seen in the stories of male religious participants.

The recalled experiences of the men religious participants in the study echoes those of the women participants.

Terence (54:M:55-64:R), a member of the Christian Brothers, recalls:

*“Sexuality was a taboo subject in my home. It was not discussed or taught in school. The only aspect covered was the moral aspect. There was no sin but sexual sin. I had problems with sexuality, especially relationships with women until mid life. I suppressed my sexuality and had no experience of an intimate friendship.” (Q1)*

This memory of excessive moralism is further demonstrated in Ben’s (4:M:45-54:R) story. His experience of puberty and adolescence was ‘black’ including, as it did, “*the terrible guilt inflicted on us by the Church teaching of the day, especially in relation to masturbation*” (J). He lived, at that stage, in an all-male world of the junior noviciate, instructed in sexual matters by a priest. His father never spoke about sexuality to him. He was aware of his mother ensuring that he did not watch certain programmes on television.

*“The emphasis was on purity and that every fault in relation to this was a serious matter of sin. I was locked into decades of pain and scruples and running to Confession. In my adolescence, I did not know the facts of life, had little contact with girls and did not appreciate the beauty of the sexual act. I was given, largely, a negative view of sexual matters.” (J)*

Ben’s experience of his sexual development and identity was shaped by a continuing emphasis on the danger of sexual sin. He acknowledges the far-reaching outcome of that early learning. Referring to the enabling effect of the personal development course in sexuality, he states:

*“It enabled me to review how my sexual identity was shaped during adolescence, with its emphasis on purity and sin and, in my religious formation, the emphasis that was put on chastity being a superior way,*

*and the complete absence of women in my life. I can remember doing a six day retreat in those years in which the priest made himself available for confessions every morning in order to help us maintain peace of mind for fear, I presume, if we had sinned against purity during the night. This early formation has influenced me right down to the present.” (J)*

Ben perceives his early learning as strongly negative. It is a learning that he believes must be unlearned. He believes the Roman Catholic Church to be responsible for engendering such negative attitudes about sexuality.

*“Like so many others in the group, the Church gave me a negative, sin-oriented view of sex, often guilt-ridden, something I am not entirely free of yet.” (J)*

Ben is conscious of the need to ensure that the children in his care receive an affirming response to their sexual development. His concern is not to communicate to them what he now perceives as the distorted learning he received in his childhood and adolescence.

Terence and Ben’s experiences of adolescent learning about sexuality reflect, in part, that of the women participants of the study as it relates to excessive moralism and the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to sexuality. The institutional Church, as referenced in Chapter Two, is patriarchal and hierarchical (Kelly, 1998; Schneiders, 1991). A particular feature of this institution is the culture of celibacy. Historically, celibacy has been held up to members of the Church as the model for perfect sexual living (Brown, 1990) and, in Ireland, Church control of its membership has relied heavily on the inculcation of sexual shame and guilt (Inglis, 1998).

Sexual submission and sublimation, without marriage, is required of priests. This is due to traditional Church attitudes which viewed sex as ‘second best’ and in order that the deployment of human resources be facilitated. It could be interpreted that this male, celibate elite is a socially supported expression of a cultural devaluation of erotic and procreative sexual relationships, as well as a devaluation of women.



Returning to the basic theme of the participants of this study, the pattern emerging of pubertal and adolescent sexual learning suggests an intensification, at that stage of sexual development, of gender differentiation. While an appreciative parental sexual mentoring was absent, messages received were clear. These messages indicated that personal sexual development was not a topic for discussion; that issues related to this development, such as body changes, emotional changes, sexual arousal, sexual attraction and learning about each other's development, were either not addressed at all or were addressed in a non-affirmatory manner. In general, the women, as girls, were particularly impressed with the moral risks and dangers of sexuality and their responsibility for ensuring moral rectitude; a 'don't do it' script. In general, the men, as boys, other than those who elected or were selected for a life of celibacy, were left unaccompanied to learn what they could from their peers; a 'do-it-yourself' script. This is consistent with Lips' (1994:90,91) assertion that girls are culturally "*prepared for powerlessness*" whereas boys are assured that "*they can make things happen*". Their subjective experiences suggest that through their learning about sexuality, these women and men, as adolescent girls and boys, were positioned sexually oppositionally to one another. This positioning was a culturally inscribed, learned starting point assigned and taken up by each sex.

### **Child sexual abuse**

During the past ten years, Irish society has suffered successive shock waves of realisation that child sexual abuse is and has been endemic in the community. In this, it shares with many other countries in the tragedy of adult predatory behaviours which target the most sexually vulnerable, innocent and needing of adult care, the children.

Eleven participants in this study volunteered that they had experienced sexual behaviours, as children, which were abusive and exploitative; ten women and one man. This is over fifteen per cent of the participants. A second man volunteered that he had been aware of sexual abuse being perpetrated, in secondary school, on his peers, by a

teacher. One of the women participants who had been sexually abused indicated that she, as an older child, had been drawn into abusive behaviour with younger children. One participant indicated that he was being wrongfully accused of inappropriate physical behaviour with children in his charge.

The inclusion of the findings in relation to child sexual abuse is considered in the context of this study for the following reasons:

1. The incidence of child sexual abuse in the population is widespread enough to constitute part of the learning experience about sexuality of a significant minority of boys and girls; a learning experience which affects their personal development, including their self-concept and sexual relating in adulthood.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, adults with a life history which included sexually abusive experiences should not be viewed as exceptional but, broadly speaking, within the norm.
2. In any adult education group, statistically, it is likely that one or more learners have experienced child sexual abuse; the learner may be affected by, or affect, the course content or process.<sup>12</sup> It is also possible that adults who have perpetrated child sexual abuse may be present in a learning group.
3. Adult educators may be confronted, implicitly or explicitly, by the experiences of adult learners who have been sexually abused in childhood in their learning environments.

---

<sup>12</sup> Researchers estimate that, in North America, between 4% and 12% of girls are sexually abused (Herman, 1981 and Russell, cited in Lips, 1994:93). In Ireland, the incidence of child sexual abuse is estimated to be at 10% (Unpublished paper by Deirdre Walsh of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre given at the annual conference of ACCORD [Assoc. Of Marriage Guidance Counsellors] cited in Ryan-Larragy, 1997). Jagger (1990:251) cites a global figure of 25% for girls subjected to male incest. Finkelhor (cited in Bolton et al, 1989:40) suggests that the risk ratio of abuse for boys lies between 1 boy to 4 girls or more and 1 boy to 2.5 girls. Statistics are difficult to establish because the criteria for a definition of child sexual abuse can differ widely (Bolton Jr., Morris and MacEachron, 1989) and because such abuse is significantly under-reported (Brownmiller, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Courses, particularly personal development courses, or courses using life history learning methods, for example, may evoke recall of experiences of child sexual abuse.



4. Adult educators, themselves, may have experienced child sexual abuse; an experience which they may need to address for their personal well-being and as it may relate to their professional role.

Three of the nine women participants who experienced abuse stated explicitly that they were naming their experience for the first time. They had never spoken about the abuse prior to participating in the personal development course on sexuality, although they had always been aware of having been abused. Two of these three women have, subsequently, taken action by seeking and receiving referral from the facilitator for therapy; the third woman felt herself to have been released from the ill-effects of the memories of an abusive experience which had accompanied her throughout thirty years by virtue of having spoken about it and written about it in the context of the course. This is consistent with Jacobs (1994) findings on the value of autobiographical work, including journalling.

The descriptions of abuse offered by the participants range from inappropriate and unsought sexual touches to vaginal penetration. They include physical and emotional coercion.

Laura (38:F:35-44:Sep) graphically recounts her experience of sexual abuse at the hands of a trusted neighbour. It began when she was eight or nine years of age and continued until she reached puberty.

*“One major ongoing experience on my sexual script occurred from the time I was eight or nine until I was twelve or thirteen. I am still not sure of the exact time span. I always played at a neighbour’s house. We lived in a rural area and it was the only house at the time... I was older by four or five years than the nearest girl, but two cousins who were my own age often came to play. On dry days we played house, hide and seek, etc., in the lovely garden. It was a warm, loving environment. But, on wet days, we would be indoors and often got bored - no television at home at that time. A very old man “Johnny”, he was an old uncle of the woman who owned the house, lived there. He was so, so, old, so morbid, so wrinkled, very scarce show-white hair. Even thinking of him now makes me cringe, my heart is thumping and I have goose pimples all over me, I can’t breathe....thoughts, emotions and feelings that I have buried for two and a half decades. This horrible*

*human being, under the guise of friendliness and care, used to take us all up to the bedroom.... We would all climb into bed around him with our clothes on and he would read us all stories. But the nearest person to him would be fondled and kissed and he would put his hand on our private parts and put his big, horrible fingers inside us. He often got into bed with only his underpants on and if he did, he would force one of us to feel his erect penis. To this day, I still feel physically sick if I think of it. It was a horrible experience and one which I could not get out of. I tried to tell but who would believe me - not my mother, my nanny, nobody. Everyone else, that is Babs, Audrey and Amy seemed to really like him. Why then did he only do this to me? Was I evil or bad or dirty?*

*When he died, I cried, not because I was upset but because I was never strong enough to confront him. I wished I had killed him.*

*This is the first time I have ever addressed this issue. I have never told anyone about it, how could I?" (J)*

Laura stopped playing in the house next door when she reached puberty. She has recently learned that her contemporaries, who came in contact with Johnny, have similar experiences to her own.

Laura, who is separated from her partner, has experienced significant difficulty in her adult relationships, particularly with regard to her self-esteem and sexual expression, which she associates with her early learning about sexuality.

Janet (5:F:45-54:P), also asserting her experience of sexual abuse for the first time, recounts two separate situations in which she was violated. The first experience was with her brother who was eleven or twelve years older than she was:

*"As a very little girl, I remember suffering great torment over a small incident of a sexual nature.... I suppose I was five or six... I was in the house on my own with him. He didn't abuse me. He just stripped me, to have a look at me. And, now, if there was anything else involved in it, I don't remember. It's quite possible maybe there was. Because I still have this awful feeling about that incident. I remember I was upstairs and I remember his taking all my clothes off to have a look at me. He would have been sixteen or seventeen. And, probably, it was just curiosity, maybe..." (I)*



It is noteworthy that, while Janet is in no doubt that this experience with her older brother caused her to feel badly, not just at the time but thereafter, even into middle adulthood, she suggests an excuse for his behaviour. She allows that 'curiosity' might have been the reason for his action, as though that defused the abusive reality for her of being 'stripped'. Janet's empathic rationalisation of her brother's abusive actions is consistent with the process whereby many victims of incest idealise and empathise with the perpetrator (Jacobs, 1994). Jacobs ascribes the empathic identification with the abuser to social conditioning which genders empathy as a relational quality, and places it on women. This empathic identification can result, according to Jacobs (1994:68), in adult revictimisation whereby abused girls, as women, enter into adult exploitative relationships.

Janet's experience of abusive coercion occurred again in her adolescent years. When she was sixteen, Janet and her school friends were involved in a drama production directed by a local priest. This man, Fr. Peter, undertook to drive the girls home from drama rehearsals, making sure Janet was last to be left home. When alone with Janet, Fr. Peter behaved in a flirtatious manner and visited unsought and unwelcome physical attention on her:

*"I had no idea of how to handle this strange, confusing attention that I was getting, but I knew it was not the norm.*

*"I remember using every wit that I had in order not to be alone with him because as soon as I was alone with him, he would try to kiss me and tell me how fond he was of me. He also made it very clear that he regarded me as a girlfriend, a sweetheart, a future lover.... I can feel now the feelings I had then. I felt ashamed, trapped and threatened. I felt there must be something bad about me. Why was this person attracted to me and none of the other girls?" (J)*

Both Laura and Janet echo the feelings of many victims of child sexual abuse, that is, feeling bad, guilty, ashamed and evil. They incorporate the wrongs and guilt of the perpetrators, believing that they, themselves, must be responsible for the terrible experience (Jacobs, 1994; Parks, 1990).

The adult world unwittingly colluded with Fr. Peter. Janet's parents *"thought he was wonderful, looking after their little girl"* (J). When Janet left home to pursue nurse training, Fr. Peter called to the hospital to visit her. The sister-tutor insisted that she see him, in spite of her protests that she did not wish to. Even at aged eighteen, away from home, Janet did not feel able to name the problem to the sister-tutor. The cultural straitjacket of sexual silence and the idealisation of male patriarchal figures, in particular of priests, inhibited her from seeking and receiving the assistance to which she was entitled, and facilitated the abuser in his dangerous and destructive behaviours (Jacobs, 1994.; Parks, 1990; Ward, 1984).

Janet learned, subsequently, that Fr. Peter transferred his attentions to her cousin at home although she does not know any details of her cousin's story.

*"This was a very painful time of my life. Why do I still feel guilty, which I do? Why do I still feel inferior to him? Fr. Peter never sexually abused me. I never gave him the chance, but today, in retrospect, the damage that he did to me was equally damaging. He abused me spiritually, he raped my mind."* (J)

Once again, Janet, while carrying the crippling emotional effects of Fr. Peter's behaviour, tends to diminish the full reality by denying that what occurred constituted 'sexual abuse'. This brief extract of her story illustrates, however, the depth of the psychological and physical trauma as a consequence of her experience and which resulted in extremely poor self-esteem. In middle adulthood now, Janet perceives these early experiences as having contributed significantly to choices made in adult relationships which have compounded her experience of deprivation.

Similarly to Laura and Janet, Naomi (3:F:25-34:S) spoke for the first time about her experience of child sexual abuse during the personal development course on sexuality. Her abuse was perpetrated by an older brother. After fathers, brothers are the *"next commonest group of incest offenders"* (O'Connor, 1996:87).

Naomi had spent almost twenty years trying to keep the memories and associated feelings of anxiety and guilt buried. She loves her brother and wanted desperately to



believe that abuse had not taken place. O'Connor (1996) indicates that this is usual amongst siblings when the younger child admires the older brother; the child is grateful for being the focus of his attention. Nevertheless, Naomi knew that her young adult way of life and ways of relating were not functioning healthily, and that she was, in a sense, 'lost to herself'. During the course, she became aware that she needed to address

*"the one untackled, previously unanalysed issue that seemed to be saying that it was the root of my uncertainty and anxiety." (J)*

Naomi found the courage to recognise and assert that

*"All my problems were rooted in my childhood sexual experience. From five to ten years of age, I engaged in adult sex with my brother, four years older than me. We didn't have intercourse but there was much petting and orgasms. I had a mish-mash of emotions. I knew it was wrong". (I)*

Having talked through her concerns about her identity and her relationships with the course facilitator, Naomi decided to seek therapy to address what she felt to be the abusive sexual issues of childhood which *"split me in two"*. (I)

Sexual behaviour between siblings is not always easy to interpret. It can range from "look-see" play between siblings close in age to coercive sexual exploitation between an older and a younger sibling. Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992:210) indicate that a four year difference in age *"is almost invariably exploitative and thus is cause for concern"*. However, they also assert the need for discernment by parents in making judgements about children's behaviours. Bolton (cited in Bolton, Jr., Morris and MacEachron, 1989:32) warns that the potential for sibling abuse is increasing:

*"The changing composition of the 'typical' family with its greater prevalence of single parents, blended sibling groups, and nonbiological children presents a less protective family environment than has been assumed in the past."*

In a society in which discourse on sexuality and sexual behaviours is largely confined to confessional situations or to impersonal media such as magazines, television or computers, it is not a topic for ordinary conversation; it is, therefore, difficult for the adult to interpret his or her personal experience/observation of childhood sibling sexual behaviours. For the same reason, that is, a social context which actively discourages men and women from including their actual sexual experience in ordinary discourse (Foucault, 1978), it is difficult for parents to know how to discern well and respond wisely to their children's sexual behaviours.

For Laura, Janet and Naomi, the personal development course on sexuality and gender facilitated their first articulation of sexually exploitative experiences in childhood and adolescence. It was the primary step needed to initiate the process of seeking and finding help.<sup>13</sup>

Three of the participants, Rosa, Betty and Gertrude, recalled abusive experiences with trusted adult men which, while frightening at the time, they considered did not harm them. However, Gertrude concluded, on the personal development course, that the memory of the abusive experience is still active in her subconscious and has affected her approach to men.

Rosa (2:F:45-54:M) remembers an incident when she was a child which caused her a lot of distress at the time:

*"When I was nine years old and living with my parents in my sister's home in Canada, I was abused by a friend of the family who was in his early twenties. Thankfully, the abuse only went as far as him kissing me in an adult way. I ran from him and made sure I was never alone with him again. (J)*

Rosa was able to protect herself from the physical abuse by ensuring that she was never alone with him again. What she was unable to protect herself from was the fear, the fear of being trapped and assaulted by the young man. The nine year old child did

---

<sup>13</sup> It should be borne in mind that the content of participants' abusive experiences as outlined above simply consists of initial presentations and may not represent the full situation as it might emerge in therapy.



not feel free to tell an adult about her experience or her fear. The adult world, which assures children that adults are their carers and protectors, often proves itself to be untrustworthy when it comes to issues of sexuality. The *“unholy silence that shrouds the interfamilial sexual abuse of children”*, referred to in Brownmiller (1976:281), surrounds sexuality in general, and results in children like Rosa having to take on her own defence against a powerful adult male.

Rosa now regrets that she was unable to speak to an adult about the incident. She realises that, by remaining silent, her young niece also became vulnerable to this man’s abusive attentions.

Betty (27:F:25-34:P) refers to her sense of aloneness growing up. Much of her time, she recalls, appears to have been spent on her own, even though she had sisters and brothers living at home; her sisters were much older than she and seemed remote from her; her brothers had their own ‘gang’ and did not include her in their play.

As Betty approached puberty and her body began to change, she began to be molested by a man who visited her home regularly:

*“In my early stages of development, a family friend used to touch me inappropriately but I never had the courage to tell anyone as a child. Instead, I lived in fear and used avoidance as a tactic.” (J)*

Betty’s feelings echo those of Rosa.

*“I also think I blamed myself and carried feelings of guilt and shame throughout my teenage years and didn’t ever like anyone touching my breasts.” (J)*

Gertrude (22:F:45-54:M) describes drawing an image of herself at puberty during the personal development course:

*“I drew myself in a school uniform... holding a tennis racquet and tennis ball. I also had a black form to my left which I knew was a priest who came to give us a retreat when I was about fifteen and made advances to myself and other girls. I suppose that subconsciously I*

*became aware of being a woman then and the seedier side of sex. I was never very conscious of that incident having any impact on my life and making any big impression on my life until I saw how I drew him into the picture - dressed in black, hovering, like a devil.” (J)*

Gertrude asserts that the experience did not affect her adversely. Her anxiety centred more on the fact that one of the girls determined to report the man’s behaviour; she feared this might result in her having to discuss the issue with an adult. This particular fear reflects a pedagogy that adults are always right in what they say and do; and that sexual behaviours are ‘not nice’ and should not be spoken about. As Brownmiller (1976:271) asserts:

*“No area of sexual abuse is characterised by unchallengeable authority to a greater degree than the sexual abuse of children, for, to a child, all adults are authority figures. When a child is sexually abused by an adult, the entire world of adult authority bears down to confuse and confound the hapless victim.”*

The child who is abused by an adult, even extrafamiliarily, is afraid, in the first instance, that he or she is at fault rather than the adult. Such a child may be afraid of bringing trouble on the abusing adult, if believed, and of bringing trouble on himself or herself, if disbelieved.

Gertrude, as stated earlier, recognises, on reflection during the course, that her attitude to men has been shaped by this early experience, although she does not ascribe any significant damage to it. This begs the question as to what constitutes harm or damage. Attitudes towards others, shaped by fear resulting from the breaking of sexual boundaries, although the physical boundaries may not be considered to have been seriously breached, cannot be judged as neutral and are not life-enhancing. O’Connor (1996:158,159) notes that while some victims of child sexual abuse appear to cope well, it is impossible to know how they might have been without the abusive experience:

*“Others have more subtle problems, are quiet, lacking in confidence or never really fitting in. It is as if they have never reached anything near their real potential. But they are hidden victims whose stories are seldom told.”*



Sally's story is an example, in part, of how a person can experience himself or herself as traumatised in relation to sexuality, even though actual physical abuse cannot be remembered; it is an experience of sexual boundaries being transgressed.

Sally's (59:F:25-34:Sep) story of abuse is two-fold. In the first instance, Sally believes that her father may have sexually abused her when she was a very small girl. While she cannot actually remember such an experience, she has always been conscious of a sexual inappropriateness in her father's relationship with her. In the second instance, Sally is in no doubt that her uncle behaved towards her in a sexually abusive manner, in particular at puberty and during adolescence. However, Sally considers her father's attitude to her to be the more invasive and upsetting. Speaking about her history of sexual learning, Sally asserts:

*"...there were incestuous messages from my father; maybe not physical, actually doing anything, but it was all there, you know. I find that still, today, when there's you know, ads., baby ads., they do something to me; you know, these pamper ads., they affect me and I know there's stuff there... that I have to deal with. I believe it started off with my father; there was something there. I could feel him watching me. I knew I was pleasing to him and it affected my relationship with men ever since." (I)*

With regard to her uncle, Sally is definite about the physical aspects of his behaviour. Nonetheless, at the time of recording her story, it is the relationship with her father to which she ascribes disturbing effects:

*"I was abused when I was three by my uncle and I have very vivid memories of it. I was abused when I was thirteen or fourteen...basically. But, it's funny, if you were working on the incident, if you were working on a scale from nought to ten, they weren't huge incidents. It wasn't rape... the incestuous thing is bigger. I still feel today 'I love you Daddy very much' and I know he loves me and yet there's something there... sometimes I feel him ... he's very loving and he cares about me and he'd do anything for me but I feel that he and my mother had problems sexually and he directed his desires almost on to me. He never actually, not that I remember, physically abused me but, mentally, I could feel him undress me and almost feel him...I know it sounds crazy...feel him getting turned on by*

*looking, by watching me. And that did more damage than physical abuse would do. It's still with me today and something that I had to deal with. But, you know, sex for later on...." (I)*

Sally distinguishes between physical and psychological sexual abuse, the latter being the most damaging for her because it related to her father.

From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, it might be argued that what Sally experiences in relation to her father is the incestuous fantasy wish of a daughter for sexual pleasure with the father (Freud, 1977). However, in the light of recent studies of Freudian theory which critique Freud in this respect (Webster, 1996), it is more likely that Sally's experience reflects a patriarchal cultural value of 'male entitlement', in which a father may understand himself to be the proprietor of his daughter's sexuality (Brownmiller, 1976; Ward, 1984; see also McGahern, 1990).<sup>14</sup> The effective power of incestuous actions or attitudes on daughters can be explained by the nature of the patriarchal father/daughter relationship; in a patriarchal culture, father is perceived as the head of the family, within the family, and as the family provider and protector (Jacobs, 1994). The father's proprietorship within the family is conventionally provided for and protected by socio-cultural norms, without due cognisance of its destructive potential. McCullagh (1996:110) warns, however, of the danger of theories which result in designating all men as potential sexual aggressors and violators. Such a perspective is essentialist, does not admit of change, and does not take into account the social factors involved in male sexual violence.

*"But, you know, sex for later on..."(I):* Sally's experience of adult sexual relationships was troubled. A brief sexual encounter with a young man, at a party, when they both had had alcohol, resulted in a pregnancy. Subsequent to having the baby, Sally married a man, not the father of her baby. She discovered that she disliked sex with her partner intensely but used it as a means of patching up troubles in their relationship:

---

<sup>14</sup> McGahern, in his novel "Amongst Women", set in rural Ireland in the 1940's and 1950's, describes a patriarchal family in which the father exercises tight control over his wife and family. Part of the family ritual is the submissive kiss 'on the lips' which each of his four daughters give him every night before going to bed.



*“I hated it. There were nights I would... this is the truth to God... I would lie there and there was a voice inside me, screaming inside, to stop. (I)*

As a result of participating in the personal development course on sexuality, Sally, who had been in counselling previously, sought and received referral from the course facilitator to a couple counsellor and a psycho-sexual therapist.

*“It was through the sexuality course that I realised... that I got the help from the group and yourself to get... to go and do something. It was something positive, which was to go for counselling again.” (I)*

In due course, Sally made the decision to separate from her partner and is relieved and happy to be living on her own with her children. She is currently in a relationship in which she experiences sex as pleasurable and life-enhancing.

Two participants, Elaine and Sarah, indicate that not only were they abused as children but that they had also been sexually abused in adulthood.

Elaine (47:F:35-44:P) has been in therapy for three years to attend to *“the internalised self-hatred and negativity towards men”* (Q.1). As a child, she was frequently abused by those into whose care she was entrusted by her parents:

*“My childminders filled in the gaps in a very crude basic manner and abused me sexually, not as far as full intercourse.” (Q.1)*

As a young adult, Elaine's experience of the use of sex as a destructive force was compounded when she was raped. Elaine became bulimic. Currently, Elaine is working to overcome the trauma inflicted on her both in childhood and adulthood and indicates that she now enjoys a good sexual relationship with her partner.

Sarah's (44:F:25-34:P) experience of abuse differs somewhat from those of the other participants. From a very early age, five or six, Sarah believed that she had an almost magical aid for achieving power over boys and men. She arrived at this perception,

she says, through her experience of being singled out from other children for treats by the adult population:

*“Ever since I was a girl of five or six, I had a sense of myself. I was very much a tomboy but I knew, I don’t know how, but I knew I had something, something men and boys wanted. I was a daddy’s girl, but that had nothing to do with it. I had three sisters at the time and they weren’t like me. I remember that smiling at the man in the shop would get me a sweet, no-one else, just me. (J)”*

The ‘something’ that men and boys wanted, in Sarah’s experience, was her use as a sexual object for abuse.

Sarah’s first memory of abuse was by an elderly man *“older than my granddad”* (J) who lived next door. Initially, he simply watched her at play.

*“I still remember the way he looked at me and I knew I had something.” (J)*

Subsequently, over the course of six years, the neighbour sexually abused Sarah on an almost daily basis until Sarah’s family left the neighbourhood. Sarah did not object to this behaviour. At the time, she perceived it as a way of exerting power over her abuser. He wanted something that she had, and she could give it or withhold it by staying away from his house:

*“He really liked touching me. I don’t remember if I liked it. I suppose I must have. He would lick me and kiss me. I remember even then teasing him, pretending to let him pull my pants down, then saying ‘no’, or taking all my clothes off and not letting him touch me. Power, eh!!” (J)*

At the same time as the relationship with the neighbour began, Sarah was also being abused by a teenage boy, ‘one of the gang’. Subsequently, she was abused by this boy’s older married brother when he discovered his sibling and Sarah in bed together:

*“I don’t even remember his name. I remember vividly his face, his hairy body. I remember my striped catalogue dress. He liked that one best. But I remember more than anything my sense of power. I had*



*something he wanted, that they wanted, and I knew I could use it whenever I wanted. Seems remarkable but true, and I used this power thing all my life.” (J)*

Sarah’s sexual story continued to be an abusive experience throughout her adult relationships. Violence, coercion and exploitation as an object of sexual abuse by a partner, and by his friends, at his urging, constitute the substance of her adult sexual learning. Sarah is currently painfully grappling with the reality of her sexual abuse and with the difficulty of recognising herself as victim, particularly with regard to her adult relationships. She has profoundly internalised the distortion of personal power as sexual power over the perpetrator (Jacobs, 1994); in her early learning about sexuality and relationships, she learned that *“sex gave her a measure of control in a world over which her real influence was limited and problematic.”* (Giddens, 1992:70).

In choosing to participate in and continue with a personal development course on sexuality, Sarah recognised that she was inviting a new self-confrontation. She is currently engaged in addressing these issues of on-going abuse with the help of her doctor and therapist.<sup>15</sup>

As stated earlier, only one man participant volunteered that he had been sexually abused as a child. This does not mean that other men participants did not have such an experience. The information in all cases was volunteered, not sought. However, the current state of knowledge on the incidence of sexual abuse indicates that it is perpetrated more frequently on girls and women than it is on boys and men.<sup>16</sup> It must be borne in mind that, in a culture in which boys and men are stereotypically cast as leaders, competitive and sexually dominant, and in which sexual mastery is considered a measure of virility, it may be more difficult for boys and men to acknowledge having been victims of sexual abuse than it is for girls and women (Bolton, Jr., Morris and MacEachron; 1989:11-17).

---

<sup>15</sup> Sarah has addressed the issues of her abuse to the point that she feels she is well on the way to recovery. She is currently pursuing a third level degree course.

<sup>16</sup>As long ago as 1969, the Children’s Division of the American Humane Association produced an analysis of sex crimes against children. This study indicated that ten girls are sexually molested for every boy (Brownmiller, 1976). As noted above, Finklehor (cited in Bolton, Jr., Morris and MacEachron, 1989:32) places the ratio of boys’ abuse to girls at a higher figure.

Jerry (48:M:35-44:P) recalls the fact that he and his friends, as young pre-pubertal boys, were subjected to abuse by older teenagers.

*“...there would have been older teenagers in the area where I grew up and they would have been interfering with us young fellows.” (I)*

Jerry recounted how groups of teenagers used to chase and catch younger boys, strip them of their trousers and handle their genitals. Jerry does not seem to consider this behaviour to be more than that which might be expected. However, while in training as a therapist, Jerry encountered a man, the sight of whom affected him emotionally in a frightening manner:

*“Something about this man unnerved me. I don’t know what it was, but this guy really frightened the life out of me.... I was an adult, in my twenties at the time, and I was six foot two and sixteen, seventeen stone, and I was hiding. This guy frightened me.” (I)*

Jerry was unable to account for the fear he felt and immediately sought help from a counsellor. In counselling, he quickly came to the conclusion that the man reminded him of his father and that his father had abused him when he was a very small child:

*“It just blew me. What happened, the whole thing was your man’s teeth - was the whole focus - I could see his smile and that was driving me insane... I felt this guy was raping me.” (I)*

Jerry does not remember any actual occasion on which his father sexually abused him. However, he believes that something of an abusive nature did happen:

*“This is the whole thing - it’s that as an infant,... and how true it is or how untrue, I suppose I don’t know but, for me, that was real, and you know, I accept that.” (I)*

In the course of counselling, Jerry recalls having what could be described as flashback memories of being abused. He had previously been disturbed by seeing a picture of a child in bed and of a man sitting on the end of the bed. On seeing this picture, his



spontaneous reaction was *“this man is abusing this kid”* (I). Jerry had put the thought firmly out of his mind until he recalled it with his counsellor:

*“...then it was as if I had a kind of out of body experience. I was up in the ceiling, looking down and I began to talk about what I saw was happening to that kid and it was all about abuse and the counsellor led me to have a look, to look up and to see a face, and I did and I identified the face - it was that of my father.”* (I)

Jerry spoke with his sisters about his belief that he had been sexually abused by his father; one of them refused to allow that it might have happened, the other accepted what he said without affirming or denying it.

Jerry, who is a father of four children, reflects on the issue of child sexual abuse. He has two concerns; firstly, that, as someone who believes that he has experienced abuse himself, he is categorised by society as being damaged for life and likely to become an abuser; secondly, that society tends to identify the perpetrator of sexual abuse as a person apart, ‘different’ from the norm, thereby overlooking the potential for abusive behaviour in everybody:

*“I would also have strong feelings that any one of us can abuse. It’s not a case of there are abnormal people in different parts of the country and that they come out at night and the moon affects them and they are going to rape kids. No, I think it can happen to anyone. Anyone of us is capable.”* (I)

The tragedy of child sexual abuse is becoming clearly evident daily as more women and men are reporting their experiences of abuse. In so doing they seek to bring the perpetrator to justice and to put an end to his or her criminal behaviours. They seek personal help towards recovery from their own damaging histories.

Less evident, perhaps, is the effect that child sexual abuse has on children who, themselves, are not the target for abuse but experience, consciously or unconsciously, the abuse of their siblings or peers.

One participant, Dermot (36:M:25-34:P), while not having been sexually abused himself, as a child, was aware that his friends and peers were being abused in school. Dermot was aware of the abuse at the time that it took place.

In Dermot's situation, the perpetrator of the abuse was a teacher who was entrusted with the task of instructing the children about their sexual development:

*I have a very vivid memory of the particular person in question, who regularly abused children anyway in the school. I actually have a very vivid memory of his discomfort, very sensitive to his discomfort." (I)*

Dermot's sensitivity to the teacher's discomfort relates to the fact that the teacher was entrusted with the task of teaching the boys about sexuality. Knowing that he was regularly abusing a number of his class-mates and hearing him publicly preach sexual morality sat uncomfortably with Dermot.

Dermot has already described school as one of the key places in which he learned about sexuality, and where there was a strong emphasis on genitality and sin. There is a quality of dispassion in his account which raises questions about children's acceptance of adult exploitative behaviours which cannot be addressed here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, while society is becoming more open to recognising the reality and high incidence of child sexual abuse, a recognition largely driven in Ireland by the media, the wider effects amongst the community of children in which the abuse takes place is still to be explored.

Darina (42:F:25-34:P), when she was very young became aware of the fact that her closest friends were being systematically abused. They had been abused by their older brothers before they were able to speak. The abuse continued and Darina, with her friends, also became a victim to these older boys. The most painful part of Darina's childhood experience, which has had traumatic effects on her adolescent and adult life and relationships, was that, sexualised by the abuse, as she grew older, until the age of twelve, she joined with her friends in drawing younger children into similar sexually abusive behaviours:



*“[It’s] just the enormity of it and the consequences of it, and hurt for myself, of course,... that I would have been central to that.... It’s quite, quite, frightening.” (I)*

Darina describes her adolescent experience of growing up as extremely difficult. The childhood abuse and her role in it ended. Deciding that she was a lesbian and judging herself to be a paedophile, she withdrew socially and became depressed. Overall, she communicates a picture of a sensitive girl who struggled without appropriate knowledge and support about her developing sexuality and with an absence of emotional and spiritual nurture. Darina coped by avoiding relationships with the opposite sex, which she now considers to have had a detrimental effect on her adult life:

*“I had a boyfriend when I was fourteen and, after six weeks, I broke it off with him because I just didn’t know what I was getting into. I thought it best to avoid the pain. So that was from when I was that age until I was twenty. I literally had no romantic contact with a boy.... It wouldn’t have twigged with me that if I wasn’t in relationship, that if I wasn’t going out with guys from the time I was twelve to twenty, that this was going to seriously affect every aspect of my life in my twenties and for evermore. I had no clue of that” (I)*

Darina is conscious that her own sexual development occurred in a context of secrecy and sexual violation: violation that continued into her adult relationships.<sup>17</sup>

Darina’s story draws attention to the far-reaching effects of child sexual abuse. It draws attention to the fact that many children in our society are scathed by the phenomenon; that many adult relationships are built and shaped on sexual foundations formed and informed by women and men who have been either abused themselves, witnessed to the abuse of their peers, or developed in an environment permeated by abuse. It draws attention to the fact that perpetrators of sexual abuse are spread across the spectrum of sex, class, age and relationship, creating havoc not only in the

---

<sup>17</sup> Darina’s account of her early adult experiences is contained in the following Chapter. At the present time, having been moved to action by her experience of critical reflection on her personal sexual history, Darina has completed a course of therapy during which she has successfully confronted her past and the people who were involved in it.

personal development of a wholesome sexuality for a large number within the community but, also, in the collective development of communal sexual values undistorted by exploitation.

Among the women participants who experienced sexual abuse as children or in adulthood, two volunteered that they had been made aware that their own young daughters had also suffered abuse.

One participant indicated that false allegations of inappropriate sexual behaviour with children in his charge were being made against him. This was at the time the field work for this study was in train. The participant was very distressed and felt unable to contribute further to the study by interview.

The experience of child sexual abuse for the participants, or the observation of it, emanated from members of trusted groups in the community. Stranger abuse is more strange than familiar; family and the extended family of the local community is where most child sexual abuse takes place (Brownmiller, 1976; Ward, 1984:99; Giddens, 1992:106,107). This raises issues about 'Stay Safe' programmes taught in schools, aimed at the prevention of child sex abuse by empowering the child to confide in a trusted adult if he or she is physically approached in an inappropriate manner by another person. While it is imperative that children learn to speak out, who is the child to trust?

The impression outstanding from the participants' stories is one of powerlessness and pain. These participants, as children, were trapped, confused, afraid, guilty and shamed. Integrity of personality and identity are intimately connected with respect for sexual boundaries right throughout life. These boundaries are frequently breached as exemplified in health care, when bodily privacy is not properly respected; in the work place, when sexual harassment is perpetrated; in public places, when colloquial sexual words and terms are used in a denigratory or abusive fashion. In the case of sexually abusive behaviour with children, personal sexual boundaries are outrageously violated with, in many cases, long term serious effects reaching into adulthood. For some the



damage can never be fully healed as *“the effects of traumatic sexualisation may continue to inform their lives...”* (Jacobs, 1994:165). For others, the damage can never be even addressed because of the ‘silence imperative’ (O’Connor, 1996).

From an adult learning perspective, a significant finding in this study is that three women participants felt enabled, by participating in the adult education personal development course on sexuality, to speak for the first time of their experience of sexual abuse in childhood. A fourth felt enabled to address the complex issue of having been abused and, also, of having participated in abusive behaviours, as a child. As a result, these participants initiated a process of recovery from the damage inflicted on them as children which has seriously inhibited their lives.

For three participants, the process of recovery involved entering into therapy. For one participant, the process of speaking and writing about her experience was considered by her to be sufficiently liberating so as to release her from the feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy arising from her childhood trauma. A fifth participant was encouraged by her participation in the course to seek additional therapeutic help to that which she had already received. She was enabled, by the course, to give a more comprehensive account of her experience to a therapist than she had previously done. This assisted in identifying the type of intervention which was most helpful to her. As a result of these interventions, this participant was enabled to make choices about her life and relationships which she had been unable to do previously.

The role that the personal development course in sexuality played with respect to these participants above was not therapeutic in the professional meaning of psychotherapy. It was, however, perceived by the participants to be therapeutic in its facilitation of a transformative learning process.

The fact of child sexual abuse throws into high relief a fissure or fault in adult sexuality. While society is beginning to come to terms with the fact of the victims, it is less advanced in terms of integrating the reality of perpetrators. As Jerry (48:M:35-44:P) indicates above, all adults may have the potential to be abusive. Alternatively,

the participants' experience may reflect a socio-cultural acceptance of oppressive sexual power relations which encourages perpetrators to believe themselves secure. In any event, there is a need for society to own the distortion in adult sexuality that is endemic, thereby committing to getting to the root cause of it (Butler Scally, 1996). This means, in the first instance, breaking the culture of sexual silence.

### **Sexual learning in childhood and adolescence: summary of findings**

In this chapter, the focus was on the participants' experiences of childhood and adolescent learning about sexuality, now recalled in adulthood. The question it sought to explore was whether or not childhood and adolescent learning about personal sexuality was experienced by research participants as adequate for their adult relationships of intimacy.

The age spectrum amongst the participants indicates that their childhood and adolescence ranged from the early nineteen fifties to the late nineteen eighties, spanning the alleged 'sexual revolution' of the sixties. Yet, while experiences differed between individual participants, overall, there was no clearly demonstrated significant change between the younger and older members' experiences of childhood and adolescent learning about personal sexuality. This may be a result of the fact that the parents of all of the participants were likely to have grown up before the nineteen sixties, bringing to their parenting the traditional values of the first half of the century. In addition, the continuation of the intergenerational cycle of learning, without any significant, systematic educational intervention or cultural change, would contribute to the homogeneity of experience amongst the participants.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> In Chapter six, the participants' parenting of their children will be explored. This will elucidate what changes, if any, have occurred among the participants in the pattern of parental/child sexual education. However, it is of interest to note that currently, in Northern Ireland, education in adolescent sexuality is not considered adequate for the young people of today. Recognising the failure of traditional approaches to sexual education which focused on girls and on the prevention of pregnancy, a new initiative is planned. This initiative will adopt a personal development approach to the education of boys in personal sexuality (Judge, 2000:2)



In summary, the findings show that, for a majority of the participants, a culture of sexual silence existed and was reinforced by adults which prevented meaningful communication and learning about sex, sexual development and sexual relationships of intimacy.

Positive parental intervention in sexual learning, for the majority of participants, did not take place. Institutional interventions by family, church and schools were experienced by a majority as personally oppressive rather than as educational.

Such learning as was received by the participants, either at home or in school, was minimal, incomplete, confined to basic informational aspects of reproductive sex, presented negatively and allowing of no discursivity. Any exceptions to this approach were exceptional in tone and in attitude rather than in content.

The participants, as children and adolescents, received gender differentiating and differentiated scripts. The imprint of moral teaching on the girls in relation to their sexuality was, in general, excessive and repressive; this was also true, in part, for the boys who entered religious life. The imprint on the boys was one of an unsupported expectation of the achievement of stereotypical male values of sexual autonomy and mastery. Significantly, the learning from these scripts was experienced by both sexes as inauspicious for personal development and for affective relationships between the two sexes. There is virtually no evidence to suggest that participants recall having been taught to appreciate the other sex positively in the context of their learning,.

As was seen above, a significant number of participants experienced child sexual abuse, the malignant effects of which are still evident in adulthood.

In response to the first hypothesis that

individuals have learning needs relating to their personal sexual well-being which can only be met in adulthood irrespective of the quality of their pre-adult learning,

the findings show that the participants' pre-adult learning about personal sexuality was inadequate for their personal sexual well-being not alone in adulthood but, also, in childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, for a significant majority of the participants, the findings indicate that their pre-adult learning about personal sexuality was inimical to their growth and development as adults and as adults in relationship.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUBJUGATED AND SEPARATED BY SILENCE: ADULTHOOD AND PERSONAL SEXUALITY**

As the participants have shown in Chapter Four, by the time the individual reaches whatever is culturally recognised as adulthood, childhood and adolescent learning has already formed an experiential well from which adult assumptions, expectations, fears, needs and behaviours spring. This has significance for transformative ambitions to change personal or political worldviews in order to enhance individual and communal well-being. Meaning perspectives acquired from early learning may be inhibitory of the critical intelligence, agency and impetus for political engagement which are characteristic attributes of liberated subjects of history.

The major themes emergent from the findings as they relate to participants' experiences of personal sexuality in adulthood and in relationships of intimacy are as follows:

1. self-image and sexual self-esteem in adulthood;
2. partnership and intimacy: conflict and change in intimate adult relationships;
3. fertility and sexuality;
4. parenting: the intergenerational cycle of sexual learning.

These thematic designations are 'umbrella' terms sheltering clusters of sub-themes. This umbrella covers issues such as body image, physical intimacy and sexual intercourse, pregnancy, fertility, infertility and gender differentiation. These themes

and issues are signposted here as distinct entities. In the lives of the participants they intertwine in the revolutions of adult learning challenges. For example, sexual self esteem is not separate from personal or cultural history of gender differentiation. Sexual intercourse and fertility are intimately connected, and the experience of each impacts on both; both may impact on sexual self-esteem. This inter-weaving of themes is evident in the text below. For example, the issue of 'work' appears in the section 'self-esteem and sexual self-image in adulthood'; it reappears later in the text in the section entitled 'change and challenge in intimate relationship'. The text reflects the reality of participants' personal lives; the same features may be seen from different vantage points and offer different perspectives.

This chapter illustrates the main issues in adulthood, in relation to sexuality, identified by the participants in their stories. In particular, it illustrates how the quality of the critical and communicative processes is considered by them to be central to their experiences.

Anita's story gives an overview of new learning situations of adulthood in relation to sexuality and the accompanying inhibition of silence and constraint in communication. It is a story of twenty years, from early adulthood to mid-life, incorporating many of the themes experienced by both the men and women participants.<sup>19</sup>

Anita (17:F:35-44:P) describes her marital relationship as happy, evolving and challenging. She considers herself lucky in her marriage; that it has survived. She is well aware of the demands the ordinary exigencies of intimate living make on two people raised in a culture which 'promises the moon' for marital relationships but provides little means of getting there. Anita married her first 'serious' boyfriend. Her expectations of the marital relationship were romantic and idealistic. Although she observed her parent's relationship to be less than ideal, viewing her mother as religiously and sexually conservative and her father as "*a real man about town*" (J), her assumptions about marriage were formed by the media:

---

<sup>19</sup> The selection of Anita's story as an overview should not be interpreted as prejudicial to the men participants. Her story signposts many of the issues which arose for other participants, both men and women.



*"I had this vision that you get from books - from television or songs, I suppose. I think you are sold such a strong image when you are growing up about marriage and having babies, and everything is rosy about it - there's no reality in the image - and in the sort of fairy-tale that people see. You have this image of 'they lived happily ever after.'"*  
(J)

Anita's choice of partner was deliberate; he was *"the exact opposite to my father"*(I). She wanted a partner whom she could trust in a way that she felt her father could not be trusted.

Although a cheerful, buoyant, humorous extrovert, Anita suffered from what she describes as an over-protected, sexually repressive childhood and the introjection of media images of the idealised tall thin woman. Anita is tall, not remarkably overweight for her height, but she was never thin. Pregnancy with three children contributed to her womanly shape. Anita feels so mortified by the size of her stomach that she cannot bear to even speak about it today. Her body, which has functioned so beautifully in bearing and bringing to birth three children, is a source of low self-esteem, affecting how she experiences herself in the closeness of physical marital intimacy and in the wider external world of men and women in the workplace, in the adult education class and in the community.

Anita recalls the challenges to her assumptions made by the reality of her change in status in living in partnership when she married. Initially, there was the issue of adjusting to another person's sexual needs. Although Anita and her partner were sexually active and engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage, their experience when they married was very different to her expectation. She had anticipated that

*"...sex would always be wonderful, now that we're married". (J) I had this vision that you get from books, I suppose: 'Oh well, now we're married, we'll have sex all the time - and it will always be wonderful; and the reality was completely different because we were very shy with one another.' (I)*

In fact, the reality continued to be different. Anita's partner worked at night. She experienced difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that her partner's readiness for sexual activity did not always coincide with hers.

*"I'd be all ready for sex, delighted he was in, and he would say 'no, I'm too tired'. I'd think this is not the way it's meant to be, and I never talked to him about it and he never talked to me about it". (I)*

The babies arrived in quick succession. The couple hoped to have a family of four. Pregnancy posed a new issue of intimacy for Anita in her relationship:

*"I felt really sensual. I thought it was brilliant to be pregnant and I felt a need for sex. But he wasn't really interested in me when I became heavily pregnant - he wasn't interested in sex at all, I think. I think, in one way, he found the change in my body a bit repulsive and I thought he should be glorying in it. But he wasn't. And again, that was not talked about." (I)*

The arrival of the first baby marked a new phase and a distinct change in the couple's relationship, and one which had not been anticipated by Anita. She found herself drawn into the mothering role, delighting in the baby, devoting herself to nurturing her to the exclusion of her partner:

*"... your whole focus is really completely away from your partner, I suppose, and it's towards this little bundle that needs you; and I suppose it answers that thing of being needed. You know that the child needs you and it's very satisfying but, if your partner could have been included in it - when I look back at it - it would have been much better." (I)*

Her attitude to sexual intimacy with her partner altered:

*"...it was - really, to be honest, it was very mundane. And I think I was very closed about it." (I)*

Pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding contributed to physical changes in Anita which altered her body to her dismay:



*I was worried about my body image. This had all changed. I breastfed for four months and that had me leaking all over the place - 'oh, don't touch me now, this is awful' - and it wasn't awful when I look back on it." (I)*

She withdrew further from physical intimacy, a fact she now regrets, explaining:

*"You know, it could have been great but because I didn't have the experience, or the knowledge, or the trust in myself, maybe that's it." (I)*

Anita and her partner never spoke to one another, at the time, about these changes taking place in their sexual relationship and in their family life.

*"It was very much me and the kids and him over there" (I)*

She refers to a lack of courage as being the cause of their inability to discuss the sexually intimate dimension of their relationship. As children, they had been brought up not to talk about sex. As adults, they had no experience or modelling of sexual discursiveness; quite the opposite in fact:

*"..it was never referred to - you know, sex isn't referred to - that it would be part of marriage... When I look back on it, even with girlfriends,.. we just didn't talk about it. We got married. Lads would make the odd old reference - but it was kind of in a very macho way... (I)*

Anita became ill during her pregnancy with her third child. A further pregnancy was considered inadvisable. The couple's original expectation of having four children became problematic. Fear of further pregnancy became a dominant feature of their sexual relationship. Fertility control became a central issue for her:

*"The pill didn't suit me, condoms weren't great for me; I had a terrible allergy to them. Nothing really worked great, so there was always this thing in the back of my head about getting pregnant." (I)*

Eventually, the issue of fertility control was resolved by tubal ligation. Rearing a young family and maintaining the home occupied Anita fully for a number of years. However, when the children were well established at school, Anita felt the need for change, to expand her personal horizons. She returned to work and returned to education. This, she describes, was a new phase in her life and raised new issues for herself and her partner in terms of gender roles.

*“In the beginning, with the excitement of going back to work, everything was fine, but when the reality of this schedule - it just became too big for the two of us. I began to feel pressure: ‘maybe I should cut back a bit’ and ‘I’m not really there when the kids are there’ and ‘I’m so busy trying to study’; it was like [having] this huge thing on my shoulders.” (I)*

She and her partner worked out new schedules to share tasks more evenly and to allow time for themselves. However, Anita is conscious that it is she who still takes responsibility for the management of the family and household; she is also conscious that she carries the emotional burden of their children’s resentment about her return to work and to college whereas her partner bears none of that. Anita is struggling with these issues at the present time.

Parenthood and the different stages of parenthood continue to pose new challenges for Anita. Her children are growing up and, already, one daughter has entered puberty. Anita recognises that her children’s sexual development is challenging her own and that her of her partner. They are needing now to engage explicitly in the role of sexual educators and Anita is concerned about how to achieve this.

As the early chapters of her children’s sexual stories are unfolding, Anita is now aware of the imminence of the closing and opening of another chapter in her own sexual story. She is anticipating the experience of menopause about which she feels she knows nothing:

*“I think that, in one way, for all the information you don’t get about pregnancy and that, you certainly don’t get any education, unless you go and seek it actively yourself, about menopause. I think, again, it is*



*one of the big hidden things. And again, anything to do with women and what happens to them, when you think of it, there isn't any education about it. And I think there are so many myths about it and worries about how it is going to affect me sexually. Will I still have desire? Will I be able to have sex comfortably? Will it just be an awful experience? Will I be going around permanently flushed, and hot and warm? How am I going to feel about myself? Is it going to change my image of myself? When I was sterilised, people asked me did I feel differently; do you look at yourself differently because you are barren? And I could honestly say 'no'. But menopause is a different kettle of fish to that. Because that was a choice, and menopause isn't a choice; it's just going to happen."* (I)

During the past two years, now in early mid-life, the flow of Anita's life course (Levinson, 1978) appears to have increased in pace and turbulence. Two catalytic events, the death of her father and participating in the personal sexuality module of an adult education course, have combined together to act as a watershed. These events have channelled her into a critically reflective mode in relation to her adult journey; in particular with regard to her relationship with her partner:

*"So there's the change in everything. For a while there, work was the priority... I became aware that really my sexual relationship wasn't a priority and began to ask myself why wasn't it..."* (I)

In reflecting on the twenty years of her partnership with her husband and the changing situations which she experienced, Anita returns continuously to the theme of communication and silence and its impact on the challenges and conflicts 'normal' experiences held for her and her partner. She emphasises the fact that, as a couple, they had not learned how to communicate with each other about any of the issues of intimacy they encountered in adulthood: experiences of self-esteem, physical intimacy, fertility, parenting and conflicts caused by unquestioned gendered assumptions about roles and relationships. The chasm of silence deepened as the years passed:

*I never talked to him and he never talked to me. I just didn't have the courage. We used to talk about everything except ourselves and our relationship. And, from the outside, everybody would say 'God, they're very happily married', but we never, you know, talked about anything, which is, really, when I look back on it, such a shame."* (I)

Anita, conscientized at the watershed, follows a new course, breaking the lifelong taboo of sexual silence, as will be shown later.

### **Self-image and sexual self-esteem in adulthood**

A sense of self-esteem or self-worth is necessary for effective communication and relating (Erikson, 1965). It indicates a 'good enough' personal experience of acceptance, sustenance and well-being which assures the individual of his or her social status (Lake cited in Peters, 1989). Sexual self-esteem in intimate relationships can be gauged, to an extent, by the degree to which a person knows herself or himself to be a loveable human being, capable of being desired (Clulow and Mattinson, 1989:155).

Anita's story indicates how, in spite of her having a robust personality, she is and has been vulnerable at the level of her sexual self-esteem. In particular, she refers to the way her perception of her body affected her self-image and how that, in turn, controlled negatively the ways in which she approached intimate relations with her partner.

Sexual-self-esteem connected with body image is evident in the stories of many of the participants, but more explicitly so in relation to the women. Wanda (11:F:25-34:S), like Anita, is a tall big woman. She reflects, with anger, on her experience of her body image growing up in childhood and later on in adulthood, and on the power of the clothing and fashion industry which shapes social attitudes and values regarding the body:

*"I have been in the position over the years where I have been stereotyped, even typecast.... I was always taller and bigger and earlier to develop than my classmates and friends. As a result, throughout my childhood, and especially my adolescent years, I was labelled. It was assumed that I would be rougher than everyone else and liable to start a fight. Basically, I was seen as quite masculine because of my physique. In fact, quite the opposite is true. This*



*continuous 'judgement' has affected me greatly over the years. It has damaged my self-image, self-esteem and confidence." (J)*

As a text within a text, the conjunction of size, aggression and masculinity in Wanda's account is an interesting reflection of hegemonic assumptions of bio-social, essentialist theories of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Wanda's experience of a false labelling which attacked her self-esteem did not end in adolescence. She reflects:

*"...this is something I have struggled with over the years. At this stage in my life, I feel quite comfortable in my body but it still annoys me that people judge me by my physique - all part of living in a figure conscious society. Many thoughts... some thoughts of anger with narrow minded people's perception of me. The perception of the fashion industry that larger ladies have no fashion needs or taste and certainly we are not meant to look or feel sexy." (J)*

Madeleine (26:F:35-44:P), an average sized women, mourns the size of her stomach. She blames her self-image on her indoctrination by the media:

*"...the media tries to determine what we should look like - shapeless, sexless. Yes, it is time I was happy being me, warts and all." (J)*

Aileen (19:F:25-34:S) concurs with Madeleine, exemplifying women's preoccupation with that part of their body which is naturally rounded but, metaphorically speaking, hounded out of existence in the western idealised image of womanhood. Referring to her 'tummy', Aileen complains:

*"...I pinch it, squeeze it and generally try to hide it. The truth is I have always had it. No matter how much weight I lost, I never fully accepted myself as I am, tummy and all. I remember my first relationship, I joked about the size and the fact that the guy had long arms. It brings up a feeling of sadness for me now, I thought so little of myself..." (J)*

Jill (41:F:34-44:Sep) captures the way in which low valuation of the body can cut to the heart of sexuality to the point of attempted denial of womanhood. Jill has never felt comfortable with her sexuality. She dressed to hide it:

*“When I was growing up, I would dress in jeans and a leather biker jacket. My father always had a motor bike and my brother also from the age of sixteen. Looking back now, I see that I was trying to hide my sexuality by becoming more male and losing my femininity. Today, I still feel uncomfortable in wearing clothes that are seen as feminine or sexy. Even wearing nice underwear or stockings makes me feel a fraud for some reason. I haven’t worked out why yet. I think the perception that I have of my body is a contributing factor to this. I have always seen myself as being fat and unattractive. This is very hard for me to write and is bringing tears to my eyes, though when I look back on photos of myself, I was, at the most, plump. To make sure that others see me this way too [fat], to reinforce MY belief, I would dress and behave in fat and unattractive ways.” (J).*

Jill’s cameo demonstrates the vicious circle of self-appraisal against a false standard; the projected images incorporated by Jill, and which act as benchmarks for her self-appraisal, are of women whose body shapes range from extremely slender to emaciated. In comparison, Jill exaggerates her rounded form to the point where she perceives herself as fat; fat as opposed to thin. Thin is desirable; fat is not. ‘Fat’, in many parts of Western society, signifies ugliness, ill-health, unloveableness and lack of self-control (Bordo, 1990, 1993; Rakow, 1990). Jill shows the depth of her indoctrination in the desirability of slenderness to the exclusion of other bodily shapes in that she uncritically connects ‘fat’ with ‘unattractive’. Having judged herself wanting, defensively, she commits to a course of ensuring that others will share her devaluing beliefs about herself.

None of the women participants expressed complete satisfaction with their bodies; they were too fat, too thin (rarely), too small, too tall, breasts and legs were the wrong size and shape, noses were too long, waists were too thick, hips too broad and, most frequently, stomachs, ‘bellies’ or ‘tummies’ were too large, protuberant and heavy. The idealised representations of women, (which could perhaps be described as consumer, consumable and consumed), as portrayed by the fashion industry and in the



media, appear to have been deeply incorporated and embedded in the participants' psyches; so much so that it might be said they spoke as with one voice in rejection of their actual bodily appearances in favour of the idealised image.

What is interesting is the contradiction and split involved in the above dynamic. On the one hand, the women participants knew very well that the idealised version of 'woman', projected by the fashion industry, the entertainment media and related businesses, is selling a lie; the lie that to be loveable and desirable, in other words to be sexually esteemed, a woman must fit the images portrayed (Wolf, 1991). These women believed deeply that to be influenced, much less governed, by such images was ridiculous and not in their interests. They knew that such images are only realised by the rare and exceptional girl/woman at a certain age; so rare that she is scouted for globally and plucked from the throngs in the public thoroughfares. Even then, she may require some 'adjustment' at the hands of a plastic surgeon or an airbrush technician in order to fit the image. As Gerber (cited in Shilling, 1993: 8), expresses it:

*"Today, the super-endowed, surgically altered woman has become a reference point of fashion."*

On the other hand, the women participants, while aware of the lie, felt helplessly compelled to judge themselves by it. Continually measuring themselves and their bodies in relation to the idealised images, they were, inevitably, doomed to fail by comparison. This sense of bodily failure causes low self-esteem. It is an alienating process, states Jagger (cited in Tong, 1989: 187) in which a woman's body, in a patriarchal culture, *"becomes an object for men and for herself"*; a divisive practice which alienates women *"from the product on which she works: her body"*, and divides women from each other as they are suborned in a competition *"for the male gaze"*. As Berger (1972: 47) asserts, in relation to this internalised objectification of women by themselves:

*"From earliest childhood, she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the*

*surveyed and surveyor within her as two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman."*

Not alone were the women participants doomed to fail, inevitably, to match the image of the '*rara avis*', they were doomed, also, to the subtle and self-blame inducing failure implicit in the splitting of the head from the heart deplored by Michelson (1998); the women recognised intellectually the deployment of exploitative power in the manipulative control of bodies; and yet, emotionally, they were caught up, impressed into consumer service of the exponential proliferation of these images and idealisations and of their attendant businesses (Wolf, 1991; Frank, 1991:95; Burkitt, 1991).

Another way in which issues of self-image and sexual self-esteem is expressed by the research participants is in terms of relational dependency.

Rosa (2:F:45-54:P), who describes herself as having been "*a shy insecure child, an indecisive teenager, afraid to speak up for what I wanted*" (J), had so little sense of her own worth in adulthood that she felt she had to prove herself by what she could contribute to others' well-being. She believed that if she could meet her partner's needs, he would confer on her that approval which would validate her and confirm her worth:

*"My need was to please other people, not make a fuss and do what I felt was expected of me. I assumed marriage meant security and 'happy ever after'. I chose a partner who needed me and my love to make his life happy, but my happiness was an elusive thing....."* (J)

Gertrude (22:F:45-54:P) echoes Rosa's search for sexual self-esteem through her partner. Referring to the years of her early adulthood and marriage, she reflects:

*"I think that is a time in my life when I had the most problems, especially with my sexuality. I was most demanding... and I needed constant reassurance. I saw slights and hurt in the most innocent of remarks. It must have been hell for T [her partner]."* (J)



In reflecting on why she felt in such need of reassurance, Gertrude thinks that it was because her partner had the advantage over her in age, education and status. The relationship was not one of equality and her partner was inclined to treat her as a child. His mother disapproved of her as not 'good enough' for him. Physically, she had permitted 'heavy petting' before they married which, she surmises, may have forced him into proposing to her:

*"I felt for a long time that perhaps he felt he would not have married me except he felt obliged to. Heavy petting, in those days, was almost akin to sleeping together." (J)*

Gertrude suffered from feelings of inadequacy as a woman and as a partner for many years but believes she has succeeded in overcoming much of her insecurity, attributing this success to her partner:

*"It took me a long, long, time to get over my feelings of inadequacy and only for T.'s patience and obvious love, our marriage would have failed. Circumstances have changed and I feel far more confident and secure, thanks to my husband's encouragement." (J)*

Both Rosa and Gertrude, conscious of personal sexual inadequacy in the broad sense, and not simply as related to the capacity for sexual intercourse, looked to their partners for sexual affirmation.

Rosa and Gertrude exemplify the experience of a significant number of women participants in their belief that institutionalised heterosexual partnership would validate their sexual self-worth personally and socially. Rosa seeks acceptance and affirmation as a reward for meeting her partner's needs; Gertrude seeks them by having her felt needs met through her partner's constant reassurance. Both reflect a dependency, as opposed to interdependency, which is a feature of subordinated groups, and which seeks affirmation through affiliation and relationship in an inappropriate fashion (Baker Miller, 1978). Such affiliation confirms rather than eliminates low self-esteem.

These participants believed that, by acquiring a male partner and by virtue of the status confirmed on them in the socially approved institution of marriage, they would be accepted and sustained.

For Rosa, marriage and partnership did not fulfil her needs or her expectations. Married for twenty-five years, with a family of three children, she and her partner did not achieve the level of communication required to build their relationship and facilitate intra and inter-personal growth in mutual intimacy. Gertrude, on the other hand, believes that her low self-esteem has been eliminated to a great extent with the support of her partner. But, as her story indicates, this required an inappropriate form of affiliation. Moreover, she notes that there are still paragraphs, if not chapters, in her own sexual story which she feels she could not communicate to him; for example, the body-exploratory play she engaged in as a child with her peers. Their relational equilibrium, she believes, could not sustain such disclosure. This is consistent with Rubin's findings (cited in Giddens, 1992). Gertrude's sexual self-esteem is fragile. She fears the outcome of the communication of such memories, taking refuge in the safety of silence.

Cecily's (20:F:25-34:P) sense of sexual self-esteem reflects a tiny minority of participants who indicate having experienced a positive sense of self in early adulthood and who feel affirmed in and through the marital relationship. As her story revealed earlier, in her growing up and her early experiences of puberty, adolescence, marriage, partnership and parenthood, Cecily sadly felt the lack of support from and company of her mother.

In reflecting on her adult sexual journey, she states:

*"I have moved on in my life and my primary relationship now is with my husband.... My most important need was to be loved and cherished. I need to know that I am loved for myself and to be reassured of that. Thankfully I am." (J)*



Communication between Cecily and her partner is good. Both of them are aware of the need to work at keeping “*the excitement in our relationship*”. They are both explicitly committed to developing their relationship and recognise that “*this is a hard task but a worthwhile one.*” (J)

Reflecting on her sexual journey, Cecily comments:

*“I realise that it could have certainly been much clearer and uncomplicated, but I have survived. Perhaps if my own relationship with my husband was not as complete, and I still relied on my parents for support in this area, then things might be quite different.”* (J)

Cecily’s sexual self-esteem is strong. In her marriage, she experiences her partner as mutually contributing with her to the growth of their relationship. As part of her self-reflexive project (Giddens, 1992), she has let go of her need for parental company and support at the level of her sexuality and looks to her partner for those qualities. From a developmental perspective, she has succeeded in taking on the adult task of relinquishing the child’s need for its parents and establishing her partnership as her primary relationship (Gould, 1978; Giddens, 1992:108). It might be argued that Cecily is simply transferring an emotional dependency from one protectorate to another. However, her story asserts an interdependent relationship with her partner. Each surrenders to the challenge of adult intimacy thereby initiating a new cycle of affirmation and affiliation within the adult sexual relationship. This is assisted by what Cecily believes is essential to that process, “*honest communication*” (J), by breaking the dishonest silence.

The destruction of sexual self-esteem is particularly injurious in sexually abusive and violent relationships, either in childhood or adulthood. Four women participants volunteered, in the course of their stories, that they had experienced physical and sexual violence in adult relationships. The accounts of two are exemplified here.

Tessa’s (56:F:35-44:Sep) story illustrates the devastating dismantlement of sexual self-esteem effected by violence on these participants, and the fear of speech which

inevitably extended the perpetrator's power; this fear of speech is not alone wrought by the perpetrator but is also reinforced by societal values which uphold the supremacy of the man over the woman and by the subordination of sexuality to the private sphere, away from the threat of a critical gaze.

Tessa, in early adulthood, was sceptical about marriage as an institution. Her observations led her to conclude that marriage tied a woman down, immersed her in child-minding and prevented her from leading any kind of independent existence. However, she was acutely conscious of parental and social pressures to marry which she resisted until in her late twenties. Her partner-to-be was amusing company:

*"...he was fun and I didn't have to be too serious and it stopped me from going through the usual questioning and battling. He made me laugh. He brought out the lighter side. So, I married him because he made me laugh - and I was to cry for the next five years." (I)*

Tessa believes real communication, had it taken place between them about mutual expectations, might have led to a different outcome than marriage:

*"He was as immature as I was. So, the communication was at a very surface level. It wasn't great. Communication could have helped a lot... where this kind of thing, with views on both sides, could have been spoken about." (I)*

Within three weeks of the wedding, Tessa wanted to end the relationship; expectations had not been negotiated and she was expected *"to toe the line"* (I). When she broached the issue with her partner of having made a mistake, she received her first black eye. Tessa's experience over the next few years was harrowing. She had three children during that time, two as a result of marital rape, once at knife-point. She was beaten, imprisoned, demeaned, verbally abused, sexually abused and raped. She was emotionally tortured and exploited by her partner's threats to kill himself if she left him. Utterly sundered, she lost all sense of her personal worth:



*“I isolated myself. So, once I’d gone to the stage where I was isolated, I was beginning to doubt my own judgement. I began to feel it must be something I was doing wrong.... So, I began to doubt my own judgement.... I didn’t trust my own judgement at all and I figured it must be me, so, therefore, it wasn’t easy for me to go and tell anybody, because I felt I was the one who was going to be locked away.” (I)*

Tessa was afraid to speak; afraid to speak to her partner because of the consequences of confronting him, consequences which she regularly experienced; and afraid to speak to anyone else, because she thought she would not be believed and would, therefore, be judged unstable. By keeping silence about the truth of her sexual torture, Tessa remained entangled for five years in a nightmare of sadism and bondage. Moreover, her children had to endure and suffer the subjection of their mother by their father, daily, to such violent abuse.

Sarah (44:F:25-34:P), in sexually abusive relationships as a child, as described earlier, believed herself to be powerful. In adulthood, she struggles constantly with her low self-worth which has resulted in her tolerating deeply abusive, degrading adult sexual relationships for a period of years:

*“When I think of my past lovers, I see that I fell into a trap of looking for men who would abuse me, because abuse was normal. They were all older men who wanted control. If I sit and write down all the abuse I suffered, I can’t make sense of it. Why did I take it?” (J)*

Sarah felt helpless; abuse was ‘normal’. This feeling of powerlessness is characteristic of women who have been sexually abused as children (Lips, 1994:93). Sarah blames herself for the abuse perpetrated on her by men. For a number of years, she was partnered by men who exploited her and engaged her in debasing practices. She recalls a particularly painful experience of such abuse in her relationship with a man who fathered a child with her:

*“He sold me to his friend for a week, £500. He would tie me up, take photos, let his friends fuck me. I had nowhere to go. I stayed. Therefore, I deserved it. He even let his ex-lover have sex with me*

*while he took photos; her husband joined in. I was only the mother to his daughter and his whore.” (J)*

Referring to a later relationship, Sarah recalls how she was sexually harassed throughout but never felt able to confront her partner, blaming herself for his behaviour:

*“He was the horniest man I knew, and if he wanted sex, he had to have it, or else. Sometimes, at the most inappropriate times he would demand sex. I let him bully me. When I finished the relationship, he freaked, beat me up. [He] came up [to the city] a month later to apologise; raped me, beat me and told me he loved me. Sick, but I took it so I deserved it.” (J)*

Tessa's and Sarah's stories are examples of how culturally constructed relations of dominance and subordination facilitate the systematic perpetration of sexual violence (Kappeler, 1995; Kitzinger, 1994). Their stories are examples of massive erosions of self-esteem making it practically impossible to seek help. In such a culture, fear of public opprobrium, instilled in women by their observations of the treatment meted out to them should they speak out, keeps them in silence. As Braiden, (1996:3) points out:

*“The majority of rape victims keep the rape and the violence secret and invisible because of the invidious inclination to blame the victim and the onerous burden of going through insensitive processes.”*

These are examples of the victimisation of women, culturally facilitated by “*enshrining male dominance...*” (Faith, 1994:59). Not alone are the concepts of justice distorted but this distortion twists the spirit of such women so that they believe, as Tessa and Sarah believed, that they must deserve the violent and abusive treatment enforced on them by male aggressors (Brownmiller, 1976). Furthermore, as Tessa learned, men who are violent are often facilitated in their violence by those same social institutions which are constitutionally bound to uphold the principles of justice and care (Dobash and Dobash, 1996; Connell, 1994:148; Faith, 1994:58). Tessa discovered that when she eventually broke out of the vicious cycle of violence and sought shelter for herself



and her children, there was little institutional respect for her experience or for her human rights:

*“It was rough. It was like all society around was - I felt I had to prove myself. I had to prove first of all that he was actually violent. I had to prove that I was OK as a mother. I had to prove that I wasn’t fiddling the system. And I remember one County Councillor official turning around, when I was waiting for housing, saying to me ‘you know, it’s not County Council policy to break up marriages by housing the other spouse.’” (I)*

Both Tessa and Sarah are convinced that the silence surrounding sexuality is a damaging silence; it contributes to countless assaults on personal worth and self-esteem. These assaults, resulting from the violent abuse of power, are hidden from the light and enlightenment of ordinary discourse. Tessa’s and Sarah’s experiences reflect the western cultural repression of transgressive sexuality and violence enunciated by Harvey and Gow (1994); a repression which removes it from democratic critical interrogation such as might be facilitated by transformative learning in adult education.

The issue of sexual self-esteem was less obvious in the stories of the men participants than in those of the women. Sexual self-esteem, for them, appeared to be more connected to self-questioning about ‘who am I?’ rather than ‘how am I?’ or, more specifically, ‘how am I in relation...?’ which exemplified the women’s self-questioning. This distinction is reflected in concepts of personal development by Erikson (1965: 252-258), Egan and Cowan, (1980:164), Gilligan, (1982) and Chodorow (1990). This is not surprising given the difference in learning experienced by boys and girls; boys learn very early in life that who they are matters; girls learn that who they are will be defined to a great extent by the presence or absence of a significant man in their lives. The overt or covert popular interest in the answer to the question “who is her husband, partner, father?” frequently illustrates the persistence of this perspective. Furthermore, the question is expected to reveal what the significant man in her life does. Linked to the question of ‘who am I’, for men, is the issue of ‘what do I do?’, ‘what I do’ becomes embedded in ‘who I am’, becoming synonymous one with the other. Thus, sexual self-esteem for a man tends to be more dependent on his sense of who he is and

what he does. As Block (cited in Lips, 1994:90) summarises: “*girls...were encouraged to develop roots, boys were taught to develop wings.*”

In this context, the women participants agonised about their adequacy in and for relationship; the men participants struggled more with how they were affected by others and by the concerns of the public sphere. Both sexes shared something of the same emotional journey; they travelled through the same cultural territory, but their points and times of departure were different. This led to both a recognition and non-recognition of the different travelogues as they were recounted to each other on the course on personal sexuality.

An aspect of this difference in experience between the sexes is demonstrated in the manner in which the men reflected on their bodies. Men have not, historically, been subjected to the same cultural conditioning which evaluates their worth in terms of their body image and the extent to which it conforms to the media’s idealised portrayal (Bordo, 1990:102, 1993). While, as Burkitt (1991:33) asserts, men’s bodies are coming under pressure to conform to idealised images such as ‘*the muscular mesomorph*’, they are not commodified and subjected to sexual objectification in the way that women’s are (Berger, 1972; Rowbotham, 1973; Wolf, 1991). Perhaps more fundamentally, men, in a culture which represents them as the dominant sex, have not been enculturated into the need to conform to particular physical sizes or shapes in order to render themselves attractive or desirable to women. It might be said, figuratively, and this is a generalisation, that men in Western cultures are taught to be raptors rather than attractors. As persons who belong to the sex which orders social values, men’s starting point for self-evaluation, as indicated above, differs from that of women.

Jason (43:M:45-54:P), among the men participants, was the most explicit about his perception of his body. There are two physical features which affect his self esteem: his height and his beard. According to Jason, who is British, the average height in Great Britain is greater than it is in Ireland where he is living at the present time. His



youthful ambition was to join the English police force. However, his body size impeded him:

*“5 feet 6 1/2 inches - too short for the Police. [This was] a MAJOR disappointment to me when leaving school.... No one said a word to me about the Police and my height - no career assistance in those days. I was classed as small in school and in the UK...” (J)*

Jason states that he is no longer anxious about his size:

*“I have come to terms with my height over the years. No other areas [of body] worry me.” (J)*

Any bodily concerns that Jason has relate to functionality and health. This bodily focus is reflected in Connell's (1995) analysis of gendered masculinity as constituted by bodily performance. Reflecting on his body during the course on personal sexuality, he concludes that such reflection was helpful because:

*“I started to see more how others see me but perhaps more importantly how over the years others had given me certain thoughts about myself, some good, some not so good. It also showed me how healthy I was and that I had a duty to look after what I had been born with. The VHI [health insurance] cannot replace all moving parts.” (J)*

Jason's physical shape obstructed his choice of career. His reaction to rejection by the police force was a physical one. He grew a beard:

*“Always wanted one since I was a boy - thought it made the 'man'. Felt it gave an 'air' to the person - stern looking but underneath, kind, gentle, fair... Never think of shaving; wouldn't do it for any reason except for a life. Did turn down a job once, (in the) UK; funny people, wanted me to shave the beard off; nothing to do with the job, just the Company Secretary didn't like beards. Bankers used to regard anyone with a beard as a 'bad risk'.” (J)*

It is interesting to note how Jason's idealised image is stereotypically that of a benign patriarch: *"stern... but underneath kind, gentle, fair"* (J). Jason's defining bodily experiences are related to work; in the first instance, he is denied the job he wants because his body does not fit; in the last instance, he denies himself the job he wants because it demanded that he alter his body. He felt powerless in the first instance. In response, he believed that he empowered himself by taking control of his body and growing his beard, reflecting Shilling's (1993:7) argument that the body has become a symbol of self and identity in modern society:

*"If one feels unable to exert influence over an increasingly complex society, at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one's body."*

The beard becomes a symbol of Jason's manhood.

Damian's reflection on his body faintly echoes that of Jason. Damian (7:M:25-34:P) experienced some feelings of discomfort in discussing the more intimate parts of his body; they were not part of his ordinary conscious reflection:

*"(This is) usually done in sniggers, whispers, and in single-gender groups."* (J)

Damian's comment refers to men's use of sexuality as a resource for peer bonding through jokes, innuendoes, denigration of women and sexual gestures (Segal, 1990).

Damian's consciousness, in terms of his body, he noted, related to his work *"in theatre, teaching, facilitating"* (J):

*"...I was most comfortable with those components that I consider media of expression and essential in all my work to date. It's totally in line with my view of myself as someone who motivates, instructs, energises with eyes, face, hands etc. It's also an indictment of my detachment of 'myself' from that which is being taught. I never identified this before."* (J)



While it is important not to over-interpret Jason and Damian's connection between body image and work, it is, nonetheless, interesting to note the role 'work' plays in their conscious physical self-appreciation; the emphasis in relation to their bodies being less on how they appear and more on what they can do with them; less on how they relate through them and more how they perform; less on how they connect with the private sphere of intimacy and more on the public sphere of work. In addition, Jason's interpretation above reflects a measure of confidence in his public status as one "*who motivates, instructs, energises*"; a confidence which, Lips (1994:90) concludes results from childhood socialisation of mastery for boys.

The connections between work, identity, sexuality and self-esteem is highlighted in Dermot's endeavours to come to grips with the issues raised for him, as a man, by the significance of work and his relationship with his marital partner; these issues he perceives as general to many men. Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) is dedicated to personal development and critical reflection on roles and relationships. He learned from his father and from his religion that to work hard was the mark of a worthy man. All else would follow. In adulthood, Dermot has had to struggle with an identity constructed on this teaching which made work the central issue in life and pleasure something to be wary of:

*"Approval was very conditional on certain types of behaviour.... I think there are two words for me - enjoyment and approval. Whereas the other side of it is displeasure and disapproval; and enjoyment and approval are not really current. So work and approval were much more likely to go together and pleasure and disapproval were much more likely to go together. " (I)*

The process of redressing the balance was not easy; of integrating the concept and experience of play, pleasure and sexual relating which was both playful and pleasurable, as good, worthwhile, and commendable behaviour for a man:

*"I think the awareness was the first difficulty - actually finding out that it might be OK to do those things, was the first thing, rather than experiencing a feeling of it not being OK. I think when you come*

*from a childhood that is based on repression and suppression and so on and that values work rather than play and all that kind of stuff, I think that's why it is very difficult to develop an adult sexuality, very difficult. So I just feel that is a learning that I had to do." (I)*

Dermot emphasises the fact that the actual process involved in beginning to bring about change in his own meaning perspectives about sexuality did not evolve automatically; it was a difficult learning process. Dermot describes himself as an untypical man in that he is deeply committed to his own continuing emancipatory learning which enables him to be

*"...a sensitive, vulnerable male in an open way... My way of being a man, I don't experience it as typical - that's the word which keeps coming to me - I don't experience it as current culture, but I think there's a movement towards difference." (I)*

He reflects on the current culture which has contributed to his formation, noting how, in general, men's work is valued over and above women's work, and on the value that men place on their work and which work confers on men's self-esteem:

*"...I'm just struck by what men stand to lose if they lose work, and it's much easier for them, for example, to lose the relationship than it is to lose work. Now I'm generalising on the basis of recent experience. Then again, I think work is core whereas relationship isn't - work is literally - to lose work, I think, for many men, I was going to say, even for myself, but I'm actually, I think, I'm speaking generally, I think it's literally that the identification with work is so core that it's devastating... So I think that a lot to do with maleness is to do with aggression, achievement, competition. And all those things are clichés; and as I say them, they are clichés, but I also experience them very much." (I)*

Jason, Damian and Dermot reflect the conjunction for men between achievement in the public sphere of work, measured by the culturally dominant value system, and their self-esteem (Gilmore, cited in Connell, 1995:33). Damian sums up the dilemma experienced by the men participants who recognise the poverty inflicted on them by a



culture which binds their self-worth with the rewards of material productivity and male solidarity, and fails to acknowledge their intimate selves (Giddens, 1992:60):

*“People joke about it here in the office and talk about men hugging trees and beating drums in the wood but I mean... I mean, ‘how are you?’ - ‘I’m fine’; total non-discussion of huge areas of experience and feeling in life. I’m as cut off as anybody else.” (I)*

The participants are caught up in a culture which focuses on ‘who/what are you?’ in the world of work but excludes the ‘who/how are you?’ in the world of personal relationships. A culture which emphasises the first question, while failing to give equal prominence to the second question, is exercising social censorship; it is another form of silence and the deployment of power through the manipulation of discourse (Foucault, 1978).

The interlinking of sexual identity and sexual self-esteem by men in this study is evident in the stories of Damian and Dermot. It is as though patriarchal relations offers a sexual identity charter for men, at least for those men who conform to the approved heterosexual preference (Connell, 1994:163) which guarantees their sexual self-esteem. Once their stance on patriarchal territory is threatened, as it is by feminism, issues of identity, esteem and sexuality spring up (Kimmel, 1997).

Damian reflects that a military analogy is apt to explain men’s traditional way of perceiving women; apt in its goals and processes; and a way in which he himself perceived them and acted accordingly in his early adulthood:

*“A woman is to be colonised like a country... It’s like yes, she’s mine but on my terms - I will fly my flag here - and this is my territory now - and it’s total occupation and invasion. It’s like the idea of a virus entering a system and taking it over.... And I would have said that in my twenties I thought like that. Maybe less so now, but I understand that thinking and I see it; it makes me uncomfortable but I know it’s there, I know it’s real.” (I)*

Although it is uncomfortable for Damian to think of his aggressive attitude and his conception of women as a land to be captured, dominated and possessed, he is aware of a fearfulness in relation to loss of power if the situation were otherwise:

*“Because the idea of a woman who’s authentically sexually, totally politically herself is very threatening to men; because of all those tribal things about I’m a man and I make the first move; I’m the man and I make the decisions; I define the home; I define the relationship; I set the ground rules. All of those things are threatened... so it is threatening. It threatens the whole order you know. I think a lot of men, sensitive middle-class men, have had a bad reaction to this whole thing about ‘men have ruined the world, men launch bombs, men are individually peeping’. I didn’t launch any bombs, I didn’t, you know.” (I)*

Damian reflects the pressure which feminist critique has brought to bear on “*the whole order*”. This pressure is confirmed by Connell (1995) as a global challenge to patriarchal relations. Damian is distressed at being ascribed responsibility by virtue of his sex for aggressive and transgressive actions in which he, as an individual, has had no part. However, in defence of his position, he singles out “*sensitive middle-class men*” as the group, of which he is one, which feels aggrieved at the injustice of being associated with the oppressive aspects of patriarchal relations. Hondagnew-Sotelo and Messner, (1997:507) argue that it is the relatively privileged men of the white, middle-class, who are reconstructing a new form of hegemonic masculinity; a form which allows of and encourages male sensitivity, release of emotions and male bonding, but which does not

*“confront men with the reality of how their own privileges are based on the continued subordination of women and other men.”*

This awareness of sexual injustice and inequality and of emotional ambiguity elicits from Damian feelings of ambivalence and uncertainty as he reflects on sexuality:

*“And sexuality is about the whole person.... I suppose it’s about even a way of being authentically male or female... this is one of my problems... one of the few negative things that the women’s*



*movement has done is that there's a generation of Irish men who aren't sure what they want to be, where they're going, trying being women, almost, because, you know, to be non-confrontational and, you know, be that. But that's not what women want either. They want people who will be authentically themselves, sexually."* (I)

Dermot echoes Damian's sense of loss in a changing of the status quo. He is trying to redress the situation in his own life. However to bring about change which alters the balance of power is not easy, even when committed to the values of that change "...men do have the power, and have the power to change and not to." (I) However, to change is

*"to open yourself up to all sorts of things like power and powerlessness, to highs and lows of emotion, to constant vulnerability and I guess that it's difficult for some people to enter into that because they're losing something. So yes, I think that's very difficult. I would only ask people to recognise the difficulty of changing. That is all I ask them to recognise."* (I)

Dermot, in describing the shift from a gendered position of dominance, perceives that taking up a new position, a position in which there are changes in power relations, fluidity of emotions and vulnerability, is to lose status. Arguably, this is analogous to women's culturally assigned position. Paradoxically, as a position for both sexes, it could hold the potential for a richer form of relating, introducing a permeability in relations which would allow a greater cross-flow and mutuality of experience between the sexes.

Both Damian and Dermot express themselves as men who are aware and critical of the status quo as it relates to issues of sexuality. They are reflective of the imbalances in gender relations, not just as they affect women but also as they affect men, by inhibiting the exploration and development of major tracts of potential male experience which their socialisation has repressed.

An interesting element emerging from this complex of identity, esteem and sexuality, proffered by men participants in the study, is the role the current publicising of male

abuse and violence towards women and children plays in men's self-appreciation. Issues of inequality and oppression of women, endemic in society, have found voice in the reporting of abuse and violence. The evidence of abuse by some men and by some institutions of state is incontrovertible. It is also shocking. Its effect is to make toweringly visible to individual men the destructive iceberg of patriarchal or, as Turner (1984:155,156) argues, patristic defensiveness, discrimination and prejudice. Now, in the public sphere, men, generically, are being overtly viewed by women, by children and, significantly, by men themselves, as sexually dangerous.

Damian echoes the feelings of the men participants when he expresses the horror this overwhelming realisation has on his sexual self-image, and his repudiation of any suggestion that he is personally implicated in sexual abuse or violence against women or children. Yet, he is uncertain about what its prevalence amongst men means. Using the analogy of the virus mentioned earlier, it is as if the effects of that virus are only beginning to surface, and showing itself to be randomly host-destructive, so that no man can feel secure in his sexual assumptions:

*"...if you think of the culture at the moment, and the emphasis on sexual abuse and violence towards women, one really does feel like - it's almost like you want to climb up on a building and shout 'it's not me, it's someone else' and yet you wonder is it something in the wider male psyche that's coming out because it's been twisted or pushed down somewhere else." (I)*

The realisation of the pervasiveness of sexual abuse and violence brings to the surface feelings of guilt and shame; it threatens sexual self-image, betraying the vulnerability that men feel in the face of such public exposure and indictment. Dermot expresses the dilemma posed by such a situation:

*"I... find myself so much in sympathy with people who have experienced deep abuse at the hands of men that I'm just ashamed of being a man quite a lot of the time. And I'm in danger of losing my manhood - or nurturing only my - and I use quotation marks here - 'feminine side' instead of owning my power as well." (I)*



It is interesting how Dermot expresses the assumption, developed in Lips (1994), which equates the *'feminine'* with powerlessness. Nevertheless, the feelings expressed by Damian and Dermot indicate the threat that many men feel to their integrity and their manhood by the malignant behaviours of some; a threat which is rocking their sense of sexual wholeness but which is also drawing them inexorably towards a questioning of what gives rise to and/or supports male sexual violence and abuse. As Damian reiterates:

*"I think men, generally, that I've spoken to want to separate themselves from this and say 'it's not me' and yet there's a feeling of discomfort that maybe it is part of something larger that's not spoken about. (I)*

The question insists:

*"..where did they come from? why? what culture bred that?" (I)*

There is pain, anger, pleading and disassociation in Damian's response to his own question posed above:

*"The idea of patriarchy as a blanket term is something I sometimes get angry about. I didn't set up patriarchy. I didn't go to any meetings to agree it. And I agree there is a shadowy world order called patriarchy but, you know, I never went to the meetings, and I never took a card out for that particular organisation." (I)*

However, he feels compelled to acknowledge that, as a man, he benefits from patriarchy, from his superior advantage in the workforce and from the way he manipulates women sexually in his exercise of power:

*"Of course I do [benefit]. I'm a man who's a manager here where I'd say 80% of the work staff are women. And I'm a man.... I know that I have abilities in certain fields but I use charm, hugely. There's a certain combination, for men, of arrogance and charm and drive. There's the traditional male men in suits; things we all say we despise; but if you combine those elements with other things, you've*

*got something fairly lethal, you know. And I'm a bit unreconstructed, I'd say, in that sense, in that I'd use those things."* (I)

Dermot reveals the depth of effort and isolation which he feels in his engagement with the task of his own development as a man in a patriarchal culture; his own development which he believes, ultimately, cannot be served by that culture:

*"I would want the wide world to know the difficult journey it is to be a man in the late twentieth century - how extraordinarily difficult it is to actually forge an identity by yourself and for your relationships that is not oppressive, that is not repressive; that is not based on denying who and what I am and is not denying anybody their rights. And I would just really want everybody to know that it's very difficult."* (I)

He stresses the unfamiliarity experienced in this territory which is new for men. There is remorse and fear of loss; remorse for the inequities established and sustained by patriarchy; fear of masculinity being lost in the process of cultural reform:

*"It's uncharted territory... many of the men who are doing it [trying to change] really recognise the evil that patriarchy is and feel a deep sense of compunction and remorse and they're in danger of losing .. they're in danger of taking [so much] responsibility that they actually just throw maleness out."* (I)

Dermot feels that his personhood, including as it does his sexual self-esteem, is endangered by alienating experiences with some women. He pleads for a distinction to be made between what is oppressive in a male dominated society and the person of the individual man:

*"It's like uncharted territory and it's a bit lonely and a bit frightening and I can take all of that, but I also want respect. I want to be respected. I want that difficulty respected. Quite often, I feel, as a male, disrespected by people who, basically, hate men. I mean, that's how I experience it. I know there are very few of those people but, yes, I think patriarchy is evil, but I'm not."* (I)



Both Damian and Dermot express feelings of isolation and alienation brought about by lack of constructive communication on issues of sexual identity, self-esteem, male violence and patriarchy and the relationships between them. In Damian's instance, he regrets the prevailing silence about these issues amongst his own sex:

*"[I feel] great frustration because there's nowhere to talk about this. You might gently nudge out one or two people but, by and large, you know, men smell a threat to the order very quickly. A lot of men don't want to have this conversation. It's too early. It's not for them."* (I)

In Dermot's situation, he not only feels regret at the lack of communicative and appreciative discourse with both sexes on these issues but, also, anger at the enmity directed at him because he is a man. He pleads for a hearing:

*"..it's quite extraordinary how glib it has become, how people talk about patriarchy and men doing this and men doing that. And it's extraordinary the level of hatred that people have for men. I'm pissed off with that, actually. I'm actually very pissed off with it.... All I would ask is that you just listen to what it's like for us, that's all I would ask. That's all. Yes."* (I)

Damian's and Dermot's reflections communicate the sense of emotional fragility and threatened identity and sexual self-esteem felt by the men participants in the face of feminism's exposure of the oppressive underside of cultural sexual orthodoxy; a fragility which could snap into a backlash if unheard and understood, in the first place, amongst men themselves. Damian asserts:

*"So many men still feel that the idea of a men's movement is some form of navel-gazing, 'tree-hugging' activity. It's essential for a profound silence to be broken."* (J)

Damian and Dermot are conscious of the absence of constructive and liberative discourse which they think would facilitate them in their chosen task of achieving what Giddens (1991:214) describes as *"emancipation from the fixities of tradition and from*

*conditions of hierarchical domination*". Their narratives suggest that the lack of empathic discourse on sexuality among and between the sexes is alienating and paralyses progress.

Damian and Dermot's stories resound with the difficulties they experience of being men in a culture which is strongly challenged at a theoretical and practical level on issues of male dominance and the supremacy of male values. This recognition of their own oppressions by a patriarchal/patristic culture makes it more possible for them to join with women in transforming an unjust world. As Freire (1972:32) puts it, those who are oppressed, in freeing themselves, free their oppressor. This applies to the oppressor and the oppressed within each person.

### **Self-image and sexual self-esteem in adulthood: summary of findings**

The narratives above show the manipulation of self-image and the body which maintains women and, more increasingly, men, in a state of discomfort and displeasure within their own skin, under the guise of health, empowerment, beauty and control (Foucault, 1979, 1980; Wolf, 1991; Burkitt, 1991; Bordo, 1993). The preoccupation with body image in the women's accounts exemplifies a commodification of women's bodies (Rowbotham, 1973), the manipulation of women's desire (Bordo 1990) and, ultimately, the alienation of women from their own bodies (Pinkola Estes, 1992). Self-image and sexual self-esteem is shown in the men's narratives to be more associated with bodily functionality as a representation of masculinity (Connell, 1995).

The close relationship between identity and work is revealed in a number of the men participants' accounts. These show an oppositional positioning of work and intimate relations, with the men's self-esteem hinging on their achievement in the work sphere. This is reflective of Erikson's (1965:252) warning, which seems as topical, currently, as it was when made:

*"If he accepts work as his only obligation, and 'what works' as his only criterion of worth-whileness, he may become the conformist and*



*thoughtless slave of his technology and of those who are in a position to exploit it.”*

The findings also reveal the workings of manipulative sexual power relations in which one sex is placed in a position of dominance over the other; whereby men are the “*measure of all things*” (McKinnon, 1993:185); and in which abusive and violent behaviour is wreaked on women by some men whose actions express the dysfunctional end result of the tough, competitive, aggressive learning curve of maleness culturally encircling all men in the western world (Brownmiller, 1976: Bolton, Jr. et al, 1989:11).

However, the findings also show the difficulty men experience in the cultural delegitimisation of patriarchal relations which Connell (1995) describes as currently taking place, although men, in general, Connell argues, are not proactively allying themselves with the destruction of patriarchal relations. The concerns expressed by the men participants reflect Giddens’ (1992:59) assertion that men are discovering their masculinity to have become a problematic.

The continuing narratives of the participants, as shown above, supported by the literature from a geographically wider domain, cast light on a number of issues which are significant in the construction and development of self-image and sexual self-esteem. They show a vulnerability present in both men and women, culturally engendered, which hinders the development of intra and inter-personal relationships of intimacy and the elaboration of a mutual critique of socio-cultural support for such relationships. In this context, ‘the other’, be it of the same or opposite sex, in the absence of a critical, communicative and appreciative discourse, is prone to being positioned as adversary rather than assumed as friend.

These findings raise issues of how values of inclusivity, justice, democracy and friendship can prevail without changes in personal empowerment and emancipation and changes in the dominant culture.

## **Partnership and intimacy: challenge and change in intimate adult relationships**

Sexual intimacy, in the context of this study, refers to the physical and emotional sexual closeness in relationship which emerges as a significant theme in the personal histories of the women and men participants. Their stories encompass the pleasure and pain of physical loving and unloving; the struggle to overcome inhibitions inappropriate to intimacy; the struggle to overcome gender blockades to intimacy; the efforts made to reach the other emotionally, and to fail sometimes and, sometimes, to succeed. They are courageous stories; it takes courage to disclose difficulties experienced in communicating intimate needs, fears and expectations with a partner; and courage to disclose a need for intimacy, within or without partnership, which is unmet.

Early expectations and experiences of sexual expression in partnership and marriage is one of the themes which emerged in the findings, in particular as expressed by the women participants.

Compared with the men in the study, the women participants were more articulate about having specific expectations about intimacy and intercourse in relationships of committed partnership. This may reflect women's tendency to embrace values of relationship, affiliation, responsibility and care (Gilligan, 1982; Baker Miller, 1978), and a cultural context in which young girls and women are impressed with concepts of heterosexual romantic love and a relational colonisation of the future (Giddens, 1992:58-64). It also may reflect the fairy-tale myth of sexual awakening by the 'prince/lover' imbibed from early childhood (Pinkola Estes, 1992); a myth which continues to be fostered in adulthood under the many guises of romantic novels, soap operas and advertising.

Anita (17:F:35-44:P), as was shown, in the early days of her marriage, had great expectations of sex and marital intimacy which were not fulfilled as she anticipated. Her 'prince' was tired after night work and nobody had prepared her for that. Neither of them had discussed it as a factor to be borne in mind in planning their sexual intimacy; neither of them felt able to discuss it until nearly two decades afterwards.



Melanie (66:F:35-44:P) perceives herself as having a very positive experience of intimate relating and intercourse with her partner, although the sixteen years of her marriage has confronted her with some serious relational challenges for which she felt unprepared. Initially, while Melanie had no reservations about being sexually active with her partner, she felt inhibited about anybody knowing about it and, indeed, did actually suffer some inhibitions with her partner:

*“I had no problems with sex with P., absolutely none. It was ‘don’t let anybody see me, don’t let anybody hear me. We were not to be heard or seen. If we were on our own, I was very free.... We’d have sex, we’d make love, but in darkness, of course, because I wouldn’t have the light on. It would have to be at night-time. There were a lot of things, when I think of it now, I realise how inhibited I was and how I changed over the years. But then, he was learning too. So we learned as we went along. I feel we have come on a lot. We talk a bit more now about it.” (I)*

Melanie considers herself to be a modern, liberated woman, and yet she did not find it easy to talk to her partner about their physical intimacy; even to name parts of the body with comfort was difficult for her:

*“It was hard to talk about it [sex]. The words weren’t said at home. I mean even the word ‘vagina’ and ‘penis’. It took me a long time to say vagina without feeling embarrassed by it.... How to find the words and how to say them, use them; even the word orgasm, clitoris, or anything to do with the sexual side, I thought them hard words to say.” (I)*

Betty (27:F:25-34:P) reflects the hopefulness with which a majority of the participants began their sexual partnering and which was subsequently followed by an unexpected, unplanned for and unspoken reality:

*“I very much assumed love-making would be wonderful - the old story that they all live happy ever after. However, my first experience left me in total disarray as it was painful, messy and awkward - why had nobody told me this?!” (J)*

Not alone was the early reality a shock for her, but, along with her contemporaries, she felt silenced by the prevailing culture which admits of no public flaw in marital sexual experience. She and her friends used humour to hide their confusion and uncertainty:

*“I found it difficult to talk about it and, like my peers, we all joked and covered up a lot. I had expectations that my partner should know what I needed. I needed a lot of affection, and intimacy, for me, was emotional as well as physical.” (J)*

Betty’s expectations of emotional intimacy in her marriage is reflected in Giddens’s (1992:1-3) argument that women today are working towards change in the traditional emotional order. However, she still gives expression to an expectation which is echoed in the stories of other women participants and which was succinctly illustrated earlier in the text by the men participants, in particular, by Tim, Cormac, Martin and James, that the man in the partnership will *“know what I need”*.

Aine (18:F:35-44:P) echoes Betty in her expectations about sexual intercourse and of her partner:

*“One of my most powerful assumptions was that love making would always be fantastic and that my partner would know exactly what to do. Both of these assumptions became unstuck very early on in our relationship.” (J)*

In contrast to these, Darina (42:F:25-34:S), having suffered emotionally in previous relationships, as was shown earlier, experiences feelings of ambivalence about her future relationships. Darina perceives marriage as potentially threatening; the choice appears to be either the pursuit of her own interests or the servicing of those of a partner and family, although she is conscious of feeling predisposed to marriage:

*“I assume I’ll get married; I’m not sure though. I need a relationship and a caring partner. I would fear I’ll never find this person and if I do, that I’ll be hurt.” (J)*



*"I've gone out with three guys in my whole life... in two arguments we had, it was as if I was opening my mouth but my words weren't coming out. I was unrecognisable." (J)*

Darina exemplifies the manipulation of speech and silence as a means of avoiding real dialogue, real communication. Referring to her most recent relationship, she says:

*"The intimacy [sex] was wonderful and my experience of sex was that it was in Shirley MacLaine's words 'fan-fucking-tastic'! After the act, this guy used fall asleep immediately, which always irritated me as I felt so alive... He didn't understand me or anything about me, which at the time was a relief because I was working so hard, I didn't want to talk." (J)*

Interestingly, in Darina's story, although the context is one in which she and her partner experienced the eroticism of physically pleasurable intercourse, her commitment to work puts a damper on her desire to communicate, that is, to address the affective dimension of the intimate engagement, leading her to collude in the silence. In the stories of the men participants already cited, work also appears to be a major hazard to sexual intimacy. Ultimately, Darina's relationship failed to generate a genuine interpersonal encounter, symbolised in the poverty of their sexual behaviour; the relationship foundered. She reflects: *"At the end, it was all a lie. He cheapened sex for me and he cheapened me."* (I)

Laura (38:F:35-44:Sep), abused in childhood and separated after thirteen years of marriage, reflects on her early expectations and experience of sexual intimacy. With her sexual self-esteem severely damaged by her early abusive experience, Laura had little positive sense of herself as sexually desirable and loveable. Her fear was a self-fulfilling prophecy:

*"I had many fears but my biggest fear and one which proved to be correct was... not being able to satisfy my partner. As these fears became a reality, a cycle of negatives began. The more I tried to*

*perform, the worse I was; the worse I was, the less I wanted to try.”*  
(J)

Laura's anxiety about satisfying her partner sexually underlines the participants' learning in childhood and adolescence, shown in the previous chapter, that women's sexuality is for others; that is, it is for men.

*“My sexual experiences with him were disastrous initially. I still enjoyed his company and after a year and a half we got married. I still hoped the sexual side of our relationship would improve. Looking back, it did for a short while. I could at least say that it was a kind, caring time in my life but no great pleasurable experience. I believed that it was me. I was holding back. Within three years we had three children; nothing wrong with fertility. I threw myself into them and my work. Sexual activity became a very low priority on the agenda. I hated it anyway - surely there had to be more to a relationship than this! Over the years, W tried many times to engage in sexual activity; when I would it was a cold experience. I felt no desire for him and no pleasure. Intercourse was painful and, if not, I just wished it was over as quickly as possible. I would lie there thinking of what was for the dinner next day or count the cracks in the ceiling. W was patient, caring and oh so condescending - he knew I was frigid but he loved me and only he would put up with me. So I became exactly that - ‘a lump of sexual ice’ and it suited me.”*  
(J)

Laura expresses the suffering of a woman who, having been conditioned to believe herself unworthy by her early sexual learning, allows that belief to be reinforced in the most intimate arena of sexual intimacy. In so doing, she reaffirms her own disbelief in herself. Her sexual silence is the silence of disassociation and withdrawal. It is one of the classic forms of silence of the victim of sexual abuse (Ward; 1984:3; Brownmiller 1976:281; O'Connor, 1996:158,159).

Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) reflects on male experience in relation to sexual intimacy. Still in the early stages of his marriage, although having partnered his wife for some years previously, he is of the opinion that men's experience of sexuality and intimacy can be constraining:



*“I think, quite often, the male experience of sexuality can be quite restricted. It can, I think, be very genital. Maybe there’s biological reasons for that, but maybe there’s also cultural reasons for it. So I think it is quite genitally based. It’s also quite performance based. So it’s actually, you know, it’s a pressurised situation where you have to deliver the goods kind of thing, and to be able to perform is to be successful, and stuff like that. So, out of that melting pot, issues of disrespect for sexuality, and for partners, can arise, you know, that are experienced as deeply disrespectful, especially by women.” (I)*

This emphasis on “delivering the goods”, on the pressure to perform as opposed to the pleasure of sexual celebration, which is a mirroring of the male ethos in society and in social institutions (Giddens, 1992), is repeated in Damian’s story.

Damian (7:M:25-34:P) reflects something of the perplexity which surrounds sexual intimacy for both the men and women in this study. Still struggling to define himself in terms of relationship with another, Damian’s early experience of sexual intimacy and intercourse refers less to his expectations of intimacy or of his partner and more to the pressure he feels to acquit himself well, sexually.

*“If there are unwritten rules and rituals of behaviour, I always felt that women knew them automatically and I didn’t. It’s all about a sort of poise, I suppose. (J) Initially, I tried to please in everything and it’s hard to come back from that, especially with work and children; there’s just no time.” (I)*

Damian, along with other men participants, has internalised the notion, culturally engendered in his childhood and adolescence, that there is an idealised male image of what it means to be a man in relationship, but without a clear model:

*“I think there is some template out there for being a good lover, an ideal partner – but I don’t know what it is.” (I)*

Measuring himself against a fantasy ideal and fearful of being found wanting, Damian retreats into silence for self protection:

*“I’m afraid to open up because it might be too much about being judged. I have such fear of disapproval.” (I)*

The application of the cultural, performance based work ethic to the art of sexual loving is strongly expressed by James (23:M:45-54:P) when he states “...*the level of performance [is] measured by the fulfilling of the woman’s desires*” (J). It is interesting to note the measurement of success: fulfilling the woman’s desires. It begs the question as to what constitutes any individual woman’s desire and how men can come to that knowledge. Both the men and the women participants in this study state that they have no facility for discussing the issue. There is a danger that sexual intimacy today may simply be interpreted by using the old yardstick of orgasmic prowess. This pressure to perform, culturally embedded in the male psyche, and the fear of being judged by such performance, prevents a learning and affirming discourse amongst men themselves (Kimmel, 1997). James, reflecting on such peer judgement concludes that

*“serious discussion with a male friend could be termed an admission of failure in some circumstances and is generally shied away from.”*  
(J)

As popular graffiti might put it, “Silence rules, OK!”.

Ben (4:M:45-54:R) defines intimacy as he experiences it while living as a celibate:

*“For me, intimacy entails a deep sharing of my inner being with somebody else and that person’s sharing deeply with me. I experience a certain intimacy in community. However, the fact that I do not experience a deep sexual and intimate relationship with a woman is a sacrifice. I see myself having the body of a man. I am heterosexual. I have feelings and a desire for intimacy which I feel is not fully satisfied.... I do not see myself as ‘macho’, as the hard man without feelings. I have cried a lot. I am growing in my ability to form intimate relationships.”* (J)



Ben's definition, extending as it does beyond genitality, mirrors the desire expressed explicitly by the women participants for an experience of the affective as well as the erotic dimension of sexual loving. He is committed to living his sexuality as a vowed celibate. Relationships in which socially approved genital sexual activity is directly an issue is not a concern for him in the way that it is for the men who live in partnership. In fact, Ben's early adult expectations about sexual intimacy were strongly repressed according to the learning tradition in seminaries. It is within this celibate context that Ben does not experience the pressure to perform sexually, articulated by other men participants; rather, he experiences the reverse, that is, the pressure to avoid genital sexual expression and exclusive partnership. Feeling the lack of such sexual relating and companionship, Ben is conscious of the ever present tendency to compensate by using that well-trodden man-beguiling route described by Giddens (1992) as potentially addictive:

*"There are times of stress. I experienced a later sexual awakening. I have gone through a painful mid-life crisis, deep loneliness, yet in that loneliness, I found solitude. I am aware of the danger of seeking compensation in workaholism." (J)*

Dermot, Damian and James relate above how the stereotypical pressures to perform, and the use of silence as a defence against potential criticism, inhibit intimacy. Ben expresses the desire for mutual, emotional closeness in friendship. Martin (73:M:35-44:P) summarises the antipathy which exists between men's instrumental focus and their communicative aspiration.

*"In my long-standing relationships, there is still a degree of contamination from my youth where I felt that the role was everything and without it, I was nothing. My tendency from childhood has been that I do not disclose and, in uncomfortable situations, I withdraw. It is, therefore, difficult for me to articulate intimacy. I have difficulty in being intimate, particularly in relation to core emotional issues. I am most comfortable where I have a role to play out. This is true even if the role presents serious difficulty and raises uncomfortable emotions. I have difficulty, therefore, in being intimate and have a sense that this difficulty inhibits those around me." (I)*

Damian reiterates the sense of hopefulness that both the men and women participants expressed in anticipation of committed intimate partnership and the inchoate fear that breaking the silence between one another about personal sexuality would jeopardise both self-identity and the stability of the relationship:

*“The difficulty is communicating honestly with one another. My partner is better at it than I am. There’s a huge gap between what I think and feel and what I do myself; my attitude is, ‘let’s not talk about it’. I’m afraid of change, afraid of actually putting it out there - I won’t unless there’s a real crisis; afraid that there might be a rift because I want to believe in ‘forever’ and I hate conflict - and I hate criticism.” (I)*

The issues surfacing in the stories of these men participants are ones of identity, inhibition of feeling and fear of change being brought to the status quo by entering into intimate communication. The identity in question is a conforming identity; conforming to the cultural male stereotype. The stereotypical man is heterosexually active, autonomous, invulnerable to the ‘softer’ emotions and is always in control (Kimmel, 1997). He is the ‘performer par excellence’. As Martin (73:M:35-44:P) asserts:

*“I think the situation is different between men. There is much more emphasis on ‘OK, what needs to be done about this?’ There is, in my experience, very little tolerance for the expression of feeling.... the role which I must constantly fight to throw off is that of the strong, dependable, constant support of those around me; the facade must be seamless, and the least sign of weakness is intolerable...” (I)*

Such a culturally constructed identity is threatened by relational intimacy which, of its nature, requires self-disclosure and communication of feelings (Giddens, 1992:61-64). Yet, this is the dimension of human experience which men traditionally, from boyhood, have been taught should be repressed if they wish to be recognised as ‘real men’ (Chodorow, 1978; 1990; Keen, 1992; Becker, 1993). An important aspect of this ‘recognition’ is that it is to be achieved with and by other men; women’s valuation of ‘a real man’ does not come into the frame. It could be said that, sexually, to be ‘a real



man' has more to do with matching one's mates than meeting one's mate (Kimmel, 1997).

In a cultural context as outlined above, it is not surprising to hear men advert to fear of communication because of the change it might bring about. The 'strong silent type' is a model, albeit an untrue one (Ehrenreich, 1993), consistent with maintaining the familiar relational balance within which a man may feel more or less secure. To enter into intimate communication, disclosing personal vulnerability and need, and to hear such from a partner, requires a skill with which men are not alone unfamiliar, but one which is antipathetic to those skills culturally determined as manly. And yet, the very strength of the defence indicates the depth of the vulnerability being shielded. As Martin reflects when contemplating the difficulty he experiences in intimate communication and his fear of change:

*"It's very hard to say whether crossing this rubicon is going to make things more or less difficult or painful. I suspect that I set myself up for a quiet, comfortable life and become apprehensive at the prospect of change. So, the change of revealing myself in intimacy is going to be painful. The revelation might lead to a reduction in 'background pain', if I can put it that way, but I must be motivated to do something about my background pain, or L's [partner] background pain, to do it. 'Whatever you say, say nothing'." (I)*

Martin's concept of 'background pain', as a descriptor of the experience of the participants in this study, is apt; it captures the experience of those participants who, though in stable relationships are, nonetheless, aware of a limitation on their potential for developing as individuals and as couples. This limiting of their potential, they assert, is brought about by virtue of the inhibition of communicative and critical discourse with those to whom they are committed by the closest ties.

Relationships of intimacy undergo regular change over time and challenge the women and men in this study. The stories the participants tell of the course of their intimate sexual relationships over the years are rich in their diversity; and yet most have the common thread running through of efforts to breach the invisible 'glass wall' of silence

which separates one from the other. Sometimes, the effort was one of direct confrontation, sometimes avoidance was the strategy used to facilitate co-existence.

As was shown earlier, Anita's relationship with her partner changed after the arrival of the first baby. Lacking the facility for discussing their feelings about their sexual intimacy, sexual loving became peripheralised.

Unlike Anita, Melanie's experience of sexual loving was never routine. Her story outlines in broad brush strokes the changing experience of partnership and intimacy which couples encounter over the life of a relationship. She recalls the years of trying to accommodate to intimacy and sexual activity; the embarrassment she felt of being revealed in sexual surrender, albeit within the arms of the person she loved and trusted deeply:

*"In our sexual relationship, I found it very hard to let go. Sometimes, well, you'll have an orgasm and that's it. I wouldn't like him to be stone sober... I would prefer him to be also in the throes of a climax so that he wouldn't see me losing control. And this was a 'biggie' for a long time."* (I)

Communication was never easy. Melanie describes the pressure of trying to understand and meet both her own needs and those of her partner in a context of communicative dis-ease on sexual issues. Melanie recounts, as an example, the years of silence she maintained on the issue of masturbation; a dimension of her sexual experience which she found personally life-enhancing but which, nevertheless, she felt had to be kept secret from her partner:

*"The masturbation thing... I mean, I didn't even tell him until we were seven or eight years married that I masturbated. I never told him. I was just embarrassed about it. Masturbation was wrong, so I felt it was very wrong, but my own instinctive feeling was 'this is a fantastic release for me, this is wonderful.'" (I)*



Melanie's experience of change and challenge to intimate relating continued over time. What she describes as her husband's 'near affair' with a colleague affected her profoundly. Feeling unequipped and unable to confront him verbally, she found the courage to write to him about the her hurt. Devastated by his inability to empathise with her, she states:

*"He could never understand how hurt I was... I was contemplating going under a car. It actually took two years for it to hit him. 'You broke my heart and you didn't see it. I didn't trust you for two years after that and you never knew it'." (I)*

Melanie is sure in her conviction that her relationship with her partner is solid and permanent. She is sure of her love for him and his for her. And yet the ongoing theme of silence persists in dogging the footsteps of their life together. Her mother's death brought grief to both of them. She recalls the numbness she felt and her inability to speak to her partner of her need for his emotional support and of her temporary loss of libido due to the anguish she felt at the death of a much loved parent:

*"If I wasn't approaching him in bed, it wasn't because I didn't love him but because I was grieving so much. But even if I could have said to him 'I know you can't be there for me at the moment, you can't be there for me because you're grieving as well', but I didn't. I just stayed quiet and he stayed quiet and we were kind of getting nowhere and I could feel the distance coming between us when I needed him most, when I really needed him." (I)*

Melanie's story exemplifies the type of changes and challenges to intimacy which a relationship encounters over the course of a life-time or part of a life-time. It exemplifies the underlying difficulty, articulated by many of the participants, of communication on issues of intimacy, relationship and sexuality. Her story also exemplifies the developmental process involved in any life course; of the sometimes painful process of expanding meaning perspectives to meet transitions and include new experiences and new ways of understanding and responding (Mezirow, 1990; 1996). It belies any cultural message which implies that the wedding day or its equivalent is the consummation of intimacy free-flowing to the furthest horizon of the future. As

Melanie perceives it, intimacy and partnership is an on-going learning process: *We're sixteen years married and I still feel there's more to learn.*" (I)

For most couples, the arrival of a baby commences a new chapter in the history of intimacy. There are no longer only two; and the third in the relational space (and fourth, and so on) are utterly dependent, utterly demanding and utterly exhausting. The baby, or babies, as was indicated in Anita's story, can also be chosen as an alternative centre for affective intimacy to that of the partnership. Difficulties, or strong challenges to the partnership, are washed over by submersion in mothering and parenting.

Damian offers 'a male perspective', thereby echoing Anita's report of her partner's experience. He, too, feels peripheralised by the arrival of children in the family and by the changes in the rhythm of intimate relating:

*"Children just squeeze the space and the man out, especially if he's working full-time. I say there's only women in our house - women and me; well, me and the cat - and the cat has been to the vet! And, since the last baby, we are so far away from saying what we'd like or wouldn't like in bed... the baby is in the bed with us... in the middle."*  
(I)

Damian recognises how relational intimacy is allowed to be marginalised by life's circumstances, particularly in a culture of silence, and how he contributes to it:

*"Then work takes over. I put my drive and energy into work and it leaves me drained so that when I come home, I have no energy left to talk about our relationship or to do much about making love. The thing is, we have to plan. It can't be spontaneous, between work and children. We have to plan time together. It's a terrible battle with the humdrum, the routine; that's more of a killer than infidelity."* (I)

Aine (18:F:35-44:P), like Damian, is conscious of the deliberate effort needed to maintain active communication about intimacy with her partner. She describes her learning process over the years as moving from *"being passive, eager to please and*



*undemanding in terms of my needs” (J) to being “able to discuss openly our needs and fears so that our relationship has become more verbal as well as physical” (J).*

However, she notes that while her partner is open to such communication, recognising how work and caring for the children can militate against intimacy, she is the one in the partnership who initiates and sustains the effort to maintain the development of intimacy between them. Both she and her partner give expression to the ties, as it were, in their gender-girdling inconsistent with intimacy and to their commitment to loosening them:

*“Somewhere, deep in my unconscious, I had picked up the message that it is a woman’s job to make and keep a man happy and, of course, if he should stray, the fault lay with her. I now realise that his right to be happy is mutual with mutual responsibility.... He talks about being on a merry-go-round of work and wanting to get off... By talking, both of us realised that we have to make changes...” (J)*

Aine’s experience expresses an aspect of differentiation in gender learning which contributes to an imbalance and inequity in intimate partnership; that of woman’s responsibility for nurturing relationships and intimacy (Giddens, 1992:60). This was highlighted earlier in the childhood and adolescent accounts of gendered learning by the participants. The conscientization of women has led to a realisation by some women and some men that change is needed if intimate partnership is to exist (Clulow & Mattinson, 1989; Giddens, 1992). Verbalising the need for change is a beginning. However, bringing about actual change is more difficult in a society which is so strongly embedded with an anti-intimacy culture such as the present day western business culture. Maintaining a hold on the work ‘merry-go-round’ can be a full-time occupation, depleting not just men but also women of the energy to relate in any depth. Sexual relationships can become almost solely a refuge and recovery space from the exigencies of work rather than an environment for the evolution and expansion of intimate partnerships.

Rosa's (2:F:45-54:P) experience draws attention to the danger to intimacy which conventional cultural role-playing together with non-communication poses over time. Now in mid-life, Rosa sadly reflects:

*"How intimate is my relationship with my husband and three children, twenty-five years later? I would have liked to have been able to share more with my husband but I feel he put up the barriers early on in the marriage. He would now like those barriers down but I feel used to being behind them for so long, it is hard to dismantle them now."* (J)

It is interesting to note how Rosa chooses to describe the situation: he 'wants'; she ponders delivering the task. As their communication faltered and petered out, so did love and physical intimacy;

*"Where am I now sexually? I'm lazy about sex, much to my husband's annoyance. If my husband is jumpy and aloof, I find it hard to feel sexually aroused and be the way he would like me to be in bed."* (J) *To me, sex goes hand in hand with love. I fell out of love, I fell out of sex."* (Q.2)

Tessa (56:F:35-44:P), having broken out of a violent marital relationship, has eventually found much sexual pleasure and a certain level of sexual contentment with a man. She sums up her conclusions about relationships and the way in which gender divisiveness, promoted in patriarchal cultures, cripples intimacy; it is another form of silencing, of preventing appreciative understanding and the outflow from such understanding:

*"Sexuality, because it differentiates so much with the gender, it causes this interaction between men and women and it becomes a battleground. The struggle is to get beyond what you're saying as a penis and muscles or a vagina and tits... Also, have to recognise what they [men and women] have in common, which for me is pretty much the same underneath it. And I think that if men can admit it more, and women, women also have to admit it, but they're better at admitting it... it's the common ground that we both share that we could build something great on at an individual level... but it's getting past the bullshit."* (I)



## Partnership and intimacy: summary of findings

These stories of the women and men participants in the study who have been or are in partnership indicate delicate treading on grounds of uncertainty, fear, hope and tenderness, and the damage that silence about sexuality can wreak in sexual relationships. These are not stories of the strange or unusual; they are stories of ordinary women and men living lives of extraordinary inhibition in sexual discourse. Giddens (1992:78) asserts that

*“For both sexes today, sex carries with it the promise - or the threat - of intimacy, something which itself touches upon prime aspects of self.”*

The experiences articulated by participants on the themes of partnership and sexual intimacy are particularly striking when consideration is given to the context in which they occur; a context in which the ‘happy ever after’ assumption is reinforced daily, as a norm, by all the major social institutions of state, religion and media in relation to heterosexual intimate partnership. These major institutions are dominated, as Connell (1995:216) points out, by hegemonic masculinity.

While many of the study participants approached early adult sexual choices and relationships informed and often marked by negative early learning experiences of sexuality, it is notable that a common thread of hope of ‘home-coming’ in intimacy was stitched into their expectations. By ‘home-coming’ is meant a sense of arrival, in an intimate relationship which allows the realisation of personal hopes and needs, the allaying of personal fears and what Giddens (1992) terms, a colonising of the future. This was true of the men and women participants who were single, of those who had entered into committed partnership, and of those who had chosen to live their sexuality celibately.

The accounts cited of the women highlight women's stereotypical expectations of men's sexual expertise and, with one exception, their own positive anticipation of sexual intimacy. These accounts also demonstrate that the women carry a large level of responsibility for trying to grow the sexual intimacy in their relationships over time and with varying degrees of success. This reflects women's socialisation as nurturers, carers and, in particular, as emotional carriers for the community (Gilligan, 1982; Clulow & Mattinson, 1989; Giddens, 1992).

The accounts of the men participants resound with the problematic of the relationship between work and intimacy in partnership consistent with Clulow & Mattinson (1989:18) and Giddens (1992). For many of the men participants, the balance between identity and intimacy (Erikson, 1965; Bancroft, 1989) appears as a continuing dilemma. Their accounts reflect Kimmel's (1997) assertion that boys and men are socialised away from intimacy and homosocialised into competitive sport, work, rewards and competitive sex. In such a competitive arena, personal identity is continually at risk. As Kimmel states, and as the men participants indicate strongly, it is threatening for men to drop the defences, lower the masks and discover and disclose the vulnerable "*rag and bone shop of the heart*" (Yeats, 1990:363) in a culture which values 'power over', as in domination rather than 'power to', as in collaboration. In this stereotypically competitive context, some men may regress to the exploitation of intimate sexual relationships in order to protect and defend a stereotypical male identity and self-esteem, if these appear in danger of being undermined in the public sphere (Bancroft, 1989:165).

Distinctively, the findings show that participants' experience of changing needs in adulthood in relation to partnership and intimacy become problematic and inhibiting of personal and social re-forming, when dominated by the constraint of silence. The silence about personal sexuality, already shown to have been all-pervasive in childhood, becomes more deafening as the personal sexual spaces become more intimate, or requiring of intimacy in adulthood. As Damian states: "*It's like we have to relearn how to be lovers and how to communicate about it.*" (I)



## **Sexuality and fertility**

Women and women's experiences in relation to fertility feature strongly, but not exclusively, in the findings. Experiences of fertility and reproduction are today vulnerable to medical and scientific sequestration (Treichler, 1990:130; Giddens, 1991, 1992; Ryan, 1997). Nonetheless, for women, this dimension of experience still continues to bring them up against some of the fundamental life and death questions posed by human existence.

Anita (18:F:35-44:P) at the beginning of her partnership soon became pregnant and had three children in quick succession. Pregnancy and the birth of the children had its effects on her marital relationship. These effects included misunderstandings about the couple's sexual and intimacy needs and a subtle estrangement between Anita and her partner, caused, in part, she claims, by her over preoccupation in mothering the children to his exclusion; an estrangement which was consolidated by the silence about intimacy. Silence about intimacy was an inherited, learned feature of their relationship, unchallenged until her participation in this study. When Anita's health required a cessation of child-bearing, the management of fertility became a major issue involving the trial use of several methods of family planning, none of which was satisfactory. Fear of pregnancy now accompanied every act of love-making until, finally, Anita took the decision to have a tubal ligation. Having solved the problem of an abundant fertility, Anita, as she stated, is now anxious about what the ending of her ovarian fertile cycle will entail. She is less than enthusiastic about her anticipation of menopause, particularly as she perceives this to be another area in sexual experience that is shrouded in ignorance and fear-sustaining social silence.

For many of the participants in this study, issues of fertility had been shrouded in ignorance. This lack of knowledge contributed to a significant number experiencing the difficulty of dealing in the dark, as it were, with family planning concerns; concerns which are already dense with issues in relation to health, morality, aesthetics, sexual

needs, interpersonal conflicts and politics (Turner, 1984:222-224; Butler Scally, 1985, 1988; Treichler, 1990; Inglis, 1998).

As with Anita, Ursula's story of fertility and its management within her relationship reflects some of the complexities associated with fertility and sexuality. Musing about her reproductive organs and her feelings about them, Ursula (25:F:45-54:P) states:

*"[They] brought me both pain and pleasure, a sense of creativeness... my womb hardly every caused me any problems until about four years ago. I always had positive feelings towards it as a healthy part of my body but there was also a fear of pregnancy which affected my sexual development." (J)*

Ursula had a less benign view of her ovaries:

*"My ovaries were a different story... caused endless problems for me because of their cyclical role, and me constantly in an emotional mood swing which I never really understood or accepted until it was too late." (J)*

Ursula recalls attempting to equip herself to address the issue of fertility and family planning in advance of her wedding:

*"Before my marriage, I asked my mother about family planning and she said that, for her, the method was single beds. My parents got a double bed after their seventh child was born!! So she suggested I ask my aunt who would probably be more up to date as she had been married only three years previously. I asked her, and she gave me some books to read and said to ask questions of her if I needed. I read the books to the best of my ability but, as I then moved away, never got to the questions. (J)*

Ursula never got to the questions but, wishing to practice Catholic teaching about fertility management, she attempted to follow the instructions for the use of a natural method of family planning outlined in the book given to her. The outcome was not what she had anticipated:

*"My first child was born nine months and three weeks after our marriage and the second child arrived the day before our second*



*anniversary. We planned our third child and the other three were unexplainable 'accidents'. The last pregnancy was also unexpected but explainable.” (J)*

Ursula reflects the dilemmas experienced by those participants who a) were lacking in sufficient knowledge about fertility and how it functions in order to make informed decisions, with their partners, about its management; and b) were lacking in adequate information and understanding in order to choose, with their partners, and use methods of family planning most suited to their individual and relational needs and their family planning intentions.

Ursula tried different forms of contraception without much success. While deeply loving of her children, she continues to feel pained by the moral and social pressures she experienced coupled with the ineffectiveness of the different contraceptive measures taken by her; that inability to control fertility impacted on her aspirations about paid employment and about acquiring a level of freedom from mothering:

*“The issues around fertility for me came under various headings which ranged from Church teaching, natural family planning, breast-feeding, attitudes of his family, my family, friends, my doctor, priests, the pill, other forms of contraception, returning to work and independence, or lack of it.” (J)*

This experience, of being overwhelmed by fertility rather than controlling it, and of being pressured by the people in her community with an interest in her fertility, weighed heavily on Ursula for the many years of her fertile life. Coming from a traditional Roman Catholic background which forbade the use of contraceptives (Paul VI, 1968), her decision to disobey this ruling exacted a heavy psychological price, both morally and relationally. The burden for Ursula was increased by the fact that, while taking, as she perceived it, the serious step of using contraception, she still did not achieve her family planning intention:

*“The strain of non-effective family planning affected my whole attitude to sexuality even further, which was probably compounded by my convent education and Church teaching on the matter, both of which had a very strong influence on me. All of this put a strain, extra strain, on this aspect of our relationship and thus [on] our marriage*

*and lives, which [in turn] affected our approach to sexuality and fertility even further.” (J)*

Ursula’s experience is one example of conflict common in intimate relationships: the opposition of interests which frequently lie below the surface of fertility and choice (Butler Scally, 1983:77-79, 1995, 1996:9,10).

Ursula’s story communicates the sense of treadmill on to which a woman or a couple can be swept by virtue of their potential fertility. This is not simply about the ability to have or not to have a baby (Tong, 1989:71-94), nor is it just a question of ascertaining an appropriate and effective method of family planning (Butler Scally, 1985; Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:171,172). In Ursula’s relationship with her partner, it is evident that the affective and erotic energy of their sexual loving was overshadowed by the procreative possibility for many years. Consistently, for Ursula, making love was an experience of being torn between her own desire and need, her partner’s desire and need and the knowledge that this relatively brief coming together might result in a new life and consequences for a life-time. As she stated above, this situation affected her whole relationship. In particular, for a woman, anxiety about an unplanned pregnancy does not stop when sexual intercourse is over; nor does it stop at the bedroom door. For many women, every hour of the waking day is weighted with the question of whether or not they have conceived, and every bodily sign is interpreted either hopefully or fearfully.

Looking back on her history of fertility control and its effects, Ursula expresses regret for the lack of knowledge and critical insight, now gained, which might have helped her limit her family, freed her from moral oppressiveness, and enabled her and her partner to benefit from the enjoyment of sexual intimacy:

*“While most aspects of this issue have now been resolved for me, I know I will always have an “if I knew then what I know now” attitude to this whole area of my life.” (J)*



In contrast to Ursula, Caroline's (57:F:45-54:P) journey in relation to her fertility is an example of the few women participants who did not experience their fertility as an aspect of their sexuality needing to be addressed, limited or controlled:

*"It was never a major issue in our relationship. I never knew when I was fertile. I got my period only once every five months. Therefore, it was just pot luck, so to speak." (I)*

Nevertheless, the issue of becoming pregnant was not trouble free. Caroline was fertile approximately twice a year; it is not surprising that she found that she did not easily conceive, particularly as she had not learned how to recognise physiological signs which herald the onset of fertility:

*"But I persisted and, finally, I became pregnant.... There was no way I could plan a family. I was either pregnant or I wasn't. And I never knew I was pregnant for about three months. So no, [family planning] wasn't really an issue, but trying to get pregnant was an issue." (I)*

Unlike Caroline, choosing a method of fertility control was an issue for Melanie (66:F:35-44:P) and her partner. Melanie wanted to use a method which was not hazardous to her health but which would be effective in preventing pregnancy:

*"And he [her partner] didn't wish me to take the pill because he did not feel it was good for my body." (I)*

Melanie, therefore, visited a family planning clinic to be fitted for a diaphragm. Her experience at the clinic caused her *"to feel a freak"* (I).

*"I was getting fitted for this diaphragm, but I actually have a very large pelvis and they had to go to this bigger size .... and it was a male doctor, which didn't help.... and he was fitting me for this and he said 'I don't think this is still a proper fit' and I said 'it's OK, I'm not going to bother because I felt 'now they can't even get a bloody diaphragm to fit me'.... So, anyway, I decided, there and then, 'no way' and I thought 'what about condoms' ...?" (I)*

Melanie fled from the clinic feeling shamed by the experience. The lack of ordinary discourse on fertility and sexuality has its effects on women and men when they find

they need to address, either with one another or, more especially, in the external arena, the issue of their family planning requirements. Melanie's embarrassment was fostered not alone by the breaking of the customary reticence on issues of sexuality but also by what might be described as an almost surreal experience; an experience of her body, her fertility and her family planning need, about which she held deep feelings of intimacy and privacy, meeting with and being invaded by the clinical, pragmatic, impersonal attention of detached, though kindly, professionals. Melanie's account of the stilted meeting between two arenas of differing sexual discourse, that is, between the private, passionate, intimate and shaming experiential arena of the individual and the public, professional and dispassionate response of the institutional, highlights the degree to which personal sexuality and meaningful discourse about personal sexuality has been inhibited. In such circumstances, the public and the private domains of sexual discourse fail to meet and challenge and be challenged by each other. Melanie's flight from the family planning clinic and from the doctor attending her is symbolic of women and men's flight from addressing the reality of their own sexual experience; and from bringing that experience to bear on a critique of the social contexts which reinforce fear of breaking the silence. It is also symbolic of a radical feminist perspective which views the socio-culturally constructed women's role in the sexual scheme of things as the primary source of women's subordination (Tong, 1989:111). Melanie, as symbol, takes her embodied self from the man who is her partner to the man who is the doctor; is opened to be fitted, 'kitted out', by the doctor in order to be 'fertility-proofed' and, thereby, sexually available without the consequences of pregnancy. While not wishing to over-interpret Melanie's experience, or her partner's, it is this type of event in relation to sexuality, this movement of a woman between men, between partner and doctor, and the repugnance accompanying it, which is symbolic of women's status as men's sexual objects or chattels in patriarchal or patristic cultures. This situation reappears later in this text in relation to medical intervention and infertility.

Subsequently, Melanie and her partner chose to use a combination of condoms, "*if we had to*" (I), and the 'safe period'. This combination of methods was effective for them. Their first two babies were planned. However, as a majority of the stories of the participants illustrate, fertility does not always conform to a plan. Melanie and her



partner found that they were unable to conceive the planned third baby for which they wished. This resulted in Melanie being caught into a cycle of anxiety to accompany her menstrual cycle:

*“I would say each month, as the period would come, I was very disappointed.... It wasn’t a crisis but I’d have a sadness each time the period came, and say ‘pity’. One time, I went a few days over and I thought ‘maybe this is it’... but it wasn’t.” (I)*

While Melanie and her partner shared in addressing their issues of fertility and family planning, Tessa (56:F:35-44:Sep) eschewed family planning altogether. Tessa, who was beaten, abused, raped and terrorised by her partner before she finally left him, has three children. She has never used any method of fertility control:

*“I’ve never taken a contraception in my life. I’m over thirty. I smoke so, therefore, the pill is out. And I have a thing about foreign bodies being inserted into me. I just don’t like that.” (I)*

Berating herself for her naiveté in relation to the circumstances of her last pregnancy, when she believed her partner’s prior promise not to force sexual intercourse on her, she recalls the despair she felt when she was raped by him and how she considered having an abortion:

*“I was suicidal. I was absolutely suicidal when I realised I was pregnant. I didn’t want it. I hated it.... It was a nightmare. Abortion wasn’t an option for me, personally, because I knew the guilt trip...I just couldn’t handle it. So, I thought about it and knew I couldn’t do it.” (I)*

In Tessa’s story of personal sexual trauma, her attitude to contraception and protection from unwanted pregnancies forced on her by a violent partner might be interpreted as consistent with a battered woman of broken spirit, a victim unable to attend to her own interests. On the other hand, it might reflect more truly a spirit which clung to whatever bodily integrity she could, as she experienced it, by refusing to ingest contraceptive medications or allow the insertion of any devices into her body.

Gertrude, when she married, did not use contraception. Her reasons were different to Tessa's in that she was constrained by the twin curbs of both secular and religious morality. Gertrude (22:F:45-54:P) reflects on the effects of the institutional sanctions against contraception which prevailed in Ireland when she married and how fear of pregnancy interfered with her enjoyment of sexual intimacy with her partner for many years:

*"I spent the first ten years of my marriage worrying about my fertility. In fact, I would go so far as to say it dominated my life. It all seems so unfair, now that contraceptives are so freely available but, back then, they were illegal and immoral."(J)*

Referring back to her own situation as a young married woman, she recalls the stress and anxiety associated with fertility:

*"I knew that contraceptives could be got but, living in rural Ireland, it was almost an impossibility. Every single month, I worried. Was I safe? Was I pregnant? The only time I could truly relax was when I had a period and knew for certain that I wasn't pregnant. In between, every little twinge or tummy upset was analysed and pondered over. I could never rejoice in my fertility." (J)*

The quality of sexual relating changed when Gertrude gained access to contraception:

*"Fortunately, I discovered the family planning clinics in Dublin and my life was changed. All these visits to the clinics had to be done in secrecy, but I was one of the lucky women who could do something about family planning. Lots of women didn't know or couldn't afford to do anything about it. Up until then, I can only say that my fertility, and my partner's, put a great strain on our lives. Even still I resent that and I will always blame the male dominated Church for its blinkered views." (J)*

Gertrude reflects above on the difficulty she experienced and which she understands was experienced by many women, of being subjected to secular laws and a morality constructed by men which impinged profoundly and permanently in determining some women's destiny. The lack of education in and availability of contraception made a significant contribution to the spousal sexual dilemma: whether or not to initiate or



respond to a partner's desire for sexual intimacy with a reasonable probability of pregnancy ensuing, or to deny oneself and one's partner such intimacy in order to defer, space or limit a family, thereby depriving the relationship of the bonding strength offered by such intimacy. The sexual dilemma, in this instance, however, was exacerbated more by the intimations of moral turpitude ascribed to those who practised artificial contraception, and made explicit in the teachings of the Church and the injunctions of the Law, than by the lack of contraception itself.

Fertility was experienced by Gertrude for a considerable time as more of a burden than a gift. This, in effect, meant that sexuality, for her and her partner, bore the weight of an unwelcome morality. It was as though the oxygen of intimacy supporting the spousal relationship was drawn off, depleted by the demands of fertility. Sexual intercourse was for them largely deprived of its life-bearing qualities by moral prohibitions masquerading as life-saving protections.

As is being clearly demonstrated in the findings, the experience of sexuality in adulthood is in constant change, even unexpectedly surprising at times. In spite of the hardships endured by Gertrude and her partner for a lengthy period of their marriage, the onset of the menopause brings with it some regret for the passing of that which she recognises as precious but which was, nevertheless, problematic:

*"Now that I am beginning the menopause and coming to the end of my fertility, I feel a little saddened but also somewhat relieved that I have come safely through that other time and have been blessed with four healthy children. I believe very strongly though that women should have always had the choice with regard to family planning and, probably because I have seen both sides, I know what unhappiness and strain can be put on a family where family planning is not available or disapproved of." (J)*

In secular terms, the law has changed and contraception is available in Ireland to people such as Gertrude. However, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has not changed. Gertrude captures below a popular prevailing response, current in Ireland, to the Church's moral teaching on the use of contraceptives. In so doing, she reflects the creativity, tolerance and trust of women's inclusive ways of managing the

ambiguities of morality and relationship (Gilligan, 1982). Commenting on how change has come about in relation to family planning, in spite of the continuing religious ‘moral status quo’, she notes a recourse to a higher and more compassionate authority:

*“They [contraceptives] still are immoral, but I think everyone has a word with God.”(J)*

The Church’s moral permissibility of family planning by use of sexual abstinence during fertile times in the woman’s cycle of fertility (Paul VI, 1968; John Paul II, 1983:348-351), while attractive and helpful to many couples, is not considered sufficiently simple to use, aesthetically acceptable, reliable or open to sexual need by many, including some of the participants in this study.

Women’s increasing experience of consciousness-raising through exposure to critical discourse on their socio-cultural subjugation is having the effect that, even amongst the most traditional and conservative women, political questions are emerging. These interrogate many of the religious and social structures and strictures which determine how women and men live (Inglis, 1998).

One of the interesting aspects of Gertrude’s story, reflected by some but not all of the women participants, is the ownership she takes of fertility and its management within the relationship. While it would appear that her partner was supportive of any decisions taken about family planning, Gertrude does not communicate a sense of his having a proactive role in addressing the issue; nor does she seem to feel the need for that, as is indicated by her emphasis above on women making the choice about fertility control.

Gertrude’s appropriation of responsibility for fertility is consistent with a patriarchal culture of male abdication from such obligation, charging women with responsibility for sexuality, fertility and the nurturing of relationship (Firestone, 1979:192). Paradoxically, it is also consistent with other radical feminist perspectives which hold that women’s control over reproduction is crucial to achieving gender equality (Tong,



1989:3; Rhode, 1990:211,212) and with Giddens's (1992) argument that women's control of reproduction has initiated the transformation of intimacy.

Jerry and his partner began their married life with what appeared to them to be an idealistic and shared attitude to their fertility:

*"Part of our ceremony for the marriage was that we said we would accept any children that God would send us. We had sat down and we had deliberately included that into our ceremony. When S [his partner] became pregnant, or when we became pregnant, I should say....it's not fair to say S became pregnant....we discovered we were expecting our first child and we were both very, very angry. We were angry with each other. We did not want the child, which is terrible. You know, we wouldn't send him back, but the initial thing we felt was that, if we had some time together before we would bring a child into the world..." (I)*

Time and reflection has caused Jerry to reconsider the thought that he and his partner would have been more ready for a child if they had had more time:

*"But what I now think, and we are thirteen years married, if you were to ask me now, we still wouldn't be ready for him and he would never have been born if we waited until we were ready." (I)*

Jerry further reflects that although he had actually committed in the marriage ceremony to have children, subconsciously, he suspects that there was ambivalence about becoming a father:

*"I think, deep down in myself, there would have been an area that said 'I don't want any children'. Now, that was something I hadn't looked at. And the number of children we would have had, we never actually planned it or talked about it. We never sort of said 'right, will we go this time?'. You know, it just didn't happen." (I)*

Jerry and S made a decision together about their fertility at the time of their marriage ceremony. However, fertility and family planning, pregnancy and parenthood are among the most challenging dimensions of adult sexual partnership, precisely because they involve two people, for a lifetime, in relation to an unknown other life. The only known about this unknown life and the decision to bring it into being is that it will

impinge profoundly on all other possible life choices. The two people concerned may be 'one flesh' but they are also unique individuals (Mansfield and Collard, 1988:180-194). The outcome of their fertility will be experienced by each in a unique way. So, while the question about fertility and family planning addressed by a couple, if addressed, may result in the same answer, the space between the question and the answer contains two individual histories of motivations and conflicts which may lead to different interpretations of the text (Butler-Scally, 1985).

While Jerry initially indicates that he and his partner were at one in their decision about their fertility, he acknowledges now that there was, in fact, a gross lack of communication about family planning:

*"We wouldn't have addressed it together.... It was one of those things, no planning, no preparation, no nothing, just it happened." (I)*

Jerry had presumed that children would happen and that it was not something that one controlled. However when it did happen, his perspectives changed:

*"I discovered there is a part of me here that would like to have some control, would like to be able to decide what's going to come or go out of my life, and for us to make choices." (I)*

He attributes the original attitude he had to fertility, that is, to allow it to take its course without planning or management, to his religious upbringing. However, both his attitude and that of his partner have changed over the course of time:

*"We were still steeped in the Churchy bit, you know, that this is not an area that you play God with. Whereas now, we both have decided this is where we're at; what we have now is our family. We do not want a further family." (I)*

Ian (12:M:45-54:P) agrees below with Sally (59:F:25-34:Sep) about the need for men to be involved with their partner in decisions about fertility management. Prior to marriage, Ian and his wife both considered when they would try to achieve a



pregnancy. Their decision was based on various pressures and restrictive factors in their circumstance as well as on personal pleasures and ambitions :

*“My wife and I planned to have no children for four or five years, to travel, and to study, and to do some unfinished business for the single life... We, too, had to contend with in-laws, pressure of job, promotional prospects, moving house etc.”(J)*

While Ian and his partner appear to have achieved consensus about the deferment of pregnancy, it is not clear, however, whether one or both partners took responsibility for choosing the method or methods of birth control.

Sally is absolutely clear about the need for shared responsibility in relation to fertility management. She is currently taking the contraceptive pill to manage a pattern of heavy menstrual bleeding and pre-menstrual tension. However, she notes that this is a choice she is making for herself and it is not directly related to fertility control. Sally rejects the learning she received about managing fertility on the basis that it is gender skewed:

*“I was told that if you didn’t want babies, you went on the pill and that was it, you know. And you took responsibility for it, not the man. It was the woman took the responsibility for it. After all, it was your body. After all, I mean, if you were the one who didn’t want babies, you made sure you didn’t [get pregnant].... I think if I was in a sexual relationship, I would say ‘hey, what about your responsibility?’, and ‘what about you doing something about the contraceptive end of our relationship?’.... ..it’s something I would have to sit down and discuss and say ‘well, it’s maybe not such a good idea for me [to be] taking the pill, how about you?’ There’d have to be compromise.” (I)*

As is clear, the participants were divided on the question of responsibility for birth control, expressing the views that a) a woman should ensure her own protection from unwanted pregnancy and b) men and women should share the responsibility.

A majority of the participants indicated that a significant motivating factor in calling for a shared responsibility in fertility management is that, to date, no method of family

planning is fully satisfactory from every point of view (Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:139-177; Eschen & Whittaker, 1993:106).

The assumption that shared responsibility for fertility and fertility control is a desirable goal needs to be questioned, if consideration is taken of the radical impact the conception of a new life has on a woman. It could still be argued that a woman may be better advised, as Rich (1976) counselled some decades ago, to maintain personal charge over that which has such far-reaching effects for her. This argument is particularly valid in a culture which shows itself to be prejudiced against women and children and women's and children's sexuality while biased in the way that it favours male heterosexuality.

Choices about fertility sometimes requires medical intervention. A number of the participants referred to their experience of the relationship between medical intervention and fertility as an alienating one; one which hurt psychologically as much as it tried to heal physiologically.

Joy (6:F:35-44:P) had polio as a child resulting in paraplegia. She was anxious about whether or not she and her partner would be able to have children; all the more so because her partner's parents had rejected her arrival into the family as their son's wife, asserting that Joy would neither be able to have sexual intercourse nor children.

Initially, Joy did experience difficulty in having sexual intercourse:

*"I actually found it very difficult and found it difficult for many months - to the point that I actually went to see a gynaecologist because I would have wanted... I would have loved to have had children and, at that stage, to be experiencing difficulties, and I wasn't sure whether it was something that was wrong with me, or that we weren't able to have intercourse properly, or that there was something else." (I)*

The manner in which medical interventions were executed at times caused Joy deep embarrassment. They were felt by her to be emotionally insensitive as well as being physically painful. Initial treatment involved Joy's instruction, by a gynaecologist, in



the insertion and use of vaginal dilators. The treatment was ineffective. This was followed by “*cutting a bit of muscle*” (I), which made intercourse possible and pain free.

While ‘*cutting a bit of muscle*’ may have facilitated Joy and her partner in having sexual intercourse, it prompts the question as to its effect on the experience of intercourse for Joy herself. Just as the repair of a perineal tear or of an episiotomy after childbirth anecdotally includes, in popular medical parlance, ‘the husband’s stitch’, that is, the stitch that tightens the vaginal entrance thereby promoting the partner’s pleasure through increased penile friction, ‘*cutting a bit of muscle*’ may also serve the interests of penile penetration without due regard for the loss of pleasurable sensation for the woman. Joy, today, questions the treatment she received; whether or not it was appropriate to her situation.

Joy and her partner continued to have difficulty in achieving pregnancy. After approximately two years, the gynaecologist decided to perform a dilatation and curettage, with positive results:

“...he said he’d do a D & C. I had a D & C... and I was pregnant straight away.” (I)

It is interesting to note the way in which Joy relates her story. She is a strong woman, an effective communicator and committed to being in charge of her affairs. Yet, what she says about her experience with the gynaecologist, and how she says it, conveys a certain quality of passivity and submissiveness. Individuals, especially when vulnerable at the level of health and well-being, and this includes the areas of personal sexuality and fertility, are often cowed by dominant professionals or institutions from whom or from which help is sought. These are experienced as failing to recognise that their purpose is to serve the person, not to dominate her. Joy’s story resonates as that of a woman who did what she was told rather than of a woman in interactive dialogue with her physician about how her needs might be best met. Martin (1990:79) captures Joy’s discomfort when she states “*that it is nearly impossible to imagine a conversation*” between a woman and a gynaecologist because

*“Gynaecologists would probably be threatened by the implied equality, while women would be intimidated precisely because of the power relations involved in the codification and institutionalisation of the science of women’s bodies.”*

Becoming pregnant was wonderful for Joy. However, she recalls with distaste the medical processes relating to monitoring fertility over a period of time. In particular, she recalls the way in which these processes impacted on her sexual relationship with her partner:

*“...when I look back on it...when you think of all the times when you had to come home and make pretend for to give in these specimens...and be examined...oh, it was just...you felt you were doing it just for the sake of doing it. I don’t know. Sometimes, there was nothing to it.” (I)*

During this time, Joy experienced sexual intercourse with her partner as a mechanical act, performed on demand, to meet the requirements of a clinical investigative process rather than as a response to a desire for an expression of loving intimacy:

*“It had become a chore. I used to say ‘this is it again’ type of thing; and that was the only reason.” (I)*

*“And, you know, going back and discussing with these doctors such intimate details; every time you’d go back, it would be a different doctor. Most times, I would say nothing. I’d say, ‘read the chart’”. (I)*

Each time Joy returned to the hospital with a sample of semen or a fertility chart or to have her vaginal mucus extracted and examined for sperm motility, she was met by a different doctor. This exacerbated the sense of detached, clinical, impersonal and institutional intrusion into the most private spaces of her spousal relationship, thereby destroying the intimacy and consensuality of the couple during that time.

While her earlier experiences with the medical establishment resonated with a passive acceptance of its directives, in relating her later experiences, Joy’s anger at the process is revealed in her virtual refusal to speak at all. The difference between the personal



and professional discourses, as experienced by Joy, is profoundly alienating. In the theatre of the gynaecological/medical establishment, the surgical couch and stirrups offer a distorted mimicry of the marital bedroom; however, there may be little meeting of minds or hearts between the players because the professional text has been socially constructed to dominate, and is inherently unempathic to the non-professional 'other'. Herein lies an example of how sexuality is sequestered to professional medicine, amongst other disciplines, as Foucault (1978) and Giddens (1991) might argue, and expropriated from those whose experience would make a valuable contribution. What is signalled by Joy, and reflected in the stories of other participants, is the need for a critical approach which analyses and deconstructs processes, opening up agentic possibilities of change, revealing leverage points for transformative action.

One of the common assumptions amongst young adults is that they are fertile; that is, that they have the capacity to conceive and give birth to a live child. However, infertility is a problem experienced by a large minority, ten to fifteen per cent of men and women, according to Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992:127). Rutter & Rutter, (1993:302) state that:

*"Until very recently, infertility has not featured in most discussion of life-span development - perhaps because it was wrongly thought to be an uncommon experience, but probably most of all because it was misleadingly viewed as a narrowly medical concern.... Its impact is as much on the couple as on the individual, and the life-span implications need to be considered in social as well as individual terms."*

Betty's story reveals the multi-faceted problem which infertility constitutes for the individual and the couple. Betty (27:F:25-34:P) feels acutely the pain between two partners who wish to have a baby and cannot, and the effects this can have on their sexual loving:

*"The whole area of fertility is very close to the bone for me at the moment. I always felt it was very important for me as a woman to be able to have children in future years. When we got married, initially, we both agreed to wait sometime, to get a house etc. sorted out. I was nervous as I suffered a lot with my periods and have an older sister who has infertility." (J)*

When Betty and her partner tried to conceive, they found they were unable to do so. Betty and her partner began the process of infertility investigations:

*“When we started trying, I guess I got a little uptight and, with nothing happening a year later, I did the trip to the doctor. Last summer, I had all the tests and I really believe it was one of the most traumatic times in my life.” (J)*

The brevity and simplicity of the last sentence above indicates the physical and emotional invasiveness of infertility investigations experienced by women.

Betty expresses the lack she feels at not having a baby. The investigations indicated that there was no specific reason as to why pregnancy could not be hoped for. Betty is grateful for this outcome. Part of her identity as a woman, in her own estimation, is in being able to express her fertile potential through pregnancy and motherhood:

*“While I was very relieved after the tests, I still feel very vulnerable at times. On reflection, my fertility for me, as a woman, is important, but there is also a very strong maternal need in me.” (J)*

Betty reflects the social as well as personal expectations of motherhood which are impressed on women in all societies (Rutter & Rutter, 1993:301; Potts and Selman, 1979:83; Tong, 1989:84-90). Her story also captures the ‘see-saw’ emotional conflictual experience related to women’s fertile potential from puberty to menopause, when she describes the change from the relief of yore to the grief of now when her body signals the onset of menstruation:

*“In contrast to the relief I felt in my early twenties when those familiar twinges swept through my abdomen, I now feel disappointment. It’s very hard to stay relaxed and it’s so easy for others to say ‘you should relax more’ when your body and mind are pulling in opposite directions.” (J)*

The wider social responses to infertility bring increased pressure on a couple for whom the situation is already seriously distressing:



*"I also have realised how insensitive others can be with loose comments about the fact that you have no 'news' etc.; and how it can hurt deeply at times. I think it's been good to write this down for me and I haven't given up at all, so for now, I keep going and hoping." (J)*

In common with many couples coping with infertility, Betty, as the female partner, tends to take responsibility for monitoring and directing the programme for achieving the desired goal. This responsibility frequently includes self-blame and guilt, as though the male partner were an 'innocent victim' of 'her infertility':

*[During the course], I realised that while I talk to T [her partner], I have taken on a lot of the responsibility and don't always share my fears and anxieties. I tend to be jovial at times...maybe fear of upsetting him as I know how desperately he wants children. I take responsibility for keeping the chart, taking the temperature and deciding when the time is right. I have excluded him in a way and would like him to be more involved in the process. I get annoyed when he doesn't always jump to having sex when the time is right. The reality is, sometimes, he's exhausted and, if he's reluctant, I sulk and maybe get angry." (J)*

Betty highlights the danger to the relationship of exclusion of the male partner in a situation of infertility. It is interesting to note that, in her account of the investigative process, any testing of her partner's fertile potential is implicit rather than explicit. This may be explained by the fact that, in general, the focus of infertility investigations and treatment is on the woman.

Two of the participants volunteered the experience of having had a pregnancy terminated; a third person, as was shown earlier, stated that she had thought about it but recognised that, for her, pregnancy termination would give rise to more problems that it would solve.

Janet (5:F:45-54:P) says that she avoids speaking about her fertility. Her personal sexual story includes a deep-rooted, on-going sense of guilt and grief about the termination of a pregnancy which she had twenty years ago as a result of an extramarital relationship:

*"I developed what you'd call a post-traumatic syndrome... I'm talking now in terms of twenty years that I've been suffering from minor nervous disorders, I suppose, stress and low-grade depression, sometimes, underlying depression. I've never been treated for depression but I know it's there. I've often talked about it with my GP. And, it's as a result of what I call my black spot. I had an abortion. That, I would say, was the cause of huge problems with my health...the fact, I suppose, that I never talked it out with anybody." (I)*

Janet has never felt she could share this experience with anyone during the twenty years, apart from with a priest immediately after the event:

*"I remember, I started getting panic attacks, going in to him one day in desperation, sitting in front of him and pouring all of it out. And he was fabulous really. I went back to him five or six times, after that, during the year, to talk it out. He was so logical and whatever. He was great. Still, it never alleviated the guilt or the loss. Nothing will ever alleviate the loss. Nothing. I can't tell you a birthday..." (I)*

Janet, who is a health care professional, believes that women's experience of abortion falls under the cloak of silence surrounding sexuality in general; a silence that is colluded with by health professionals:

*"....knowing now in the area that I work that so many women go through the psychiatric system suffering from depression and anxiety disorders and many, I am convinced, have had abortions and even psychiatrists and psychologists and counsellors never get at it.... even going through their history, they never raise it.... it's a huge area in Ireland that we should be all guilty about too. I think that, in fact, it should be exposed as well. We still can't talk about it, even though I do know there are groups who support people who have had abortions. But I couldn't go to one of those groups...not able to go. It's as taboo as sexuality itself. (I)*

Janet's pain is palpable. Not alone was her situation socially unacceptable, so was her resolution of it. She has never been free from the grief and guilt which she feels from having had her pregnancy terminated. It was a decision Janet felt she had to make in the light of all of her circumstances, but one which has taken a serious toll on her personally. This is consistent with some women's experiences of pregnancy



terminations (Clulow & Mattinson, 1989:125; Mahon, Conlon and Dillon, 1998:329,330). Apart from her initial conversations with a priest twenty years ago, Janet has never felt in a safe enough environment to reveal this aspect of her sexual story until now. By remaining silent, Janet helps maintain the silence which retains people in inhumane prisons of their own and of society's making:

*"...there's such a huge need for education at all levels, and for being able to talk, and for being able to feel that no area should be taboo to that effect that it drives people mad." (I)*

Critical reflection on her experience of personal sexuality, through participating in this study, began the process of Janet's breaching that wall of silence:

*"That was the black spot, and it never came to the surface until now." (I)*

Sarah's (44:F:25-34:P) background is different to that of Janet. Janet is Irish and a Roman Catholic, Sarah is English and does not subscribe to any orthodox religious beliefs. Her experience illustrates that it is not only in an Irish Roman Catholic context that abortion can be problematic. Sarah has two children in whom she takes great pleasure. Their fathers have long ceased to be in contact with her or them. As shown earlier, Sarah suffered sexual pain, degradation and abuse, both as a child and as a young adult. Having abstained from sex for several years, Sarah became pregnant as a result of a casual sexual encounter. She refers bitterly and briefly to her experience of pregnancy termination:

*"I broke five years of celibacy with a one night stand, a seventeen year old boy. He loved me like a queen. I still have fond memories of him. This resulted in a pregnancy, terminated. This time, it was my unborn child abused." (J)*

Both Janet and Sarah refer to abortion as a negative experience in their sexual life histories. Janet perceives the termination of her pregnancy as a morally culpable act and a personal grief. Sarah perceives the termination of her pregnancy as an abusive act, connecting it with her own experience of sexual abuse. In a culture in which access

to abortion is not provided and in which the prevailing religious and socio-cultural ethos is one of condemnation for abortion (Inglis, 1998), it is not easy for women to speak experientially on the issue. This is so whether a woman is content with her decision to have a pregnancy termination, or otherwise. In fact, it is more likely, in such a culture, for a woman to both name and entertain negative moral aspects of such an experience.

Sarah and Janet's stories of their experience of abortion illustrate the dilemmas which confront some women. Their backgrounds are different. Neither woman professes herself satisfied with abortion as a solution to their problem. This is consistent with observations by Clulow and Mattinson (1989:125) which note the regret and grief experienced even by those who wholeheartedly decide to seek a pregnancy termination, and with the journalist and social commentator, O'Faolain (1996:324), who identifies a value common to opposing sides in the abortion debate, that *"there would be no abortion in any of our utopias"*.

An understanding of the personal and political issues involved and of a response to these issues suggests a need for engagement, by men and women, in critically reflective and communicative discourse. O'Faolain's perspective cannot be achieved by dictat but through a nuanced comprehension of the issues of each other's lives and each other's conflicts; it is a issue appropriately broached and approached in an adult education forum.

A different experience of loss is that encountered by Ursula. She had a miscarriage and this was followed by the necessity for a hysterectomy. Ursula recalls the mixture of feelings accompanying the miscarriage and which still colour her emotional palette:

*"Were the physical problems I experienced in the latter years before surgery all caused by emotional stress through frustration, fear, worry, tension in my role as wife and mother? Or was it all purely physical? Why did my system break down? Why did I lose the baby? Did I reject the baby and my womb? This is something I will always wonder about and possibly never resolve completely."* (J)



The loss of the baby had a crushing effect on Ursula and was catalytic in bringing to the fore a torrent of emotions suppressed over the course of her lifetime. She describes it as though a dam had burst under pressure, releasing a flood of feelings. The ‘dam-burst’ was an agonising experience but ultimately a liberating one:

*“...washing away all the debris and grit which had settled beneath the surface of this lake (me) over the years.” (J)*

While Ursula describes the psychological experience as ultimately cathartic, nonetheless, she examines and re-examines her role in the miscarrying of the baby, irrationally questioning her guilt in the matter.

Jerry (48:M:35-44:P) and his partner have three children. However, they also have had a history of four miscarriages which has contributed to an ambiguity of feeling about the choices they made in relation to their fertility:

*They [the miscarriages] have been very traumatic, and I suppose, in the back of our heads, we feel guilty about them. And each of the three kids that we have, you know, we resented the initial thing of being pregnant. So coming to terms with that [was an issue] for both of us.” (I)*

The experiences of the miscarriages were very distressing for Jerry in spite of and, perhaps, because of his ambivalence about welcoming any pregnancy at the time of its happening, as indicated above.

The first miscarriage was an experience which Jerry continues to feel distressed and angry about. One of the acutely painful aspects was the response he experienced from his sisters-in-law. He tearfully recalls the occasion:

*“I remember S’s two sisters were down and I was nearly thrown out of the house. I was isolated from this...this was woman’s work...and that was terrible. Like, no one had a right to do that.... This was nature, in its own way doing something, and yet where I should have been a part of it, in that first one, I wasn’t allowed, and I hadn’t...I didn’t know how to fight that...I presumed that this was best, or maybe they knew best but I suppose if I listened to myself, I would have known that it is*

*not true... they had no notion of what kind of a bond had been there between S and myself.” (I)*

There is almost an archetypal appeal in Jerry’s recall. It is as though he feels the paradigmatic cut of the reproductive divide; woman and nature bonded in their own business, however regretful that business was in this particular instance, and man’s desire to be included in such a powerful engagement (Tong; 1989:79). The irony is that it is a man-made culture and the medicalisation of reproduction (Ryan, 1997:255-267) which has, historically, intensified the lay male partner’s exclusionary experience; it does so by defining gender roles in a way which, historically, labels child-bearing and child-rearing as ‘women’s work’ (Firestone, 1979:192), albeit work which requires men’s professional oversight.

Jerry is bitter about the expression given to gender roles during the time of that first miscarriage; an expression which he experienced as sexist and exclusionary and which he perceives as exercised towards men, in general, by women:

*“When it came to the miscarriage.... we men, I think maybe they’re [women] happy to have men, to be able to name-tag men and sort of say ‘right, out of your box’, you know, be the hard macho, and yet, when you do that, that’s not acceptable either. You know, there is ambiguity; there’s mixed messages. You pick up messages in the whole area.” (I)*

Jerry’s feelings about his exclusion from the room in which his partner was miscarrying triggers anger about a wider personal experience of gender exclusion and confusion. He communicates a sense of being ‘wrong-footed’ by women because of his sex; of confusion about his role and about what women want.

The experience of the next three miscarriages were less distressing for Jerry because he and S now understood what was happening and were not separated in sharing their grief:

*“On the second one, there was just S and myself, and we could just hold one another and that was far healthier and we could both cry and be there for one another, and the same with the other two miscarriages*



*after that; that we kind of knew the pain of that. And the last, the fourth one was terrible in that I was in America and it all happened so...” (I)*

Jerry became incoherent with grief at this point in the interview. When he resumed, he became aware that aspects of this last miscarriage were still unresolved:

*“I’m even surprised at myself now. I suppose in ways we would have talked about it and yet it’s so... maybe we don’t give it as much space as it requires.... As I’m sitting here now, I am becoming more and more aware of the work that we haven’t done in that area.” (I)*

Ursula and Jerry’s stories of miscarriage underline the emotional complexity of losing a baby to spontaneous abortion or miscarriage. It is all the more distressing because, historically, such a loss has not been culturally viewed as being significant. In the face of public silence, or a form of speech which dismisses the event as something to be put behind one quickly in order to get on with ‘real life’ and the future babies to come, the grief may have nowhere to go except inwards (Clulow and Mattinson, 1989:125-128).

It is only in recent times that recognition is being given to the need for mothers and fathers to mourn the loss of what, professionally, might be termed an ‘embryo’ or a ‘foetus’ but is, they feel, their baby (Clulow & Mattinson, 1989:127, Dept. of Health, 1995:42). Whether the baby is planned and desired or unplanned and, perhaps, very undesired, the sense of loss, nevertheless, is real. This sense of loss may include a need to grieve for the mother or father which one might have wished to become, or wished, perhaps even desperately, not to become. The loss of a baby through spontaneous abortion or miscarriage carries with it a complexity of emotion which takes its toll on the individual and on the couple. Although it is a common occurrence, it is not one for which people are prepared because it belongs to the category of the ‘unmentionable’. As Jerry says in relation to an understanding of and preparation for the possibility of such an event in the fertile life-time of a couple:

*“No. There was no mention, no mention.” (I)*

As Ursula's story indicated, the death of a baby in utero or through premature delivery can cause women to experience a sense of personal failure and irrational guilt because their identity and, Vickers (1994:191) argues, their power is both biologically and culturally enmeshed in fertility and motherhood. This may be compounded if, in fact, the pregnancy was undesired in the first instance. The sense of personal failure and guilt may also be exacerbated by cultural expectations that a woman ought to be able to produce a healthy baby 'for' a man. Feelings of failure and guilt are not, however, the total preserve of women; men too are no strangers to these emotions in relation to fertility, as Jerry indicates. In particular, men are often subjected publicly, within male peer groups, to cruel derision under the guise of male bonhomie, if it is perceived that they have failed to accomplish an evident pregnancy with their partner. In a patriarchal, homophobic culture, such as described by Kimmel (1997), pregnancy and childbirth by one's partner affirms a socially approved, heterosexual, virile masculinity.

### **Menopause - End of the Line?**

As was shown earlier, Anita anticipates that the next stage in the drama of her sexual story will be the onset of the menopause. She indicates that, in her experience, the silence about the ending of fertility is as profound as the silence surrounding the beginning of fertility. It is as though women's fertile life is contained between inverted taboo commas.

Jill (41:F:35-44:Sep) is already currently experiencing the 'change of life'. It is happening earlier than she had anticipated and she feels both angry and challenged by it. Jill has read around the issue and recognises there is a range of perceptions about this new stage in a woman's life:

*"Menopause, a word which many women shy from; it can mean many things to many different women; from an end to useful productive female fertility, loss of sexual attraction, to a liberating time, a rite of passage, when one feels free of the trappings of our female bodies."*  
(J)



Jill and Anita are both irritated by the social avoidance of the issue. Both are annoyed by their lack of preparation for the menopause, a lack which is contributed to by women's own reluctance to engage in the topic which Jill perceives as:

*"...a subject that many women do not, or will not, think about until the signs start to become undeniable; the tiredness, irritability, loss of memory, fluctuations in the menstrual cycle, loss of libido, to mention but a few. The physical signs can be addressed in many ways but the psychological ones are harder to deal with."* (J)

Jill deplores the ignorance and silence on the issue. The peri-menopausal stage in a woman's life takes place at a time when many things are changing, with old roles becoming redundant and new roles being demanded (McCashin, 1996:43-47). Old certainties disappear and new questions arise, in particular once more, as Jill states, the question of identity:

*"It is often during the menopausal years that women feel a 'yearning' for something other in their lives. Their children may be grown, ageing parents may be moving back into the family space. We feel a need to prove ourselves, to validate our existence not as mothers or carers but as individuals. Without a knowledge of the changes happening within our bodies due to time marching on, we can create conflicts both within ourselves and on a relationship level...."* (J)

Jill laments the absence of discourse about the menopause. She believes this makes a challenging time of life-change more difficult than it need be:

*"As women, we build through our lives a certain persona which becomes our world-view of our sexuality. We have defined our boundaries of where our sexuality is in ourselves.... When this persona starts to crumble and change at the onset of menopause, if we are not aware of the reasons, we can begin to doubt our own sanity.... For myself, I felt full of self doubt of my own sexuality. I was no longer in control of my body, it was acting without any choices from me."* (J)

Distressed by the changes she was experiencing, both at the physiological and psychological levels, and in the absence of companionate communicative discourse, Jill lost confidence in her ability to manage effectively:

*"I know for myself that I have turned down a very lucrative job doing something I very much enjoy and believe in because I know that, for now, I am just not able to function at 100%." (J)*

Jill's story reflects the experience of many of the participants in the age group in which menopause generally occurs. The menopause has not been a topic for ordinary discourse. This may be explicable when account is taken of the fact that, within the medicalisation of menopause, there is a certain ambivalence as to whether or not menopause is a dysfunction (ovarian), a deficiency (oestrogen) or a natural disaster (evolutionary error)! Reitz (1985:11,12), Dickson and Henriques (1992:10) and Shreeve (1987:xi) point out that definitions of menopause corresponding to these categories are still current in certain medical literature. As Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992:256,257) and Shuttleworth (1990:62) indicate, in Western society, menopause, historically, during the last two centuries was commonly held by the medical profession to signify women's decay. Shreeve (1987:xii), who is a member of that profession, offers an alternative view on the menopause and one perhaps more closely resonant with reality as:

*"a natural step in our development to physical, mental and spiritual maturity, and most emphatically not as a ghastly if inevitable experience through which all normal women are obliged to pass on the way to the grave."*

Jill's doubts about her sexuality are a reflection of cultural myths which perpetrate the idea that the end of women's capacity to have babies is also the end of her capacity and desire for sex (Dickson and Henriques, 1992:55; Shreeve, 1987:81) and of her desirability and worth (Christ:1991:295,296). This myth supports projections of women as sex objects adverted to previously; such projections inculcate the idea that only the stereotypically attractive woman in her biologically fertile stage of life is sexual and desirable.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The irony is that many of these projected images are of women who are, according to Dr. John Griffin of the European Council on Eating Disorders (Sunday Tribune, 1998), sub-fertile or infertile as a result of dieting to maintain the low body weight demanded for professional modelling.



Every woman, if she survives, will experience the menopause. And yet, as Anita and Jill regret, together with menarche, menopause is not considered an appropriate topic for conversation (Weideger, 1978:1-16; Reitz, 1985:6-10; Shuttleworth, 1990; Dickson and Henriques, 1992:65-67).

It is interesting to observe that, at the time of life perhaps most propitious to achieve agency on her own behalf, a woman disappears from 'public' view, her sexual attractiveness culturally considered to have ended with her fertile youth, as evidenced in Anita's and Jill's perceptions. A riffle through women's magazines demonstrates the almost total absence of portrayal of post-menopausal women; an absence which approximates to a 'blackout'. While men feel threatened by the ageing process and have concerns about their sexual vigour (Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:253-255; Dickson and Henriques, 1992:110,111; Rutter and Rutter, 1993:319-322), they are not subjected to the same form of representational disappearance.<sup>3</sup>

The taboo of silence which stretches to encompass women's experiences of the closing of their biologically reproductive fertile lives excludes women, such as the participants cited above, from the qualitative learning opportunity which is made available through shared experience. As Weideger (1978:3,4) states:

*"The taboo of menstruation, of which menopause partakes, includes the precept that women shall keep these experiences hidden. When we are taught that something has to be hidden, we naturally believe that it contains an element that is not acceptable to other people. If menstruation were considered "clean" and menopause "decent", everyone would freely admit to their existence. We are ashamed of menstruation and menopause, we are taught to hide all evidence of their existence, and we have come to believe there is something in these experiences that is "wrong". This belief is reflected in our language - we don't call these events directly by name."*

---

<sup>3</sup> A recent popular illustration of this is shown by media admiration expressed for a celebrated actor, (Anthony Quinn) aged 80, for impregnating his young fertile partner. In contrast to this attitude was the general outcry against a British woman, Elizabeth Buttle, aged 60, who achieved conception with the aid of medical intervention by persuading the professionals that she was in her forties, and gave birth to a baby (Thompson, 1998). One of the issues here, in this example, is not parenthood for the elderly but parity of treatment of the ageing process in men and women. While the pursuance of gender equality may not be a complete answer to a patriarchal culture which subordinates women, nonetheless, an example such as that cited above is a graphic illustration of discrimination and inequity of esteem between the sexes that such injustice must, as Jagger (1990) asserts, be challenged.



A real threat of the menopause, articulated by Jill, is the danger of women's internalised false self-perception that she is 'past it', that age has devalued her (Wolf, 1991:226,227; Fischer, 1995:86,87).

Today, many women are connecting or re-connecting in mid-life with their potential beyond reproduction. Part of this connection process involves a certain disconnection from their accustomed relational concerns with partners or significant men. It is as though the belief in the myth that attractiveness, desirability, fertility and youth are inextricably bound together finally exhausts women to the point where, in mid-life, many let go of that myth. In letting go of the stereotype, analogous to Rosa's (2:F:45-54:P) experience indicated earlier, they also liberate themselves from a culturally induced and internalised over-responsibility for the sustenance of emotional relationship. Freed from the myth, in mid-life, some women are leaving the hearth as men return to it (Butler Scally, 1988).

There is the risk of genuine impoverishment in intimate heterosexual relationships if the experience of menopause is excluded from heterosocial conversation. The nature of this danger is not unsimilar to that which exists for girls and boys at puberty: that is, the danger of further gender alienation by virtue of lack of learning opportunities to appreciate the significant life experiences sustained by either sex; a lack of appreciation copper-fastened by silence.

### **Sexuality and fertility: summary of findings**

As the findings suggest, the presence or absence of fertility in sexual relationships constitutes a significant challenging dimension of personal and inter-personal experience. They show that, during the course of the fertile life-phase, expectations and needs alter, circumstances change, sexual expression takes on new shapes. It is arresting to think that in the Western world, including in Ireland, during the course of a woman's approximately thirty-five year fertile life span, the realisation of that fertile potential may be sought on only a small number of occasions (Barry, 1998:362,363).



There remains an extensive portion of life-time in which men and women are confronted with the management of their fertility in the context of their intimate relating.

The findings also show that there are implications for individuals other than the couple, such as other family members, in the realisation or non-realisation of fertility. There are implications for society, the institutions of which will be engaged either minimally or maximally with the control and management of reproductive outcomes of the sexual encounter (Vickers, 1994:188-191). In particular, there are implications for the human life conceived in that encounter; a life which may end before birth or live on to old age; a life, the future of which, for example, may be determined by whether or not it is male or female (Tong, 1989; Heise, 1993:171-195).

The findings indicate that for a significant number of participants, the quality of communication about fertility and fertility management concerns was inhibited by a learned cultural silence. Communicative inhibitions about such concerns affected their interpersonal intimate relationships. In a number of cases, it contributed to distancing participants from their partners. This reflects a repetitive pattern of gender alienation, throughout the results, contributing to an oppressive experience for both sexes. Additionally, these communicative inhibitions affected participants' relationships with professionals and institutions. Unchallenged, repressive patterns in relation to the experience of fertility, sexuality and associated concerns negatively affect the probability of ordinary collective communicative discourse which could facilitate a reflective critique of personal assumptions and behaviours; a critique which would also interrogate the demographic, institutional, economic and commercial interests for which fertility and its management is a central focus, as indicated by Fahy, Fitzgerald and Maitre (1998) and Vickers (1994:188-191).

In addition, a significant finding relates to the pervasiveness of religious cultural indoctrination constricting cognitive mobility in a manner which tended to prevent the participants from questioning their assumptions or critiquing their meaning perspectives.

What is distinctive, overall, in the findings about fertility and sexuality, is the way in which they highlight the on-going personal and political problematics of a central and wide-remitting dimension of human experience; problematics which, according to these women and men, are seriously overlooked as issues for democratic interrogation and democratic transformational discourse.

### **Parenting: the intergenerational cycle of sexual learning**

A feature of the research participants' reflections on their sexual journey is the constancy and conscientiousness with which they directed their gaze outwards towards the next generation with a critical evaluation of their own roles as sexual educators. Occasionally, it might be interpreted that focusing on children's sexuality may have been used by participants as a defence mechanism against personal inquiry. However, during the study, this was not the norm, and the participants were quick to acknowledge and return from any such 'straying' when confronted with this possibility.

A majority of the participants reported that the research process for this study, including the course on personal sexuality, was experienced as a significant intervention in their own lives leading to perspective transformations in relation to their sexuality and to their parenting. The process of critical reflection on their personal histories led to a reflection on and analysis of their parental roles as sexual educators of the new up-coming generation, and on the cultural context affecting how they implement their roles in relation to their children's sexuality.

Anita's (17:F:35-44:P) early learning experience in the home, as has been shown earlier, was mainly one of sexual silence and prohibition, particularly against allowing any male, including her father, to become aware of her emerging womanhood, as illustrated by her experience of menstruation. She describes how she, too, although



having considered herself more sexually liberated than her parents, practised, as it were, an impoverishing economy of sexual speech with her own children. Her participation in the adult education course on personal sexuality resulted in her taking action to break out from the backyard of her own experience of parental sexual education. Even with the best intention and some success, she recognises the difficulty of this process:

*"[The course] made me look a lot more carefully at any messages I might give to my children. I have two daughters and a son. I do think that I'm quite open with them - but again, get back to the wet dreams one - when I talk to my two daughters and my son, they all know about periods and about babies and about intercourse. They know as much as they know, but I never.... like my son is now ten.... and I know now that I will talk to him and it will purely be because of the course, and also with the girls.... I have already with the eldest one; she got her period last year, and she was saying what a pity boys didn't get them, and I began to talk to her about it. Now, I would never, ever, have discussed this with them, only I did the course. I know in my heart and soul that I wouldn't - and I talked to [my partner] about it. We talked [for the first time] about his first experience of wet dreams and what it was like for him." (I)*

Anita illustrates the limited extent to which the participants, in general, shared their sexual learning stories with their partners. This limitation contributes to the continuing exclusion, or peripheralising, of boys' experience from the parental sexual educational equation. It is also of note that 'progress' or 'liberalisation' in Anita's approach to educating her children in sexuality, prior to engaging in this study, was expressed by talking to her son about girls' menstrual periods. This 'progress' or 'liberalisation' did not address her son's own sexual development, thus further embedding the concept of education on matters of sexuality and intimacy as belonging to the girls'/women's domain rather than to both sexes, as indicated three decades ago by Baker Miller (1978:27).

Anita highlights the situation as it exists for a majority of the participants who are parents or educators; that is, a) responsibility for sexual education is accepted as largely resting in the hands of the woman/mother; b) such education significantly

overlooks boys specific learning needs, and c) the content of such education centres around factual, instrumental knowledge, such as how to manage menstruation. It does not, in general, address intra and inter-personal relational knowledge such as the implications of sexual desire, attraction, pleasure and preference.

Anita reflects a general strand in the parents' stories; while their approach to sexual education may be different to that which they, as children, experienced from their parents, sometimes profoundly different in desire and detail, overall the similarity is more striking than the difference. This pattern can be seen below.

Janet (5:F:45-54:P), like Anita, is conscious of trying to break the pattern of her own sexual learning as she mothers her children. She perceives her mother's teaching and example on sexuality as "*toxic*", and feels contaminated by it:

*"How did I relate to my children? There was, I would say, a certain percentage of knock-on effect. I found it difficult to explain sexual matters to my own children as the need arose because of the amount of negative baggage that I carry around with regard to my own sexuality.... It was an effort, and sometimes still is, not to pass on my own preconditioned views.... Reflecting on the mirror image of my mother as she was when I was a child, I don't like the image, first of all because it reminds me of the control my mother had over me. My fear would be that I would try to exercise that same control over my family. But I do know that I have made a conscious effort not to do this. I do know that the tendency is in me, it is bred in me."* (J)

Janet articulates the difficulty of speaking of that about which one has been silenced either literally or figuratively. Although she rejects her mother's parenting approach, she recognises the strength of the mother-daughter gender role-modelling (Chodorow, 1978; 1990) in her propensity to mirror that approach to her children's sexual education. This, coupled with the instilled taboos and cultural fears associated with sexuality, makes it difficult for Janet, as with many of the other women participants, to disengage sufficiently from their experience in order to be able to critically analyse it and effect desired change. This is especially so, if there is no systematic support available to assist and validate such a process; the type of learning support which



Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986:194) assert is of importance for women's re-learning.

Mitzi (74:F:35-44:P) also recognises the influence her parents' role in her sexual education has on her own parenting. She, like Janet, has strong negative feelings about the way she experienced her mother's repressive, silencing role in her sexual education and how these feelings affected her own approach to her children, almost mirroring that of her mother:

*"... when I was growing up, I almost felt that I wasn't a real human being, you know. Women were deficient in some way. I don't know, when I was growing up, that I had been able to accept myself as a woman and that my functions were all normal and natural and healthy and good. There always had to be this awfully hidden stuff... 'It's all terribly private'. I realise now that resentment that I had against my mother was a kind of block in the sense that when I was talking to my girls, I hadn't really ... hadn't really given them permission to talk about how they really felt." (I)*

Mitzi touches on the broader implications of women's sexual learning and the role the mother-daughter sexual learning chain plays in promulgating women's experience of being positioned as 'less than': as inferior to men by virtue of their sex (de Beauvoir, 1972; Tong, 1989; Jay, 1991; Cameron and Frazer, 1996). As she describes it above, it is as though a cultural corruption of some women's sexuality transforms the 'good and the beautiful' into the 'bad and the ugly': a foundation for enslavement in low self acceptance which speeds such women on paths of perpetual endeavour in order to compensate for this deficiency. It is the Sisyphus complex!

Mitzi's participation in the course on personal sexuality resulted in reflection on her role as sexual educator. In consequence, Mitzi re-engaged with her daughters about their experience of puberty and sexual development:

*" So, it was good for me because I was able to go back to them [her children] and say 'you know, what do you not like about the whole business - tell me what you [think]; talk about the inconveniences and how you feel and all the rest of that... and I did that...' (I)*

It might be argued that Mitzi's action in revisiting her daughters about their experiences of sexual development and the attendant feelings is limited, confining the issue to the inner women's room, as it were. However, it can also be seen as that one step which begins a transformational learning process (Mezirow, 1990, 1991). It takes insight, courage and conviction, in a culture of maternal/parental pedagogic sexual awkwardness, for a parent to voluntarily revisit her adult children about sexuality with a view to enabling them explore their own stories as they are unfolding, thereby opening a door to critical analysis and communicative discourse.

Mitzi's action is an initiative towards a further mutually emancipatory learning circle or community; it is a dialogic intervention instead of a silent maintenance of uninterrogated, intergenerational deposit/re-depositing banking modes of instruction (Freire, 1972:45-59). It could be described as the creation of an expanding transformational learning spiral: every additional, widening revolution increasing in capacity to encompass political perspectives implicated in the matters at issue as well as personal perspectives, and drawing both from their respective poles into a dialogic and dynamic helix of critical reflection.

Gertrude (22:F:45-54:P), like the participants cited above, realises that her parents and teachers had left a significant deficit in her learning so that, quite unwittingly, she has been repeating their impaired tutoring. She has until now been unable to access the subjugated knowledges about sexual development necessary to affirmatively educate and accompany her sons in their sexual growth:

*"I certainly would have liked to have known men's feelings about puberty long ago. Maybe I wouldn't have been so resentful about my lot as a teenager and I would certainly have understood my own boys a lot better when they were going through that difficult time in their lives."* (J)

Gertrude, like a majority of the other women participants, had received no education about the changes in boys' development at puberty and adolescence. In this respect,



not alone was she unable to keep her sons company in their learning about their sexuality but, also, she was thereby ill equipped to exercise a positive parental role in relation to the learning her sons were receiving from external sources such as the media and the schoolyard.

In addition, it is notable that Janet, Mitzi and Gertrude's partners, the children's fathers, are absent from their commentaries and critique; the women articulate a sole responsibility for their children's sexual education and well-being; a learned position consistent with French's (1994:30) argument that mothers *"are held responsible for their children and, in the West, blamed for their fates."*

Gertrude echoes Mitzi's anxiety that she may have passed on to her daughter that which she had learned from her own parents and teachers. However, unlike Mitzi, Gertrude regretfully feels that the time has passed for her to choose to exercise a different type of role as educator to her daughter:

*"Maybe I just passed on some of my anxieties on to her. I tried hard not to. I wish she was younger or that I had done this course before she reached puberty and maybe I could have helped her better."* (J)

Gertrude expresses the feelings of guilt resonating in the women participants' reflections on their roles as sexual educators of their children. Guilt and motherhood are no strangers to each other. On the contrary, as Croghan (1993:243) states, research shows that guilt is pandemic among women in heterosexual relationships resulting from *"what they perceived to be their own personal failure to live up to the ideal of 'good motherhood'."* What is missing in Gertrude's self-evaluation, and in those of many of the other participants, is a critical look at what, for whom, and why these women feel dispossessed of their self-respect, dignity and worth, and repossessed by feelings of persistent anxiety, inadequacy and guilt. The anxious feelings expressed by the women participants above suggests the continuing validity of Rich's (1976) argument, supported by Jagger (cited in Tong, 1989:188,189), that the cultural institution of motherhood rather than motherhood itself is alienating women from themselves, from their mothering and from their children.

Cormac (72:M:45-54:P) would have welcomed an education which would have enabled him contribute to liberative sexual learning for his children. He has become aware of the false inhibitions and constraints of his own sexual learning which he had never previously interrogated. He shares misgivings with the participants above at having reproduced, with his own children, by his attitudes, the negative aspects of his parents' approach and values imbibed by him in his youth. He, too, like Gertrude, passionately regrets the time which has passed and the loss incurred; his children are adults now:

*"One of the things that I did learn [on the course] was that your sexuality, that teaching about your sexuality happens as kids grow. I should have been at that course when I was twenty-five so that when the kids were growing, I wouldn't have had all these daft hang-ups that I had still when I was forty-five; a waste of twenty years of parenting time." (I)*

While Gertrude and Cormac feel the passage of time gone in terms of parenting, Nessa (75:F:45-54:P) is more optimistic about her role as sexual educator, even though her children, like Gertrude's and Cormac's, are reaching or already have reached, the young adult stage of their development. Reflecting on her sexual learning story, she recalls how, since attending the personal development course, she availed of an opportunity to engage with her children about her own learning as a spring-board to re-addressing their experience:

*"...three of my daughters happened to be at home at that time and I happened to share with them... 'what do you think, and this is what I think, and, like, do you agree?' And I think we went on talking until about three o'clock in the morning during which I learned more about their sexuality than I ever learned before - it opened up so much for them. And I mean, I would have regarded our relationship as pretty open and I would have talked to them about things sexual quite openly but I never heard so much as I did that night. It gave permission for the floodgates to open. It was very enlightening." (I)*



Nessa exchanged *“the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students”* (Freire, 1972:49), thereby engaging with her daughters in a liberating learning process. An important aspect of this discourse was her permission-giving self-disclosure. Nessa’s metaphorical use of ‘floodgates opening’ conveys the dammed up torrents of unspoken experiences contained behind the barriers of permitted sexual speech.

In Aine’s (18:F:35-44:P) story, her experience of a sexual learning deficit wrought by the absence of a parental/adult input is similar to that of Gertrude. She received no information on male sexuality. Although her experience of early learning about sexuality was considered unexceptional, she realises there are areas of omission which she, in turn, manifests in educating her children. Aine reflects on how her parents educated her. She recognises that she does not wish to pass on the same sexual learning that she acquired from them:

*“We pass many of our [sexual] scripts on to the next generation. My adolescence in terms of my sexuality was fairly uneventful, or so I thought. Mapping my ideal script gave me the opportunity to reflect on that time in my life from a mature and distant position. As I started to write, I noticed that I wanted to change everything.”* (J)

Commenting on the shared experience of personal sexuality on the course with a mixed sex group, Aine confirmed that it had taught her about aspects of male sexuality, physical, emotional and social, about which she was utterly unaware, even as a mature, married woman. In consequence, she initiated conversations with her partner on the topic and on how they might approach their son’s sexual education.

*“In some ways, I feel privileged to have this time to reflect, because by writing my ideal script, my husband and I have gained new insights into how we will deal with our children’s sexuality. We discussed how we would deal with the arrival of our son’s puberty. I feel privileged that I have become aware in this way.”* (J)

Aine's story bears out a prevailing theme amongst the women participants: that of lack of knowledge about boy's sexual development. It is as though the intimacies of male sexual development are hidden in a societal 'blind spot'. Prior to taking the course on personal sexuality, participants like Aine were not conscious of this aspect of male growth, or of it as a learning need for their sons and daughters. This aspect of the participants' stories, as parents, reflects the silence of omission; an omission which includes aspects of sexuality such as pleasure, mutuality, fun and friendship within and between the sexes. These are significant dimensions of sexuality the experience of which has the potential to heighten men's and women's awareness of structural requirements detrimental to the interests of individual and communal well-being and to relational values of intimacy (Wolf, 1991:141,142; Giddens, 1992:3).

While Aine realises and regrets the limitations in her own sexual awareness in consequence of the learning she received from her parents and teachers, she believes there was no malice intended by that generation in the shortcomings she experienced in her sexual learning and which she, unconsciously, was in danger of continuing in parenting her own children:

*"By looking at and examining the past, I understand more clearly why my parents gave me the messages they did and this has made me carefully consider the messages I am giving to my children." (J)*

Aine further recognises the extent to which the falsely inhibiting patterns of sexual learning held sway in her family of origin, and the power of those patterns to persist from one generation to the next. Her mother's mother maintained the sexual silence; her own mother, more or less, sustained it, although attempting to breach it by giving her a booklet on sex. Aine, herself, while addressing sexual issues with her daughter, totally omits addressing these issues with her son. She also failed to take cognisance of and confront the issue of how absent her partner, a key person in terms of parenting, was to the process of sexually educating their children as, it would appear, were the partners of her mother and her grandmother.



As a couple, Aine and her husband had never discussed their own sexual learning or how, together, they would share the parental responsibility for keeping company with their own children as their sexual learning needs emerged, until she had attended the adult education course on personal sexuality. Referring to the deficits in her own early learning, Aine is not bitter:

*“I am not angry about the information I did or did not receive. My Mum did not know any other way to deal with the whole subject. She knew nothing about sex when she got married. Her mother had never given her any information. The fact that she tried to talk to me at all was an improvement on the way her mother had treated her.(J)*

Aine recognises the intergenerational learning pattern repeating from mother to daughter. She is quick to affirm her own mother. However, she does not verbalise a recognition of the culture which places women, including herself, her mother and her grandmother in the contradictory position: that is, deprived of the status of equal power, respect and worth to that enjoyed by their husbands (Rowbotham, 1973:113,114; Jagger, 1990:239-254; French, 1994), yet charged with the emotional care, nurture and sexual education of their children in those cultural values (Baker Miller, 1978:27; Segal, 1987:74; Vickers, 1994), for entry into a socio-cultural system which predominantly values those children for their contribution to production for profit rather than for relationship (Hart, 1992). This socio-cultural context provides neither adequate knowledge, skill nor support in the task, and mothers are targeted for blame if unsuccessful (French, 1994). At the same time, these alienating cultural strands of patriarchal type relations and the construction of motherhood (Rich, cited in Tong, 1989:186), together with the separation of the private space of child-rearing and parenting from the public space of production and competition (Rowbotham, 1973:115; Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG, 1988:24-26,65), leads women and men such as the participants cited above to an acceptance of the personal and political status quo. They perceive it as normative, thereby unwittingly aiding and abetting an intergenerational cycle of sexual learning inimical to an inter-personal and socio-cultural transformational appreciation of sexual relations.

Aine, in her analysis of her own learning situation, reflects the degree of internalised social compliance which was evident in many of the participants. Nevertheless, Aine recognises her potential to resist: the potential to apply the fruits of her insights and changed perspectives further afield than the family circle, planning to extend her new learning to the groups of women with whom she works. In so doing, like Mitzi and Nessa, Aine may promote the possibility of a learning spiral with the potential for social transformation:

*“In terms of my work, I hope to pass on my learning to the women who use the community centre, both in informal discussion and in a structured course on sexuality, at some point in the near future”. (J)*

It is not only the women participants who suffered from the effects of the repeating pattern of intergenerational sexual learning, although their experience differs from that of the men. James (23:M:45-54:P), as quoted earlier, also bears the weight of such repeating patterns. He echoes Aine’s compassionate understanding for the previous generation of parents while confirming that negative cycles of learning are passed from generation to generation if there is no direct intervention to interrupt them. However, whereas Aine identified her mother and her mother’s mother as lacking in the skill to do more than they did, James looks outwards to the established mores of the era for the cause rather than to his parents or grandparents. James believes that particular historical social norms were responsible for the way in which his parents learned about their sexuality and for their limited attitudes towards educating their children in this regard.

*“I realise that their particular era set the precedent for such actions and I’m not blaming them although, given the chance, this is one element of my past that I most definitely would change. I would do this for both them and myself, as I feel that the quality of their own lives would have benefited by this change. I can really empathise with their predicament and the helplessness that they must have endured. My parents were, however, exceptional people and showed us an awful lot of love in every other respect [other than sexuality] which was appreciated and reciprocated.” (J)*



James recognises the impoverishment experienced by his parents and his own subsequent impoverishment to be as a result of a repressive socio-cultural attitude to sexuality. However, he identifies the problem as a consequence of a particular historical period without analysing its construction and role in today's social relations. In James' view, the present time offers a more liberal approach to sexuality and, therefore, a better outcome for the children of this generation. His assumption that that era has gone is unquestioned. Commenting on the value he perceives in adult education as a positive intervention in the intergenerational cycle of sexual mis-learning, James continues:

*"Apart from helping them [the present generation of parents] to come to terms with their own sexual growth.... I feel that this [adult education course in personal sexuality] can give them an added tool to enable them to pass on this experience to their counterparts, pupils, and children, whatever the case may be."* (Q2)

Melanie (66:F:35-44:P) is also conscious of negative cycles of learning passing from one generation to the next. Like Aine, Melanie wants *"to change everything"* and had set about trying to do so. She determined that her children would have an affirming experience of sexual learning:

*"I used proper words with the children...because things were so taboo [at home]."* (I)

Using the right words does not necessarily guarantee the right attitudes. Melanie recalls, with wry amusement, overhearing her son when he was eight years of age intimating a sexual superiority which would not have been of her choosing. In a rage with her, he taunted:

*"And you don't even have a penis, you've only got a bagina [sic]. And I said 'it's a vagina'. He was mad at me. But the way he thought... he felt that he had something extra, at eight years of age!"*  
(I)

What is evident in Melanie's account, and constitutes another ongoing theme in the women participants' parenting tales, is the extent to which a woman, as mother, can hold herself responsible for 'getting it right'. She, like Orbach (1993), has the experience of the wider world outside her home providing a powerful learning forum in which their sons imbibe attitudes of male supremacy contrary to a parent's conscious intent. This raises the issue of educating adults, not only for responding to their children's sexual learning needs but, also, for politically challenging institutional and cultural mores which feed into and support oppressive sexual power relations.

Melanie is aware that, in attempting to battle against the "*sex repressive*" learning which she received from her parents, she is in danger of swinging too far in the opposite direction, becoming "*sex obsessive*" in her desire to offer her children an affirmative education (Ehrenberg and Ehrenberg, cited in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny: 1992:211):

*"I never wear a dressing gown, parade naked, because of what happened at home. I decided I would be the opposite. I almost went too far the other way."* (I)

Melanie's partner also shares in the task of explicitly educating their children about sexuality. Melanie, however, thinks the male approach, as exemplified by her partner, errs on instrumental aspects of learning which the children could not quite comprehend at their age and stage:

*"He's very good; he'd explain it. But, it wasn't that he was shy about it, but I thought he was a bit technical, you know, a real man. He would explain the egg and the sperm and going in, and I thought he is being too technical. And it was, and a lot of it went over their head."* (I)

While Melanie's judgement of her partner's approach may be valid, it could, nevertheless, be interpreted as reflecting the cultural ascription to women of the sexual



education of children and, thence, to a view of her partner as playing an ancillary, more amateurish and less powerful role. Melanie's critical interpretation of her partner's approach to their children's sexual learning as '*a bit too technical*' and, therefore, that of a '*real man*' is suggestive of the kind of labelling which is stereotypically essentialist, potentially dismissive of his contribution and, ultimately, releases him from his responsibility. Unconsciously, by trying to hold on to 'delegated power' (Tong, 1989:66-69), Melanie runs the risk of disempowering the transformative moment in human interaction which she seeks.

Through participating in the adult education course in personal sexuality, Melanie became aware that she, like many of the other participants, had either been unaware of or had overlooked boy's pubertal change and development. Melanie had made her son aware of his sisters' sexual development, but not of his own:

*"...wet dreams! I've realised I have not said anything to the boy about it. I just haven't thought of it. I just didn't. He's going on thirteen. He's probably coming to that age... I just never thought to say it to him, you know."* (I)

The theme of boys' sexual development being overlooked by parents, as presented by the participants, impresses at the level of how culturally constructed 'blind spots' inhibit seeing even that which is obvious. At first glance, this may seem an extraordinary situation and, as indicated earlier in the text, gave rise to feelings of isolation and confusion amongst the men participants as a result of what appeared as adult obliviousness to their sexual development. However, while the experiences outlined above indicate significant parental oversight in terms of knowledge about and attention to boys sexual education, such oversight may also account for the fact that the men participants, as boys, seem to have grown up with less incorporation of self-surveilling guilt than did the women participants.

It is noteworthy that, consistent with the mother's role with regard to sexual education of the young, including boys' education, Melanie's spontaneous reaction is to blame herself for this omission.

Ursula (25:F:25-34:P) exemplifies the dual role critical reflection on personal sexual story is playing, both for herself, as an individual woman, and as a parent committed to changing the pattern of sexual learning which she imbibed, a pattern which she judges incongruent with positive sexual education:

*“However, I know now that my discomfort and self-consciousness about my sexuality and womanhood has been addressed in a very positive way. While this has been, and will be, extremely beneficial to me, personally, it also has happened in time for me to avoid inadvertently causing similar problems for my children, both female and male, as they approach different stages of their development.”*  
(J)

Ursula clearly experiences herself as empowered by the adult education course to break the intergenerational cycle of sexual parenting, although she continues to assume personal responsibility for the task.

Emma (28:F:25-34:P), on the other hand, is provoked by the course into questioning both her personal role and that of the establishment in shaping children’s sexual learning. Emma, who is a teacher, is an example of those participants who, although not parents themselves are, nonetheless, conscious of their role as educators of children. She is aware of and questions the intergenerational reproduction of sexual education:

*“Many adults in our society have been given negative messages about sexuality, and continue to carry these with them - harming relationships and passing them on to their children.”* (Q.2)

Reflecting on her own learning about sexuality in childhood and adolescence which she perceives as negative, she muses on the possibility that she, too, may be reproducing that detrimental learning for her pupils. Sure of what she does not wish to repeat with children of this generation, Emma also questions what should replace it:



*"I wonder what kind of message I am giving to children and adolescents. I know I would discourage teenagers from being sexually active. I wonder if I am now part of the system that passes on oppressive messages. How can I change this? How can I get my values across along with a healthy attitude to sex? On reflection, what do I mean by getting my values across?" (J)*

Wondering how to alter 'the system' in order to educate her children with the positive sense of their sexuality which is rightfully due to them is part of Tessa's (56:F:35-44:Sep) dilemma. Another part of her dilemma, echoing a number of participants above, is that she lacks the knowledge to assist her in understanding boy's sexual development. In Tessa's situation, the dilemma is dramatically sharpened by her experience of abuse and violence and the horror that her five year old daughter was also sexually abused. As with the majority of participants, her experience of sexual education within her family of origin was largely one of silence and, therefore, unhelpful to her as she tries to protect yet liberate her children into the gift of life-enhancing sexuality:

*"I had no experience of boys. I had no brothers. My first baby [was a girl], Lilah. I wasn't a born mother. I learned like everyone else. I didn't have major problems. Second child, Robert, was a different kettle of fish altogether. Around his body, he was much more.... you have a two year old going around hanging on to his penis like a bloomin' handlebar all day...and will or won't I stop him? Will I or won't I? By then, it had come too far, really, to interfere at all. He's seven now and he's still going through with all this toilet talk, smutty jokes, lewd songs he gets on the bus. ... This frightens me when I hear this stuff, because I think he's going that road, the 'macho' road. I had that experience myself..." (I)*

Tessa does not see the inhibitory and inadequate cycle of sexual learning being broken in one generation. There is too much to be undone, a culture to be changed. This will take time:

*"It may not happen for another generation. But for them to take it another mile, another step - a mile more than I did - for them to actually have the notion integrated that yes, their body is their own - what they do with their body on their own is their own business, and*

*that if they choose to share their body with somebody else in a pleasurable way, that is also their choice. I would like them to have much more freedom around the whole subject.” (I)*

Rosa (2:F:45-54:P), like Tessa, would also like her children to have more freedom around their sexuality. She recognises her mother’s teaching in her own approach to her children, the struggle it was to try to alter her approach to a less inhibiting one and the comfort she seeks in hoping that all will be well:

*“I know I have passed on some of my attitudes to my three daughters. Whether I’m right or wrong, time might tell. But I always seemed unable not to impose some of the attitudes from childhood from the fifties and sixties. When they were small, I always said to them, as my mother said to me, ‘sit properly’. I tried to be less rigid than my mother and I would say if they were not wearing trousers, ‘girls, no sitting with one leg east and one leg west.’ I often hear them use exactly the same term now in relation to sitting. On reflection, those first precious years should have been more fulfilling, with the sexual side given much more priority. I should have been more OK and relaxed with my body. I should have loved myself first.” (J)*

Rosa recognises, with regret, that much of the learning she received from her parents has informed her own role as sexual educator of her children; the deprivation in her early learning about sexuality has affected the gift she would wish for them. In a single phrase *“I should have loved myself first”*, Rosa highlights one of the keys to being a sexual educator.

The findings bear out the difficulty of breaking an intergenerational cycle of negative learning; and of the need to do so in order to take on the adult role and become an effective educator of a new generation (Erikson, 1965:393,394; Gould, 1990).

Melanie states:

*“Adults who were brought up where sexuality wasn’t openly discussed may carry on this tradition in their own lives.” (Q2)*



## **Parenting: the intergenerational cycle of sexual learning: summary of findings**

The findings show that an intergenerational cycle of sexual learning operates for a majority of the participants. These participants are clear that they do not wish this cycle to continue.

The participants largely avoided addressing the issue of sexual development with their children in any depth, or addressed only some of the physical aspects of it. This resulted from their own repressive learning about personal sexuality which led to both a knowledge and a communicative competence deficit in relation to sexuality.

Anxious lest they pass on their own misapprehensions and, in a significant number of cases, poor sexual self-concepts, participants', in their approach to their parental roles as sexual educators, conform to the 'sex avoidant' classification indicated in Ehrenberg and Ehrenberg (cited in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:211); that is, they limit the discussion of sexual issues with their children to a minimum. By so doing, they assist in a continuation of an intergenerational subjugating pedagogy which contributes to the inhibition of democratic sexual discourse and sexual relations.

This silence or, as Anita describes, economy of speech is evidenced in the findings in that, overall, a) the participants and their partners do not communicate with each other significantly about their own early sexual development; b) as fathers, they do not communicate with their children about their sexual development; and c) as parents, neither fathers nor mothers communicate with boys about their sexuality.

These findings reflect the early childhood and adolescent sexual learning that the participants received shown in Chapter Four. Although the participants wish to change the learning cycle, they do not appear to have experienced an intervention which would have facilitated this prior to this study.

The findings also show that the women participants, in general, accept responsibility for carrying the parental role in relation to children's sexual education. This is consistent with research findings carried out in the United States and cited in Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1992). Even where both partners are involved, in the majority of cases, it is taken for granted that the weight of responsibility rests with the woman. This supports the argument that the cultural deployment of power invests women with the responsibility for reproducing the dominant sex/gender values of patriarchal relations (Vickers, 1994:188). In this respect, in spite of a rejection of their own early sexual learning process, by unquestioningly accepting or taking sole responsibility for children's sexual education, the women participants model and implement values about sexuality, womanhood and manhood supportive of the cultural norm. Thus, there is a repeating strand in the overall intergenerational parenting pattern. By failing to interrogate the objectives and content of sexual education and issues of responsibility relating to its practice, women collude in those relations.

In spite of accepting responsibility for children's sexual education, the findings indicate that a majority of the women participants experience difficulty in addressing children's sexual development. Given what might be termed 'the sexual silence, secrecy and shame syndrome' evident in the findings of so many of the women participants in this study and corroborated by studies further afield (Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1992:245; Bancroft, 1989:166,167), it is not difficult to understand why efforts to accompany their children educationally in their sexual development are hampered by informational inadequacy, emotional discomfort and fear of failure. This is reflected in Lips' (1994:93,94) argument that women, as girls, are culturally conditioned into a personal sense of sexual danger, vulnerability and helplessness. Furthermore, the sexually divisive nature of the early learning received by the women participants, which discouraged or prohibited a shared learning between boys and girls, highlights an absurdity in mothers being assigned responsibility for educating the opposite sex in sexuality without the children's fathers taking an equal share of the responsibility.

As Melanie's account suggests, women's assumption of this responsibility can also act to deprive men of an intimate role in their children's upbringing. However, without



interventions which unmask motivations in the deflection of fathers from proactive emotional parenting, the intergenerational cycle of learning will continue; and men who become fathers will continue to exclude themselves, and be excluded, from nurturing their sons, thereby contributing to the cycle (Seidler, 1988:272,302).

The findings show, however, that the men participants in this study resist stereotyping and desire change. They repudiate their association, by sex, with an oppressive relational regime and want to relate more affectively with their children than their fathers did. This is consistent with Ramazanoglu (1993:63), who points out in her consideration of heterosexuality, including heterosexual parenting:

*“We do not need to see all men as personally oppressive, but what is urgently needed is a sense of how difficult it is for both men and women, day in day out, to counter social pressures in transforming heterosexuality.”*

An outcome of the personal development course in sexuality, as shown above, is that a significant number of participants initiated dialogic interactions with their partners on the issue of sexual parenting. An example of this change in pattern is Paul's (21:M:35-44:P) resolution that his children will be sexually educated by both parents. In this, he acknowledges his need for help from his wife but is determined that:

*“with [her] assistance... to sit down, discuss, explain, ensure,... that our children will not have to endure the ignorance that I did in respect of their sexuality”. (J)*

As indicated above, an interesting finding shows that there is a 'blind spot' on the part of both parents which is facilitated by the subjugation of democratic sexual discourse and by the dividing practices in parenting roles and responsibilities in relation to boys' sexual development and learning. This is a two-sided problematic: boys may suffer from a lack of parental attention to their education about sexuality but, significantly, in

consequence of this, the issue of learning about sexual relations as a 'location of loving possibility', to paraphrase hooks (cited in Barr, 1998:80), is forfeit.

While factual knowledge with regard to sexual development is essential for parents and adults as educators, the texture of the participants' accounts holds the wish to be something more for their children than good encyclopaedias. Nessa's recall, above, of an evening running into morning with her children is an example of communicative learning and collaborative discourse which has the power to open doors long since closed or never opened at all (Habermas, 1978; Mezirow, 1990;1996; Frank, 1991:51). It is an example of the type of learning discourse which can cut through the old reproductive frames of reference and which leads to

*"a more fully developed and dependable frame of reference... that is more inclusive, differentiating, more open to alternative perspectives and more integrative of experience." (Mezirow, 1996:7)*

It is evident from the stories of the participants that neither the state of adulthood itself, nor the fact that the majority are in sexual partnerships, of their own accord bring about a situation where husbands and wives, parents and partners, achieve a level of communicative discourse with each other about sexuality appropriate for a more comprehensive, holistic and appreciative facilitation of their offspring's positive sexual learning.

What is of particular interest is that shared reflection on their own sexual learning made it possible for a significant number of participants to reframe the premise (Mezirow, 1996:6-9) from which to approach their roles as sexual educators of the young. As has been shown, this process has led to the implementation of new approaches between partners, as parents, and with children. The parental insights gained and new approaches adopted resulted from critical reflection and discourse on the participant's experiential sexual learning. As Dominice (1990:202) states in relation to learning via life histories: *"Adults learn when they can reorganise and enrich what they already know"*.



In sum, the findings, in relation to the theme of parenting, show a) that a culture of sexual silence inhibits a majority of the participants who are parents in achieving their wish to break the intergenerational cycle of negative sexual learning of which they are a part; b) that this cycle of negative learning about sexuality is powered by oppressive cultural gendered relations to the detriment of both parents' and children's well-being; and c) that the dialogic encounters engaged in by the participants, on the adult education course in personal sexuality, facilitated a significant number of participants in initiating some changes in parenting practices.

### **Adulthood and Sexuality: Summary of findings**

The culture of sexual silence, graphically portrayed by the participants in Chapter Four, continues to be evident in the findings in this chapter. A majority of the participants gave expression to difficulties arising from their inability to articulate the things that really matter to them with regard to their sexual relations. This pervasive inhibition was consistently illustrated in relation to such fundamental issues as self-image and sexual self-esteem, partnership and intimacy, fertility and parenting, as they arose during the course of adulthood. The findings show explicitly that repressive learning from childhood and adolescence underpins this inhibition; and this is sustained, in adulthood, by oppressive gendered structures and a cultural ethos antipathetic to just, inclusive, democratic, loving sexual relations.

Implicit in this text is the confirmation that the changing needs of adult sexuality, as expressed by the participants, could not be met by childhood learning, irrespective of the quality of that childhood learning. The participants' experiences of adult sexuality show that meaning perspectives are continuously challenged by the evolving circumstances of personal, interpersonal and social needs. Whether the changes are experienced as positive or negative, they constitute personal, relational and social problematics and require new learning:

*“I feel that when you are an adult, you go through many different stages - being single, in partnership, having children, not having children, getting old, losing partners etc. and that adults need to continually learn, explore, and educate themselves about these issues and their feelings on them. We accept the need for continuous learning in other areas - why not sexuality?” (45:F:25-34:S:Q2)*

While the experiences of the women and the men participants differed, for example, in relation to body image, work, sexual expectations and children’s sexual education, a common lack of well-being with regard to personal sexuality and relationships of intimacy, keenly and painfully experienced, was evident. Within this context, the participants struggled to make sense of their relating with limited knowledge and inhibited communicative competence.

The findings clearly indicate that, while both men and women participants experience personal sexuality as problematic, the women participants suffer, particularly and explicitly, within the prevailing oppressive socio-cultural sexual discourses. This is borne out by Frye (1990:183) in her argument that:

*“...the lives and fates of humans on this planet fall out along fault lines of female and male as prominently and consistently as on fault lines of wealth and or tribal, racial, or national identities.”*

As Cameron and Fraser (1996:211) argue, in relation to women’s struggle for subjectivity, but which this study would extend to both sexes:

*“...the struggle to be subject is played out in many fields... but one key site of struggle is the field of sexuality”*

A significant finding in this case study, evidenced in the participants’ narratives, and illustrated by them in responses to each others stories, is that personal sexual experience constitutes an area of subjugated knowledge. Furthermore, that the women and men participants, in respect of personal sexuality are culturally subjugated. Their experiences confirm Rhode’s (1990:211) conclusion that the important issue to be



interrogated is the value society places on relationships of intimacy and the obligations of care.

Notwithstanding the gendered separation of the sexes evident in the sexual learning histories of the participants, and the difficulties posed by cultural norms of gendered dominance and subordination, and by the effects of resistance to such normative value systems, the participants, in critically reflecting together on their personal sexual histories, showed a willingness to transgress boundaries of normative sexual silence in order to question their mutual learning and the personal and political implications of that learning for individual and social well-being. Following from this, a significant majority of participants initiated changes in their behaviours and relationships.

In response to the second hypothesis which was

whether or not personal sexuality is a developmental process with changing needs throughout the life-course, the addressing of which, in adulthood, is central to the well-being of the individual and of society

the findings show, conclusively, that it is such a process with such changing needs. Furthermore, they show that personal sexuality will always have inherent learning challenges which will need to be addressed because, as Giddens (1991, 1992) argues, and as this case study demonstrates, sexuality is central to the reflexive project of self in society.

The participants take up this issue of adult learning for personal sexual development in Chapter Six.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **BREAKING THE SILENCE: THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT: PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES**

Chapter Six presents and interprets the participants' perspectives on the potential role of adult education in contributing to that learning on personal sexuality which continues throughout adulthood. The chapter also presents the views of a number of adult educators from a university staff; as indicated previously, these had already been part of the main body of participants in the research and have contributed to the study from their personal experience independently of this designated professional contribution. In addition, the chapter will present the views of a number of practising psychotherapists on adult personal sexuality and adult education.

All of the seventy-six primary participants in the study affirm that there is a need for education in personal sexuality in adulthood. In addition, of the sixty-one participants who were specifically asked if courses in sexuality should be part of the normal repertoire of adult education, all answered in the affirmative. By 'normal repertoire' is meant inclusion in the ordinary or customary discretionary adult education course provision offered to the general public and to adults training to be adult educators. Such uniformity of response may be explained by the depth of personal educational need and the continuing challenges of adult sexuality indicated by the participants in the previous chapters.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> A question posed in the second questionnaire asked whether or not an adult education course is an appropriate forum for addressing learning needs about personal sexuality; seventy five of the seventy six participants confirmed that it is. The participant who disagreed with this view did so in a qualified manner: her view being that it is too onerous to take such a course along with other courses



The reasons offered by the participants for the above affirmation of adult education's role in personal sexuality are five-fold:

1. the centrality of sexuality to the person and to society;
2. the relevance of adult education in personal sexuality for work;
3. the appropriateness of the adult education environment for the topic of personal sexuality;
4. the relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality.

The term 'adult education' is inclusive of three meanings as it is used in this chapter: it signifies

- the phenomenon which is adult education for transformative learning;
- the policy makers, curriculum designers, programme planners and providers of adult education; and
- adult education courses, specifically, transformative learning courses for personal development.

---

in a wider programme of adult learning, and that it should be addressed separately in an adult education provision.

Sixty-one participants were asked in the same questionnaire whether or not courses on personal sexuality should be available to all adults. The other fifteen participants, members of the two pilot groups, did not have that specific question included on their questionnaires.<sup>4</sup> Of the sixty-one who answered the question, all answered in the affirmative. Ten participants qualified their answers by stating that such courses should be optional rather than obligatory in any programme of adult learning in which they occur, while four participants asserted that they should be mandatory for every adult; four participants that they should be mandatory for all adult educators; and two participants, that they should be mandatory for all care workers.

## **The centrality of sexuality to the person and to society**

Damian (7:M:25-34:P) urges that an adult education provision should be made for learning on personal sexuality on the basis of the importance of the topic in terms of personal growth, and that this provision can only be offered by adult education:

*“It’s a crucial area of adult learning - inappropriate scripts imprison adults, not merely [lack of] formal education or work deficits.... exploring sexual history, sexual identity, and options for personal development, I would consider it absolutely necessary for inclusion on any serious adult learning programme. Otherwise, what other context can this learning take place in?” (J)*

Paula (45:F:25-34:S) concurs with Damian, emphasising the overlooked aspect of this central topic:

*“It is an integral part of our being and, therefore, cannot be ignored in any setting; yet, although it is such, we do so little to develop and explore it, and often under-estimate its importance.” (Q2)*

The centrality of personal sexuality to adult development and, therefore, to adult education’s curriculum is underlined by Damian when he points to the value and need for a holistic approach to education:

*“I think it’s the business of adult education. If you are going to look at personal development, and not be coy about it, we have to look at the whole person. We have to be holistic or it’s just throwing money away.... How can it be transformative if you’re not looking at the full picture? If these fundamental issues about rites of passage and learning etc. are not present, then, it’s bogus. It’s nonsense.” (I)*

The concept of a holistic approach is echoed in Karen’s (30:F:35-44:P) comment on the centrality of sexuality as a qualitative issue for personal development in adult education:

*“...our sexuality is a vital and fundamental part of our life force, so any limitation in this area limits our being, undermines the quality of our lives... For many of us, our sexuality is a side issue as opposed to a fully integrated, integral part of our very existence.” (J)*



Lilah (76:F:35-44:S) explains her experience of ‘a holistic approach to personal development in adult education’, implicitly adverting to a stereotypical, oppressive cultural ethos in relation to sexuality, the effects of which separate out and repress core dimensions of personal experience:

*“In some sense, it’s about challenging the fantasies that we have... ‘men are...women are’, and getting behind that facade or those fantasies, and getting to the real people behind those fantasies that we live with. For me, it [experience of the course] was a bit like bringing something from my shadow into the light; something that I knew was there, didn’t know how to explore, or didn’t know how to claim for myself...and it was bringing it into the light for me and so, therefore, it became a part of me.” (I)*

Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) is very much in favour of adult education’s engagement in all significant dimensions of experience, repeating Lilah’s concern about excluding sexuality:

*“Adult education should incorporate all aspects of the person and sexuality is not something we can just ‘box’ away but rather it is part of our very being. It cannot be ignored. Sexuality is us.” (Q2)*

Thomas (35:M:35-44:P) reflecting on the appropriateness of adult education for adult learning on personal sexuality refers to sexuality as *“an intrinsic part of human being and development... and ...a most important area that needs attending to”* (Q2) while Frank (33:M:34-44:S), reflecting on the value of adult education addressing personal sexuality in its provisions, indicates that a holistic experience of adult development must include sexual development because of its centrality to personhood:

*“This is an area which is fundamental to our personhood. If we are to attain any degree of maturity as human beings, then sexual growth and development must be part of the overall development of the person.” (Q2)*

The concept of ‘maturity’ in adulthood, as a goal of personal development, can generate a lively debate amongst adult educators (see below) because of its connotations of adult completeness, culturally constructed, and the consequent

implications of incompleteness in some adults, or 'immaturity'. Equally, the concept that automatically links 'maturity' to age evokes criticism such as articulated by Jarvis (1983:105) in the course of his summary of Mezirow's theory of adult learning. Frank's assertion of the centrality of sexual development for the maturation process in human development is not one which is intended to label the adult status of individuals according to cultural constructions of maturity nor according to the self-knowledge acquired with age. In fact, the argument for the recognition of sexual development in adulthood, as central to the process of human maturing and growth, makes no assumptions that adults have acquired a requisite level of awareness, knowledge and skill for intimate relationships because they have reached adulthood. It recognises the potential in every adult, at every stage and in every context of their lives, through attention to their sexual development, to learn and grow and, in that sense, to mature as human beings. It challenges the 'taken-for-granted' assumption that personal sexual development in adulthood is not a central issue for women and men and society at and during each stage of their life courses.

Liz (31:F:<25:S) is conscious of a need in personal development work to expand individual/personal horizons to include the social/political context of experience. She highlights what she believes could be a limitation endangering the learning process:

*"While it is important to arouse one's own perceptions of one's sexuality, it is essential to make a connection with the wider societal issues."* (Q2)

Liz is identifying a significant issue. Many personal development courses taking place limit their focus to the psychological dimension of individual experience without addressing socio-cultural and political aspects shaping that experience (Ryan, 1997:17-23; Mayo, 1995; Lovett, 1988). A vital role for the adult educator lies in precipitating critical thinking about the context which structures experience, so that participants appreciate the *"essential contingency of their worlds"*, an important understanding for transformative action (Brookfield, 1986:125). There is a question of judgement in determining the level, timing and method of explicitly engaging people with the wider, public, socio-political issues on a learning course (Hart, 1990); a course which



involves, for the majority, their naming and sharing in a public forum, most likely for the first time, their personal sexual story.

Sarah (44:F:25-34:P), in asserting the need for adult education to engage in personal sexuality because of the centrality of the issue, reasons that the negative socio-cultural influences which impact on personal learning need interrogation:

*"A person's sexuality is their very being, their essence. From the moment of conception to death, sexuality is our driving force. Unfortunately, there are people who abuse this essence, physically, mentally and emotionally; and we, ourselves, cause as much abuse by denying the importance of our sexuality. We cannot help it. On all levels, social, cultural, religious, family, school, people want to take our own individual special essence and shape it or break it until it fits their mould." (I)*

Sarah's emphasis on sexuality as personal "essence" and as the "driving force" of being is congruent with a liberal/humanistic interpretation of sexuality. Such an interpretation posits sexuality fundamentally as an intra-psychic phenomenon. However, discourse analysis would challenge Sarah's understanding. From a Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1978), Sarah's self-understanding illustrates the power of discourses; discourses employed, for example, by the very institutions she names above and which she has internalised to the point where she experiences the production of sexuality by such discourses as inherent to her as an individual.

Sarah is seeking from adult education that 'really useful knowledge' which Thompson (1996:21) associates with

*"the development of critical thinking, the recognition of human agency, political growth and the confidence to challenge what is generally taken for granted as inevitable."*

Jasper (39:M:45-54:Sep) shares Sarah's concern and view that many of the socio-cultural influences relating to sexuality are oppressive and imprisoning of the individual. He is vehement in his call for transformative, educative action:

*“Myths and misconceptions must be exploded or exposed for what they are. Lives can be ruined when humans exist bound by conventions and taboos imposed or accepted through fear or ignorance, or both.” (Q2)*

While Jasper notes the personal impact of a silencing sexual socialisation process, Frank (33:M:35-44:S) points out that the centrality of personal sexuality extends beyond the individual to include virtually all aspects of social living and, therefore, must not be ignored:

*“...the area is central to issues of relationship, communication, power, role, culture etc. It impinges upon life in a profound way. Not to address such an area would be to leave a large gap affecting all these areas and our way of living in relation to them.” (Q2)*

Sarah, Jasper and Frank reflect participants’ awareness that, as individuals, they are vulnerable to disempowerment by the pressures of societal structures and interests in relation to sexuality; furthermore, that society as a whole suffers in the course of this dynamic. Reflection on their personal sexual history has led to a “*subjective reframing*” of the problem (Mezirow, 1996:9), that is, in this context, to the problem of personal sexuality.

Looking beyond, though not excluding, their own individual needs, it could be said that from “*the authority of lived material experience*” (Thompson, 1996:21), the participants, by seeking an adult education forum as a route for women and men to address and redress this problem, are acting collectively and politically to bring about socio-cultural transformation through their contribution to this research.

Cormac (72:M:45-54:P), continuing with the analysis, turns the argument around from the socio-cultural effects on individual women and men which require redress to the effects of individual men’s unreflected and uncritiqued sexuality on society and culture. He argues that there is an obligation on adult education to make time and space available for learning on personal sexuality. This is because society, as a whole, is suffering from the lack of men’s engagement in critical reflection on their personal sexual development, thereby depriving new generations of positive male sexual role models:



*“If you’re looking around at the minute, look at the number of sexual attacks on elder women by young men...look at the joy-riding by young men...the whole drugs problem...now, I think part of that stems from the fact that there isn’t a contained, grounded role model for young men. Given societal upheavals, there isn’t any role model for young men. What we’ve come to see is this vastly competitive society for young men.” (I)*

Cormac’s qualification about the type of woman young men attack could be interpreted as suggestive that sexual attacks on younger women are less reprehensible than those on older women. It is more accurately interpreted as selecting to exemplify the ‘weaker’ in society in contrast to the ‘stronger’. Drawing on his experience and that of the other men in his group who participated in the course on personal sexuality, and urging that such courses should be available, Cormac continues:

*“Whereas, we have arrived at a certain degree of self-knowledge, a certain degree of groundedness which has got to be expressed verbally and in other ways and which has got to be experienced by the people who come in contact with us, a part of that groundedness comes from the awareness that we have got from having had the freedom and the environment to consciously reflect on our sexuality and to experience the unconscious osmotic effect of other people reflecting on their sexuality.... [other men] feel a need for that kind of space for reflection; if it would be given to them, then I think you would start redressing the ills of society. That’s putting things very widely, but there would be a start made to reconstructing a male role model.” (I)*

Cormac is affirming the ‘time and space’ which was offered by the personal development course when he adverts to *“the freedom and environment”* for consciously reflecting with others on personal sexuality. As he acknowledges, in relation to redressing the ills of society, he is *‘putting things very widely’* and, in that sense, qualifies his claim. However, his reflection above draws attention to issues which may appear to be gender specific in a relative sense. From the perspective of the women and men in this study, learning together about each other’s relative difference is a significant initiative towards resisting and/or dismantling some of the internal and external oppressive agencies bred in the cultural constructions of that difference. Cormac is currently expressing his own conviction and resistance by being party to

initiating and participating in the provision of courses on personal sexuality in his local community.

An aspect presenting itself in many of the participants' observations in relation to adult education and its aims regarding personal sexuality is that of 'time and space'. This is meant both literally and metaphorically. For an issue which the participants declare to be central to their lives and to their personhood, they find there is relatively little opportunity to reflect on its meaning for them as individuals and for society.

In this context, Darina (42:F:25-34:S) believes that, as sexual development is central to adult development, it must be central to adult education, and must be catered for methodically:

*"I would see, personally and professionally, sexuality development as hugely important, even vital to any constitution of learning throughout all our systems of learning. For individuation and for growth of the individual to occur, there must be a consistent time and space given to reflection on one's sexuality as we change." (J)*

Elsa reasons, in her appeal for an adult education provision, that 'time and space' to reflect on personal sexuality is not easily accessed in modern western society because society places so many other demands on people:

*"With the growing pressure of everyday life, people get very little chance or time to take stock of their lives in terms of relationships and sexuality. That's why it's important to include it in adult education programmes. People may not be functioning well in other areas of their lives and wondering why, and it can often be traced back to how they view relationships." (J)*

Lilah (76:F:35-44:S) agrees with Elsa's evaluation of contemporary time and space pressures militating against reflection on personal sexuality to the detriment of the individual and of his or her relationships:

*"With modern living, and I have become aware of it in reflecting on my own sexual journey, so many people have lost their own space, and it's about regaining that space for themselves, to reflect on their own*



*sexual journey, to understand where they are coming from and where they want to go, that is central to developing healthy relationships.”*

(I)

This connection between the pressures and pace of modern living, and the subsequent effect of the marginalisation of ‘time’ and ‘space’ for reflection on issues concerning personal sexuality, is an extension of the imposition of silence about personal sexuality, a recurrent theme throughout this study; in this case, attention is drawn to the silence imposed by ‘time and space’ demands of contemporary living alongside the silence imposed by cultural repression.

In the context of globalisation and the pressures of market forces, women and men experience feelings of political helplessness and “*uncertainty about the basis of personal identity...*” (West, 1998:236). Within this context, the individual is challenged at the level of identity, values, relationships and intimacy and what could be described as their ‘place-ment’, ‘dis-placement’, ‘re-placement’ and ‘self-placement’ in ‘time’ and ‘space’. It is against this “*modern living*” background, that Ella and Lilah foreground their lack of ‘time’ and ‘space’ for reflection on issues of personal sexuality.

An outcome of the pressures and pace of contemporary experience, aided by the developments in information and communications technology (Edwards and Usher, 1998:161), means that few gaps naturally occur in the course of a day or of a month in which the mind or the body ‘idles’. This results in what might be said to be a form of ‘microwave mentition’. The effects, as described by Elsa and Lilah, are that issues central to the person and personal relationships are either compressed, suppressed or by-passed.

‘Time and space’ for critical reflection on personal sexuality is potentially subversive and revolutionary in that such reflection leads to a critique of the societal values which marginalise a topic described by the participants as central to human development. As Giddens (1992:3) suggests, and already noted, the transformation of intimacy could dismantle the beyond question/taken for granted format of many dimensions of western

life, even those demands of competitive production in the work place; demands which absorb time and space in a manner which is often inimical to intimacy and relationship. It is, therefore, understandable why the participants in this study look to adult education, itself, arguably, a radical process, as the natural locus for such subversive and revolutionary discourse, as “*a location of possibility*” (hooks cited in Thompson, 1996:22) for transformative learning on personal sexuality.

Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) adds a cautionary note regarding the provision by adult education of courses on personal sexuality. Alert to the danger of substituting one oppressive imperative with another, Dermot insists that such provision must be based on need and freedom of choice rather than by imposition:

*“I really do think that exploring oneself as a sexual and gendered being is an important thing to do. It is a need that people feel and I would like adult education to be able to answer that need. And it would be important that it would be based on the need. I think that is the thing that I would certainly ask for, that it is an answer to an expressed need rather than something that would look upon it as good for someone and they should do it.” (I)*

Dermot’s affirmation of the exploration of personal sexuality as “*a need people feel*” and one which is appropriate for an adult education response, provided such response is not imposed, while it prompts the questions ‘whose need?’, ‘from whence does it come?’ and ‘of what is it constituted?’ (Foucault, 1977; Bartowski, 1988), nonetheless identifies an important consideration in making an adult education provision.

The quotations used above as illustrations of participants’ observations touch upon the dilemma of human freedom and socio-cultural influence: there cannot be freedom outside of culture and yet some cultures can destroy freedom. These quotes portray the fact that personal sexuality and individual freedom have, according to the participants, been severely compromised by socio-cultural influences; and that this oppression has been achieved mainly through a cultural denial and repression of sexuality.



The participants suggest that adult education must take up the role or the task of offering courses on personal sexuality, so as to contribute to personal freedom and the development of a more just and affirmative cultural approach to sexual relations. Furthermore, it is suggested that the outcome of adult education taking on such a role and making such provision could contribute to transforming society itself in relation to sexuality. It would achieve this by facilitating the presence within society of men and women with a greater capacity for critical reflection and a more holistic perspective on sexuality acting within the institutions of society and as role models for the generations following.

The participants in this study challenge adult education providers to hear and respond to their expressed needs in relation to personal sexuality. The challenge is being made in the belief that, because transformative learning in adult education, as it has been portrayed to these participants, *“has the radically democratic development of knowledge at its heart”* (Barr, 1998:71) and

*“has a vision of learners engaged in dialogic participatory discourse, collectively seeking ways of changing themselves and society so that all systems, organisations and individuals respond to the needs of others”* (Fleming, 1996:52)

and has the framework for facilitating women and men in

*“..exercising considerable imagination, critical thinking, subversion and undutiful behaviour to destabilise and de-construct the authority of the inevitable”* Thompson (1996:21),

adult education’s providers will respond!<sup>5</sup>

From the perspective of the participants, adult learning focused on personal sexual story has beneficial effects on the society in which they live. Each participant is conscious of his and her interactive and influencing role in the community at the level of inter-personal relations. Many are conscious of their interactive and influencing

---

<sup>5</sup> How this may actually happen is addressed in chapter seven.

position in society through their professional, work-related roles. All are aware of their potential to bring about change in their own lives and to effect or influence change in the wider community.

Martin (73:M:35-44:P) believes that the process of adult learning about personal sexuality in an adult education forum has a 'societal ripple' effect. Referring to the outcome of such learning, he asserts:

*"No one appreciates their need for help until they appreciate that there is somewhere that they want to be which isn't where they are. That, I think, requires the expansion of a group of people who have had the good fortune to have been given some time in this atmosphere where they can safely and confidently either reflect on themselves or where they absorb other people's reflections. It's almost personal economics translated into social economics....if there is this group of grounded people, other people will see...there will be a trickle down effect..." (I)*

Martin's belief in the out-reaching, societal effect of adult education in personal sexuality is echoed by Mitzi (74:F:25-34:P). Reflecting on the oppressive aspects of patriarchal relations in institutions such as the Law, she observes:

*"The magic thing about all of those things is that they're only made up of doses of people and, if you can get one of them... it ripples out into transformative effects and that's just the way life is; if you get one dominant person in the jury, in a rape case, for example,.... [that person is] able to sway a lot of other people because he or she believes in what they're at. It's the same with any other institution, with the Church or any other huge business." (I)*

Mitzi emphasises that individual personal developmental learning in adult education is necessary for societal change. Without the personal liberatory effects of learning which leads to self-knowledge and understanding, the individual remains disempowered:

*"But, I do think that adult education is necessary if you are going to have people who are able to change the structures, or challenge the structures of society, because, if you don't know who you are, and what you want, and how you think things should be, you won't have the energy to challenge anything, really. You know, when you're so busy minding yourself, you don't have any energy." (I)*



Megan (32:F:25-34:P) concurs with the view that people can be so constrained by internal inhibitions that part of the transformative learning process is to create an environment in which this internal material can be focused on and addressed before an expectation of either individual or social transformative action can be entered. In her view, the tendency in adult education is to focus on the external at the expense of the internal, on the political at the expense of the personal:

*“I think in adult education we tend to focus an awful lot on the external world. So, it’s always around the oppressed or it’s always around the system, or freeing the person up to be creative or explore their potential. It’s only in the last few years that I have begun to realise that there are internal blocks in people which block them even in the most wonderful situations of actually engaging with their potential.” (I)*

Having said that, Megan believes that the relationship between the personal and the political, the individual and social, consists of an on-going dynamic; they are interwoven, and there cannot be one without the other:

*“But, if you’re challenged at your core level to look at yourself, you can’t do it in isolation of the relationships you’re in in the workplace or anything; and it’s around relationships.... I would believe that any kind of work that has at its core change and development - we’re not in vacuums - will lead people to challenge the roles they’re in, the way they relate to people, the political structures, the jobs. It’s bound to.” (I)*

Mitzi and Megan highlight an on-going tension in the academic debate regarding transformative learning in adult education: that is, the tension between the personal and the political and the extent to which the emphasis and focus in the learning forum should rest with either or both.

‘Political’ is a word with a depth range the level of which is determined by the interpretation placed on it. In relation to learning, Brookfield (1987:162) asserts that

*“Political learning occurs when people become aware of the pervasiveness of issues of power and control in all spheres of human interaction and then work to alter the patterns and structures of human*

*interaction. It involves critical analysis, reflection, and action in the world. It can take place in widely varying settings and at different levels of involvement."*

'Political', as it is used in this text, refers to a) breaking the learning mould by facilitating women and men in critical reflection and dialogue on their personal sexual stories, and by facilitating them

*"to realise that their value systems and behavioural codes are culturally and interpersonally received, not divinely ordained..." so that "once these internalised assumptions are externalised, it becomes possible to consider questioning and altering them." (Brookfield, 1987:177)*

and b) the outcomes of this process; that is the social behaviours and actions engaged in by the participants which result from reflection and analysis of their experience of personal sexuality. 'Political', here, does not refer exclusively to an organised, collective challenge to the institutions and structures of society in order to change them.

Speaking from her experience of having a physical disability and having lived in an institution for much of her early life, Joy (6:F:35-44:P) demonstrates how, within the emancipatory learning process of reflection on personal sexual history, 'the political' can be explicitly as well as implicitly operative together with 'the personal'. In articulating her story of learning about sexuality, she thereby chooses also to transcend her individual agenda and to act as an advocate for a minority in society; a minority group with whom she personally identifies and perceives to be marginalised in relation to personal sexuality:

*"It is important not to skate over issues of sexuality, to ignore them, or to pretend that diverse sexuality does not exist within the disabled community. If people with a disability are to be treated on a truly equal basis with non-disabled people, then we have to create space for discussions about sexuality - whatever that may ultimately mean. We should not assume that just because people are brought up in institutions means that they are never going to have to deal with problems associated with sexuality... I think I discovered on that course that I owed it, I owed an awful lot more to the people who*



*would have been in those institutions at the same time as me, to discuss the way I felt about being treated the way I was.” (J &I)*

Joy indicates how the movements between the personal and the political are as tides in the one sea. Hart (1992:202-204) draws attention to *‘the courage to know’* required by those at the ‘centre’ in order to seek out the injustices practised on those at the ‘margins’. As is evident in this study in relation to personal sexuality, there is the issue of ‘the courage to speak’. Joy, in speaking her personal sexual story within the learning group, acts politically, challenging the members of the learning group to have the courage to know of the reality of her sexual learning experience and that of her peers, as she perceived it, in the socially marginalised world of people with disabilities who have been institutionalised. The socially constructed distance between the margins and the centre collapses relatively in the shared recognition of common personal sexual experience. Having spoken on behalf of those whom she felt to be not only silenced in their sexuality but also deprived of consideration as sexual beings, Joy, subsequently, lobbied for and achieved the introduction of a course on personal sexuality into an ‘Education for Independent Living’ programme for a national group of women and men with disabilities. Joy, a member of a socially and sexually subjugated minority (Petrie and Shaw, 1998:159), by critical reflection on her shared personal sexual story, is conscientized, and thus, *‘emerges’* to *‘intervene in reality’* (Freire; 1972:81).

Joy’s response confirms the Freirean view that adult learners are not passive receptors ready, as it were, for insertion of the micro-chip of adult education’s radical thinking. Their presence in the group, or in the class-room, and their willingness to name their experience in a group is, itself, already a political action and, sometimes, a radical one.

### **The relevance of adult education in personal sexuality for work**

A majority of the participants who work outside the home refer to the implications for their work of having had access to personal development learning courses on

sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Professionals from the teaching, nursing, policing, legal, community development and adult education spheres, for example, explicitly express the value that their adult learning about personal sexuality brings into the workplace, thereby effecting change in the relations, quality, and processes of their work.

The reasons given by those who indicate that their learning on the course in personal sexuality contributes, or will contribute, to their work include an increase in personal confidence in relation to sexuality which enables them to address sexual issues arising in their work situation. Paul (21:M:35-44:P), a policeman, refers to the positive professional outcome of the learning he experienced in terms of his confidence and ability to work with people who are involved as victims or perpetrators of sexual crimes. Wanda (11:F:25-34:S), a house-parent for young adults, states:

*“I work with young adults with learning difficulties and challenging behaviours; people who are developing and questioning with regards to their development as individuals and, especially, as sexual men and women. I find myself speaking more confidently with the people I work with, as a direct result of this course.” (Q2)*

Confidence about working with mixed sex groups is another example of the type of feedback made by participants. Rosa (2:F:45-54:P), anticipating future work, states:

*“If I were to facilitate a mixed group, I would be more relaxed and confident on matters sexual. This course has been very beneficial to me as a woman and as someone who would like to be employed in the field of adult education and community work.” (Q2)*

---

<sup>6</sup> Fifty-three of the sixty-five people, asked whether or not the learning on the course in personal sexuality would contribute to their work situation, answered in the affirmative. Only one of the eight who answered ‘no’, commented on his answer. His comment was, in effect, more positive than negative:

*“Potentially, yes; in that a) it has helped me to push back, or forward, my own boundaries; b) [it has] given me ideas regarding framework, difficulties, fears, issues, and dangers in addressing areas around sexuality.” (Q2)*

Of the other seven who answered the question in the negative, two are counsellors. These two participants had received extensive training which included reflection on their personal sexual learning histories. Two participants are adult educators, which may indicate that they are already skilled at this level by virtue of the professional training they have acquired or, on the other hand, that they do not find it important for their particular work. Of the three remaining participants, two do not work outside the home, and one is currently unemployed, from which it might be inferred that they do not consider this question relevant to their current experience.



James (23:M:45-54:P) responds similarly to Rosa. He is exploring the possibility of a career change, or an expansion of his present work as a panel beater, to include personal development work with youth. James confirms the benefit his increased confidence as a result of the learning on personal sexuality is contributing to this venture:

*“I have recently been involved in a project for developing life skills awareness for youth. I really find myself drawn in that direction and can see a direct application for this learning.” (Q2)*

The achievement of skills to work more effectively in the professional tasks of, for example, teaching, nursing and community education is also named as an work-related outcome of the learning. Janet (5:F:45-54:P), a psychiatric nurse, exemplifies the type of comment made in this regard:

*“I need to be able to discuss sexual problems with my patients without embarrassment and the inclusion of old personal hang-ups. I feel so much more at ease with the whole subject.” (Q2)*

An instance of this, referred to earlier in the text, is offered by Aine, who is a community worker in the inner city:

*“I would suggest that this type of course is an essential part of learning for all adults.... After all, if we are comfortable with ourselves and embrace our own sexuality, it is only then that we can reach out and help others in society, thereby allowing them to develop into their full selves... I work with a Community Education Project in inner city Dublin. We offer a wide range of courses to local people including personal development courses, women’s health courses, etc. But, to date, we have not offered courses on sexuality. In autumn, we hope to rectify this matter and introduce a sexuality course to the curriculum.” (J)*

Aine’s critical analysis and reflection on the structure of the adult education curriculum in the inner city community in which she works, and her action to effect change in the curriculum to include courses in personal sexuality, is an example of how her personal

learning is also a political learning (Brookfield, 1987:162) and translated into social action.

Another instance of the interaction between the personal learning achieved on the course in sexuality and action in the workplace is exemplified by Martin. Martin is a member of the legal profession, specialising in personal and family affairs:

*“Before the course, I had never come across a sexual problem! 50% of women clients, since then, have told me about their experience of being sexually abused as children. So, something, at a subliminal level, changed as a result of that course - from a professional point of view..... I was giving people permission to talk about areas which were clearly very difficult areas for them.” (I)*

“Giving people permission to talk” is, in this context, another way of describing a relationship which empowers another to overcome inhibitions through the removal of one’s own, often unconscious, defensive or incorporated constraints. Personal liberation opens up new ground on which others feel welcome to tread. This is reflected in Martin’s practice. Martin further reflects that, as an outcome of the course, he has come into possession of himself in a way which enables him to exercise his role in and on society more effectively, on behalf of those who experience abusive behaviour in their interpersonal and institutional relations. Referring to his current advocacy on behalf of his clients, Martin reflects:

*“..that’s where the real value of the course of this nature lies, that if I know myself and I’m comfortable with myself, I can say in front of the Judge, in front of the Lord Chief Justice, in front of anybody, ‘I’m me. I’m entitled to be here.’ I can say my piece. And I’ll not be stammering and I will have the confidence to speak because I know who I am.” (I)*

These examples of participants’ evaluation of their personal learning and the implications of that learning in relation to the wider society in which they live and work is validated by Mezirow (1990:363) when he states:

*“Adult educators have differing views on whether individual or social transformations are the ultimate goals of adult education. What*



*emerges as common ground is that we must begin with individual perspective transformations before social transformations can succeed.”*

The participants of this study assert that personal sexuality is a topic for transformative learning in adult education's provision because it is central to the individual and pivotal in terms of social relations. They affirm the role adult education can play, both in terms of their personal well-being and in terms of political effectiveness, within and on the institutions and structures of society.

Looking at it from the perspective of transformational learning, as Damian points out, the participants judge that personal development courses in adult education must incorporate the “*whole picture*” in such learning. They perceive this as meaning the incorporation of critical reflection on personal sexuality in order to see the whole picture and to begin to transform it.

In addition, the participants above indicate that issues of sexuality are frequently met in the course of their professional work with adults. The work indicated ranges over a wide spectrum. Across this spectrum, the participants assert, transformative learning in relation to their personal sexuality enhanced their ability to work more effectively with and on behalf of others.

### **The appropriateness of the adult education environment for the topic of personal sexuality**

Because of the personal risk experienced by the participants in engaging in experiential learning in relation to personal sexuality, a strong emphasis comes through in the findings related to issues of trust, safety and empathy in the learning environment.

Karen (30:F:35-44:P) reflects on her experience, indicating both the importance of the topic and value of having a safe learning environment:

*“The course was dealing with a subject which is relevant to every single human being. It was also dealing with a subject around which almost everybody has at best baggage and, at worst, problems and difficulties. We approached the course with trepidation, anticipation and a certain excitement. Each of us had our own personal reason for selecting this option. From the beginning, each member of the group felt respected and safe within the group...a prerequisite, in my opinion, when such a sensitive topic is being explored.” (I)*

Sally (44:F:25-34:P) expresses an anxiety which can accompany choosing such a course:

*“I firmly believe that people need and want sexuality courses, but have that fear of baring all.” (I)*

Sally’s comment reflects the reality that speaking about personal sexuality is self-revealing and self-revelation, at this level and in Western culture, can be experienced as threatening, and is often painful. This is consistent with Fraser (1995:143), who asserts the inevitability of pain in experiential learning, not because past trauma is remembered:

*“...but in the realisation of, and the connection with, the implications which cohere around the initial painful event. Reflection can thus call into being the deeper complexities in the formation of experience and thence generate experience anew.”*

Darina (42:F:25-34:S) emphasises the special nature of a learning course on personal sexuality and the need, therefore, for safety and trust in the learning forum:

*“Any [personal] sexuality course, as much as, and probably more than [another] personal development course, due to its provocative and very primal nature, must promote safety, sharing, giving, empathy and dialogue.... it is most truly effective when the relationships forged promote genuine interconnection.” (J)*

Megan (32:F:25-34:P) corroborates this need for a secure environment for personal adult learning of this kind. In so doing, she reiterates the centrality of the topic for personal development:



*“I think one’s sexuality is, at essence, a core, core issue. And that if you’re going to do that [offer courses on personal sexuality], you need to do it in a very safe and supported way.” (I)*

In further consideration of the safety of the learning environment, participants emphasise the importance of skilled facilitation and the role of the facilitator in maintaining that safety. A skilled facilitator, they assert, creates and preserves a secure environment for engaging with sensitive material and retains focus on the topic. Aoife (37:F:35-44:Sep) cautions:

*“I think the role is one which requires a high level of competence and trust in order to hold the difficult moments. I would not recommend educators to take on the role lightly.” (Q2)*

Madeleine (26:F:35-44:P) voices the participants’ perspectives when she asserts that:

*“The presence of a facilitator is a vital component for the course. The facilitator establishes a group contract which is essential to produce a feeling of safety in the group and to encourage bonding.” (J)*

Babette (67:F:35-44:P) notes how the facilitators helped the groups to establish, confirming the safety of the learning space:

*“They... opened our minds to new ideas without undue pressure. This made us all feel at ease as a group together. We felt it safe to open up and we had many laughs too.” (Q2)*

Madeleine sees the facilitator as contributing to the learning:

*“...by actively encouraging participation by each member and looking for views or experiences which may be different to those already expressed.” (J)*

Jason (43:M:45-54:P) concurs with Madeleine, noting that the participation by all of the group on the topic is helped by the exercise of facilitative skills:

*“The facilitator was very important here, as a lot of subject matter was very personal and required a great deal of sensitivity. A number of participants, including myself, had to, at times, be drawn out. The was done quite successfully and proved very revealing.” (Q2)*

The facilitator’s active role is viewed by Martha (16:F:45-54:P) as contributing to the chemistry of the group, enabling dialogue:

*“It would not be possible to engage at a deep level of discussion without a facilitator. The facilitator was the catalyst that initiated discussion.” (Q2)*

Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) uses the metaphor of ‘space’ which arose earlier to illustrate his experience. Reflecting on the dialectical encounters in the group, he emphasises the complexity of personal sexuality and relationships and the role of the facilitator in ensuring that respect for each person is maintained and boundaries protected, so that the integrity of each person’s experience is valued and accepted:

*“So having a space that is a space, that is conducted and facilitated by a skilled person, who can allow you to have your reality and allow me to have my reality, and to ensure that neither is disempowered by the meeting is fundamental.... To hear another person and to hear how they experience me and, you know, all that kind of stuff - so, I mean, life is very complex and relationships are very complex, and growing as adults and in relationships is a very complex and fraught area. So having a safe place to hear each other is absolutely fundamental.” (I)*

Dermot underlines the importance of the facilitator having the skills appropriate for personal development work. This theme is picked up by Jill (10:F:25-34:P):

*“...it is VITAL that the course facilitator knows how to conduct the course to make it successful.” (Q.2)*



Jenny (69:F:45-54:P), was encouraged by the personal participation of the facilitators in her group:

*“I liked the way they were ‘one of us’; they shared their experiences with us, talked to us, not at us. They were very open about their feelings also.” (Q2)*

Jenny’s description of the facilitators’ role, and that of the other participants quoted above, captures elements of what Allman (1988:97) refers to as ‘co-investigating reality’, Mezirow (1990:368) as ‘collaborative learning’ and Marsick (1990:36) as ‘modelling the process’, in which learners and educators engage in a joint learning venture.

Wanda (11:F:25-34:S) is specific in outlining some of the tasks which she perceives as essential in supporting the learning process for courses in personal sexuality, and which, she believes, adult education offers:

*“The facilitator of such a course has an arduous task of developing trust and confidence with a element of calmness coupled with forthrightness... such a person needs a broad range of personal and group skills to assist the group in functioning as a whole but yet to encourage individual growth and transformation.” (J)*

Wanda is also aware of the fact that transformational learning in personal sexuality may result in a number of participants needing and seeking external professional therapeutic help. The facilitator, from Wanda’s perspective, offers a safe referral route to such help, a perspective confirmed by Brookfield (1986:143,144), Mezirow (1991:204-206) and Gould (1990:134-155).

Because of the centrality and sensitivity of the topic, a secure environment means having choices about the level and type of participation at different stages in the learning; this is an important part of the process of critical reflection. It can be a process of ‘reculer pour mieux sauter’: to step backward in order to better leap forward.

Martin (73:M:35-44:P) describes variations in his learning process and the importance of freedom to choose the level and pace of self-disclosure:

*“The ambience of the course was such that there was a permission given there where matters could be ventilated, could be touched upon, and if they were painful, there was permission given to come back from them as well. There was no element of pushing; there was no element of manipulation; there was an air of openness, of freedom... of exploration... going as far as you want, retreating as far back as you want... I think that freedom to come and go, that permission, that acceptance... I think that is the essence of the course.” (I)*

Martin’s evaluation describes the movement between the intrapsychic and social relations and between passive and active modes of reflection normal to the processes of critical thinking. There are times when, metaphorically speaking, an approaching insight blinds the learner, causing him or her to recoil, temporarily, either on to the security of previously held ground or into ‘pause mode’. This is like the blink of the eye in order to clear the vision. Martin is emphasising the importance of facilitators being capable of interpreting and evaluating these dynamics sufficiently to ensure that the learner is allowed a benign ‘regressive-progressive’ learning space (Lowe 1977), without sacrificing the transformative thrust for all members of the learning group, including the learner concerned.

With regard to an appropriateness of the environment for adult learning on personal sexuality, it is the consensus of the participants that facilitated personal development courses in adult education offer a trustworthy forum suited to engagement with intimate topics such as personal sexuality; and that the structure and ethos of the course they had experienced verified, for them, that personal development courses in adult education enable significant learning on the central and sensitive issue of personal sexuality.

Shared learning, in group, is an important aspect of personal development courses in adult education which the participants find contributes significantly to learning in personal sexuality.



Joy (6:F:35-44:P) affirms the value of shared learning:

*"I think realising that there might be somebody in the group who is just like you - or many who are just like you....just to know you're not the only person. You can also learn a lot from listening to what other people say and the ways they would have dealt with various things. I suppose just really listening and learning from what other people are saying and listening to what you're saying yourself and questioning [is beneficial]." (I)*

Quite simply, in speaking about the learning value of listening in a group, Joy's reference to the value of listening to herself speak reflects a key aspect of the process regarding personal sexuality: the untold story teaches the storyteller in its telling. When the hidden is brought into the light of open conversation and discussion, it is capable of being seen more completely; more alternatives can be explored; and more choices can be made about responses. Furthermore, when it comes into the light of shared conversation and discussion, it becomes available for critical analysis with other members of the group, thereby, as Kerfoot and Knights (1994:68,69) assert,

*"...occasioning the possibility of a more creative engagement with, or perhaps even subversion of, the practices sustaining socially constituted sexual differences at the level of their discursive production."*

It becomes part of the collective conversation and discussion: it contributes to the democratisation of discourse on personal sexuality.

James (23:M:45-54:P) also reflects participants' valuing of shared learning on personal sexuality, and how it contributes to acquiring insights:

*"Just from listening to some of the dialogues, for instance, has identified misconceptions that we carry into our adulthood. We often never get the chance to identify and clarify these areas. It is essential that a mechanism be available to put the records straight. This should enable the individual to better understand and further complement their sexuality."(Q2)*

*"I really enjoyed the opportunity to witness other adult points of view in a setting that was uniquely conducive for this topic. It's not often*

*that this opportunity comes along as in most similar situations, there are undertones and hidden agendas.” (J)*

Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) stresses the value of shared learning in an adult education forum in contrast to adult learning which can be acquired from books, videos and other media:

*“We learn from each other. Most often, in adult education, the group is actually where the learning takes place..it’s not information. Again, it’s an amorphous thing - between actually meeting people, sharing stories, hearing stories, disagreeing, getting information, perhaps, from people’s experience, who’d been through a similar process, you know. And that’s where learning happens, through a combination of those things we’re talking about, not just in a cognitive learning [way] - it’s obviously a holistic learning and takes in a lot more than just information.” (I)*

Dermot’s appreciation of the dialectical dynamics of an experiential adult education course is affirmed in Barr (1998:80), whose commitment in adult education, as indicated in Chapter Two, is to:

*“...the articulation of ‘views from below’ - not because they offer truer, more accurate accounts of the world but because they increase the possibilities of knowledge, especially knowledge which is useful to those who generate it.”*

Martin (73:M:35-44:P) perceives shared learning as a validating process for those participating. Describing aspects of his expectations in attending a course on personal sexuality he states:

*“I... expect to be treated as an adult with an experience which is a valid experience and which might actually have some benefit to other people when they hear it. I think the whole nature of what we are talking about, of the growth we have been talking about, is specific to adult education.” (I)*

Martin recognises the role each member of a learning group has, including himself, in acquiring new knowledge and expanding perspectives. Cecily (20:F:25-34:P) particularly welcomes the shared learning effected by the inclusivity of a course which



is relevant to any human being, and to which any person can access, if such courses are provided for by adult education:

*“The course, by its nature, can include all adults. This is a topic on which all adults have experience and the discussion element of the course includes everyone. Therefore, it is a course that can be offered to people from all walks of life.” (J)*

Part of the inclusivity referred to by Cecily, for a majority of the participants, is the inclusion of members of both sexes within the groups.

All of the participants who experienced mixed sex groups, with one exception, gave positive evaluations to learning in this type of group. Jill (41:F:35-44:Sep) was sceptical of the authenticity of the men’s contribution to her group. In contrast to the other women participants, Jill felt the men in the group were not serious about the learning:

*“I found that the guys in the class were really negative... I felt like stepping in and asking them to leave as they did not seem to be there to gain any awareness, knowledge or to be willing to participate, just to make their own noise.” (J)*

Laura (38:F:34-44:Sep), who was a member of the same group as Jill, experienced men’s participation in the group differently:

*“It enhanced the group because each sex could see that the other was human and experienced similar experiences; had doubts, fears and anxieties just like everyone else.” (Q2)*

The positive evaluations were, nonetheless, not uncritical. Paula (45:F:25-34:S) welcomed the mixed sex group but noted a difference in the quality of the sharing between the women and the men:

*“Too often, discussion and education in this area is segregated on the basis of gender. For that reason, I support the mixed group. It was challenging and informative and added to the sessions. On the other*

*hand, sometimes, it was harder to share with men there, and I didn't always think they shared positively enough with the group and were a bit reluctant. Maybe that means we need more mixed groups."* (Q2)

Achieving the optimum balance in discussion by any mixed sex group is a difficult feat. Factors such as the way that men, culturally, inhabit and predominate conversational space has a part to play (Frye, 1990:179), in particular when set over against the assumption held by both women and men that women are more skilled at discussing personal issues pertaining to sexuality. In addition, in a number of the mixed sex groups in this study, the men are in a significant minority; this held the danger of their being 'nurtured' in the groups. Furthermore, the facilitators for the groups were women. In this context, it is understandable to find that experiences of mixed sex groups varied. Nonetheless, it is notable that a majority who participated in mixed sex groups, overall, considered that to be of significant benefit.

However, while the majority ultimately welcomed the mixed sex groups, and this is also evident throughout the earlier chapters, not every participant felt comfortable with it initially. In the beginning, Karen (30:F:35-44-P) was quite timorous about the experience:

*"The male presence in the group caused me some initial anxiety; sexuality has always been so private and secretive. I even found myself upset by their contributions for the first night or two. I realise now that this was due to lack of exposure to the male perspective on sexuality. As the group progressed from week to week, I realised that the male input was quite valuable and probably even necessary for balance and wholeness."* (J)

For some of the participants, hearing a member of the other sex disclose on a topic so culturally cloaked as personal sexuality was an experience akin to seeing people undress for the first time. This indicates the radical learning potential present; even speaking together on this topic is transformative.

As Aileen (18:F:35-44:P) states, being in a mixed group meant that the quality of learning was enhanced:



*"The fact that our group had male participants, in my opinion, contributed greatly to the depth of learning of the group." (J)*

Cecily (20:F:25-34:P) welcomes, unreservedly, the sex inclusivity of the course. She notes that, in adult education, many courses are in fact implicitly sex specific, which she perceives as unliberating and stereotypically reinforcing:

*"A course on sexuality, gender and personal development offers adults returning to adult education the opportunity to travel the road of their own personal 'history', relive it and address problems that can only be solved by reflection and perspective transformation. With the introduction of adult education in latter years, adults have been offered courses from car maintenance to patchwork quilting, but almost always, each course on offer has a gender target group, thus reinforcing the gender imbalance in society." (J)*

Ben (4:M:45-54:R) specifically values the shared learning with a mixed sex group:

*"I...found the course helped me reflect on the area of sexuality in a way I have not done before. Of special value to me was the particular learning group of mixed backgrounds of which I was a member. Not alone had I never sat down with women before to discuss aspects of our personal sexual experiences but it was the first time I did it in a group that was not totally made up of religious and all male. I value the experiences that were shared from which I received new knowledge." (J)*

James (23:M:45-54:P) concurs with Ben, confirming the value of shared learning and of sharing with members of the opposite sex:

*"I reckon that I have learned a lot about life from a woman's perspective and understand them just a little bit more. It is essential to have some insight as to what makes the other half tick, and [it] can often mean the difference in understanding or not. I would like to think that the same thing applied in our own [men's] case, and that the learning was two fold." (J)*

Jason (43:M:45-54:P) agrees that learning about personal sexuality in a mixed sex adult education group is advantageous. However, he qualifies his approval regarding

the outcome of such learning together. In Jason's view, learning together will not overcome the negative aspects of gender difference:

*"The differences, physical, emotional and mental makeup, are too great but such courses do clearly give a better and deeper understanding of each viewpoint and, as a result, should lead to better understandings, more peaceful and fruitful relationships between the sexes. This can only benefit all concerned, from the individual to the marriage base and through to community level and society as a whole."* (J)

Jason's view of the gender divide between women and men as insurmountable highlights the depth of that divide and the need to address it.

Damian (7:M:25-34:P) is more optimistic in his evaluation of a shared learning which includes learning with members of the opposite sex; he found it to be of significant value, emphasising the need for a forum of this kind to address men and women's misapprehensions about each other:

*"The experiences of the participants are shared and validated. This is the core of the learning. The fact that the group was well represented by both sexes meant that significant dialogue took place. I am again reminded that, in society, in general, no forum or context exists for this kind of sharing and learning. This is astonishing considering the amount of misinformation about needs, aspirations and choices between the sexes."* (J)

Damian considers the validation of personal experience, in a context of shared, mixed sex, dialogic learning, to be of central benefit. In this recognition is contained, in practice, radical adult education's objective of 'making experience count' (Fraser, 1995; Hart, 1990). His recognition also contains an allusion to the validating "confirmation and community" which is a prerequisite of women's preferred learning environments, in contrast to the individualistic, competitive, pre-confirmatory requirements in conventional educational practice (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986:194).



As indicated earlier, a number of the participants testified that there was value added to their personal learning about sexuality which related to their professional and working situations. Mixed sex groups had a contribution to make to learning for the workplace. Emma (28:F:25-34:P) is an example of those who appreciated the shared learning with men for this reason:

*“One of the advantages of working with such a group has been the experience of working with such a mixture of people. One of the things I gained most in terms of group work was the experience of working with men on issues relating to sexuality. I think I have become a lot more comfortable around working with men as a result.” (J)*

Gertrude (22:F:45-54:P), like Emma, also points to the value she experienced from a professional perspective:

*“Having men as part of the group helped me to gain insights into how the opposite sex reacts to certain situations and, as I teach both men and women, I feel this is of immense benefit.” (J)*

There are arguments to be made both for shared learning in single sex groups and in mixed sex groups. This study does not explore and contrast the two forms. It accepts that the dynamics are different in each type. However, it is evident from the research that, from the participants’ perspectives, personal development courses in adult education on the topic of sexuality, whether it be through single sex or mixed sex groups, offers an appropriate, safe, dialogic and structured forum in which transformative learning can take place. It may be argued that single sex groups for women facilitates an altogether more transformative outcome than when they share learning space with men; this is because of the pressure of working in an environment of social inequality and with oppressive codes of behaviour which prevail in any mixed sex group and which are antipathetic to women’s perspectives, values and concerns (Thompson, 1983:116-119). However, learning about personal sexuality in a mixed sex forum could prove to be ultimately the more subversive and revolutionary of the two possibilities. Cutting through swathes of gender constructs to the roots of personal sexual story holds the promise of a radical denouement, each sex to the other, of how fundamentally disenfranchised each is by the prevailing culture, the roles each

plays in sustaining that culture, and how, by critically reflecting on their own and each other's experience, by learning and working together, strategies may be developed for changing culture.

### **The relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality**

A majority of the participants express the view that personal sexuality and personal emancipation are intertwined. Because of the centrality of sexuality, any transformative learning in relation to personal sexuality is judged by them to be a critical experience and should, therefore, be high on the agenda of any transformative learning curriculum.

Laura (38:F:35-44:Sep) is forthright about her needs and expectations. She takes the view that, as personal sexuality is central to holistic personal development, it is, therefore, central to a transformative learning process in adult education:

*"I think that, as adults, it's our right to like ourselves and to express our sexuality and to be real human beings - not with Halloween masks on and not living up to somebody else's unreal expectations and afraid of unreal criticisms and real criticisms, and that it's OK to be us. But we're never taught that, and it's not a skill that you can ever acquire anywhere except in adult education, because it's not there for us..." (I)*

In her conviction about the necessity for an adult education provision, Laura is strongly assertive of the need for it:

*"I believe that personal development [sexuality] courses are not only a necessity in today's world and should be included in all adult education settings but are a prerequisite to good and positive mental health and well-being." (I)*

Speaking from her own experience, Laura perceives the outcome of such adult education as facilitating a transformative shift towards personal change agency:



*“This type of course enables people to develop themselves, to become more personally effective, more autonomous and affirmed in their own sexuality. It develops their self advocacy skills and enables and empowers them to be more productive, healthy, self-fulfilled human beings.” (J)*

Karen (30:F:35-44:P) is in agreement with Laura’s evaluation, stating that the process of adult learning on personal sexuality

*“sets us free...assists us in altering our previously held but quite often limiting mindsets, moves us on to a freer more expanded way of viewing the world we live in.” (J)*

Both Karen and Laura offer an interpretation of personal sexual development and transformative learning consistent with Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990; 1991). As with any personal development focus, the question arises as to the whether or not the learning is genuinely transformative (Inglis, 1997; Ryan, 1997(b); Lovett, 1988).

In response to an observation that courses in personal sexuality may serve to reinforce the prevailing culture by merely encouraging ‘feel good’ experiences in the participants without engaging them in critical analysis and remedial action, where appropriate, Dermot (36:M:25-34:P) reflects:

*“Well, it’s a common argument.... There is a sort of opinion prevalent that the humanistic principles on which adult education is based are quite often...are actually a way of helping us to feel better about living in a crap society; to feel better about living in a disempowered, disadvantaged, patriarchal, unequal system; that the feel good factor is enough...it’s like the opium approach to adult education, counselling, and therapy. And I suppose I just disagree with it. I disagree with it simply because I know that isn’t the case. It can be, of course, but I suppose that empowerment is a process whereby somebody...whereby people realise their oppression, become aware of it and find the energy freed up to do something about it, and I believe that adult education, having the psychological know-how as well as the social and political worldview and a critical radical approach to issues that people present, I feel that it does, actually, contribute to emancipatory learning and emancipation in terms of*

*freeing oneself but also of working towards a just society. So I just see it working because I meet people, virtually on a daily basis, who feel deeply liberated rather than an accommodating approach, an opium approach.... Any approach that increases awareness has to contribute to discord and, therefore, to unbalancing the status quo." (I)*

Dermot is reflecting a predicament, current in adult education discourse, as indicated in Chapter Two, in which humanist/liberal and radical interpretations of reality appear to occupy oppositional poles; in which personal development and community/collective development can seem to be placed in opposition to each other, and positioned as though in conflict or competition with each other in terms of levels of transformational achievement.

Barbara (15:F:<25:S) is convinced that personal sexuality is not only a topic for individual learners' transformative education, it is an issue for transformative action by adult educators. She is acerbic in her criticism of the lacuna she perceives in the curriculum:

*"If adult education is meant to challenge the system and change behaviour, then there is no other area that has been so neglected. Sexuality has never been on the educational curriculum in Ireland except to force people into a certain type of behaviour. The negative reaction [by adults] to the implementation of the 'Stay Safe' programme and the proposed new sex education programme shows how closed we are to dealing with our sexuality." (J)*

Barbara's observations focus on the providers of adult education, confronting them with their avoidance of a topic central to transformative learning. From her perspective, because of the centrality of sexuality, it ought to be central to the personal and political agenda of transformative learning institutions, including that of adult education.

Supporting Barbara's challenge to providers and institutions of adult education to take transformative action, Janet (5:F:45-54:P) argues that transformative learning in adult education, if it is to be faithful to its mission, has a responsibility to provide a learning forum for adults to engage with the topic of their personal sexuality:



*“In relation to the potential of this course for contributing to adult emancipatory learning, as part of an adult education curriculum, from research findings and personal experience, the inclusion of this aspect of education is a must. If adult education is to take a holistic approach to the on-going education of adults, how can issues of sexuality, gender and personal development be omitted.... Surely the omission of adult education in relation to their on-going, changing, sexual needs in adulthood, leaves each person’s potential towards self-actualisation deficient.” (J)*

Janet, moreover, considers the omission of such a learning provision in adult education as a form of oppression:

*“Educators need to dialogue about the aspects of education that are wanting.... Because of the learning in this course, I have become critically conscious of this source of oppression in our educational system. As sexuality is such a fundamental part of me as a person, so, too, is it a fundamental and absolute necessary part of adult emancipatory learning.... As a person’s education in the formative years would be incomplete without the inclusion of learning on the subject of sexual development, relationships, etc., so, too, is adult emancipatory learning without the availability of courses on sexuality and personal development as part of its curriculum. If adult education is to be available, it must be present as a form of learning that is whole. Without education re his/her own sexuality, no person is whole and, therefore, no adult learning curriculum is whole.” (J)*

This critique of adult education’s curriculum by Janet is strong. Yet the logic seems to be irrefutable: personal sexuality is a site of significant oppression (Cameron and Fraser, 1996; Tong, 1989; Foucault, 1978); that which is oppressive to personal development and to human freedom is central to transformative adult education (Freire, 1972). Therefore, as Janet and Barbara assert, transformative education should take cognisance of personal sexuality in its curriculum, if it is to achieve its goal.

Damian (7:M:25-34:P) continues with the challenge to adult education. He perceives learning about personal sexuality in adulthood in a manner which explores and critically reflects on personal sexual story as an transformative task congruent with the underlying principles and practices in transformative learning in adult education:

*“At the heart of this approach lies the idea of subjecthood, critical reflection and transformative learning. What better or more significant area to begin this process than in an exploration of our sexuality?.... As a working model for personal development work, exploring sexual history, sexual identity and options for personal development and growth, I would consider it absolutely necessary for inclusion on any serious adult learning programme. Otherwise, in what other context can this learning take place? ” (J)*

Damian’s conclusion that adult education has a vital role to play in offering a forum for transformative learning on the central issue of personal sexuality is echoed in Elsa’s critique. Elsa (29:F:25-34:P) believes there is a danger of such an important learning issue being overlooked by adult education, even in its personal development provision. Critiquing the over-emphasis on skills training in adult education, Elsa points out:

*“Too often, adult education is involved in giving people skills and knowledge for evolving as a person and we skim over or leave out completely their needs as a person and their needs for learning in relationships and sexuality. It is often seen as not the place for such learning. But how can we relate to people with these new skills and knowledge if we are unsure of our relationships and if we are inhibited in forming relationships by some thing in our history?” (J)*

Darina (42:F:25-34:S) is equally concerned by what appears to be the lack of attention to the central issue of personal sexuality in adult education:

*“The personal development modules [in adult education] have mushroomed nationally as the course that most people are involved in as adults. When will this happen for sexuality development?” (J)*

She questions the possibility of transformative learning taking place on personal development courses without attention to sexuality:

*“If adult learning has any part to play in changing the world we live in today, sexual development must be part of its scaffold.” (J)*

While Darina perceives a necessity for the inclusion of learning in personal sexuality on the personal development courses widely attended by the population, Laura (38:F:35-44:Sep) looks, as it were, upstream, focusing on specific key groups in society whom



she believes have a key, caring and educative role to play in relation to others' sexuality.

Laura identifies a need for people in such professional groups to engage with their own transformative learning in relation to sexuality in order to be effective as helpers, carers and as educators of those for whom and to whom they are responsible. She believes this is a significant social need. Without engaging in such a process, she asserts, such professionals may unwittingly bring their own unanalysed prejudices and inhibitions to bear on their approach to their work. Laura's assertion echoes Alheit's (1995) concern about adult educators. Laura views adult educators as having an important role to play in the transformative personal sexual education of such professionals. This is, she argues, part of adult education's remit as a socially transforming agency. As examples of professional groups with learning needs, she identifies three:

*"Nurses and all health care workers are involved in the care of people who may have different moral values, perceptions and behaviours to their own, just as they may have different religious or political beliefs. Nurses and health care workers do not need to embrace or even accept the values and morals of others, but, if they are to help patients and clients to address sexuality issues effectively, they need to be aware of their own values, attitudes and prejudices." (J)*

A second group Laura nominates is that of facilitators and group leaders. These, she points out, have a very wide remit with regard to personal development within the community, working with a variety of groups ranging from youth to local women's and men's groups. Facilitators and group leaders, Laura states:

*"have a very important role to play in addressing the whole case of sexuality. I believe they can be a catalyst for change.... They need to be fully prepared for the challenging role of teaching sexuality..." (J)*

The third group which Laura identifies is that of educators. She perceives a need for transformative learning in adult education in personal sexuality for educators themselves:

*“Sexuality is unique in education as the professional role interfaces with the personal experience, values, attitudes and beliefs of the educator. Educators as a subgroup of society are likely to be representative of the dominant ethos of that society and will bring their values and attitudes to the classroom. Therefore, I would argue that to place sexuality firmly and permanently on the agenda, all educators must be educated in this area and become aware of their own sexuality, what it means to them, how affirmed they are in it, what prejudices they have, and how they differ from others and what their limitations are.” (J)*

Laura perceives a social need for transformative learning in the area of sexuality. However, she believes that need will not be met unless key people, educators, health care workers, community group leaders and facilitators engage in critical reflection on their own sexuality. Otherwise, they, as educators in sexuality within the community, may bring to the learning relationship an uninterrogated set of personal sexual assumptions and presuppositions. Therefore, Laura sees the role of adult education and of the adult educator as central to achieving a break-through in this impasse. However, consistent with Alheit (1995), Laura has reservations about the preparedness of adult educators to meet the learning needs of these groups in society because they, too, she asserts, suffer from the same social conditioning as those who seek their services:

*“Adult educators are currently faced with increasing demands to address sexual issues as part of the educational system, but are still influenced by external forces and by factors within the profession that support the maxim that sexuality is a taboo subject. Therefore, sexuality within education and practice is often neglected or inadequately covered....” (J)*

Nonetheless, Laura believes the time is right for confronting adult educators with the issues surrounding sexuality by inviting them into critical reflection on their practice:

*“We can start to answer some of these questions by providing a catalyst for adult educators to reflect on their practice and understanding about this area which is, at present, inadequately dealt with, in a global sense, in education.” (J)*



Liz (31:F:<25:S), speaking from her experience as a participant on the personal development course and as an adult educator, suggests why adult education may overlook the significance of personal sexuality as indicated by the participants above:

*“...these [are] issues that should be part of learning and education and so on but, like a lot of sexuality questions, we put a lid on them. And, in the area I work, which is gender, we intellectualise them and we talk about the power of dimensions, and so on, but yet we don’t do it at the personal, subjective level.... The dilemma is that question of dealing with the link between the intellectualisation of sexuality and the very important personal development angle on it...” (I)*

Liz’s interpretation of adult education’s by-pass of the subjective, experiential aspects of sexuality in favour of abstract intellectualisation is a reminder of Hart’s (1992:1-14) concern about adult education’s contribution to the devaluation of experience-based knowledge in relation to work. It is a reminder of Barr’s (1998:79) concern about an over-valuation of theoretical knowledge and an undervaluation of knowledge *“born of experience and emotional understanding.”*

Personal experience is a crucial knowledge domain to be drawn on in any critical analysis or theoretical construction (Hart, 1998; Barr, 1999, 1998). Liz’s observation, combined with those of other participants suggests, as Bagnall (1990) emphasises, a need for the training curriculum of adult educators to include the experiential as well as the moral, theoretical and technical dimensions of knowledge. In the context of this study, the implication follows that adult educators would engage in critical reflection on their personal sexuality as part of their training for facilitating transformative learning in personal development.

Liz’s reasoning that

*“these [are] issues that should be part of learning and education and so on but, like a lot of sexuality questions, we put a lid on them” (I)*

highlights, once again, the theme of sexual silence running through this research: the power that cultural silencing exerts over even such radically committed movements as

transformative learning in adult education. Adult education for personal development, if it by-passes or marginalises the individual's subjective experience of sexuality, and concentrates on an abstract appreciation of the problematic, colludes with those oppressive interests and structures which maintain women and men in sexual subjugation.

In summary, the participants above conclude that adult education has a critical role to play in relation to personal sexual development in adulthood. There is consensus about the adult need for a transformative learning forum which offers a safe, facilitated, structured, shared environment in which women and/or men can engage in critical reflection on personal sexual histories. This, the participants assert, is important because of the centrality of this dimension of experience; a dimension which has far-reaching effects not only for themselves, as individuals, but, also, for the communities in which they live and work.

From the primary participants' perspectives, transformative learning in adult education and adult personal sexual development are deeply connected. In this context, the participants of the study, from their experiences of repression and oppression of personal sexuality and of liberative learning in adult education, challenge adult education to take up the task of collaborating in the liberation of subjugated knowledges: of breaking the sexual silence.

### **Perspectives on the relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality: professional adult educators**

In exploring the issue of the provision of courses in personal sexuality with a triangulating group of professional adult educators who are members of a university department, three areas of debate and discussion of interest to this study emerged. These form a counter-point to the findings of the primary participant groups. The areas of debate and discussion are as follows:

- personal development and transformative learning in adulthood;



- the relationship between the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’ for transformative learning;
- a dilemma posed by the centrality of personal sexuality for the provision of transformative learning courses in personal sexuality in adult education.

The seven members of the group brought, individually, differing perspectives to bear on these three areas of discussion. At times, this resulted in different emphases being placed by one or more of the group members on an aspect of the subject under discussion; at times, it resulted in a difference of opinion; at other times, consensus was achieved. Presented below is a distillation of the perspectives offered by the group followed by a brief summary recapitulating the key points relative to this study.

In reflecting on the personal growth processes involved in adulthood, initially, the concept of adult maturity was discussed at some length. None in the group was happy with the concept of a ‘mature adult’, if that were to be interpreted as having achieved a state of being which is complete. As one member put it:

*“Someone who is eighteen is an adult... and somebody who is seventy... there is a maturity then, that’s appropriate. On the other hand, I don’t like the term because there is an implication that there is such a thing as an immature adult, which seems like an inappropriate adult. And I think the philosophy, or whatever, of adult education that I work out of is that everybody can learn, which implies there isn’t immaturity....”.*

In addition, it was pointed out by a number of the group members that concepts such as ‘maturity’ are socially constructed, may be repressive in their symbolism and meaning, and may be used to include and exclude individuals from social recognition and approval; because of this, such concepts need to be treated with circumspection.

It was agreed by all in the group that adulthood is a dynamic personal journey which continually challenges the individual to grow, learn and take on increased responsibility

and freedom. A number of experiences were used by group members to describe elements of the process. These included, for example, encountering setbacks, being confronted by issues of change and loss, acquiring levels of confidence, contentment and a certain autonomy, and engaging in individuation: *"arriving at...maybe various points of wholeness"* throughout the journey only to depart again.

One member reflects the general understanding of the group of what constitutes adulthood when he says:

*"I think, in adult education, adulthood is being seen as just another stage of flux and development and change - the difference being that you have more responsibility for how you cope with that change, how you respond to that change, and more freedom in relation to how that change may develop. So, I think the idea of having more responsibility and more freedom in relation to your development is a key aspect of adulthood..."*

Implicit in these attributes of adulthood is the concept of striving for and achieving greater insight and agency status; of the person continually in interaction with the world and making personal choices, to a greater or lesser extent, at different times and in different contexts, in his or her adult life course.

The consensus of the group is that there is no single, ultimate arrival point in adulthood which is definable as 'maturity'; change, challenge and the potential for growth and development and for learning are an ever present dimension of adulthood. As one member commented:

*"..there are various points of what I call wholeness along the road and maybe the culmination, death, is the point of maturity..."*

The group recognises the changing nature of experience throughout adulthood and the potential of women and men, at all stages, to learn and to grow. At the same time, they recognise the constraints, intra-psychically and socially experienced, which inhibit people in their capacity and freedom to learn. For a time, the discussion revolved around the concept of poles of growth and stagnation. One image proffered, as an



example of stagnation, was of a person who sees no need to change; who eschews the opportunity to acquire new perspectives as part of their personal growth:

*“I really think there is a condition known as smugness or complacency where people really think that they have it right, so that their insight into themselves is that ‘I have learned, I know; there is nothing you can tell me’..”.*

This profile of stagnation rather than growth, of fixedness and rigidity rather than dynamic reflectiveness and openness, served to engage several of the group members in reflection on different facets of personal development and transformative learning. There was a recognition that there are various degrees of stagnation in continuing personal development, some of it temporary and some of it more permanent. One member explained that stagnation means:

*“...there’s no imperative to grow.... They are not moving forward. They are not seeking fresh frontiers. They are not pushing their insight but they are quite content with the world as they find it.”*

However, another member pointed out that whether or not the individual chooses to be pro-active about personal development, there is no way of being disengaged in the process of life:

*“I don’t know that I believe that people can be ever unengaged.... I think it might be like Freire’s thing, that there’s no such thing as neutrality. I think you cannot be alive and be unengaged or disengaged. I think you can be engaged at a very ‘taking it coming at you’ level: that it happens unto you; and feel that you have no say in it, and that you are buffeted by whatever comes your way, but I think you can’t get off. There isn’t a ‘stop the world and get off’.”*

This recognition of on-going engagement, whether active or passive, towards enhanced personal growth or maintaining the status quo, was accepted by the group in general. It drew attention to the role that transformative learning in personal development plays in facilitating the broadening of perspectives so that choices made are informed by a breadth and depth of reflection and by connection with experience.

Discussion ranged from consideration of the discomfort of personal development and transformative learning to consideration of the comfort of fundamentalism. There was consensus that inherent in the process of transformative learning in personal development is the stimulation towards active engagement in self-determination, personal responsibility and personal agency status resulting in transformative action. In contrast, fundamentalism promises certainty and security about the rectitude of personal stance, provided there is personal compliance with the received words and ruling of the governing voice. One member of the group noted that adult education may not be invulnerable to the charge of fundamentalism in that it offers a 'whole world view'.

Key constituents of adult transformative learning surfaced in the discussion. They included awareness, both individual awareness and community awareness, information, knowledge and understanding, critical reflection and conscientization.

Finally, in relation to adult personal development being an appropriate subject for transformative learning in adult education, one member gave expression to the group's view:

*"We espouse adult education as being holistic, concerned with the whole person, so, for me, again, it's the same thing. Adult education is about personal development because education cannot be neutral and, if an individual undertakes adult education and if there's no movement or development in the person, then, I think, adult education is not worth its salt."*

A major concern for the group is the inclusion of social and political contexts in any personal development transformative learning process in adult education. This concern is captured when, in reflecting on the awareness involved in personal development, a member asserted:

*"I do think awareness of oneself is a crucial aspect of adulthood and a crucial aspect of taking responsibility, but I think having a look at the dynamic interaction between awareness of self and awareness and*



*society, and how my experience of myself can be culturally determined is very important."*

The group emphasised that, without this relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political', personal development is inhibited and lacking in transformative effect.

A number of group members adverted to the danger attached to the exclusion of the socio-political context, in which personal text is embedded, from personal reflection. Such exclusion, it was argued, actually constricts personal development. As one member stated:

*"I think you can have personal development without emancipation...if it doesn't involve some of the dynamic outside of yourself, it can remain in a closed loop rather than in an open one, so that you're gaining insight into yourself, you kind of sit with a very deep awareness of yourself, without seeing yourself in a political or social context...."*

A member made the point that personal development without inclusion of the socio-political context can, in fact, be counter productive in terms of its own objectives:

*"It sometimes, perhaps, creates a more comfortable way of being in the world - comforting. I think that, perhaps, is one of the differences between certain forms of therapy that seek to comfort individuals or, alternatively, that it becomes a shoe-horn to ease them into a too stiff shoe."*

Another member stated that an outcome of this type of 'personal development' is to

*"...maintain the status quo in a way that is more powerful than a police force or an army or any other kind of institution in society."*

There was strong support within the group for the concerns expressed above about the need to include the socio-political dimension in any personal development transformative learning process. In summary, the group held the view that transformative learning expands the individual's horizons to incorporate a wider appreciation of the personal and political inter-connection. In transformative personal

development, critical analysis of culture, structures and of power relations must form part of the learning process.

A qualifying comment to the discussion above was added by one member and received general support. While personal development can fail to achieve liberative status if it is confined in focus on the individual, there is a danger that over-focusing on the socio-political context can be detrimental to the person. Over-focus on the socio-political context may give rise to false assumptions about emancipation and deny the individual's personal issues and inner reality:

*“Could I say that the converse of the situation of the shoe-horning or the comforting in counselling or therapy...or community work, or adult education, or whatever, that is dealing only with the ‘out there’ portion, that leaves the individual, again, with an illusion of freedom and emancipation but, in fact, is forcing them into an uncomfortable place with all their uncomfortable unresolved issues of abuse, or fears or death, or sex, or being abusers, all of those issues [is also unemancipatory]”.*

In reflecting on the socio-political context in which the individual engages in transformative learning, and to which she or he brings that learning to bear, that is, engages in social action, the question arose as to the constitution of that ‘wider world’. In response, the wider world was described as the community; the community includes the institutions that affect people, such as the state, the government, and *‘the political ideologies that dominate the world’*. The wider world or community also includes sectors and interest groups to which a person may belong, for example, the unemployed or aged sector, or a political party.

The question of the family being part of the wider world raised issues about the definition of the family. A number in the group concluded that the culturally constructed definition of family was extremely narrow and exclusive.

A view expressed by some of the group members, and supported explicitly by a majority of the group, was that the family, as an institution, is not a place in which transformative action can be effective. The reasons given for this view were that the



family is too narrow a forum and too emotionally charged for an individual member to achieve effective change in it; that the family itself, as an institution, is too powerful and constricting; and that each person, as a member of a family, is marked by the experience in such a way that to bring about transformative change in the family is almost an impossibility. One comment reflects some of the views of the group:

*"It can be very, very difficult to have a critical faculty in relation to it because we're so close to it."*

An alternative perspective was offered by another group member who suggested that individual transformative action could, perhaps, be effected within the family, if the individual was explicit with the family about his or her analysis of the family situation and of his or her intention to work at achieving change. However, she concluded that *"there may be too many forces there for it to change"*.

A member suggested that an analytical approach to family as a transgenerational site of power relations would facilitate the questioning of *"underlying assumptions, the underpinning ideologies"*. Some of the inequities and injustices, particularly in relation to gender, are obvious and easily accessed for critical analysis in the family. However, another member reflected the misgiving, expressed by a majority in the group, about the possibility for individual transformative interaction in the family of origin or, taking it further, transformative action for social change through the institution of the family :

*"...it's such a powerful system and one in which we all find ourselves embedded; and that biases us so much in terms of viewing our own family, but also in viewing anyone else's family. How difficult it is to stand outside to look objectively at that entity at all because, whenever we're doing that, our strings are being pulled so much - we're resonating to what goes on in our family of origin. And to stand outside of that, to be objective, to view another family, or to view the family as such, it seems to me to be an extraordinarily difficult process."*

In terms of transformative learning in adult education, the group underline the need for inclusion of the socio-political context in relation to personal development courses.

However, serious reservations were expressed about the forum of the family for transformative action. It must be noted that the family, in whatever form it takes, is that socio-political forum most immediately relevant to a majority of learners. It is also the forum in which much oppression is experienced.

The recognition of personal sexuality as central to the individual gave rise to a dilemma in considering an adult education provision of learning for personal sexual development.

The issue of the appropriateness of personal development courses in sexuality in adult education, with an emphasis on concrete, personal experience of sexuality, was raised in the group. This resulted in considerable discussion. Initially, affirmative views were expressed, reflected in the comment:

*“Speaking personally, it very definitely has a place, a very central and very important place [in an adult education curriculum] in terms of promoting or inviting one into a reflective mode around the issues involved.”*

Another member confirmed this view of the appropriateness of personal sexuality as a subject for adult education but added the qualification that, in offering such courses, the subject must be situated in the broader social context referred to earlier:

*“I’d say it does have a place... it has to have a place if we are giving personal development a place; it’s part of it. But no more than with personal development in its broader sense, personal sexuality, I would see it as dangerous unless it is put in a context of all those broader things we spoke of in relation to structures, institutions, community.... I mean everything that is outside of the individual...”*

The need to incorporate the socio-political context in which personal sexuality is experienced continued to be stressed because, *“otherwise, it could be what would ultimately become navel gazing”* and lacking in the potential for transformative change.



Discussion on personal sexuality followed, highlighting its centrality to the individual. One member commented that the fact that sexuality is *"at such a deep and core level in the individual"* explains why society and the institutions within society seek control of sexuality. This, she continued, makes it imperative for the socio-political context to be included in any personal development course in sexuality if transformative learning is to occur. Continuing on the theme of the central nature of sexuality, another member concurred that, while it was a key subject for personal development in adult education, it was a *"dangerous"* area in which to engage:

*"I would see the raising of issues of sexuality as being absolutely vital and essential in any kind of personal development you are talking about in adult education. But I would also see that there are dangers in that because my sexuality is at the core of my personhood.... it is a dangerous area for all of us or it's a vulnerable area.... I think there is a danger maybe of manipulation in that particular sensitive area for all of us.... provided that it doesn't become dangerous or manipulative, and that it has that liberative element, fine, but I can see a definite danger there for manipulation or even oppression or abuse of power."*

Consideration of the core nature of personal sexuality and of the potential perceived for manipulation and abuse in an educational setting led to group reflection on the boundaries between an educational and a therapeutic intervention. It was agreed that such boundaries are difficult to define. This, it was stated, is because, for example, in adult education, counselling and groupwork are part of the curriculum, and they are subjects in which the educational and the therapeutic interface with each other in a manner which makes a clear divide between the two difficult to establish. One group member articulated the perceived dilemma for adult education, posed by the centrality of personal sexuality and the risks and sensitivities attendant on an educational response to it:

*"...I would see the sexual as so personal and so core to the individual that I'm not sure it can be entered into outside a therapeutic boundary, but I would also see it as so core to the whole issue of liberative learning, of freedom, of gender issues, of adult education, that I cannot see adult education being real, or what it is supposed to be, without entering into that area."*

Seeking a way of resolving the dilemma led to further discussion on the need for boundaries, appropriate skills in the facilitator, and a clear negotiated contract with learners about the nature of the work and the extent and limits of the boundaries to ensure:

*“that they know what they are entering into and that they may choose not to; the boundary needs to be very clear, the table needs to be very fenced.”:*

Further discussion led to a suggestion, by one member of the group, that the difficult issue for the group was that of trying to identify a balance between extremes suited to an transformative learning course in personal sexuality; the extremes being

- a) the type of personal development course which is so introverted and self-focused in kind that it does not take any socio-political context into account and
- b) the type of course which is so socio-politically focused that it allows no space for the recognition of individual needs.

The difficulty for the group, she suggested, was that of trying to seek the middle ground *“which is around carrying theoretical concepts but also carrying the personal”* in relation to a subject which is so core to the person and so sensitive.

Regarding this interpretation of the dilemma, this group member offered the following perspective, paraphrased as follows.

At times, in the transformative learning process in adult education, there is a need to concentrate on the ‘personal’; at other times, there is a need to focus more on the ‘political’. Because personal sexuality is, culturally, such a taboo area, and because it is so central to the individual, a positive discrimination in favour of the ‘personal’, initially, is needed; that is, particular space may need to be dedicated to encompass exploring personal experience. *“That is very specialised work and you would be very clear that there are boundaries and training”*. This, she continued, does not deny the



requirement, subsequently, to incorporate the socio-political context; it simply recognises what is an appropriate process for the subject, a process in which both the 'internal' and the 'external' are important.

This consideration gave rise to further discussion on the role of transformative learning in adult education in relation to the challenge it poses to pre-suppositions, including those about sexuality, and the relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political'. The two sides of the argument on the management and positioning of the 'personal' and the 'political' in relation to transformative learning courses on personal sexuality were presented without any clear group consensus favouring one or the other. The view making the 'personal' argument drew attention to the culture of silence in relation to personal sexuality; a culture which means that people who attend a course on sexuality are exploring, possibly for the first time, in public, their personal issues. Without having this opportunity, in the first instance, to break out personally from that culture of silence, political engagement is impossible:

*"Unless I've had some space to look at my own sexuality and feel comfortable with it, how can I try and engage in conversation with people when I start to be very political about sexuality.... there are taboo subjects that are not talked about and unless I have some space to get rid of the taboos for myself, I can't engage [politically], and I need to do both. It is to break the taboo for myself so that I can engage, and part of the breaking of it is that somebody else engages with me."*

The view presenting aspects of the 'political' argument drew attention to the fact that many issues are raised by focusing on the personal experiences of sexuality which need to be connected to the socio-cultural context in order to bring them to proper closure. In addition, there is a danger that personal issues may be raised for people on a course on sexuality which are painful or unresolved, which may not be articulated, and which may not be capable of being managed in an educational setting.

*"..a lot of stuff is raised and I would worry if people had that experience, you know, if they had stuff that they didn't disclose and which was particularly painful, because sexuality is painful, that in some way it [focusing on the personal] was creating... opening rooms,*

*or whatever, that wasn't being dealt with or couldn't be dealt with at adult education level.*

Furthermore, the view was expressed that, as sexuality is deeply institutionalised, all personal sexual stories *"are rooted and grounded at this systems, structural level"*. Therefore, there is a therapeutic aspect about connecting personal experience to political realities.

The question was put to the group as to how progress might be made in engaging adult education in the provision of transformative learning courses in personal sexuality. This issue was considered by one of the group to be premature, and this view was, in effect, supported by a number of other members:

*"Personally, I feel it is too early a question in terms of the issues that we have been grappling with over the last fifteen or twenty minutes. I would feel the lack of clarity, certainly, that I have in naming the issues, but I just do not know how one draws them together and creates the spaces that are, at one level, safe enough and, at another level, provocative enough. I don't know how to do that, let alone weave that holistically and healthily, dynamically and creatively, into a programme."*

A number of concerns were expressed about the provision of courses in personal sexuality. One such concern was that courses of this kind should be optional and not prescriptive in terms of the curriculum for training adult educators:

*"I certainly wouldn't be prescriptive about it as having a place necessarily in adult education training. I would, actually, expect people to have enough integrity to have worked through some of these issues and keep working on these issues."*

Another concern was that all adult educators should not implement such courses; it was considered very important that only people with an interest in this work, and with the appropriate training, should facilitate them.



A third concern gave expression to the dilemma and ambivalence, indicated earlier, about adult education being involved in the provision of courses in personal sexuality, and to the issue of boundaries for the educators:

*"[Courses should be] something that is not imposed on the individual and on every adult educator... but yet, recognising that our sexuality is central to our personhood and, obviously, the issues arising from that need to be out within adult education; but that, if sexuality is part of our programmes, it is not in the therapeutic sense, that it's not in the sense that we are sex therapists."*

When asked as to whether or not adult education should be involved in the provision of courses in personal sexuality, if such courses were facilitated by appropriately skilled people, were optional and included the qualifications about context suggested above by members of the group, a number were deeply uncertain on the basis that courses on personal sexuality are:

*"too political an issue"; "because they are so deeply personal"; and "too therapeutic an issue."*

This response gave rise to the argument, by one group member, that adult education cannot abdicate from confronting central aspects of human experience, even if such aspects require careful management:

*"And yet, on the other hand, adult education, because it is all the things we were saying it is, can't avoid controversy. This is a fundamental aspect of humanity and it is laden with all sorts of powers and whatever else, then adult education has to step around it, carefully."*

There was consensus among this group of adult educators that personal sexuality is central and core to personhood and, therefore, a significant subject for transformative learning in adult education. Because of the centrality of the subject and the sensitivity surrounding it, clear boundaries are necessary for the facilitator and for the learning group, and back-up extra-curricular support available if needed. A majority view held that transformative learning in personal sexuality should be optional for learners; not

mandatory for adult educators; and that such courses should only be facilitated by trained, skilled educators.

At a theoretical level, there appeared to be a relative consensus that personal sexuality is an appropriate subject and, indeed, according to a number in the group, a necessary subject, for adult education to include in its provision. Yet, as the discussion centred more on the concrete implications of offering such courses, levels of uncertainty, anxiety and ambivalence arose amongst some members of the group because of the core nature of the subject of personal sexuality.

### **Perspectives on the relationship between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexuality: professional psychotherapists**

As stated in Chapter Three, because of the sensitive nature of the subject of personal sexuality, and because psychotherapy is a domain in which personal sexual discourse is socially permissible, a group of three psychotherapists, two women and one man, were invited to interview for this study. All members of the group are integrative-humanistic therapists and trainers in psychotherapy; one member is also a psychosexual therapist. Their professional perspectives were sought on the subject of personal sexuality and the provision of personal development courses by adult education on this subject.

The following areas of discussion emerged:

- personal development and transformative learning in adulthood;
- the transformative potential in speech about personal sexuality;
- the relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political' in regard to personal sexuality;



- the centrality of personal sexuality for adulthood;
- perceptions of the role of adult education in relation to personal sexuality.

Discussion began by centring on the developmental aspect of adulthood and the engagement in making, breaking and sustaining relationships. One member reflected that second relationships [committed adult sexual relationships] are often very different to first relationships. This difference results from personal growth through experience:

*"...where there's been some grasping at some sense of oneself, some acceptance, some sadness at what you're never going to be and some pleasure in who you are."*

This is not a definitive statement about first or second relationships, but an observation on personal growth and development in adulthood, and on the awareness, understanding and struggle with interpersonal reality which are important ingredients for successful relating:

*"It's arriving at a certain place where, in fact, you really are ready to encounter another human being and, sometimes, we expect to do that before we've arrived at the place where we encounter ourselves."*

This observation was explored by the three group members. The discussion led to the conclusion that connecting with the 'reality of self' as opposed to the 'illusions of self', which accompany many adults into their adult sexual relationships, is a significant dimension of personal development. However, this connection or encounter is not done independently of others, or of an other; as relational beings, the inter-personal and intra-personal are interdependent.

Another group member clarified that there is no single point of ultimate arrival in the life course:

*"And 'arriving' at a point of acceptance - I mean this is so daft because it is momentary - but at a point where there is some degree of*

*self-knowing, some degree of comfort and even satisfaction with the ground on which I stand..."*

In reflecting on personal development in adulthood and the view that personal growth in relationship is a life-long task, the issue of how the group perceived 'transformative learning' was raised.

One member offered the view that transformative learning results in persons having more choices and being better able to make them. Another member noted that transformative learning may be quite hidden at a given moment in its process:

*"...sometimes it doesn't feel anything like liberative, maybe, from an outsider's [perspective] but it may be, ultimately, even though it may not have shape in a person, in the moment, in a person's experience."*

Another member continued on the theme:

*"I find myself thinking that it's something about a meeting of experience and consciousness. It's something about knowing and, in fact, there may be no visible movement. It's something about understanding, and it is about choice, even if what you choose appears not to be freeing. But the fact that you've exercised the choice out of a consciousness about your own experience in the world [means] that, even if you decide that you will stay in this pattern, the pattern is altered completely; because you know the pattern, and you've chosen to stay there, because it's a better place for you, or you're not ready to be somewhere else, or whatever."*

Continuing, the point was made that the transformative outcome following on the meeting of experience and consciousness also includes, in the consideration, the balance between personal and communal needs:

*"It's something about prioritising the individual good and the societal good, or the community's good, and that's really a difficult one."*

The group noted the difficulty they observe, in their practice, for women and men to initiate personal disclosure on sexual experience. Discussion followed on issues of



personal sexual discourse; when, where and how it takes place. An example was given of applicants for training as therapists who, as part of their application process, are invited to name a topic for discussion with the trainers. It was noted that a certain proportion of applicants are likely to indicate voluntarily a topic related to personal sexuality.

On the other hand, however, it was noted that speaking about personal sexuality can constitute a major 'break-through' achievement. An example of this is seen in psychosexual therapeutic practice where speaking about personal sexuality is a standard difficulty for women and men. One member of the group described this difficulty:

*" I would work a lot with couples who are experiencing sexual difficulties. Almost classically, there's an inability, an impossibility of talking about it, between the two of them. And it's like there's a whole learning to talk about what they're both so aware of. In a sense, once they can begin to talk about it, they can almost get around it themselves."*

The difficulty for women and men in overcoming the restraints on speech about personal sexuality was discussed. It was noted that the process of psycho-sexual therapy specifically involved helping people to break that silence, to defeat that difficulty:

*"In a very practical way, there is almost a kind of enabling, a kind of helping to produce a sexual vocabulary so that they can begin to talk about it."*

There was agreement that the breaking of the silence, the initiation of speech about their sexuality and sexual difficulties almost amounts, for clients, to resolution:

*"And in a sense, you're nearly there when you can do that, because you're actually there when you can do that."*

This issue of women and men in therapy being enabled to speak about their personal sexuality gave rise to some discussion on the ways in which the subject is raised in the

therapy room, the timing of initiating discussion, and the pace at which the subject is opened up. Initially, the group discussion centred on the care and sensitivity which the therapists feel is necessary in approaching or responding to the subject with their clients. It became apparent that the timing for the introduction of the subject by the therapist was carefully managed. This management was due to their appreciation of the sensitivity of the material and in order to have established a degree of trust in the therapeutic relationship. Reflecting on this process, one member of the group raised the question as to the message they, as therapists, give their clients about sexuality, by the approach they adopt to the subject. By deferring questioning clients about the sexual aspects of their relationship until some time has elapsed in the therapeutic process, even while questioning them quite extensively on other aspects, therapists are communicating a political message:

*"because, on the one hand, while you're saying it's intimate and it's internalised, their very being externalises it, you know, - the way they sit with you, the way they talk with you - they're actually saying something all the time about their sexuality, so maybe there's some collusion of some sort that suggests that this is internalised when, in fact, oftentimes, it is quite visible and externalised. And a lot of our sexuality is out there as well as being in there...so there's some gain, or some collusive aspect in society that suggests that it's in when, in fact, it's out there: the way you set the table, light the candles, or dress, or sit, or talk, or become passionate about the world or contained about the world, or whatever, that it's maybe more out."*

A general observation was made on the prevalence in society of silence in relation to personal sexuality; that silence is the usual mode of expression because of the absence of a forum conducive to personal sexual discourse. Therefore, personal sexuality is not spoken about until arrival at a point where it becomes imperative to break the silence:

*"There's a lot of silence; and a lot of people feel silenced. There isn't a language, there isn't a safe place in which to voice what is vulnerable, so having an actual forum, generally speaking, where it can be safe enough for people to be vulnerable, is usually very elusive. So, it's when people are put to the pin of their collar and have to do something, or find themselves in some way faced with something that can't be withheld any longer, that it's at that point that challenge becomes possible."*



The group were invited to reflect on the concept of the 'political' having a role to play with regard to personal sexuality. After some consideration, one member stated that it was not customary in the practice to directly include the wider socio-political context, other than that of the family, in therapeutic sessions:

*"Now, introducing the cultural, the societal, the institutional scenes, I might listen to what may be coming from them [clients] if they were in some way referred to, or in terms of being influenced by, but I haven't engaged with people from that perspective within the therapy room."*

However, this member further went on to state that in the training of therapists, the socio-political context in relation to personal sexuality is included:

*"I would want people to engage with those themes - not because I would want them to talk to clients about them, but I do want to have a context for them in understanding, a bigger context than a dyad, so my mind goes more to a training setting than to a therapy room, where I would explicitly engage [with the socio-political aspects]."*

A discussion followed between the therapists on the context and the extent to which they would introduce the 'political' into the 'personal' of the therapy room. In this discussion, new perspectives emerged on the meaning of 'political' and how it applies to the therapeutic relationship. The point was made and agreed that the therapeutic domain, itself, is a political one, so that, as one member said:

*"the wider world is in the room whether or not we wish it to be there - [the issue is] what kind of way you place it, and how you bring it in, and how you allow your client to see that their personal history is constructed in their personal family which is constructed in a social world."*

The observation was also made that, in working with clients who have been sexually abused, for example, engaging in reflection on the socio-political context in which the individual experienced abuse contributes to a therapeutic outcome:

*"...in some aspects of work, the cultural frame is very important, and it is liberating in a therapeutic sense to come to it... while it's really*

*important to own one's hurt and pain in that abuse, and liberating to name it, it's also liberating, and necessary, I think, to understand that it is a structure and construction of society that allows that abuse to take place; and so, while you are very personally marked by the experience of abuse, that abuse is not yours, personally."*

This perspective was agreed by the group and prompted another member to make the point that it was not confined to the area of sexual abuse:

*"and [it is true] in other areas of oppression, or where people have experienced oppressive behaviour from those in authority, or over them, that mightn't be physically sexual or even implicitly sexual but has marked them hugely."*

The issue of the timing and management of the introduction of the 'political' to the 'personal' area in psycho-therapeutic practice was discussed. Views were expressed underlining the necessity of allowing the individual to focus on the 'personal' in a manner in which the integrity of the engagement with his and her own experience is not damaged by a premature diversion of focus to the 'political'. It was concluded that this is of critical concern:

*"I think if you do it [introduce the 'political'] at the expense of a client's personal journey, you have offended very deeply and you haven't done authentic, therapeutic work. If you do that cultural journey, without doing the personal work, if you let it in some way negate or allow the person not to address their own hurts and their own experience of power structures that have hurt them in that way, if you skip that, or if you don't attend appropriately to it, then, in fact, you haven't done therapeutic work and you haven't been authentic in what your work is about."*

The therapists were invited to express their views on personal sexuality in adulthood. All expressed the view that sexuality was central to the person and to becoming adult.<sup>7</sup> It was agreed that the process of personal growth and development includes becoming one's sexual self. One member expressed this understanding by stating that:

---

<sup>7</sup> When one becomes an adult is culturally specific and may differ widely from one group to another.



*"...they're inextricably linked; in fact, it becomes so artificial, in my experience, to try to talk about sexuality, somehow, as though it were separate from or actually isn't part of the person..."*

Discussion followed on the relationship between sexuality, adulthood and adult effectiveness. All three therapists agreed that, while people can function without having acquired a sense of their adult sexuality, the way that they function as adults is at a less than optimum level. One member encapsulated this for the group as follows:

*"[Personal sexuality is important] in the sense that you can't be adult without a sense of sexuality. You cannot actually be in that adult space, firmly anchored in that adult space, without a sense of adult sexuality. You can sort of be in two places. You can be adult in lots of ways, but if you don't have that sexual component with you, then, you're off balance, like having a piece missing, being out of kilter, or off-balance, if you don't have some space where you come to in a sexual way with yourself. They can function and operate, but it's missing. I think it's perceptibly missing in terms of quality of sense of self or engagement with others."*

Another member reflected that an adult sense of sexuality is not automatically achieved by the arrival at adulthood. In the experience of this group member, some women and men may not discover or engage with the issue of their sexuality until they are quite well advanced into adulthood. Experiences in childhood and adolescence can be such that they bring about a closure on personal sexual growth and development. Through working experientially with such men and women in relation to their personal sexual history, a recovery of their sexual selves, as it were, is made possible, leading to a more holistic form of personal integration.

Group members also underlined the fact that, because of the centrality of sexuality in personal experience, while personal sexuality can be an end in itself for intervention in terms of personal growth and development, it can also be a means to access other significant issues of experience. These issues may not be directly linked with sexuality. Personal development in sexuality can also lead, for example, to the uncovering of significant personal constraints arising from experiences of primary relationships. One member described it thus: *"So the sexual is a route into layers and layers of personal material that is difficult."*

Members of the group were invited to focus on whether or not, in the light of their particular professional experience, they saw a role for adult education providing personal development courses in personal sexuality. Following from the discussion on the theme of silence, one member indicated that such courses, if offered, would be of benefit:

*“Well, the thing that comes to me most is the thing I’ve been saying about finding a voice. So, an opportunity for them to..utter..or start uttering..both within themselves and with colleagues and with peers, and see what that sounds like - or to listen to others and see what that resonates in themselves - and the notion of people beginning to discover themselves sexually and, through their sexuality, being given some opportunity in an educational setting, a personal development setting, [I see this] would be an advantage.”*

Following on this, a discussion took place on the implications for women and men of addressing the issue of their sexuality in an adult education setting. It was noted that the possibility of a person encountering pain is always there. Also, it was asserted, there are the effects on partners and on relationships consequent on the outcome of transformative learning to be considered.

A member of the group drew attention to a concept within adult education of accepting that people seek to pursue knowledge and understanding, not knowing quite what they will find, and yet carry responsibility for what they learn; this would apply equally to the subject of personal sexuality. However, the issue of learning implications also raises the issue of the responsibility of the educator in relation to setting and maintaining boundaries.

Part of the establishment of boundaries involves ensuring that learners have a clear understanding of the content and process of the learning in which they are engaging:

*“I suppose, in a sense, any kind of personal work is accompanied by a health warning - because nothing will be the same afterwards. In a sense, there is a need for that to be said somewhere and to be heard in some way and it’s like any piece of learning of any kind, whether it be academic or whatever: there’s the excitement of speaking and being*



*part of the acquiring of new knowledge, and then, there's the sense of how little I know, and then, there's a sense of what can be addressed in that and what can't be addressed in that."*

The group concluded that while personal development in sexuality might indeed raise issues that are painful, nevertheless, it is not unknown pain. Such pain is familiar in the sense that it is known but not processed. In an adult education setting, the sharing of personal experience, and the encounter with the commonality of experience within the group, is potentially both painful and liberating. However, attention was drawn by one member of the group to the assumption that personal sexual learning can only be painful; this assumption does not take into consideration the potential for "*adventure, playfulness, excitement and passion*" which is also included in such learning.

In response to the question as to whether or not the subject of personal sexuality was too central and too core to the person to be addressed in an adult education setting, the group were unanimous in their response, expressed as follows:

*"I would think it is too central not to be addressed in some way that allows discourse and reflection."; "It's as simple as that."; "It is. It's as simple as that."; "I think it's as direct as that."*

The group members expanded on their response, noting that people have to live with core issues. With good structures and boundaries and attentiveness to the learner, not to address and work with personal sexuality because it is too central and core to the person is to collude with the socio-political repressive agenda. One member, supported by the others, emphasised:

*"That is the message. That's the message that actually has engendered the silence: that it is too intimate to be talked about; that this conversation must be contained within and, in a sense, that would reinforce that. That's the well-spring from which the silence came."*

Another member added:

*"It invalidates other work that you might do; other personal work you could do, because it's cutting off something that is so core."*

All were agreed about the potential vulnerability of both the learner and of the educator in working with personal sexuality. However, that very vulnerableness should not be a deterrent to personal development in adult education:

*"It cannot really be a reason for not plumbing the depths; it just can't be, or else you're always at some other level."*

Discussion followed on the value of learners undertaking personal sexuality courses in adult education. Apart from the opportunity that it offers women and men to speak together about their personal sexual learning, it was also perceived by one member that such courses enable people to reflect on that experience:

*"It gives you, it seems to me, what is the essential ingredient in becoming mature, which is to reflect on your experience and to make sense of it. It's a setting to do that in, and to reflect on your experience, to name it, to make sense of it."*

This was added to by another member who emphasised the potential for creative action resulting from reflection:

*"It also makes it [experience] available to them. It actually gives them, I don't know if the word is 'control', but it can shape something they can be creative out of in a way that they can't be if it's just there, unknown, unspoken, unavailable, unreflected. [There is] the potential for being creative through it in a way that wouldn't be possible [without reflecting on their sexual experience]."*

This member of the group continued to ponder on how the learning potential in adult education courses in personal sexuality not only has implications for the individual but, also, stretches outwards to a wider socio-political world:

*"If it were to happen [courses in personal sexuality], it seems to me that it would make obviously a difference in their [participants] being parents, not just couple, and... politically, it would enlighten them to other, bigger settings, you know, of exploitation or power, or possibility. And I don't think it's crazy to think it would also spark at*



*levels other than the explicitly sexual, because we've talked about the coreness of it."*

While this was agreed to by all three in the group, one member raised the issue of the danger of possible "*colonisation by crusaders*" of such transformative learning potential in personal sexuality courses, "*by those who would distort and somehow silence all over again*". A discussion followed on this subject and it concluded with agreement that, while there are and always will be exploiters, "*there is human experience that redeems something out of that which has moved us on.*" Therefore, concern about exploitation should not impede aiming for the best there can be.

Consideration was given by the group to the private space of the one-to-one or one-to-couple encounters in relation to personal sexuality in therapy in contrast to the public space of the adult education learning group. A member reflected that the public space of the adult education setting may offer a particular form of validation to individuals, even to those individuals for whom therapy has not been successful:

*"I was thinking about the validation, the public space - and how important that public space is and, kind of, when all else fails, that public space may work better than anything else; the kind of redemption that can be found in a public space, where it doesn't address the very individual need, but the fact that there is a group of people who share your experience makes you...you're in community...it normalises you; even when all else fails, even what has failed in the therapeutic setting may have a chance of working there."*

Reflecting on the potential inherent in the public space of an adult education setting, that is, of shared learning in group, a final conclusion was proposed by a member of the group and agreed by the other two members:

*"There's something about telling your story; that, in fact, you can't be known unless you tell your story to someone. I think that's liberatory because there's a possibility of being known to yourself and to someone else. And that creates an environment for more stories to be told, and to move towards the truth. And every time a story is told, more of the story can be told. I really believe that. So, it's not just my story, but my telling my story and being known by someone and myself means that more of the stories get told and get spoken about."*

In the telling of the multiple stories, it was concluded by all, a collective consciousness results leading to a transformative outcome:

*“It changes history. If the story is told with as many perspectives as possible, then, you have a possibility of reality as experienced being heard and futures being lived out of that reality instead of [from]what’s written from one perspective.”*

From the perspectives of the three psychotherapists interviewed, personal development in adulthood is viewed as an on-going process in which transformative learning is distinguished by a) achievement of adult appreciative self-knowledge, understanding and self-acceptance, b) increased agency status in relation to an expanded and expanding range of choices and c) an ability to perceive and balance individual and community needs.

In this perspective, it is appropriate in an educational context to include the socio-political context as part of the learning framework for personal development. Moreover, as it relates to difficulties in personal experience, this can have an important therapeutic effect. However, in a psychotherapeutic setting, it is important to ensure that priority is given to attending to the personal dimension before introducing the socio-political domain.

With regard to personal sexuality, there is agreement that it is a topic which is repressed; that people have difficulty speaking about their experience, and many may not even have the words with which to speak. Professionals may, unconsciously, collude in the cultural silencing of personal sexual speech by the way in which they approach the subject with clients. Breaking the silence about personal sexuality is a primary and major step towards transformative change.

The provision of transformative learning courses in adult education on personal sexuality is affirmed, because they offer a forum in which that which is core to the individual may be engaged with in community in a transformative potentiality.



Furthermore, sexuality, because of its centrality to personal experience, can be a point of access for the individual to address and redress other experiential problematics. This has positive implications for the individual and for relationships. Such courses need skilled facilitation and clear boundaries because of the sensitive and potentially difficult aspects to the subject. Finally, by facilitating the articulation of personal sexual story in group, a transformative process is entered where wider perspectives of the collective consciousness that is formed inform future realities.

### **The potential role of adult education for personal sexual development: summary of findings**

The primary participants of the case study make a consistent case that transformative learning in adult education can and should make a provision for personal sexual development in its curriculum. They express the view that the learning possibility, such as they experienced it, is not replicated in other learning spaces.

The value of making transformative learning in personal sexuality available to all adults who wish to participate is strongly affirmed. This type of learning forum, the participants indicate, enables women and men to address subjugated issues, central to themselves and to their relationships, which are at once both intimate and political, and concern individual and social well-being. As Frank (33:M:35-44:S) argued earlier (p.281)

*"..the area is central to issues of relationship, communication, power, role, culture etc. It impinges upon life in a profound way. Not to address such an area would be to leave a large gap affecting all these areas, and our way of living in relation to them." Q2*

The 'gap' identified by this research is the cultural silence which inhibits speech about personal sexuality and, therefore, inhibits the generation of knowledge which enables a democratic participation in what Plummer (1995) describes as 'intimate citizenship'. The findings confirm the potentiality in transformative learning in adult education to

reveal and interrogate the gap, and to reveal the structures which hold such gaps central to their composition.

The primary participants' evaluations of the role of adult education in personal sexuality challenges adult education providers with what amounts to an obligation to engage in this area of personal development. Laura (38:F:35-44:Sep) encapsulates this by stating that adult educators are, themselves, imprisoned in the cultural taboo about personal sexuality and, therefore, are contributing to maintaining the 'gap'.

The results from the professional adult educators include a note of contradiction not reflected elsewhere. Similarly to the primary participants' position, there is a consensus among the educators about the value of an adult education provision for personal sexuality because it is central to personal development and to transformative learning. However, paradoxically, such provision is considered, by a number of these educators, to be potentially too 'dangerous' a subject to address in an educational forum because of the sensitivity of the topic. This contradiction in position is not found in the data from the primary participants, (among which this group of educators numbered in their personal capacity), as exemplified by Barbara's (15:F:<25:S) remark:

*"If adult education is meant to challenge the system and change behaviour, then there is no other area that has been so neglected."*

Nor is this contradiction expressed by the psychotherapists, who are positive in their affirmation of the educational forum for transformative learning on the subject of personal sexuality because this holds possibilities for liberative learning for women and men which are not available elsewhere.

An important theme in the findings, articulated particularly by the group of adult educators and supported by the psychotherapists, centres on the issue of polarisation: a polarisation of individual and socio-cultural, of 'personal' and 'political', in personal sexuality. This will be further taken up in Chapter Seven.



Overall, and inclusive of the reservations expressed by some though not all of the adult educators, the participants make the case that a relationship exists between transformative learning in adult education and personal sexual development. As Darina (42:F:25-34:S) asserts:

*“If adult learning has any part to play in changing the world we live in today, sexual development must be part of its scaffold.”*

The findings in this chapter support the third and last hypothesis of this study, that the provision of a systematic approach to shared learning on personal sexuality, in a facilitated environment, is an important adult educational contribution to the individual and to society.

The findings in Chapters Five, Six and Seven have been made possible by access to the research participants’ personal sexual learning stories. These findings are confirmed in Chapter Seven, the final chapter in this study. Chapter Seven argues the proposition that personal sexual story is a research vehicle for transformative learning in adult education.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **OVERCOMING SILENCE: PERSONAL SEXUAL STORY - A VEHICLE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING**

The findings of the case study show that personal sexuality in adulthood is a developmental process with significant learning needs which cannot be met except in adulthood; that the inhibition of this developmental process, resulting from the prevailing socio-cultural norms with regard to sexuality, prevents personal and societal well-being. Furthermore, the findings assert that transformative learning in personal sexuality in adult education has potentially a vital contribution to make to redressing this situation. The process of such redress is one of critical reflection in a facilitated, focused and systematic manner, in a learning group, on personal sexual story.

Based on the above, in conclusion to the research, this chapter now proposes that personal sexual story offers both the adult and adult education a radical research vehicle for transformative learning, with far-reaching potential for individual and societal well-being. In putting forward this proposal, the following issues will be considered:

1. personal story in transformative adult education and linkages with personal sexual story;
2. personal *sexual* story: a transformative learning project in adult education;
3. personal *sexual* story: a critical research project in transformative learning;
4. personal *sexual* story in transformative adult education: a potential catalyst for social transformation.



## **Personal story in transformative adult education and linkages with personal sexual story**

The characteristics conjured up by the concept of 'personal story' or 'life history'<sup>8</sup> are of individuality and uniqueness; there are intimations of 'private' and also of 'intimate' in the broad sense of that word. Hearing another's 'personal story' is to enter on to the ground of another's being: to be invited to see and explore the terrain from the teller's point of view, and to bring one's own perspective to bear on that terrain as a potential contribution to expanding the narrator's panorama and viewpoints. This is in the context of an emphasis on the value of shared learning in the group and the transformative potential in critical reflection on personal sexual story.

Personal story, heard, understood and analysed through the lenses of pertinent existing frames of knowledge, can lead to an increase in the general body of knowledge, either by confirming, contradicting or contributing to what is already known, interpreted and understood. Personal biography as a means of contributing to knowledge, in general, can be said to be part of that which underpins the theory and practice of transformative learning in adult education, in particular, as articulated by Paulo Freire (1972) and Horton and Freire (1990) and, subsequently, by educators such as Mezirow (1981; 1990; 1991; 1996), Brookfield (1990), Dominice (1990), Hart (1998), West (1998) and Barr (1999, 1998). It is part of what underpins feminist theoreticians as they work at integrating the individuality and diversity of women's personal stories with the commonality of women in the world (hooks, 1990; Tong, 1989): as they work at developing theories which deny neither the personal nor the political, neither the particular individual nor the particular socio-cultural context to which the individual belongs, in their search for coherent approaches which are inclusive yet capable of containing difference.

The theoretical case can be made for the proposal outlined at the beginning of this chapter (p.345) by drawing from life history methodology, the biographical method or,

---

<sup>8</sup> In the context of this study, 'life history' is synonymous with 'personal story'

as it is described in this study, personal story. This methodology has been in use as a tool for research since the Chicago School in the 1920s (Antikainen, 1998; Dominice, 1990:196). In a contribution to the World Congress of the International Sociological Association, in Montreal, Antikainen states:

*"As the life experiences of a person are the very foundations of educative processes, it is natural that the biographical method is used also in educational research, especially in adult education."*

Personal story is not only of use to professional educational researchers; it can be profoundly useful for adult learners as a personal developmental methodology of transformative learning. This is shown by a majority of the participants in this study. Such transformative learning assists the person in becoming subject of his or her history and acting in and on the world (Freire, 1972). Alheit (1995:82) coins the term 'biographicity' to describe the individual's arrival at the ability to achieve both personal and social change through biographical knowledge: to become *"a social actor"*:

*"Only when specific individuals relate to their lifeworld in such a way that their self-reflexive activities begin to shape social contexts, is contact established with that key qualification of modern times, what I have termed elsewhere 'biographicity' (Alheit 1992c). Biographicity means that we can redesign again and again, from scratch, the contours of our life within the specific contexts in which we (have to) spend it, and that we experience these contexts as 'shapeable' and designable."*

Alheit's definition is suggestive of personal story or biography as 'life-work in progress'. The experiences of the participants in this study confirm this. They indicate that personal history can be shaped and re-shaped when human understanding, linked with imagination and creativity, is enhanced through the critically reflective process (Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1998:94-96), and that when personal meaning schemes are thereby expanded (Mezirow, 1990), the shape and outcomes of personal story can be more or less effectuated by the subject. Personal history can be used as a stepping stone to a



relatively more 'own-told future' rather than borne as an immutable weight holding the subject imprisoned by the past.

This interpretation of 'biographicity' is consistent with a basic premise on which this study rests and from which it emanates; that is, that human beings have the ability to engage, relatively, as both authors and actors in the dramas of their life experiences and social contexts. This interpretation appears to be reflected in the principles underpinning Brookfield's (1990) endorsement of the use of 'critical incident' learning methodology, thereby engaging students in critical reflection on their own experience, and in his advocacy of educators modelling critical thinking on their own practice (1998). It is in accord with Dominice's (1990) use of educational biographies in order to engage learners in collaborative research of their educational histories as a transformative learning process.

What is distinctive in the case of this study is the particular biographical material and the potential contained therein for transformation of the sexual/relational and, therefore, social paradigm. The topic of personal sexuality, as can be seen in the stories of the participants, concerns fundamental issues of personal identity and self-concept and of inter-personal purpose in a social context. It opens up the privatised sphere of personal sexuality on which basic human relations rest in part; a sphere, according to the results of this particular study, which is largely silenced and repressed. As Hart (1990:52) states, internalised repression prevents not only the pursuit of certain interests but the perception of them.

If a particular story, thematic to the generality of the group, is culturally inhibited from articulation, then, as Freire (1972:78) suggests, this forms

*"a very dramatic theme: the theme of silence.... a structure of muteness in the face of the over-whelming force of the limit-situations."*

In contrast, the articulation of personal story is, in Freirean terms, to "*exteriorise man's [the individual's] view of the world*". This process identifies life-themes shared

by others, that is, generative themes in relation to which women and men, in a group, can identify meaningful aspects of their experience which either enhance or detract from individual and communal well-being. Such a thematic investigation, Freire (1972:79) asserts,

*“becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and self, thus making it a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character.”*

Certain thematic interests are delineated in the results and analysis in this study which point to a *“a common striving towards awareness of reality and self”* and which constitute a series of adult learning needs. These interests related to issues of self-knowledge and esteem, intimacy, sexual partnership, power relations, gender relations, sexual victimisation, inter-personal sexual communication, parenting and to the re-generation of unquestioned sexual and relational assumptions. Such interests are constant when contrasted with the finiteness and mutability of prescribed learning needs for economic advantage and competitiveness in a fast-changing world of work, science and technology, and on which much of society’s mainstream institutional interests and resourcing are focused (Department of Education and Science, 1998; West, 1998:237; Thompson, 1996). Learning needs in relation to these ‘constants’ which underpin the human quest for understanding appear to exert relatively little influence on the disposition of interest and resources, yet they have the potential for engaging the community in critical processes which could radically alter the profile of human relating, including the profile of education and of societal aspirations and practices.

In interrogating the problematics of personal sexual story, the learner and, in this context, adult education also, engage with what might be described as the human relational infrastructure; for example with issues of fairness, trust, respect, love and intimacy. These are basic ingredients which support positive civilised human interaction. In this process, values can be exposed and examined; links with what might be described as superstructural institutions, services and socially and globally generated life-styles can be scrutinised and tested for congruity with espoused and/or



implicit relational infrastructural values. Hegemonic assumptions about the balance of power relations within and between the infrastructural and the superstructural world of human experience, and to whichever of them the benefits accrue, can be problematized and critiqued. In this sense, personal sexual story, as a biographical learning venture, is addressing bedrock issues. As such, it would seem to be a radical and worthwhile direction for transformative learning in adult education to follow. Furthermore, it will be argued here that if transformative learning in adult education, in its personal development provision, is not engaged in facilitating this level of holistic critical reflection, it is working only with the symptoms of the human problematic rather than with significant aspects of the causes. In other words, it runs the risk of building transformative learning bridges without attending to the foundations; thereby defeating a serious part of its own *'raison d'être'*. Figure 5 overleaf seeks to depict adult education's potential role in facilitating the advancement of values of intimacy. Such values, in turn, generate general values which inform interests and, consequently, lifestyles.

Indeed, a process of holistic personal development through sexual biographicity is, potentially, a counterbalance to what West (1998:248) describes as

*“powerful forces which seek to constrain human possibilities, in which human beings are conceived, implicitly, as subservient to the play of markets and liberal capitalism.”*

Such a transformative learning process which enables holistic personal sexual development extends beyond market forces, capitalism and consumerism; it extends beyond patriarchal compounds and sexual power politics; it opens up for investigation fundamental issues about the way women and men organise themselves and are organised in their relationships. In the literature, such organisation is highlighted, particularly in relation to sexuality, in feminist theory.

Adult education's involvement in transformative learning through personal sexual story offers a process for moving from analysis (and through analysis) to action: from understanding to application. The primary action is through dialogue between women



**Figure 5**  
**Transformational dynamic between personal and political spheres**  
**through adult education in personal sexuality**

**CRITICAL REFLECTION IN ADULT EDUCATION**

**SUPERSTRUCTURAL WORLD OF HUMAN RELATIONS**

**GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**  
CULTURES ECONOMIES COMMERCE RELATIONS  
lifestyles  
interests  
values

**LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**  
STRUCTURES INSTITUTIONS MARKETS SERVICES  
COMMUNITIES EMPLOYMENT  
lifestyles  
interests  
values

**PERSONAL ENVIRONMENT**  
SELF PARTNER FAMILIES CHILDREN  
FRIENDS WORK  
lifestyles  
interests  
values

**RELATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURAL VALUES OF INTIMACY**  
respect fairness trust mutuality inclusivity openness interest intimacy love  
spirit of friendship and collaboration

**Positive input towards local and global well-being**



potent in delivering change and transforming behaviours. This process is analogous to the consciousness-raising process of transformative learning (Hart, 1990).

Alheit (1995) and West (1998:238) point out that the normative structures or formats of 'a life history' or 'biography' have changed dramatically. The once-upon-a-time predictability of the structure and sequence of a life course, for example, of schooling, work, marriage, family and retirement, for the majority in this culture, does not exist anymore. Diversity in all of these 'states' or 'stages' is now the norm and biographies themselves, Alheit (1995:76) states, are

*"becoming more complicated, more individual, less 'normal', but at the same time more colourful, autonomous and self-willed."*

For the purposes of this study, it is important to clarify what is meant by 'personal story' in a transformative learning context. The following guiding definition or description also applies to 'personal sexual story' when it arises later in the text.

Personal story exists at three levels. At a first level, it is the particular individual's reflection on and critical analysis of his or her experience in and of the world, told in the responsive company of an adult learning group. At a second level, it is the collective story of the individuals' reflection on and critical analysis of their experience in and of the world. At the third level, it is the individual's and the learning group of individuals' reflection on and critical analysis of theories about how and why their experiences may be what they are. The learning companions<sup>9</sup> are recipient-actors; that is, each member in the company receives each story, as it is offered, and contributes his and her own story. In addition, with regard to each other's stories, each learning companion acts in evoking, eliciting or educating and working with those particular stories through the interpersonal interchange and reflection of the group. It is not an accounting 'quid pro quo' type process; it is rather more like jazz playing, with each musician and instrument making a particular contribution to the melody, individually

---

<sup>9</sup> The term 'learning companion' is suggested by the mutuality, intimacy and appreciative discourse of shared learning, and the permission implicit in robust companionship to challenge each others' worldviews without fear of loss.

and collectively extemporising as they are prompted by the rhythm and beat of the music. Music is played and made in the creative dynamic of the group. All of the players engage with theoretical concepts on the formation and substance of such stories. In other words, all members of the learning company are active on stage, playing their particular part in the articulation and understanding of personal story. They are, as Morris (1972:74,75) describes, metaphorically engaged in real life drama rather than mere theatricality; that is, engaged in *“real-life at its most engrossing and significant”*, by embarking on a new experience which is important to them, the outcome of which is unknown, but which they believe they can influence.

The facilitator/educator is both part of and apart from the troupe. He or she is a companion-learner and contributor to the theme of personal sexuality but also carries particular responsibilities for guaranteeing that the learning environment is maintained. Part of that responsibility is in ensuring that both intellectual and emotional literacy is encouraged and supported, so that the movement of the critically analytic learning spiral is sustained rather than settled in a circular roundelay.

For the individual, personal story is the sum and the parts of his or her past up until and including the present moment, which the person, consciously or unconsciously, selects to place in the public forum of the learning group. As Dominice (1990:198) states, story-tellers are *“the sculptors of their life histories”*. This is not to say that the story is untruthful or that it is a fiction. Rather, like Michelangelo’s David whom, he asserted, his work released rather than hewed from the marble, the work of personal story reveals what is within rather than creates what is not there. At times, different facets of the story’s composition may be made apparent by the narrator. Although the events of the experience remain factually the same, the interpretation may differ as the story is told and re-told. The shape of the story may change over time or depending on the context. The point being made here is that while ‘personal story’ is the story of a life, this does not translate into ‘one life, one story’. Nor does the fact that there may be ‘variations on the themes’ as the story is told and re-told mean that the composition is flawed. West (1998:247) describes story as *“a vehicle for an experiment in self-composure”*. And, as the story is told and understood, more of it can be told, because



as Hart (1990:56) asserts in relation to women, but which is equally applicable to both sexes:

*“Understanding is both a process of completion and of opening up the view on the terrain of unexplored interpretations of experience and of possibilities for action”.*

When new understanding is accomplished through the process of recounting personal experience in the form described herein, that understanding becomes part of the experience, thereby transforming it from what it was in its first telling. This is an important dimension to the potential for transformative learning through personal story: it contains the possibility of informing and transforming experience by making sufficient sense of it for the narrator to *“transform the facts, confusions, chaos and pain of a life into a greater, if always contingent, whole”* (West, 1998:243). In this way, the narrator is enabled to possess the story rather than be possessed by it. Consequently, she or he is in a position to exercise greater choices in its management: in shaping the script for the future.

Throughout this study, the stories of the participants highlight the interplay between what they experienced in their learning about sexuality and how that experience was mediated by the social and political structures of the day. An example of this can be seen in their accounts relating to puberty and its associated sexual and gender learning patterns. Such accounts were generally described by both sexes in the study as personally differentiating, discriminating and alienating. Their experiences were shaped and mediated, as was shown, in and by a context of social and religious sexual repressiveness, a national policy of sexual segregation in education, and within a culture of sexual silence which facilitated, amongst other things, the perpetration of crimes of sexual violence.

What the accounts of the participants highlight, and which is emphasised in the literature, is the fact that personal story comprises of two important elements, distinct but indivisible: individual experience and the socio-cultural, or political, context shaping the experience (Hart, 1998; Plummer, 1995; Usher and Edwards, 1995). As

Freire (1972:27) states “*world [and women] and men do not exist apart from each other*”. The relationship between individual experience and socio-cultural context is analogous to that between water and clay in the composition of a pottery vessel: remove either and there is no vessel.

Personal development in adult education and, therefore, personal story and personal sexual story in transformative learning, draws from theories and practices belonging to disciplines which contribute to but are not, of themselves, originally specific to transformative learning in adult education. For example, Rogers’ (1967) contribution to adult education was drawn from his psychotherapeutic practice, and the use of biography in critical reflection for transformative learning is drawn from the social sciences (Dominice, 1990:196), in particular from those of anthropology and ethnography.

There can appear to be a tendency within the human sciences, in defence of their respective theoretical standpoints, to polarise perspectives; that is, to emphasise a particular argument or viewpoint over against another with the effect of marginalising that other approach, casting it into opposition to the one being forwarded. For example, as indicated in Chapter Two, psychology studies the individual from the point of view of the psyche, of the individual mind, emotions, intelligence, defences, responses and behaviours, and formulates theories about the human being within this context (Freud, 1977; Erikson, 1965; Storr, 1989). Sociology, on the other hand, studies societies and the way societies and groups within societies function, and theorises about groupings, about the collective, and about the roles people play in society (Ruddock, 1980:59; Groome 1980:109). Neither discipline ignores the fact and importance of the other’s perspective and the interconnectedness of both. Nevertheless, psychology tends to emphasise the individual at the expense of the socio-cultural; sociology tends to emphasise the socio-cultural at the expense of the individual. The inclination in the polarising tendency is to demonstrate by opposition, creating what Barrett (1991:92) describes as “*an unfortunate dichotomy between ‘the individual’ on the one hand and ‘society’ on the other*”.



Identifying a possible tendency to polarise in order to clarify a stance or to emphasise a difference, in general, is not intended here as a criticism. It is to highlight that, in the particular instance of this study on personal sexuality and adult education, the tendency to polarise/oppose the individual and the socio-cultural, the personal and the political and, indeed, experience and theory, a polarisation with which a number of the participants and the adult educators and the psycho-therapists were shown to grapple in Chapter Six, forms a problematic of its own in relation to the constitution of transformative learning.

It might seem obvious to emphasise here the significance of the relationship between individual experience and its socio-cultural context. However, the combining of individual experience and the socio-cultural context in which the individual acquires that experience can become problematic, because both aspects need to be drawn out and critically analysed in personal story, if that story is to form a basis for a transformative learning outcome. As Michelson (1998:227) succinctly puts it “...*experience must be understood as the place where personal and social meet*”. In the transformative learning process, it is where the learning process moves beyond the poles of one or the other, gathering both into the learning momentum towards a higher tide-line of transformed comprehension. Part of this transformative process is in the stimulation of the learner’s consciousness and understanding of both dimensions. Recognition of this can fail because the educator’s training has overlooked the significance of one pole or the other, or because his or her worldview is focused in a particular direction to the exclusion of the fuller picture or, indeed, of the learners’ needs.

Personal story, that is, individual experience or life-history, as a vehicle for

*“experiential or biographical learning as a profoundly interconnected social, psychological, discursive and, potentially integrative process”* (West, 1998:236)

is a connecting process which links ideas, emotions, events, interdependencies and relationships. Its purpose is to gather into the spectrum as many of the relevant

elements as possible which go to form a life or a dimension of a life; that is, which go to form and inform particular experience. As Brookfield (1998:134) states in relation to the need for adult educators to engage in critical reflection on their interpretations of experience and which is, also, apt to the issue under discussion here:

*“Understanding our experience in new ways is possible only when we view this through as many different lens as are available to us. The more lenses we employ, the more chance we have of throwing into sharp relief the contours of our assumptive clusters.”*

What is at issue here is personal development in adulthood through critical reflection on the assumptive clusters formed by and through our personal sexual story. However, a key factor towards unlocking the transformative potential for women and men in relation to their sexuality is in enabling them to tell their stories holistically. A holistic process moves beyond polar positions of the ‘individual’ and ‘socio-cultural’, of the ‘personal’ and ‘political’, of ‘experience’ and ‘theory’, into an appreciative recognition of the interconnectedness of each to personal sexual story. The word ‘appreciative’ indicates a holding of experience and context that is integrative; not as a ‘politically correct’ academic tag-on of one aspect or the other by any one persuasion in deference to the unsustainability of its exclusion but as a genuine bridge leading to freedom for the learner. This bridge is achieved through a critical analysis of the relation between all of these elements in shaping personal experience, thereby leading to enhanced meaning perspectives and a more critical and inclusive worldview (Mezirow, 1990). From the ground of such integrated knowledge, the learner is well positioned to participate, individually or with the collective, in effectuating personal and/or political transformation.

If an educator/facilitator and learning group focus uncritically on the individual’s experience and without taking cognisance of the wider socio-cultural-political contexts of that experience, they can lead the particular individual into a repetitious ‘intra-spective’ cycle of reflection, partial in understanding and vulnerable to domestication; that is, to conformation to the status quo rather than to transformation (Inglis, 1998; Hart, 1992; Freire, 1972:28). In addition, this type of narrow ‘intra-spective’ process



changes the appropriate empathic engagement with the individual and the story from being part of a transformative learning spiral into what Brookfield (1998:130) describes robustly as a round of “*uncritical, celebratory swapping of war stories and anecdotes.....*”. Furthermore, to make a slightly different point, there is the danger that such a limited focus feeds into one of the pitfalls ascribed to individualism: individuals may quite unjustly perceive themselves simply as individuals without a context. Yet, they may not be the sole carriers of responsibility for their experiences or for their redress. Broad-spectrum factors outside of their control and on which they are dependent also have a share in the creation of and solution to the experiential problematic (Jansen and van der Veen; 1996:126,127,133), and thus need to be included for consideration in any transformative self-reflexive process.

On the other hand, the danger also exists of an educator/facilitator and learning group’s focus being turned almost solely on the individual’s personal story, or elements thereof, as a ‘take-off’ point for engaging in a critique of the socio-cultural/political contexts which contribute to shaping personal stories. Such a process, where it exists, may be described as a depersonalising process: one in which the personal experience and the emotions and effects attendant on it are shifted swiftly away from the individual in order to become material for exemplification of (and, on occasion, vilification of) broader socio-cultural/structural issues and power relations. This treatment of personal story has the potential to be equally limiting in its transformative outcome. It leads the person into an ‘extra-spective’ cycle, thereby colluding with socio-cultural suppression of the individual, where it exists. In such learning experiences, it can appear as though the ‘personal’ is expelled from the ‘story’: the person stranded outside the learning spiral. In an educational process of this type, the danger is that the individual is simply recruited into a type of ‘counter culture’ which is potentially as limited as the facilitation of an exclusively ‘intra-spective’ approach. This follows because the process does not allow space for a genuine emergence and recognition of the individual voice. It runs the risk of leap-frogging over what Edwards and Usher (1998:171) term as “*the specificity of the learner*” to a more uniform management of experience. This fore-shortening process, in an adult education learning environment, runs the risk of a further imposition of ‘object’ status

on the individual. It may fail to confirm the individual's subject status in the learning activity and in the world through the respect, attention and space given to the voice of experience, to the diversity of people's experiences, and to their own initial interpretations of those experiences.

The invitation posed to adult education by this study is to move beyond the polarisation of the 'personal' and the 'political' and to provide a holistic learning channel for sexuality through personal sexual story. It is argued here, and probably uniquely argued in relation to personal sexual story, that transformational adult education whereby a structured disclosure of individual experience is interwoven with an analysis of the broader socio-cultural contexts can provide a forum in which rotating, life-inhibiting cycles, as described by the participants in the previous chapters, can be broken. It is asserted here that such a forum can facilitate a widening spiral of transformative learning as each learning dimension propels the person into a new critical learning curve in the spiral. This inter-weaving of the personal and the political is a delicate process. Balance is not simply a matter of time allotment. It requires discernment, prudence, courage and skill on the part of any facilitator to make appropriate judgements in this transformative process.

Individual experience comprises the process and content of the individual's relationships and engagement in the world: it is the text of a life in which events and emotions interact continuously to form the script. As Michelson (1998:227) states,

*"experience itself might be defined as a complex of habits that are both cause and effect of material, social, discursive, physiological, and psychological interactions between the individual and the social reality."*

Thus, experience forms a body of subjective knowledge by which the individual's personal assumptions, needs, fears and expectations are created and established and from which behaviours are constructed.



The socio-cultural context comprises of the environmental conditions into which the individual is born, learns and is socialised as a member of the community; it is the collective's assumptions, needs, fears and expectations from which collective/political values are formed, often institutionalised, and brought to bear in the socialising process of the individual. This socialising process is one *"by which people come to be who they are by interaction with other people in their social environment"* (Groome, 1980:109; Burkitt, 1991).

Germane to this study, as was illustrated in earlier chapters, is the contention that one of the widest and all-embracing of the socio-cultural strata in which men and women are embedded is the gender stratum which defines men as superior and women, in their 'otherness' to men, as being of less value than men (French, 1994; Jay, 1991; de Beauvoir, 1972:).

The socio-cultural context is not an auto-product. Its construction and production are the outcomes of individuals' collective ascription, investment and agency endowment. Its power rests largely in the degree of collective assent or lack of dissent to its form. Society's primary energy is largely given over to self-preservation (Hart, 1992:3) as is that of the individual. However, when a critical level of dissent or resistance is expressed to the socio-cultural context, or to aspects thereof, socio-cultural change follows. This critical level of dissent may appear as a long-drawn out and bloody process, engaged with by the many, perhaps never fully accomplished, such as is the case with the abolition of slavery in the United States of America. It may appear as a swift and sudden event, initiated by a single person, as was the case when Lavinia Kerwick made the decision to appear on national television in Ireland to speak frankly of her experience of rape, thereby altering fundamentally (although by no means abolishing) the Irish socio-cultural resistance to a proper recognition of the reality and meaning of rape and of the structural collusion with that resistance. The point is that, ultimately, the socio-cultural context and resulting political dispositions are dependent on individuals and susceptible to change by the actions of individuals. This assertion is neither supportive of an over-stressed individualism nor a denial of the contingency and motility of individual empowerment (Foucault, 1978; Usher and Edwards, 1995).

It is, rather, a truism which recognises the inherent potential within the person to contribute to the re-creation or re-culturation of his or her socio-cultural context. As Freire (1972:27) asserts:

*“If men [humankind] produce social reality (which in the ‘inversion of the praxis’ turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for men [humankind].”*

The concept that either the group/community (exemplified above in the North-American public in relation to slavery) or the individual (exemplified above by Lavinia Kerwick in relation to rape) has the potential to effect change in the structures of society and the cultures contained therein, that is, to take and effect political action, is important in making an argument for the role adult education can play in bringing about transformative learning through personal development courses. In addition, it is interesting, for this study, to note that it was through giving voice to her personal sexual story that Lavinia Kerwick politicised and transformed hegemonic assumptions and attitudes in Ireland about a most serious aspect of sexual oppression.

To reiterate, personal story is the story of the individual and of the society in which she or he lives: the individual and society are the foreground and the background of the same picture. To tell the story is to tell the story of both. This is an important understanding in relation to transformative learning through personal story.

In the public sphere, the telling of an individual’s personal story can be suggestive of ‘revelation’ and ‘disclosure’. These are words and concepts frequently used to suggest an exposure of the hidden, socially less acceptable aspects of human experience; aspects held to be alien from and not in keeping with the moral norms of society, in general. This suggestion of exposure and social unacceptability is an important influence in shaping people’s perceptions of telling their personal stories; perceptions about the risk they undertake, in so doing, of being judged to be socially reprehensible and wanting. This has the effect, in many situations, such as exemplified by the participants in this study, not alone of the imposition of false silences but also the



‘normalisation’ of silence in relation to personal sexual story. In Chapter Six (p.295), Sally (44:F:25-34:P) expresses this concern by reference to “*that fear of baring all*”.

The power of socio-cultural disapprobation to control personal expression is exemplified, for instance, in Anita’s (17:F:35-44:P) story: a story of inhibition in discussing concerns raised by her early experiences of marital intimacy. It is not suggested here that personal story is always disapproved of in society. However, there are restrictions about what is considered “worthy” to be told and what is not, and how, where and with whom it is considered appropriate for certain discourses to take place (Foucault, 1978).

Personal story will always consist of the particularity of the individual in the particularity of the socio-cultural context which contributes to his or her personal formation. However, that particularity also includes generalities or commonalities. For example, while each man, in his particularity is, in a sense, his own man, if he is as Jason (43:M:45-54:P) is, newly unemployed in his early forties, now aged forty-five, divorced and re-married with a young family, having grown up and lived in an inner city local authority housing scheme all his life, there are dimensions in his personal story which are reflected in the personal stories of other men with similar personal profiles and backgrounds. Aspects of individual stories such as these are common to other men and, indeed, women with similar histories, in other countries and settings. It is also the case with socio-cultural contexts. While each socio-cultural context has its own particular configuration, much commonality can also be found amongst many of them (Frye, 1990; Freire, 1972:74).

The commonality in personal stories offers storytellers a validating solidarity or communality which, in a learning context, forms a conducive environment for critical appraisal and the engendering of transformative action (Mezirow, 1991:186; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986): a “*communitarian*” process which Alheit (1995:86) considers to be one of the essentials for biographical transformative learning.

At the same time, the diversity in personal stories, in such an empathic learning environment, immediately offers storytellers access to a depth and breadth extension of personal knowledge and the potential for developing an appreciative awareness of difference. As Alheit (1995:85) states, such exchange of personal stories offers the

*“...raw material’ for dealing with the most fundamental form of otherness, the spontaneous encounter of ego and alter, and thus the basis for the most important transitional learning process within sociality”.*

The experience of the commonality and diversity in personal stories, and the connections made between the actors themselves and with their scripts, creates a learning ambience for key transformative personal extensions: from ‘I’ to ‘We’ and from ‘What?’ to ‘Why?’

The advent of information technology and computerisation, the immediate transferability of knowledge and ‘know how’, the increasing mobility of people and artefacts, and the growing implications of globalisation, challenge concepts of homogeneity and identity within any particular learning group, community or socio-cultural context and, indeed, challenge concepts about the practice of experiential learning in adult education (Edwards and Usher, 1998). These aspects of change mean, however, that the individual and the learning group have a wider web to explore and to draw from in their relating to issues of exploitation, elitism and exclusivity, either as they experience them in the stories of their individual lives or as they experience them in the stories of those with whom they share the world. That which was experienced heretofore more abstractly and, therefore, with a lesser degree of personal impact, is becoming much more concrete in the lives of the individual and experientially more accessible.

Within this contemporary context, transformative learning through critical reflection on personal story has an enhanced potential for nurturing more extensive transformative action. This is so because the channels which feed into and out through the work of personal story are wider and broader and more far-reaching than ever before. The



connections and interdependencies which exist between all of humankind, and which emphasise the values of affective and generative solidarity and democracy (as well as the oppressions which divide and disaffect), become more visible and attractive to the individual and to the learning group.

In other words, the potential for transformative learning through personal story exceeds what it might have been heretofore when individual experience and socio-cultural contexts were more narrowly boundaried and firmly defined. As Alheit (1995:76) asserts, biographies are becoming more individual and more complex. So too are socio-cultural contexts becoming more complex. The metaphor of strata with its geological connotations is apt in that, while particular contexts may appear relatively stable, movement is taking place at all times and, sometimes, that movement becomes explosive, shaking assumed stability to its foundations.<sup>10</sup>

The stance for justice, democracy and global well-being may appear too big or outside the realm of the ordinary citizen. But, the significant point being made here is that issues of justice, democracy and global well-being arise within the micro-world of intimate interpersonal relationships and are well illustrated by the participants of this study. Furthermore, it is actually this micro-world of intimate relationships, the micro-world of the personal sexual story and the learning therein, which resources the 'global fund' with the affective and generative relational qualities needed to implement these virtues at a macro level, or fail to do so.

Individual experience articulated through personal story, as a context for and contribution to critical reflection, has the potential to generate stances of resistance to inter-personal and structural exploitation. Adult education, by offering experiential transformative learning opportunities through personal story, engages in the "*wider considerations of individual and social well-being, as well as of democratic health*" which West (1998:237) adverts to as currently being neglected. By so doing, adult education makes provision for experiential learning on "*...existential problems (such*

---

<sup>10</sup> The Japanese economic crash of the late 1980s and early 1990s is an example of severely shaken stability.

*as personal growth, giving meaning to life)...”* which Jansen and van der Veen (1996:134) anticipate will be the way forward for adult education in the changing context of contemporary society.

It is important that adult education, in its approach to the social and cultural issues of the beginning of this new millennium, avoids a ‘doom and gloom’ approach to experiential learning (Jansen and van der Veen, 1996:131) and highlights the potential for human goodness, that is, the goodness of justice, equality, participative democracy and friendship, in order to succeed in its conscientization of learners. Globalisation both diminishes the conceptual size of the world and expands the breadth and effects of individual and collective human activity.

It is the contention of this thesis that the arguments above, which demonstrate the potential in personal story for transformative adult education, apply with the same validity to personal sexual story.

### **Personal sexual story: a transformative learning project in adult education**

Personal sexual story, as a vehicle for transformative learning in adult education, challenges the culture of sexual silence outlined by the participants in this study. To narrate personal sexual story is to engage in social action. It is, therefore, a political process (Plummer, 1995). In certain storylines, it is a revolutionary process. To paraphrase Hart (1998:194,195) in relation to an educator facilitating “*constructive conversations*”, personal sexual story

*“is a form of political action because it allows voices to be heard which are otherwise silenced or struck from public consciousness.”*

This is a process which challenges the assumptions that underpin and cultivate the belief that personal sexuality is a cloistered topic, confined to the private internal world



of the individual. Metaphorically speaking, articulating personal sexual story is a rezoning of the private ground of that silence, converting part of it into a public space into which people may come and go and converse constructively. As such, this process, to quote Barr (1998:71) in relation to adult education, has *“the radically democratic development of knowledge at its heart.”*

As a majority of the participants in this study indicate, previous learning about personal sexuality contained many misapprehensions, fallacies and negating myths. The results of the study show that the assumptions formed in early childhood and adolescence tend to support the maintenance in adulthood of falsely inhibiting silences about personal sexuality; that these assumptions and consequent ensuing silence contribute to lack of knowledge, poor sexual self-esteem, lack of communicative skill as lovers, parents, educators and members of society in relation to sexuality, and to gender divisiveness (see Chapters Four and Five). Issues of personal sexuality arising in the course of adulthood suffer from this learning and ethos. This, in turn, inhibits adult democratic discourse; a discourse which could facilitate on-going transformative learning on what is defined as a central and dynamic theme by the research participants; and one which, irrespective of the quality of early learning, they assert, is necessary for their meeting the challenges and changes of adult sexuality as subjects rather than as objects of their life histories.

It could be suggested that the sexual saturation of the public sphere (external forum) by a proliferation of media presentations is indicative of the breaking up of an historical socio-cultural silence; that the entire sexual spectrum from safe sex to sado-masochistic self-help kits is presented, discussed, critiqued and offered to the listening, reading, watching and, above all, purchasing public. Another perspective, however, suggests that the socio-cultural pattern of repression of personal sexuality to the private arena of specialists or of personal silence (the internal forum) is, paradoxically, reinforced by the socio-cultural proliferation of consumerist sexuality, publicly displayed. A considerable proportion of the public/media expressions of sexuality only serves to reinforce women's and men's belief in the personal prudence of maintaining silence. Plummer, with reference to the public/media expression of sexuality

(1995:156), recognises a contemporary *“parallel story of censorship and freedom of speech and expression”* when he raises the issue of the absent voices of those who are socially silenced:

*“But what is still missing though,.....is a sense of the varying voices that watch and read and consume this material.”*

Personal silence in relation to public portrayals of sexuality and the values associated with them remains relatively unbroken because, without having acquired a communicative facility about personal sexuality, it is difficult to summon a voice to either support or counter-challenge or critique the public/media selections and depictions of sexuality. As Freire (1972) says

*“In the culture of silence the masses are ‘mute’, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society...”*

The inhibitory regulation of personal sexual story limits the degree to which society is confronted by demands from its citizens to prioritise the establishment and maintenance of a climate supportive of intimate relationship, a form of benign relational ecology, of affective relational sustainability. Plummer (1995:145-147), focusing on contemporary shifts taking place in power politics, asserts:

*“The sexual stories found in the late modern world are part of the process through which contemporary politics is being rewritten.”*

It is an argument of this thesis that, by the containment and regulation of personal sexual stories and of the harsh realities and promising potentialities of intimacy and relationships contained therein, women and men are prevented from optimally playing their potential political public role in resisting such anti-intimate, relationally oppressive, normative values as exist, thereby enabling the social machine to roll on fundamentally unchallenged. By breaking the cultural silence of personal sexuality, by facilitating the realities and potentialities of personal stories entering the public forum,



women and men can act to expose the contradictions between personal and societal needs, priorities and values, and to expose unjust imbalances in benefits between the individual and society sustained by hegemonic assumptions about sexuality, where they exist.

The strategic privatisation of personal sexuality results, as has been stated earlier in the text, in an emphasis on the establishment and encouragement of designated 'safe places' (the confessional, the clinic, the therapy room) for the relating of personal sexual story (Foucault, 1978). Within these places, personal sexual stories may be told and controlled in a way which limits confrontation of the socio-cultural context and the powerful currents within that context which have shaped these stories of personal experience. It could be said that such containing spaces confirm the context. In each of the spaces exemplified above, personal sexual story is confined to the private conversation, to the singular form of intervention, the contract of which, in general, ensures a very particular containment of the story. In a democracy in which freedom of speech is an acclaimed human right, such control of personal sexual story involves a complex apparatus of definitions, social conventions and manners, sanctions, specialisms and specialists. In a less democratic society, personal sexual story may be silenced straightforwardly by imprisonment, mutilation or death.

It is important here to affirm the value of the 'safe places' such as those named above, where and for whom these are available and accessible, and the profoundly healing and challenging work done within their confines. The point being made here is that an issue arises for critical analysis if these appear to be virtually the only places and relationships designated by society for the articulation of personal sexual story and, therefore, perceived by individuals to be the only acceptable places for the expression of certain dimensions of their lived experience of sexuality. It is an issue for adult education if, as Alheit (1995:85-86) suggests, the purpose of transformative adult education in this present era is neither that of healing nor of training but of *"biographical coaching"* defined as:

*"...the joint discovery by teacher and learner of biographical opportunities for shaping social, occupational and political existence*

*more autonomously.... in order that individuals' hidden possibilities are brought to the surface and developed, and that 'unlived' lives can be lived instead."*

Alheit's concept of transformative learning in adult education appears particularly pertinent when applied to what the participants in this study describe as the 'silenced' theme of personal sexual story; a theme revealing much 'unlived life' with which to work.

Following from the above perspective, this study asserts that the individual is in possession of, or can be enabled into possession of, the power to bring about transformational changes, personally and politically, if he or she is in critically reflective possession of personal sexual history. This would appear to be important work for 'biographical coaching' in transformative adult education, particularly so, because all men and women have a sexual story of on-going immense personal significance to tell and to work with.

Furthermore, the findings in this study indicate that personal sexual stories hold the power and possibility, if articulated in a public forum, of politically challenging societal values and norms and their role in the creation and sustenance of certain democratic deficits. These features of personal sexuality profoundly affect how women and men live and love together, the relationships they engage in, the communities they create, the rearing of children, and how sexual difference is welcomed in the community (Butler-Scally, 1995).

For example, a critical analysis of the profiles of an individual's working day in an urban environment may reveal that the time and stress of getting to and from work coupled with the pressure to produce at work, in an environment of virtually instant communication made possible by technology, is quite antithetical to personal relations of intimacy. Such an analysis may suggest that the psychological energy required and/or the physical opportunities to attend to a personal sexual relationship of intimacy are reduced to the point where they may no longer be sufficient to serve the



relationship effectively. As West (1998:238), in critiquing the effects of a narrow, economically-focused, learning society, points out:

*“Even those nearer the core are motivated by growing insecurity, working ever more frenetically in the greedy, demanding workplace simply to survive. And this is often to the detriment of selves, intimate relationships and family life.”*

Suggestions of this type of tension between competing needs of intimate relationship and work were evident in Damian’s (7:M:25-34:P) and Dermot’s (36:M:25-34:P) personal sexual stories in Chapter Five.

Common themes in personal sexual story, released from the inhibition of silence as a transformative learning venture, are capable of revealing problematic opposition between personal psycho-social needs of relationship and intimacy and the requirements of prevailing societal norms and values. This possibility within the particular learning process is a powerful one; common themes identified in a learning group make *“a starting point.... for cultural action of a liberating character”* (Freire; 1972:79). Metaphorically speaking, the potential inherent for transformation in the learner’s awakening in such a critical analytic process, at this level of human experience, carries intimations of the wakening of the winter hibernating bear: it bespeaks the arrival of a springtime but also of a new risk abroad!

The key distinction between what has been defined as ‘personal story’ and ‘personal sexual story’ is in the level of personal story being addressed in this study. Personal sexual story takes biographicity a step deeper in transformative learning in adult education: a step down, metaphorically speaking, to the more hidden and yet much-encompassing depths of intimacy and sexual relationship. The more subjugated the knowledge, the more potentially liberative its release.

Articulating personal sexual story in a learning context, because of the topic material, is a challenging process for both the narrator and for the recipient-participants. A consideration of the contents and process of sexual learning indicated by the

participants clearly demonstrates the sensitivity and tenderness and, in many lives, the pain of such learning. As Brookfield (1990:186,187), in encouraging the use of critical thinking to examine assumptions about intimate relationships, points out:

*“We may present partial representations of ourselves in our work and community lives, but in intimate relationships we reveal our most private identities, allowing the emergence of that core of our being by which we define ourselves. Conversely, the private nature of this domain makes probing its assumptions particularly impenetrable.”*

It appears appropriate, in this context, and as explained on page three hundred and fifty two, to term the group of learners a ‘companionate learning group’. The term ‘companion’ (etymologically, *con pane*, with bread) seems particularly appropriate for a learning forum in which the learners, including the educator (Hart, 1998:198,199), keep sustaining company with each other as they work radically together for transformation. In the ‘companionate learning group’, personal sexual story is not simply a narration of more or less interest to the listener in its confidences. It is a critical expression and exploration of intimate psycho-social experience. This process is entered into by the learners with the aim of discovering and reflecting with others on their experiences of sexuality, in order to find what it is in their sexual learning experiences which cause them and the world they live in to be as they are, and why: of probing ‘*particularly impenetrable*’ assumptions about that which is core to the individual and to society. In its exploration, even that which Brookfield describes as “*the core of our being*”, in this case, the ‘coreness’ ascribed to sexuality and intimacy, is open for questioning in a critically reflective transformative learning setting. As was seen in Chapter Six, the primary participants, adult educators and psychotherapists, in their respective responses, found the “coreness” of the topic to be pivotal in terms of whether or not it could or should be addressed in adult education as a means of transformative learning.

The articulation of personal sexual story by learners is a search for an increase in understanding of their stories’ composition and meaning together with a critical evaluation of the internal and external forces contributing to the dynamics of these



stories. The subsequent enrichment in knowledge is not 'money for deposit'; it is for spending on shaping new personal and political futures. Alheit (1995:86) defines an aspect of biographical learning as

*"'Interest-related'...it must have something to do with the learner's own ideas for shaping his or her world. Learning processes then become voyages of discovery - for learners and teachers..."*

This is evident in the achievements of the primary participants. In response to the insights and new perspectives gained, and supported by the solidarity experienced through mutual learning by the critical interchange of personal sexual stories, together with their positioning in the broader, theoretical understandings of the composition of such stories, a significant number of learners changed behaviours. They took action, as was shown, on issues of spousal communication, parenting, sexual abuse, professional relationships, social services, and on work programmes and practices. Furthermore, in Chapter Six, they threw down the gauntlet to adult education to take up the challenge of developing and facilitating this particular transformative process.

To embark on the quest for transformative knowledge, as indicated above, the sexual story is told and, most importantly, exteriorised. It is placed into the public forum of the learning group to be received and heard, in the first instance. This is central to the learning process. As Hart (1998:195) asserts: *"Listening is a core dimension of the relational matrix of constructive conversations."* Active listening and open acceptance of an individual's experience, as first articulated, assists in ensuring that the narrator feels both accepted and understood. This creates an environment in which, as Smith (cited in Hart 1998:195) states:

*"People's tacit knowledge of what they know as a matter of daily/nightly practices surfaces as people speak and as what they speak of is taken seriously, undistilled, untranslated."*

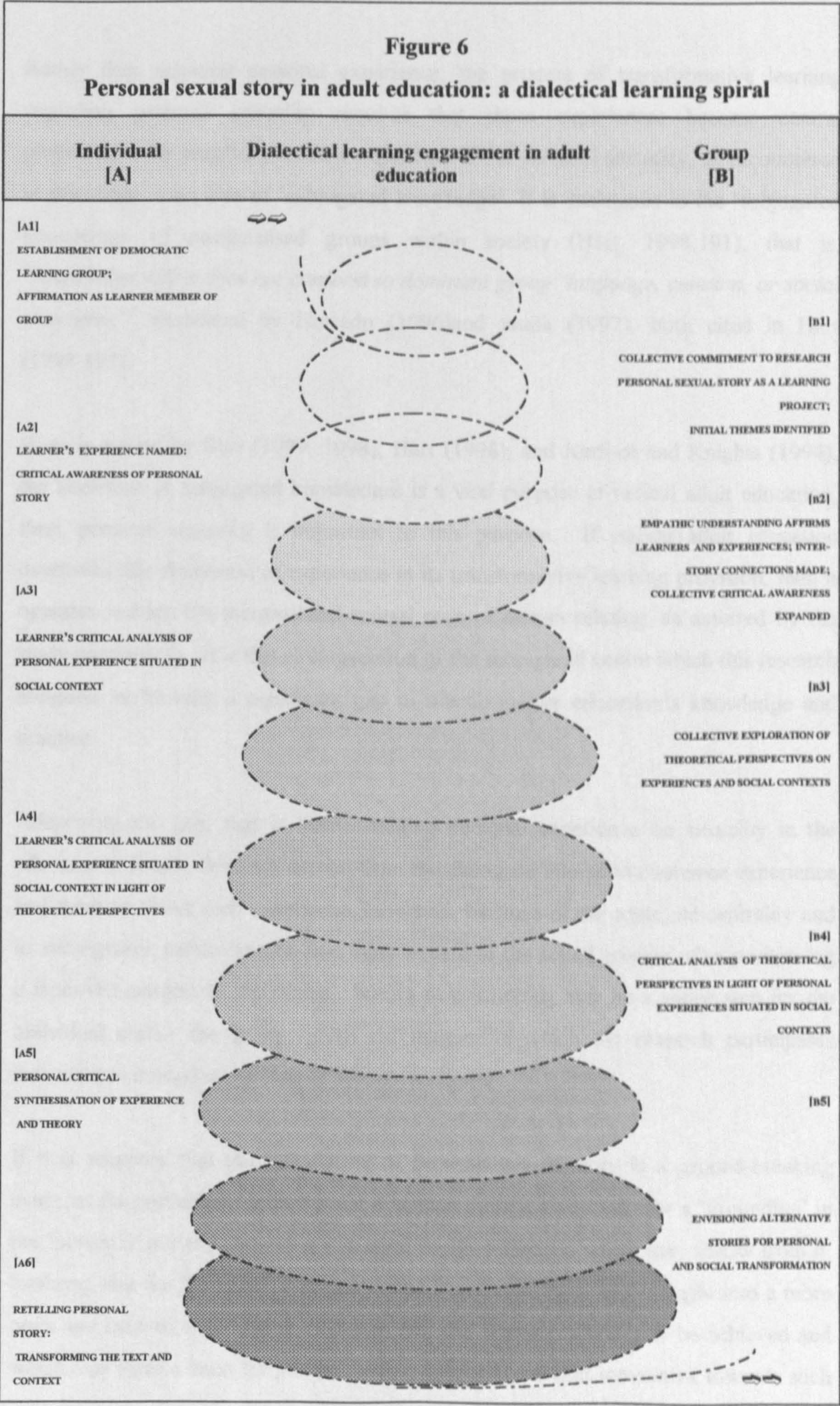
In its reception and acceptance, the story forms the take-off point to be explored by the learner in the light of the collective experiences of the companion-learners, together

with the collective understandings of the contextual socio-cultural strata in which it developed, and to be tested in the light of existing bodies of relevant theory. At its best, the script returns altered, with the story-teller strengthened by acceptance, enriched by new information and insights, and challenged into elective rescripting; that is, the learner and companion-learners are motivated by new knowledge to change and develop new forms of interpersonal and social interactions congruent with the new unfolding in the story. Personal sexual story is no longer a monograph but is an active contribution to what Plummer (1995) describes as the participatory democracy wrought by people's involvement in storytelling. This is a crucial point when consideration is taken of the undemocratic dimensions to the sequestration of sexual discourse by professional and institutional interests such as science, religion and the state (Foucault, 1978) and of the undemocratic dimensions in the effects on human relationships of sexual differences as *"dividing practices... with respect to men and women.."* (Kerfoot and Knight, 1994:83).

Figure 6 overleaf attempts to capture the spiralling dialectical engagement between a) the individual learner and the group of learners and b) between abstract and experiential learning, which is the process of transformative biographical learning in an adult education environment and which is focused on throughout this chapter.

Foucault might argue that the case for personal sexual story as a vehicle for transformative learning in adult education is merely another contribution to the proliferation of sexual discourses by the vested interest of education (and so it may be). Nevertheless, adult learners in adult education are, arguably, well positioned, through critical analysis and reflection and a politicised approach to personal development (Inglis, 1997; Ryan (1997(b)), to challenge such interests as create these discourses. As Woodhull (1988:168), addressing the question of sexuality and rape, suggests, Foucault's concept of sexuality as a construct means that such constructs can be deconstructed and, therefore, *"are, nonetheless, subject to liberatory change."* In fact, an important aspect of critical learning, particularly as it relates to sexuality, is that it offers a forum for interrogating both the liberal/humanist and Foucauldian interpretations of sexuality referred to earlier.







Rather than negating personal experience, the process of transformative learning regarding personal sexuality requires that those experiences become central propositions for attention; because experience about personal sexuality, as encountered in this study, is an area of 'subjugated knowledge'. It is analogous to the 'subjugated knowledge' of marginalised groups within society (Hart, 1998:191); that is, *"knowledge which does not conform to dominant group 'language, emotion, or social structures'"* elucidated by Hurtado (1996) and Smith (1997), both cited in Hart (1998:191).

If, as is argued by Barr (1999, 1998), Hart (1998), and Kerfoot and Knights (1994), the liberation of subjugated knowledges is a vital purpose of radical adult education, then, personal sexuality is important to this purpose. If radical adult education overlooks this dimension of experience in its transformative learning provision, then it operates outside the marginalised central core of human relating, as asserted by the study participants. It is this circumvention of the subjugated centre which this research identifies as forming a significant gap in transformative education's knowledge and practice.

Addressing the gap, that is, centre-staging personal experience on sexuality in the educational forum, does not detract from the dialogical interaction between experience and theories about such experience. However, because of the topic, its centrality and its subjugation, particular attention must be paid to the actual process of re-positioning it from the margins to the centre. Such a re-positioning may be a major step for the individual and/or the group, given the manner in which the research participants indicate it is treated in the lives of women and men.

If it is accepted that the articulation of personal sexual story is a ground-breaking event, as the participants indicate that it is, then there is a necessity for a 'grounding' in the 'personal' initially because it is central to any reflection which may follow from it. Ensuring that the 'personal' is re-positioned from the margins and brought into a more open and centred space helps to ensure that the learning which may be achieved and which may form a basis for political action is sound, and that movement towards such



action is not employed as an escape route from confronting the difficult or uncomfortable in personal sexual experience.

Any movement or re-positioning in relation to the theme, in this context, could properly be described as an exploratory one. As an exploration of women and men's personal experience, there is a need to tread carefully. In the learning group, the experience of this re-positioning is such that members need to be attended to sensitively and their stories received with care. Brookfield (1998:130), is alert to the needs of the learner for affirmation and empathy:

*"When and how we move people beyond affirmation to alternative critical reinterpretations of experience is one of those unresolvable tensions of practice. There is no formulaic answer or standardised series of steps to guide us through this dilemma. We obviously need to be wary of scaring learners away by introducing prematurely the threatening act of deconstructing and challenging familiar ways of understanding the world."*

The above is particularly true when centre-staging the private and often painful world of personal sexuality. Paradoxically, also, while it is true in terms of the educator attending to men and women engaged in the process of experiential learning through personal sexual story, the threat may be as real for the educator as for the learner. As Alheit (1995:77) asserts in his rejection of the 'therapeutic setting' as an adult education paradigm, educators are liable to the same life pressures and events as are the learners.

While there could be some reservations about the vigour of Alheit's criticism of what he perceives to be adult education's tendency towards the *"therapeutic paradigm"*, his assertion of adults' capacity to deal with the contingencies of their own lives without necessarily seeking or having available to them the resources of adult education is valid, and it should be supportive of educators entering the more intimate and stressful areas of human experience in the facilitation of transformative learning. His thesis should not be interpreted as an argument against the provision of

transformative learning opportunities in personal development for adults, nor against the potential for ‘therapeutic’ effects in such learning.

This study, moreover, would appear to be strongly supported by Alheit’s (1995) conceptualisation of ‘biographical coaching’ as a transformative learning process: a process which involves

*“the joint discovery by teacher and learner of biographical opportunities for shaping social, occupational and political existence more autonomously.” (p.85)*

The study makes the case that personal sexual stories offer most significant *“biographical opportunities”* for transformative learning in adult education to exercise its role in making visible hidden and unquestioned assumptions acting as strictures on men and women; such assumptions as may prevent the exercise of personal and political skills in critically reflecting anew on what divides rather than unites, what fragments rather than makes whole, and where the points of transformative leverage are for transformative outcomes. Table 10 depicts the dynamic which adult education can enable by seizing such *“biographical opportunities”*; a dynamic through which knowledge is both produced and acquired thereby enabling alternative ways of being and acting in and on the world.

### **Personal sexual story: a critical research project in transformative learning**

The enunciation of the individual’s personal sexual story in the learning group renders it, in effect, an object for research (Dominice, 1990:194; Plummer, 1995:5). By focusing critically on lived experience, the learners engage as researchers of their own histories. Whatever that history is or has been, each learner, by the act of putting her or his story on the line for critical reflection and analysis in a learning group, is acting, to a greater or lesser extent, as a subject of that history rather than as an object of it.



**Table 10**  
**Personal sexual story: a transformative learning process in adult education**

ENABLING PROCESS		LEARNING ACTIVITY
A D U L T  E D U C A T O R  R N I N G	<b>Confirmation:</b>	Personal status affirmed as valued member of learning community
	<b>Collaboration:</b>	Mutual negotiation of learning objectives; consent to content and process of adult education course
	<b>Communication</b>	Personal sexual stories articulated in learning group
	<b>Validation</b>	Empathic reception of personal experiential reality; understanding established and communicated
	<b>Exploration</b>	Similarities and differences in group's experiences sought and considered
	<b>Interrogation</b>	Story themes examined in the light of collective experiences, cultural contexts and theoretical concepts
	<b>Evaluation</b>	Theory and experience assessed for congruence
	<b>Generation</b>	Subjugated knowledges liberated and disseminated in process of co-researching personal sexual stories in learning group
	<b>Integration</b>	Appropriation of new perspectives and enhanced critically reflective life skills
	<b>Imagination</b>	Envisioning changed stories; composing future scripts
	<b>Transformation</b>	Re-telling the story; changing the world by continuing to name the world as a critical subject of personal sexual history

She and he are exercising the power to name their sexual worlds. This is transformative action in itself because, as Freire (1972:61) describes such action:

*“To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men [humankind] are not built in silence but in word, in work, in action-reflection.”*

The objective of the research, for the learner-researchers, is to learn in order to enter into a new, enhanced and more liberated experience of sexual well-being, both for themselves, as individuals, and for others in society. To use Alheit’s (1995:86) term,



this is particularly *“interest-related”* research. Personal enhancement through learning is professed in an increased ability to bring personal character to bear on how sexual identity is experienced and expressed. Uncritical assent to personal sexual form, devised and dictated by history, culture and unreflected experience, is challenged in the learning group. This challenge is achieved both concretely, by the presentation of alternative forms by other members within the group, and abstractly, by the introduction of theoretical concepts which offer learners potentially new meaning maps. Metaphorically, it is a significant step towards breaking, in the case of repressed personal sexuality, what might be described as the ‘keyless’ deposit box of Freirean banking fame.

In turn, the learner-researchers liberate themselves into a changed world; changed because they, the researchers, are changed. They are transformed by researching their internal and external worlds in which their personal sexual story is generated through shared critical analysis and reflection.

Researching personal sexual stories through critical reflection in a learning group lays open the way for learner-researchers to shape their futures and rename their worlds; that is, to shape purposefully individual experience and the socio-cultural context of that experience. This can be facilitated through a proactive aspect of the research process; that is, through the exploration of alternative futures. The researching of personal sexual story can and should lead to an envisioning of a desired future. Egan (1990:31) refers to the process of envisioning a preferred scenario. Barr (1999:162), building on Steele (1995), affirms an envisioning of the future as a route to transformation. The significance of envisioning a new future, apart from its motivational aspect, is that it is an important step towards a practical application of new insights and perspectives gained through the learning experience; it indicates the desired outcomes in specific situations which, in turn, beg the question of how to achieve them. This is the *“project-related”* condition for transformative learning through personal story referred to by Alheit (1995:86) and the action related aspect of critical reflection (Freire, 1972).



The point being made here is that personal sexual story, as a transformative research project, is more than an excavation and examination of the past, like a psycho-social archaeological dig: it is a discovery and exploration of the limitations of personal history to the present time with a view to creating a better way forward through the transformation of the present. This is important in terms, for example, of breaking inter-generational cycles of false inhibition and unquestioned assumptions about sexuality and relationships, as shown in Chapter Six. In envisioning a desired future, the researcher of personal sexual story, to paraphrase West (1998:247), engages in *“revisioning the story of self”*.

Women and men are the adult practitioners of sexuality. Elias (1982:3-10) addressing the split relationship between theory and practice, declares that there is a need for

*“A structure...in which practitioners talk to academics and academics seriously listen. Only by listening to practitioners will academics be able to work out the practical implications of their theories and research and thus ensure not only that their theories and research are applied in practice but also that they are really worth applying.”*

The sexual stories of individual women and men, due to socio-cultural inhibition, are slow to infiltrate and inform general theories, knowledges and scholarship on sexuality and adult learning. The traditionally acceptable fora for communicating personal sexual story, indicated earlier, bear intimations of pathology rather than health. This aspect of the socio-cultural management of personal sexuality limits the level of popular experience contributing directly to general knowledge. Such socio-cultural management, as has been shown, facilitates specialists (including educators) as the mediators - and, often, interpreters - of this experience. For this reason, sexual knowledge, for the individual and the community, tends to be knowledge somewhat divorced from the input of practical experiential knowledge which is tacit in the community.

Articulating personal sexual story, as highlighted by a number of the participants in Chapter Five, is a way of holistically communicating in a public forum actual, or

practical, knowledges of sexuality. This process is different from participating in abstract, theoretical discussions on sexuality in general or aspects of sexuality in particular, although theoretical discursivity is a crucial aspect of the holistic process. As Elias (1982:5) asserts:

*“A preferable way of understanding the relationship between theory and practice is to view it as a dialectical relationship.”*

By working with personal story, experiential knowledge, that is, subjective knowledge, enters the public forum of the learning group as a potential contribution to and a critique of objective, general knowledge. This has been, for example, a transformative achievement of women’s consciousness raising groups. As Hart (1990:57) points out:

*“Women started from personal experience because existing theoretical knowledge, the truth of established facts, was criticised as inadequate for grasping and explaining not only women’s reality, but the true nature of social reality as a whole.”*

At the same time, personal knowledge is itself opened for public scrutiny and analysis by the learning group, and by such existing theories on the topic as are introduced to the group. This is a potent dimension of the research process engaged in by the learners. By exteriorising in the learning group what has been culturally cloistered, the researcher-learners achieve a position shift which empowers them to interrogate their own histories: to theorise their experience, as it were, from the distance gained by their relocation to an external learning forum from an internal forum, and to examine, as Hart (1990) puts it, their fit or non-fit in larger theoretical frames. In this dialectical engagement, theoretical knowledge about sexuality is also scrutinised and critiqued.

The two-way process of examining and critiquing both theory and experience is a creative and productive learning activity for both the individual and society; group members are carriers of that learning into the wider public arena of the macro-society. The process, therefore, holds the potential for the transformation of experience, thereby creating new knowledge (Kolb, 1993:155) which, in turn, transforms theory.



In the area of sexuality, because of the dearth of a learning forum for reflecting on personal sexuality, experiential knowledge often fails significantly to be articulated in any forum and, furthermore, fails to be developed. As was demonstrated by a majority of the participants, the intimate fora of interpersonal sexual relationships frequently failed to offer the kind of environment in which experience could be easily expressed, explored and critically reflected upon. Furthermore, a significant majority of the participants felt unable to articulate such experience. As Plummer (1995:16) notes, the personal sexual stories of many, in particular those stories that might be described as *"banal... may be waiting in the wings for their time, their voice, their audience."*

From an educational perspective, the public articulation of personal story places the concrete experience of individuals' reality firmly in the same frame as theories of reality (Dominice, 1990:200). Examined together, the congruity or incongruity of the totality or parts of the picture become apparent. Personal experiential knowledge, frequently under-valued (Brookfield 1998:134), when articulated, acts as a contribution to affirm, contravert or to contest theoretical knowledge. For example, from a particular radical feminist theoretical framework, it could be deduced that a refusal by all women to engage in heterosexual relationships of intimacy will significantly progress women's emancipation from gender domination. However, the positive experiences of numbers of women of such relationships are quantitatively and qualitatively substantial enough to make a significant impact and confront this theoretical deduction with its possible disconnection from aspects of lived reality (Kitzinger, 1994:200,201). This type of contestation of theory by experience acts to refine theories so that they do not lose relevance in human history.

Exploring the significance of language, the poet Heaney (1982) decries a separation he sees taking place in which words are losing touch with what they represent, when the significance is in the words themselves and not grounded in what they signify, thereby disconnecting signification with experience. Analogously, theory and experience must stay connected, and academics and practitioners must seek to maintain that connection in order to continue to make sense of reality. The necessity to maintain that

connection is captured in Barr's (1999:163) work, the central issue of which is *"to heal the breach between words and things"*.

Conversely, theoretical knowledge offers frameworks within and against which men and women can test and interpret their experience. Hart (1990:67) describes the necessity of theoretical knowledge in that

*"...it supplies the general tools that can make transparent the relations that obtain among isolated and fragmented incidents of personal experience"*

Theoretical frameworks provide world views about sexuality. These are helpful in making sense of experience, as exemplified in the interview with the psychotherapists in Chapter Six. Such frameworks engage women and men in viewing a wider screen than the one immediately present: a screen that is large enough to display broader patterns and relations in which the intricacies and understandings of their experience may be held. This, in effect, draws the learner and learning group into broader spheres of knowledges which affect peoples and cultures and in which all theory and experience is connected and, therefore, in which all individuals have and can exert an interest.

Within this context, theoretical frames, when examined, also invite learners into the deconstruction of some of the poles in those frames, insofar as they indicate false trajectories or act as imprisoning bars rather than as the supportive 'scaffolds' indicated by Darina (42:F:25-34:S) in Chapter Six (p.311).

There can be no story without an audience or, as Plummer (1995:16) asserts, without a social world to receive it. Transformative learning in adult education can offer a 'social world' not alone for the reception of but also for the exegesis of experiential knowledge of ordinary men and women in relation to personal sexuality. It is well-placed to facilitate that constructive dialectical/synergistic relationship between experiential knowledge and theory (Elias, 1982; Dewey in Hart, 1992).



Barr (1999:161), asserts her conviction that

*“Adult education is one of the few spaces left where the democratic control and development of knowledge can be pursued as an ideal of citizenship.”*

Adult education, from the perspective of this study, is the best there is of the ‘good enough’ agencies and spaces for the commissioning of such a transformative project. Furthermore, by committing itself to the transformative learning project of personal sexual story, the institution of adult education commissions its own research through feedback from learner-researchers engaged in their particular task; a task which facilitates institutional research into a number of the root imbalances and injustices in society such as are expressed, for example, in the cultures of gender and work. This is ‘cutting-edge’ research. It is far removed from radical education’s fear of the narrow, individualistic advancement type of learning adverted to in Thompson (1996:21). The laying open of personal experience of sexuality for critical analysis and reflection provides invaluable material for informing agencies engaged in the processes of education for democratisation. It does so because it opens for examination the key energy source for intimate human relationships which, democratically, are relationships of friendship not enmity (Reidy, 1990). Herein lies the personal and social nucleus of human dignity, justice, partnership, equality and love. This has implications for all aspects of human life and for the environment in which it is held. Adult education, by creating a learning environment for researching personal sexual story can model an ideal community in which the search for knowledge is a co-operative, appreciative, phronetic discourse and venture.

The process of researching personal sexual story in a learning group initiates or deepens the critically reflective life-skills of researcher-learners so that those skills can become integrated in ways of perceiving and acting in the world. This enhances researcher-learners’ abilities to act on the world. This life-skill acquisition or enhancement to reflect and act on the world is, for example, adverted to by Martin (73:M:35-44:P) and Mitzi (74:F:35-44:P) in their comments on their learning

experiences in Chapter Six (pp.286-288); Martin refers to it as one of 'personal economics' translated into 'social economics'.

The cultural and political context in which personal sexual stories are created and experienced, as indicated previously, is in a process of immense and rapid change (Edwards and Usher, 1998). Part of that change is that the 'appointed interpreters' of our stories are no longer believed to be in possession of the authority and credibility to 'tell our stories' in the way they once, traditionally, were believed to be. For example, during the past decade, the authority and credibility of religious ministers, as a group, has been challenged by public exposure; they have been shown to be equally capable of sexual abuse as other groups in the community; something similar is happening with members of the medical and caring professions. It is no longer taken for granted that any one person, or group, or institution in society, has a lien on 'the truth', or has a claim to be the sole/main interpreter of another's personal experience.

In a climate of local and global change and of what West (1998:235) describes as *"frightening uncertainties and insecurities at an environmental, socio-economic and personal level"*, relationships of intimacy bear a particular brunt of the shock-waves of change reverberating throughout the world. Frequently, it is in their relationships of intimacy that men and women seek personal sustenance when change threatens, and seek to re-connect and be affirmed in their identity. Conversely, it is also within relationships of intimacy that men and women often express their fears and insecurities inappropriately: expressions that can take the form of emotional closure, defensiveness, displacement, or of physical and/or psychological punishment.

In this context, the facilitation of the skill to articulate and critically reflect on personal sexual story in an adult education forum, is a transformative educational project which, if successfully accomplished, should extend well beyond that specific forum. The project of living the critically reflected sexual self is a life project. Plummer (1995:144) in asserting the perspective of the political scientist, states:



*“..we have come to inhabit worlds of discourse which regulate lives and where the ability to take control over the story of one’s own life may be seen as a major mode of empowerment.”*

The “*major mode of empowerment*” at issue here is the democratisation of sexuality through on-going critical reflection on personal sexual story: to become the subject of personal sexual history.

Personal sexual story is an inclusive, admitting vehicle for a radical pursuit and dissemination of democratic knowledge and transformative learning. Every person, irrespective of class, colour or creed, has a sexual history. The mobility of the vehicle is an important part of its strength. As a democratic research method for adult transformative education, it is transferable across continents and cultures and can be used effectively in any setting where the disposition exists to engage in dialogic participatory learning towards a more humanely inclusive future. A philosophy of positive belief in the human being as human being, of whatever age, sex, social stratum, ethnicity and nationality, forms the undercarriage of this vehicle and facilitates this transferability. It crosses the borders of divisions while utterly respecting difference.

### **Personal *sexual* story in transformative adult education: a potential catalyst for social change**

Reflecting on the ‘sexual story’ of this exploratory study, that is on the dialectical engagement between the contributions of the participants and the various theoretical frames drawn in and worked with to assist in understanding, it would appear that a momentous opportunity in the history of transformative learning is emerging. Broadly speaking, it could be said that, in the Western world, the traditional scientific paradigm of reductionism coupled with the historical patriarchal paradigm of one-sex-supremacy have succeeded in their time in implementing and sustaining a particular culture of separatism and containment. The values of such a culture have been promoted and maintained through the fostering of competitiveness, aggression, subjugation and

domination. This applies particularly in relation to the sexes, as has been explicated in feminist literature. It is expressed in gender issues of inequality, non-participation, injustice and alienation. It appears now, however, that cultural stability is passing and that the future requires a new focus on experiential learning. West (1998:236) declares:

*“...experiential learning has, I believe, become a psychological and existential imperative as inherited meanings and traditional lifestyles have either fractured or are open to perpetual challenge.”*

The contemporary and challenging fracturing of traditional lifestyles suggest there may be a very particular invitation to adult education to participate in crossing a new threshold of human relations.

Transformative learning through personal sexual story, as has been shown consistently throughout this text, has a wide-ranging potential to transform the intimate reaches of an individual's sexual vulnerability; it has the potential to transform the wider reaches of institutional approaches to sexuality, such as within education.

The key transformative potential of such learning is that it breaks a form of silence; a sexual silence which has prevented or inhibited ordinary women and men from holding 'constructive conversations' about their sexual learning experiences with each other and about each other. This is where adult education can exercise an extraordinary potential in this historical time of flux. It can remove the gender barrier, not so much by a provision for the consciousness raising definition of “*speaking bitterness*” (Hart, 1990:59), although bitter experiences need to be articulated, but by a transformative learning provision for 'speaking sexual friendship'.

It is the contention of this chapter and this study that systematic, critical reflection on personal sexual story, in a group, in a transformative learning forum in adult education, can be such a catalyst for social transformation.



This proposal may appear to be poetic or utopian in its claim to the possibility of changing society from a patriarchal, consumerist-profit driven, scientific reductionist one to an inclusive, relationally focused, friendship motivated one in which all share responsibility to and for each other and for the earth.

Alternatively, the proposal could be perceived as prophetic, if the voices of the participants in this study and the voices in the literature are heard together as opening a new learning discourse.

On the other hand, the proposal that transformative learning through personal sexual story in adult education could be a catalyst for social change may be seen as a very pragmatic suggestion towards creating and maintaining a sustainably inclusive, participative, equal and just society by supporting the development of interpersonal relationships of intimacy based on friendship between women and men and children.

Whether or not the proposal is poetic, prophetic or pragmatic, it is the assertion of this study that transformative learning through personal sexual story has the potential to put the salt back into the earth and to put the leaven back into the bread of human relationships.

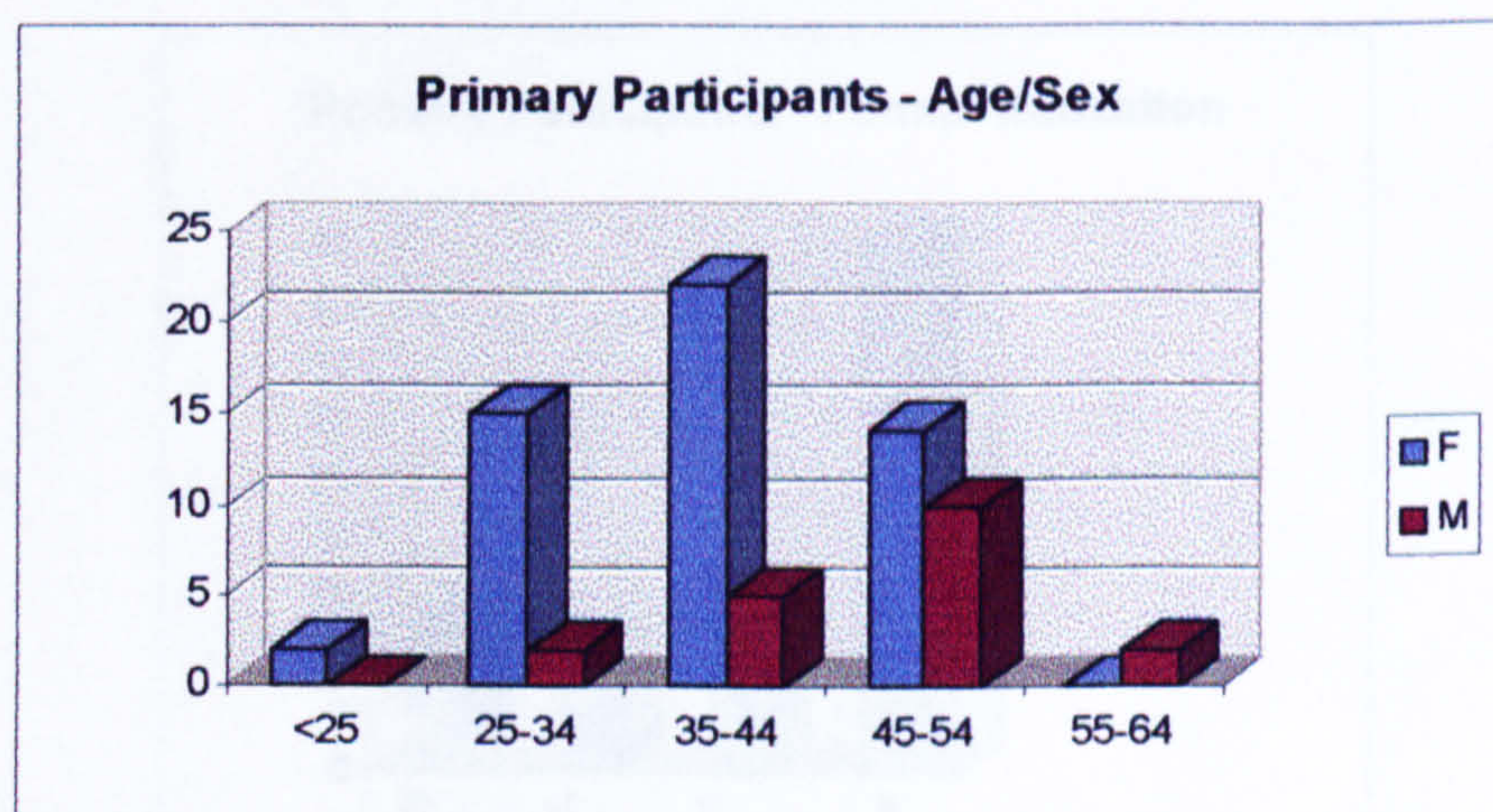
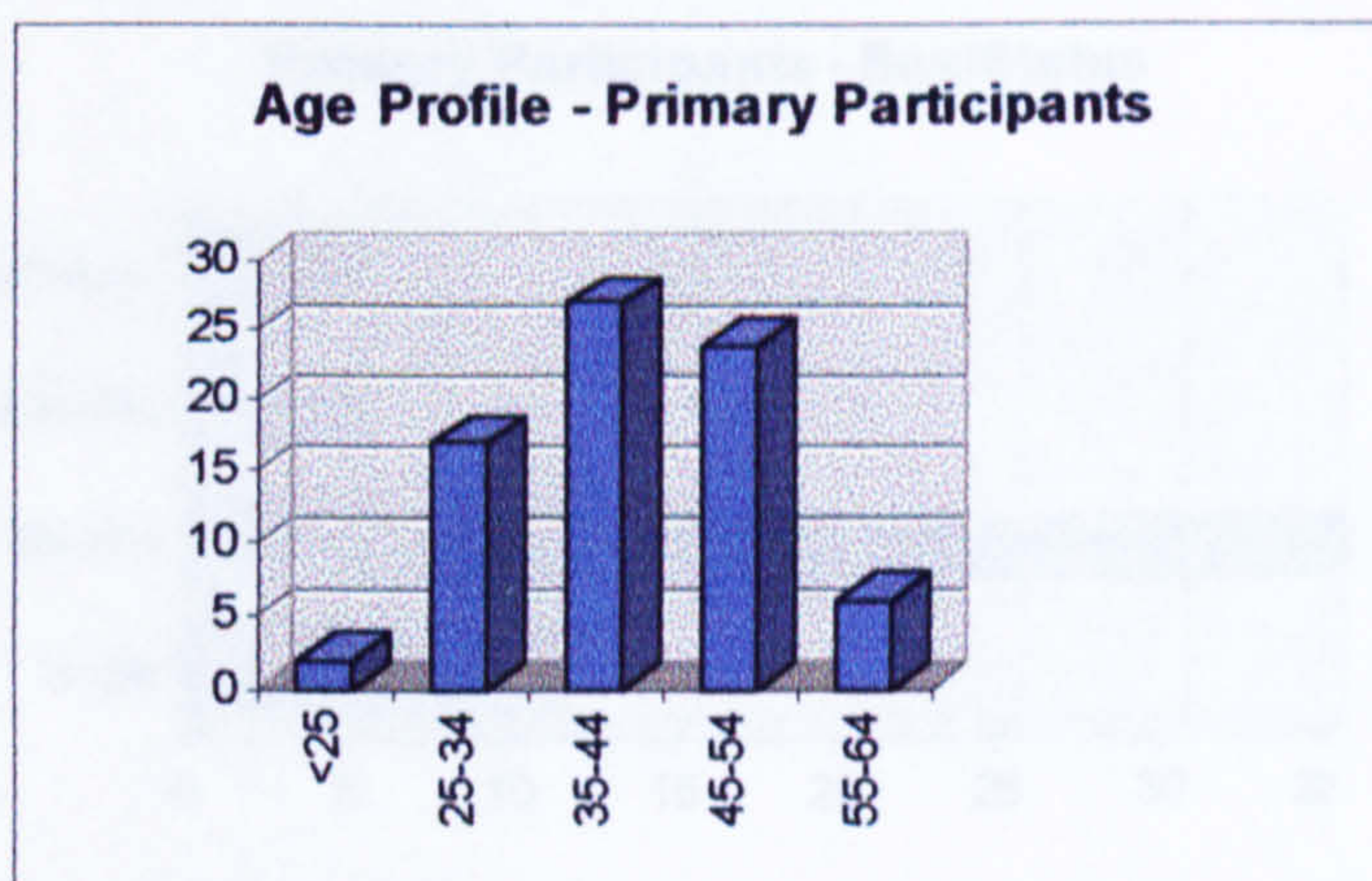
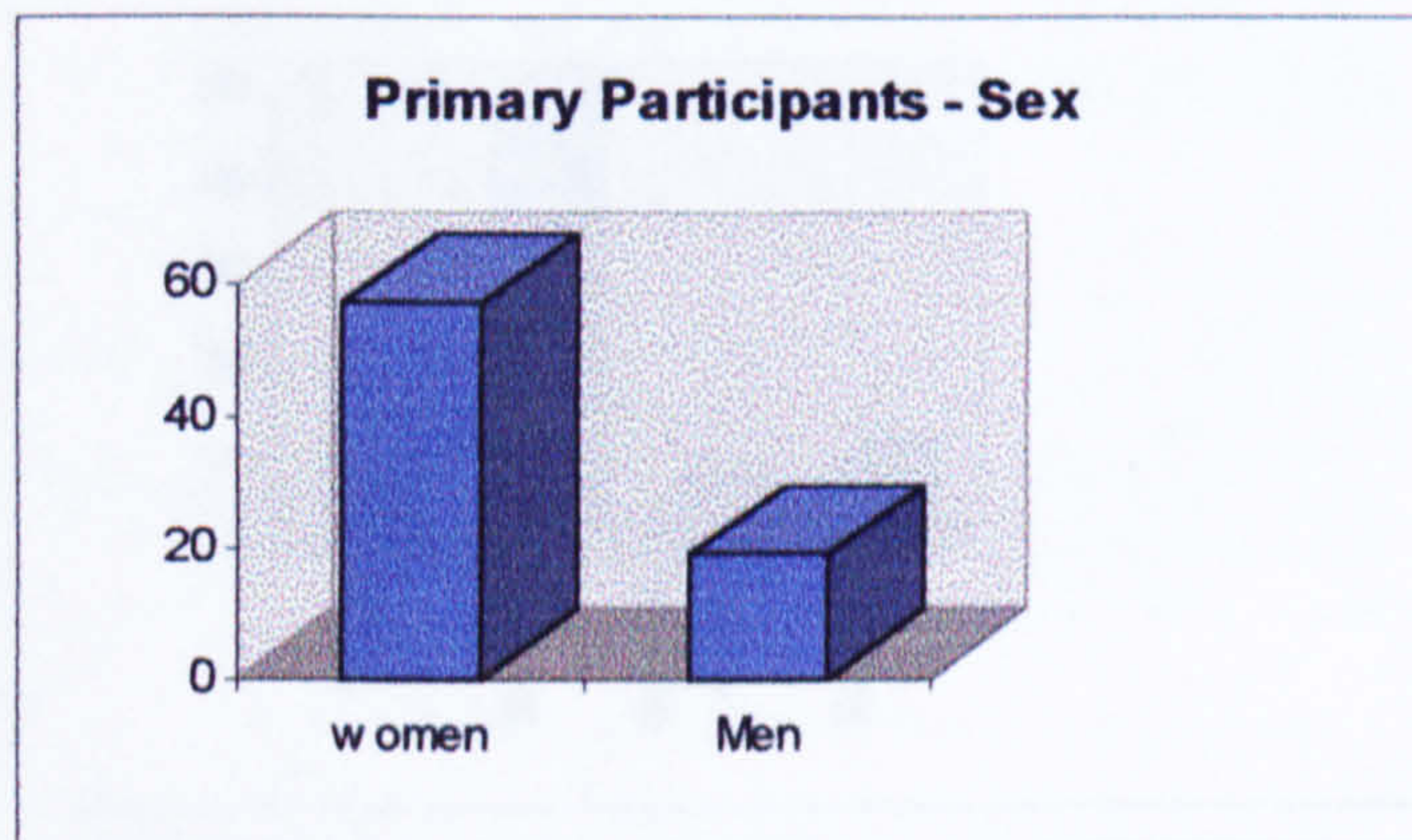
In answer to the questions which initiated this study, the outcome of the research confirms that transformative learning in adult education has a significant role to play in personal sexual development which facilitates women and men in becoming democratic subjects of their sexual histories and agents for social change. In addition, the results confirm that if adult education is to be transformative, personal sexuality, because it is a location of learning central for individual and socio-cultural transformation, must be included in its policies and practices.

APPENDIX A

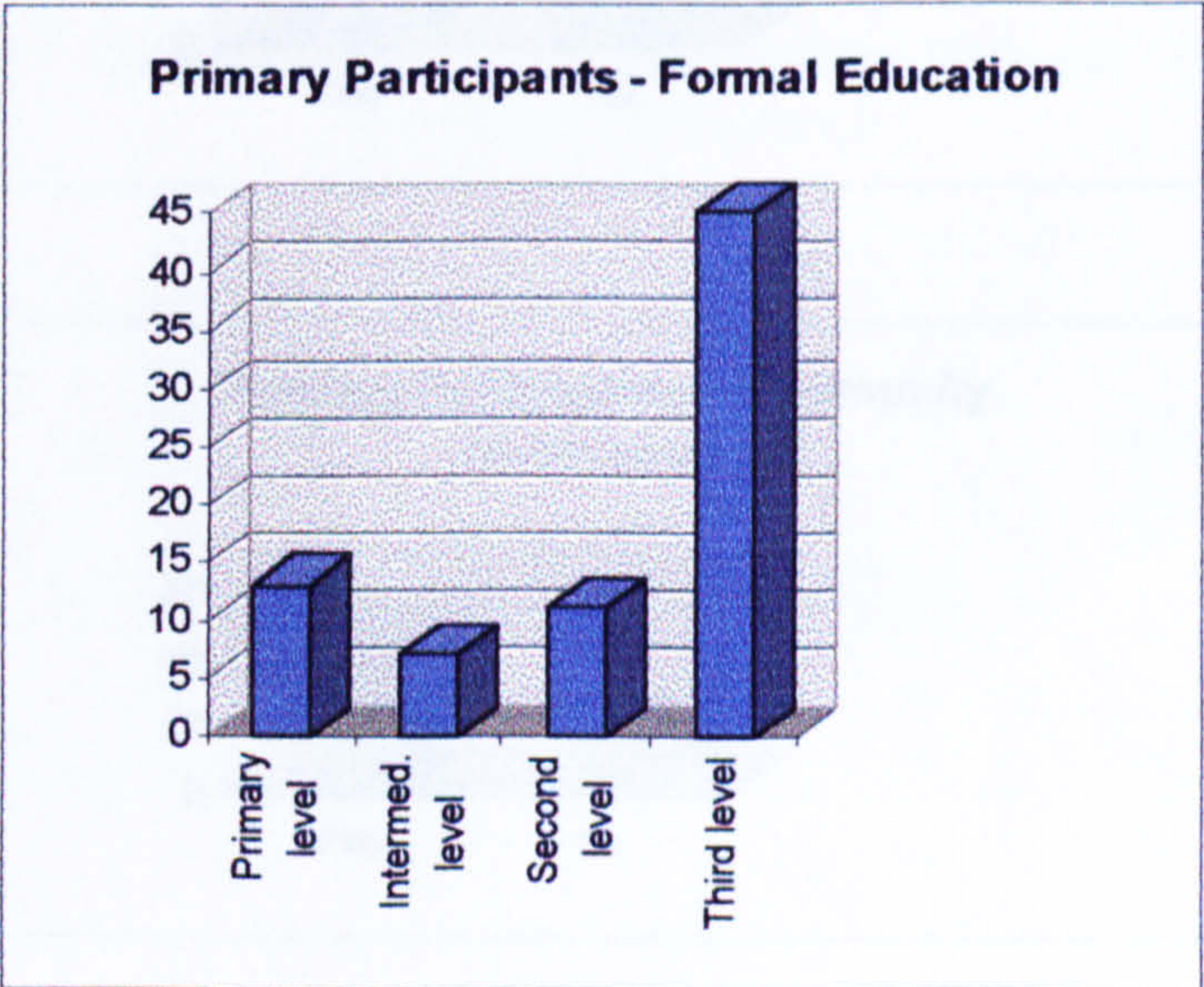
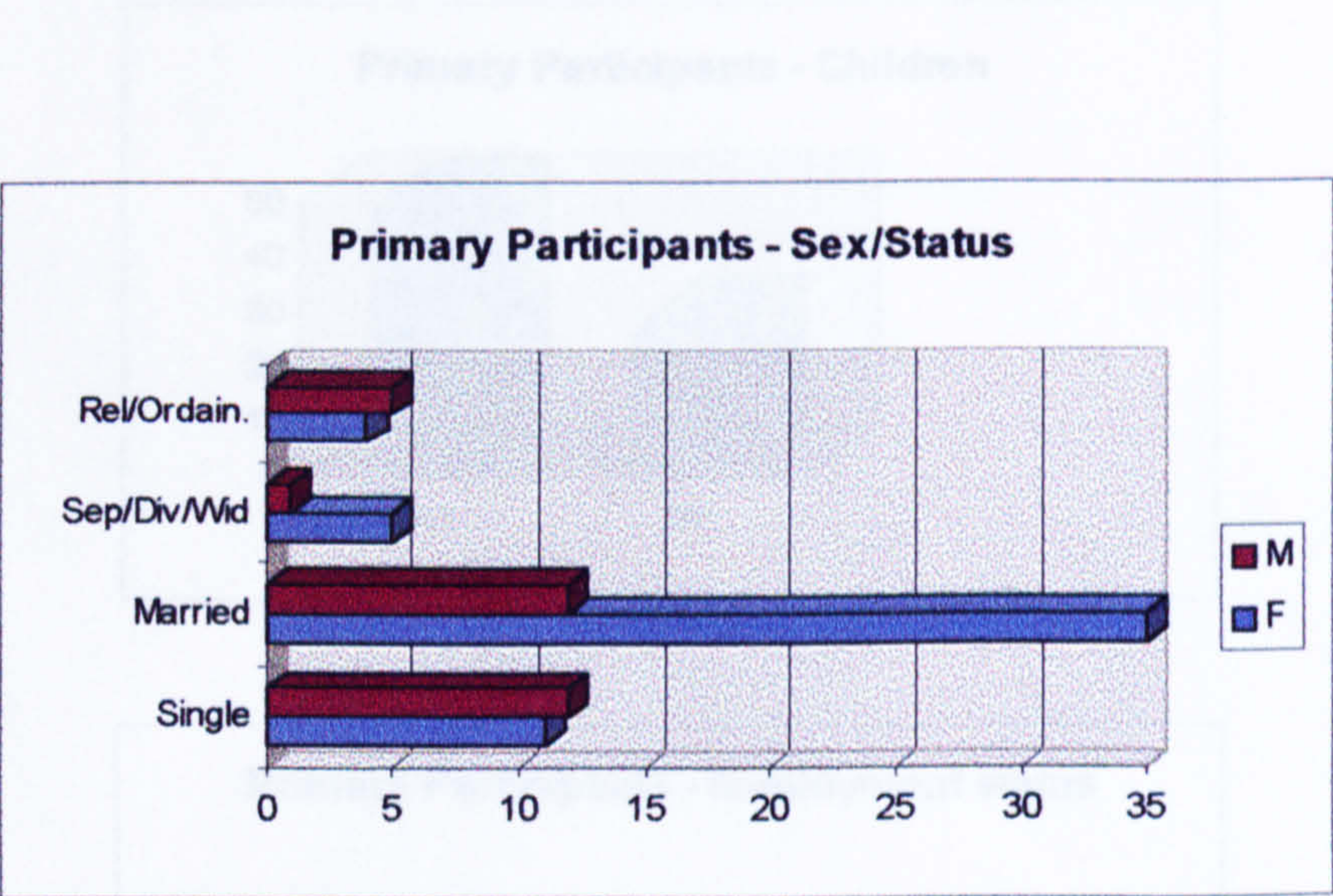
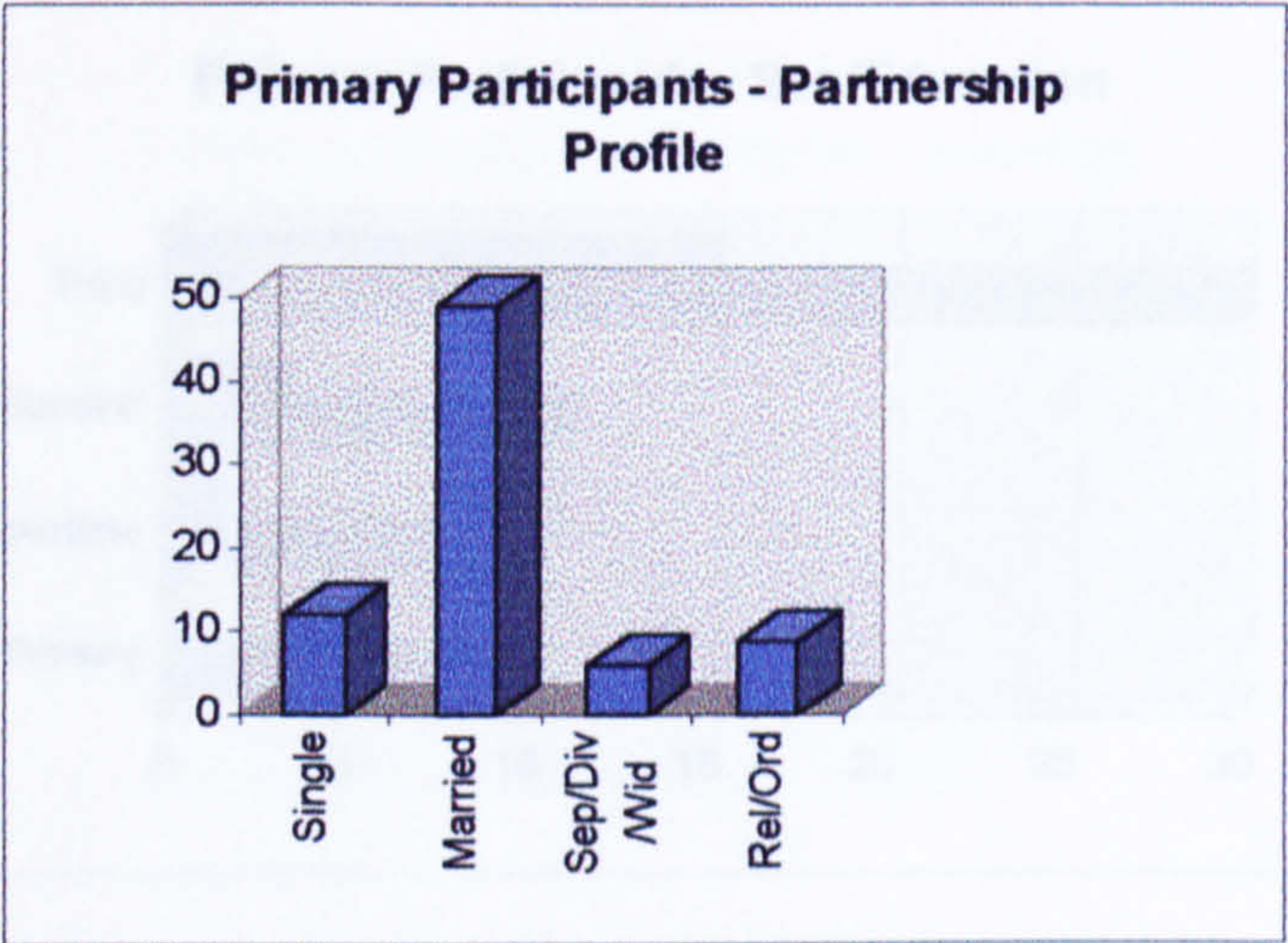
PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS: TOTAL NUMBER 76							
Sex						Male 19	Female 57
Age	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64		
	2	17	27	24	6		
Marital status	Single				12		
	Married				49		
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed				6		
	Religious/Ordained				9		
Children						Yes 49	No 27
Education	Primary level				13		
	Intermediate level				7		
	Second level				11		
	Third level				45		
Employment						Yes 59	No 17
Community involvement* Question not asked of 17 participants						Yes 43	No 16



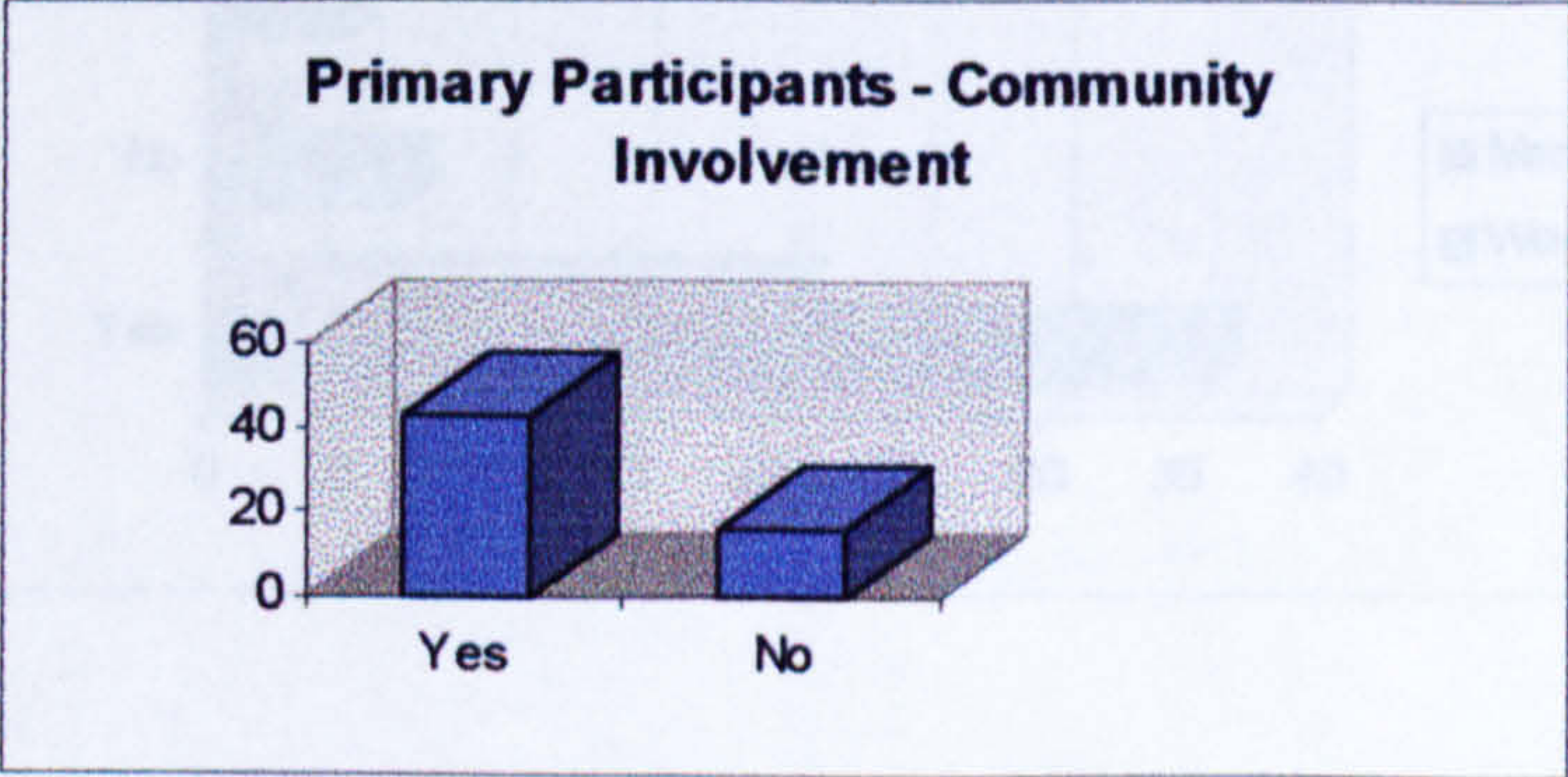
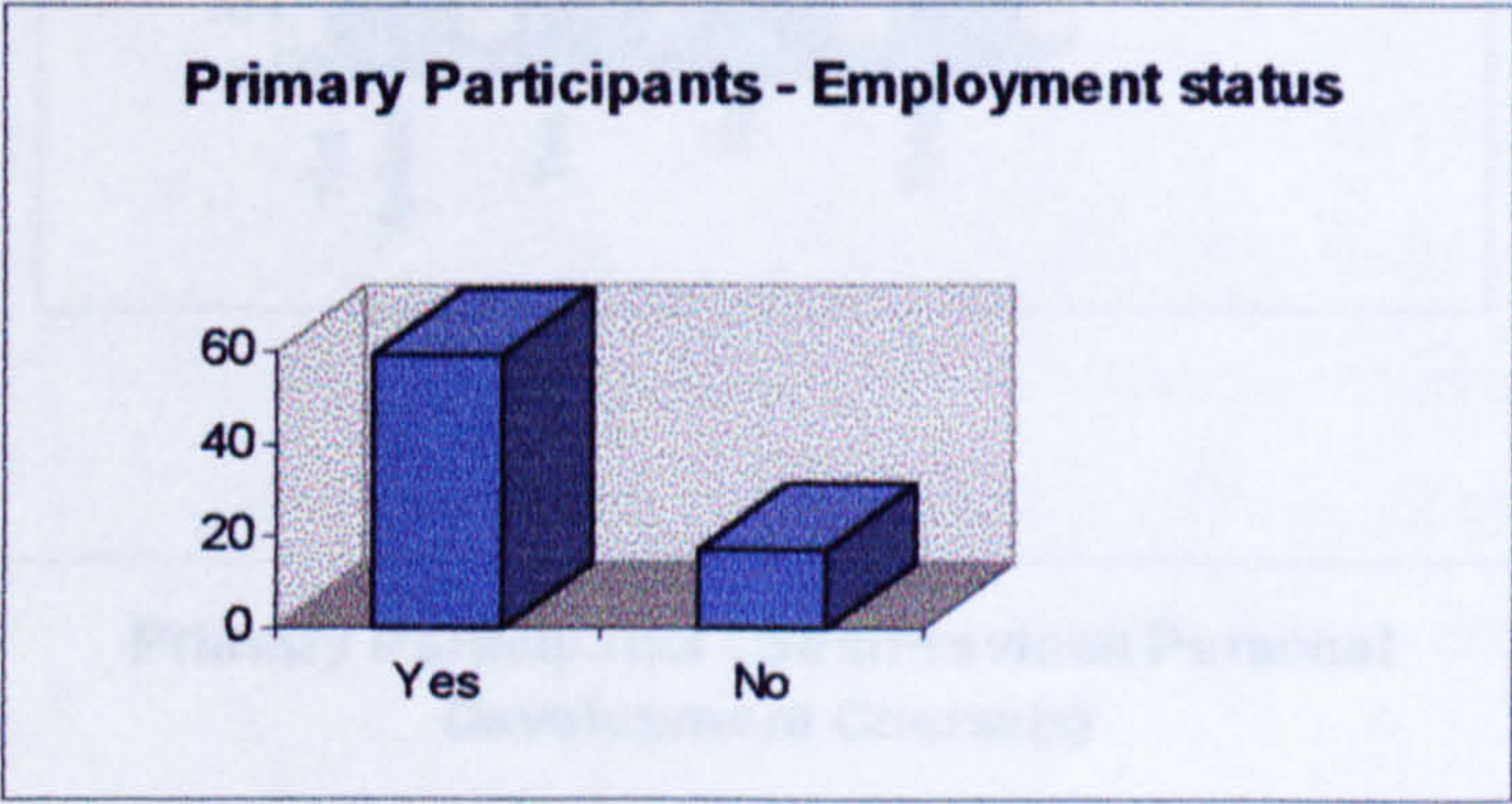
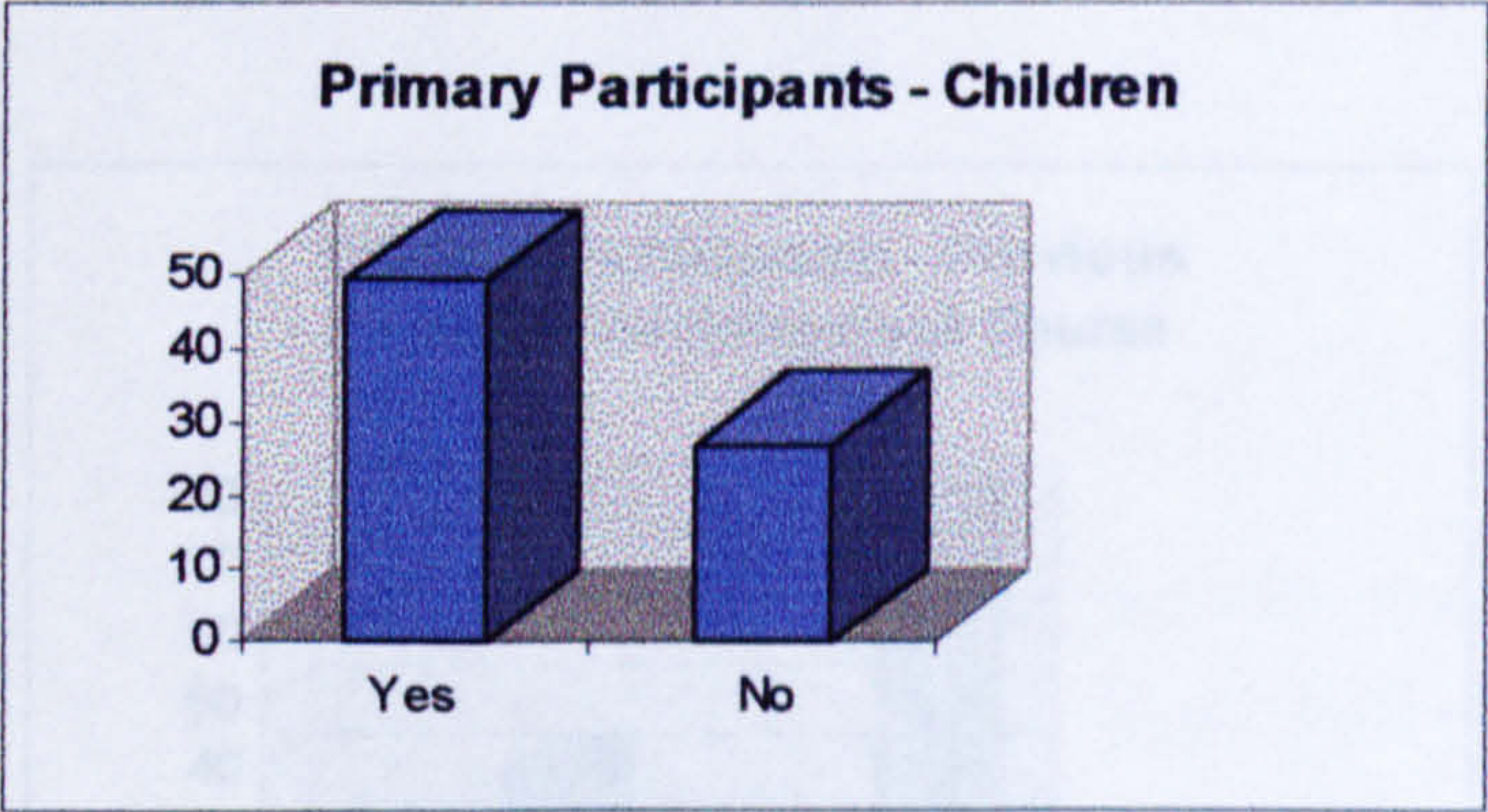
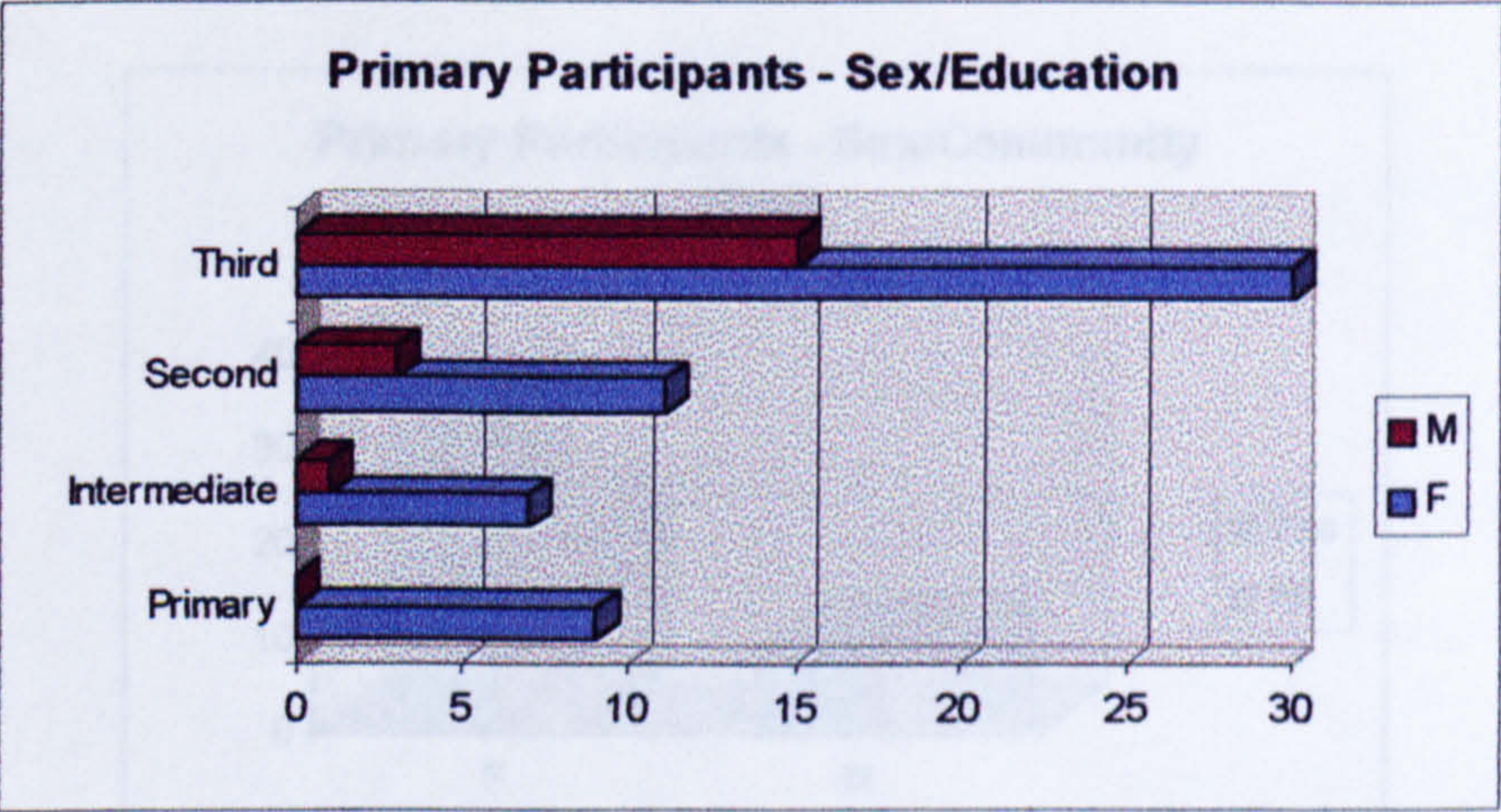
Primary Participants - Partnership Profile



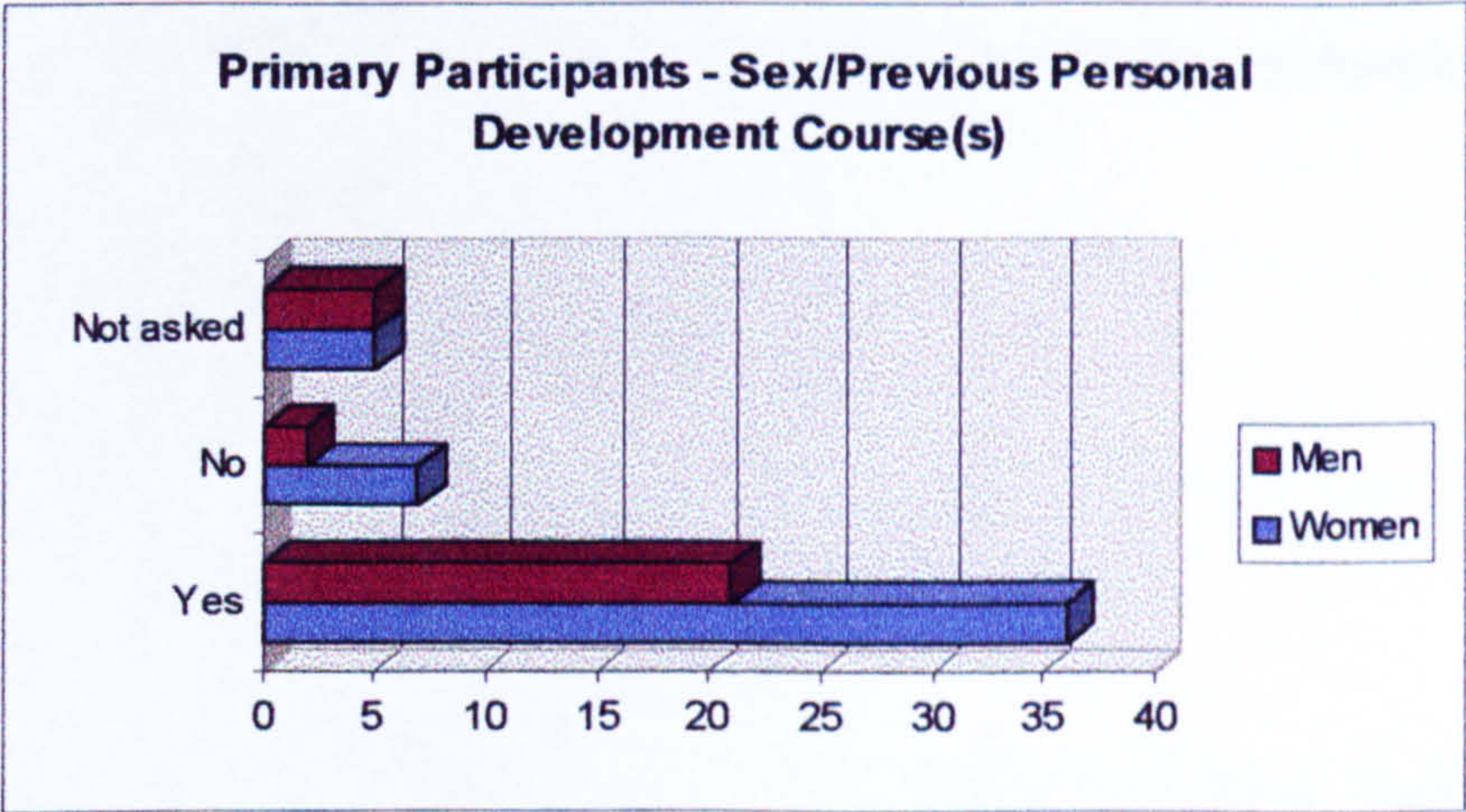
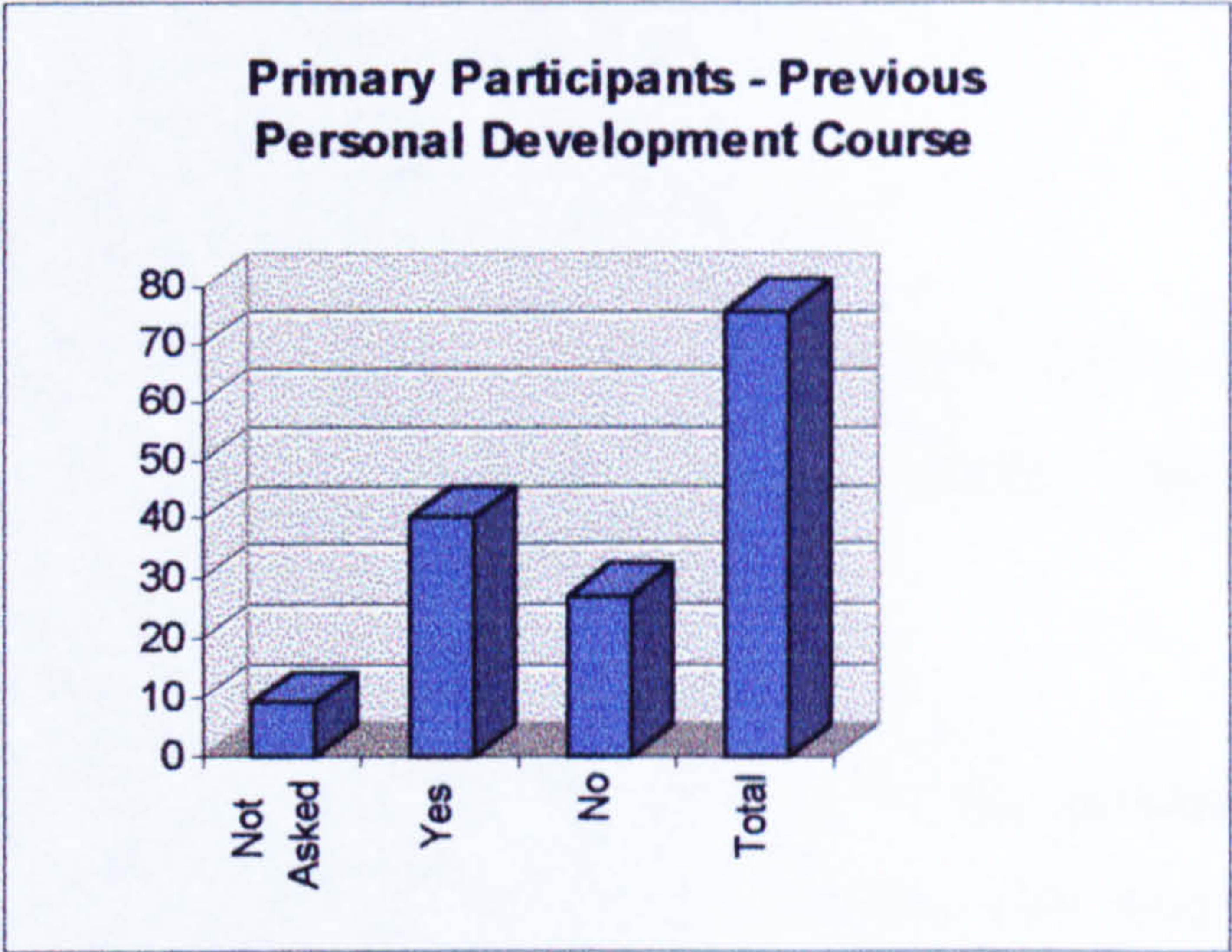
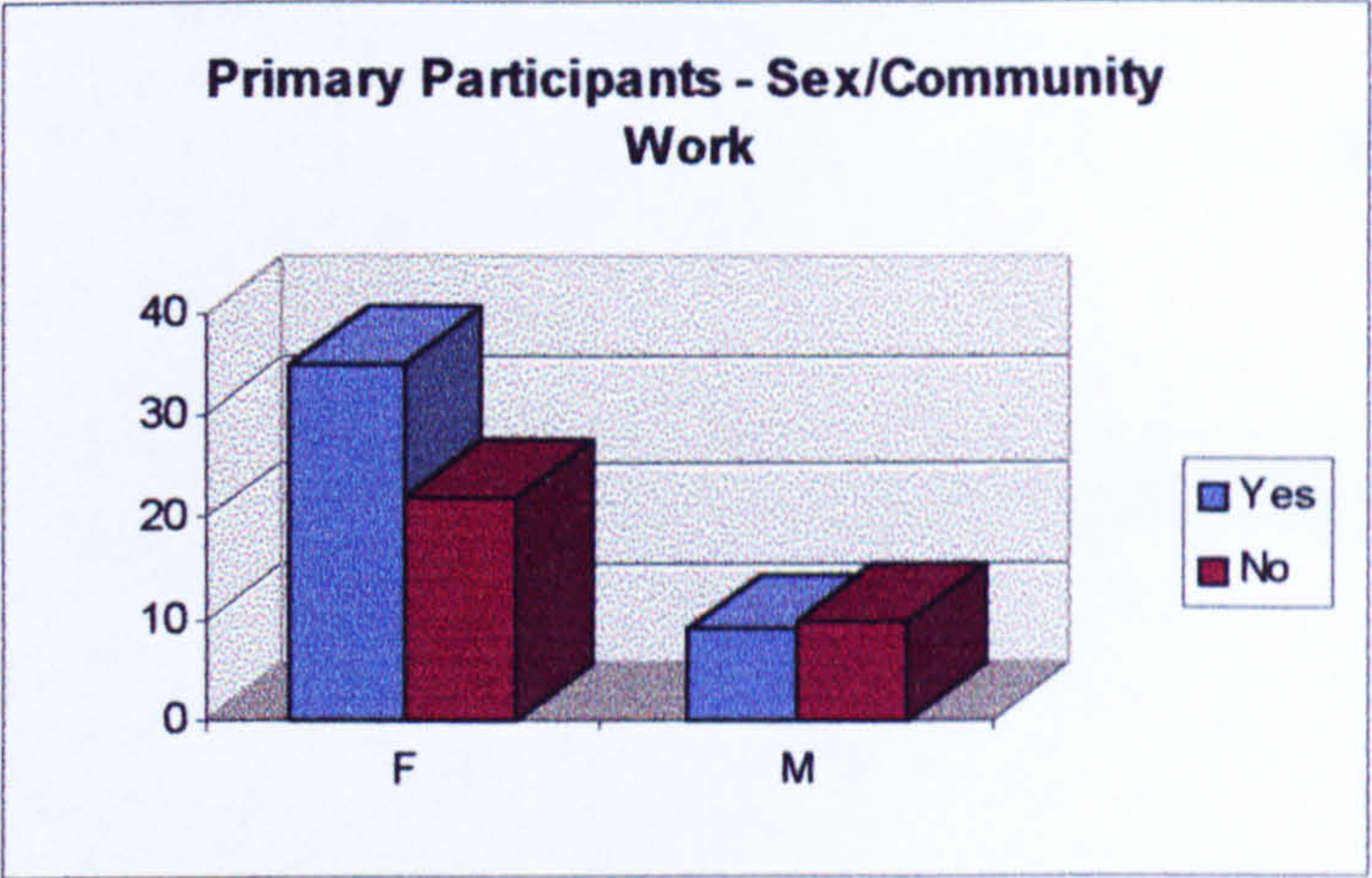














RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' OCCUPATIONS

Groups 1 and 2

13 full-time homemakers (including one foster mother)  
1 seamstress; 1 homehelp

Groups 3, 4, and 5

The range of occupations in groups 3, 4, and 5 was wide, with a substantial but not exclusive emphasis on personal and community caring services. This range includes the following:

Accountants; home-school liaison teachers; nurses; community care service providers; youth workers; trainer/tutors of people with disabilities; clerical and administrative officers; sales administrators, vocational training co-ordinators; literacy tutors; physical education teachers; health officials; counsellors; a police officer, panel beater, socio-economic advisor, homemaker, archaeologist, and an artist.

Group 6      Second level teachers/counsellors

Group 7      Third level adult educators

Group 8      Two second level teachers; solicitor; administrator; nurse; engineer.

### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE IN SEXUALITY

The aim of the course is to enable exploration and critical reflection on personal sexual learning situated in particular socio-cultural contexts, beginning from childhood experience, with a view to facilitating participants' engagement, as subjects of their sexual history, in a transformative learning process. This process is facilitated by an adult educator and includes the introduction, as appropriate, of theories of sexual relations and associated topics, to assist in critical analysis of personal experience.

The learning methods used include guided reflection; drawing; journalling; role-playing; sculpting; critical incident; dyadic, triadic, and group discussion; theoretical inputs and reading material. The following topic outlines provide a general framework for the course content.

**“Beginnings?”** - reflection on the issues surrounding birth, sex, being named, entry and placement in family of origin; sexual and gender learning experience in family and community;

**“Becoming a woman - becoming a man?”** - reflection on experience of sexual and gender issues in relation to puberty and psycho-sexual development in adolescence;

**“Sexual Scripts”?** - exploration of positive and negative messages about sexuality, fertility and relationships, imprinted in childhood and adolescence; experience of effects on adult relationships.

**“Bodies - Marks for Parts?”** - exploration of personal body image; origins and significance of images;

**“Sexual Profile?”** - critical reflection on personal history, assumptions, fears, needs, expectations and behaviours in relation to sexual intimacy and relationships in particular culture and context;

**“Sexuality and fertility?”** - critical reflection on personal experience of fertility, the implications for sexual and socio-cultural relations;

**“Becoming a parent?”** - exploration of issues related to experience of becoming, or not becoming, a mother or father; significance of roles; effects on personal and political relationships;

**“Becoming a subject - naming my world?”** - identification of transformative personal objectives in relation to sexuality;

**“Planning for change?”** - action plan for achievement of desired goals;

**“Celebrating sexuality?”** - evaluation of learning, closing ritual.



TIME SCHEDULES FOR  
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES IN SEXUALITY

<u>Group</u>	<u>Schedule</u>	<u>Each Session</u>
Group 1	10 weekly sessions	2 1/2 hours incl. tea-break
Group 2	10 weekly sessions	2 1/2 hours incl. tea-break
Groups 3, 4, 5	12 weekly sessions	1 1/4 hours
Group 6	2 1/2 days over six month period	day or part thereof
Group 7	2 1/2 days over three month period	day or part thereof
Group 8	2 residential weekends in four month period	Friday evening to Sunday afternoon

**APPENDIX C**  
**GROUPS 1 AND 2**

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 1**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**



Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

SEX: Male [ ] Female [ ]

AGE GROUP: Under 25 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ] 45-54 [ ]  
55-64 [ ] 65-74 [ ] 75 and over [ ]

STATUS: Single and living alone [ ] Religious/Ordained [ ]  
Married or Partnered [ ] Separated/Divorced [ ]  
Widowed [ ]

CHILDREN: Yes [ ] No [ ]

If you have children, are some [ ] or all [ ] or none [ ] living at home?

EDUCATION STANDARD ACHIEVED:

Primary [ ] Group Certificate [ ] Intermediate Certificate [ ]  
Technical [ ] Leaving Certificate [ ] College/University [ ]

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS, IF ANY:

OCCUPATION(S)

PRESENT WORK SITUATION:

Full-time Homemaker [ ] Unemployed [ ] Employed [ ]  
Self-employed [ ] Retired [ ] Student [ ]

**PART 1**

- 1

Are you involved in any community or voluntary service group?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- 2

How did you come to hear about this course?

a) Advertisement? [ ]  
b) Word of mouth? [ ]  
c) Other way? (Please specify) [ ]
- 3

Have you participated in any personal development courses before?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

If answer is 'yes', go to question no.4  
If answer is 'no', go to question no.5
- 4

Which of the following types of course(s) have you attended?

a) self-awareness? [ ]  
b) assertiveness? [ ]  
c) parenting? [ ]  
d) communication skills? [ ]  
e) sexuality self-awareness? [ ]  
f) other? (please specify) [ ]
- 5

Which one of the following best describes your reason for choosing this course from the options available?

a) To learn more about myself as a woman or as a man [ ]  
b) To build my self-confidence [ ]  
c) To better my relationships [ ]  
d) To improve my parenting skills [ ]  
e) To enhance my skills as an adult educator [ ]  
f) To enhance my work [ ]  
g) To facilitate personal development courses [ ]  
h) To increase my comfort with the subject of sexuality [ ]  
i) Other reason. (please specify) [ ]



- 6
- If you have not attended a course on sexuality before, which one of the following best describes your reason for not doing so? Was it because
- a) you did not have the interest?

b) you did not feel the need for it?

c) such a course was not available?

d) other reasons? (please specify)
- [ ]

[ ]

[ ]

[ ]

**PART 2**

Sexuality has to do with the experience of self as a woman or as a man, and in relationship. It touches upon issues of self-image, love, partnership, desire, intimacy, fertility, gender, power and self-expression.

- 7
- Each person has their own experience of learning about sexuality in childhood and adolescence. Have you thought about and questioned your experience
- a) not at all

b) a little

c) moderately

d) quite a lot
- [ ]

[ ]

[ ]

[ ]

Please comment

8      As a child and adolescent, how much attention was given to your learning about sexuality?

None	[   ]
A little	[   ]
A lot	[   ]

Please comment

There are many different sources from which one learns about sexuality. The learning can be positive or negative.

9      Please number in order of importance for you, in the boxes on the left-hand side below, the 5 (five) sources from which you learned most as a child and adolescent about your sexuality, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

In addition, please tick the boxes on the right-hand side to indicate whether you think the learning was positive or negative.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
[   ]	a) Mother	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	b) Father	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	c) Sister(s)	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	d) Brother(s)	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	e) Grandmother(s)	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	f) Grandfather(s)	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	g) Other family	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	h) Friends	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	i) Teachers/School	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	j) School-yard	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	k) Religion (Church)	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	l) Books	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	m) Magazines	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	n) Television	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	o) Newspapers	[   ]	[   ]
[   ]	p) Other (please specify)	[   ]	[   ]



10 For your life and relationship today, do you think your early learning about being a sexual person was sufficient to meet the needs you experience now?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

11 As a woman, have you experienced problems in your role as

member of religious community	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
close friend	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
partner	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
adult child (of your own parents)	Yes [ ]	No [ ]

If answers are all ‘no’, go to question 13  
If any answer is ‘yes’, go to question 12

12 In your opinion, is there any connection between these difficulties and your early learning about being a woman?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

13      Looking back on your own journey of development as a woman, would you consider yourself

- |    |                          |       |
|----|--------------------------|-------|
| a) | very unhappy with it     | [   ] |
| b) | not very happy with it   | [   ] |
| c) | moderately happy with it | [   ] |
| d) | very happy with it       | [   ] |

Please comment

14      Are you willing to be contacted during and/or after the course with a view to assisting in a research project on sexual learning?

- |     |       |
|-----|-------|
| Yes | [   ] |
| No  | [   ] |

**NB      Please fill in your name, address and telephone number (if any) below:**

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....



**APPENDIX C**  
**GROUPS 1 AND 2**

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO** \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**

**Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.**

**PART 1**

- 1

Has the personal development course in sexuality been a satisfying experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

- 2

Has the course been a learning experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment



- 3 During the course you were invited to reflect on different areas and stages of sexual learning in your life. As a result of this reflection, did you become aware of gaining any new significant insight about yourself and/or your relations through reflecting on these areas and stages?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

If the answer is ‘no’, please go to question 11

If the answer is ‘yes’, please number, in order of importance for you, from 1 to 5 only, the topic areas in which you think you gained most insight, ‘1’ being the most important, ‘5’ being the least important. Please add any topic you wish, not indicated below.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>
a)	Early childhood learning	[ ]
b)	Puberty and adolescence	[ ]
c)	Sexual scripts	[ ]
d)	My Body	[ ]
e)	Sexual Profile	[ ]
f)	Fertility and sexuality	[ ]
g)	Parenthood	[ ]
h)	Discerning my wish/achieving my goal	[ ]
I)	Other	[ ]

Please comment

- 4      Have the insights gained on the course affected your self-image?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]  
Please comment

- 5      As a result of the insights gained on the course, has anything  
changed in your way of behaving?  
Please explain      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

- 6      As a result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed  
in your relationships  
Please explain      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]



7      As a result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationship with your partner (if applicable)?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

8      As a result of insights gained on the course, have you altered the way you approach issues of sexuality with your children?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

9      Has the learning on the course revealed any areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

- 10      If the learning on the course revealed areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality, has it enabled you to address these difficulties?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

**PART 2**

- 11      How important would you rate the learning achieved by you on this course?
- unimportant [ ]  
fairly important [ ]  
very important [ ]

Please comment

- 12      What one word best describes for you the quality of learning brought about by doing this course?
- Informative [ ]  
transformative [ ]  
factual [ ]  
liberating [ ]  
superficial [ ]  
emancipatory [ ]  
other [ ]

Please explain



13 In your opinion, is it possible to acquire what one needs to learn about sexuality during childhood and adolescent years to meet the needs of adulthood?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

14 In your opinion, is there a need for education in adulthood about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

**PART 3**

The context of the learning was in a group, over a period of time, with a structured though flexible programme.

15      In your opinion, did the structure of the programme facilitate learning for adult sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

16      In your opinion, did hearing other group members' experiences of learning about sexuality contribute to your insight and learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

17      In your opinion, did having a group facilitator contribute to the learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment



18

In your opinion, is an adult education course an appropriate place for adult learning about sexuality

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

**PART 4**

19

In your opinion, would men benefit from a course on sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

20

In your opinion, would men attend a course on sexuality

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

**NB Please fill in you name, address, and telephone number (if any) below and indicate if you are willing to be interviewed.**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

.....

TELEPHONE NO.....

WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED	[ ]
NOT WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED	[ ]



**APPENDIX C<sup>1</sup>**  
**GROUPS 3, 4, 5**

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 1**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**

Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

SEX: Female [ ] Male [ ]

AGE GROUP: 45-54 [ ] Under 25 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ]  
55-64 [ ] 65-74 [ ] 75 and over [ ]

STATUS: Single and living alone [ ] Religious/Ordained [ ]  
Married or Partnered [ ] Separated/Divorced [ ]  
Widowed [ ]

CHILDREN: Yes [ ] No [ ]

If you have children, are some [ ] or all [ ] or none [ ] living at home?

EDUCATION STANDARD ACHIEVED:

Primary [ ] Group Certificate [ ] Intermediate Certificate [ ]  
Technical [ ] Leaving Certificate [ ] College/University [ ]

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS, IF ANY:

OCCUPATION(S)

PRESENT WORK SITUATION:

Full-time Homemaker [ ] Unemployed [ ] Employed [ ]  
Self-employed [ ] Retired [ ] Student [ ]



## PART 1

- |   |  |  |   |   |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| 1 | Are you involved in any community or voluntary service group?  | Yes  | [ | ] |
|   |  | No   | [ | ] |
| 2 | Have you participated in any personal development courses before?  | Yes  | [ | ] |
|   |  | No   | [ | ] |
|   | If answer is 'yes', go to question no.3  |  |   |   |
|   | If answer is 'no', go to question no.4   |  |   |   |
| 3 | Which of the following types of course(s) have you attended?   |  |   |   |
|   | a)   | self-awareness?                                      | [ | ] |
|   | b)   | assertiveness?                                       | [ | ] |
|   | c)   | parenting?   | [ | ] |
|   | d)   | communication skills?                                | [ | ] |
|   | e)   | sexuality self-awareness?                            | [ | ] |
|   | f)   | other? (please specify)                              | [ | ] |
| 4 | Which one of the following <u>best</u> describes your reason for choosing this course from the options available?                                    |  |   |   |
|   | a)   | To learn more about myself as a woman or as a man    | [ | ] |
|   | b)   | To build my self-confidence                          | [ | ] |
|   | c)   | To better my relationships                           | [ | ] |
|   | d)   | To improve my parenting skills                       | [ | ] |
|   | e)   | To enhance my skills as an adult educator            | [ | ] |
|   | f)   | To enhance my work                                   | [ | ] |
|   | g)   | To facilitate personal development courses           | [ | ] |
|   | h)   | To increase my comfort with the subject of sexuality | [ | ] |
|   | i)   | Other reason. (please specify)                       | [ | ] |
| 5 | If you have not attended a course on sexuality before, which <u>one</u> of the following best describes your reason for not doing so? Was it because |  |   |   |
|   | a)   | you did not have the interest?                       | [ | ] |
|   | b)   | you did not feel the need for it?                    | [ | ] |
|   | c)   | such a course was not available?                     | [ | ] |
|   | d)   | other reasons? (please specify)                      | [ | ] |

**PART 2**

Sexuality has to do with the experience of self as a woman or as a man, and in relationship. It touches upon issues of self-image, love, partnership, desire, intimacy, fertility, gender, power and self-expression.

6 Each person has their own experience of learning about sexuality in childhood and adolescence. Have you thought about and questioned your experience

- |    |             |     |
|----|-------------|-----|
| a) | not at all  | [ ] |
| b) | a little    | [ ] |
| c) | moderately  | [ ] |
| d) | quite a lot | [ ] |

Please comment

7 As a child and adolescent, how much attention was given to your learning about sexuality?

- |          |     |
|----------|-----|
| None     | [ ] |
| A little | [ ] |
| A lot    | [ ] |

Please comment

There are many different sources from which one learns about sexuality. The learning can be positive or negative.

8 Please number in order of importance for you, in the boxes on the left-hand side below, the 5 (five) sources from which you learned most as a child and adolescent about your sexuality, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

In addition, please tick the boxes on the right-hand side to indicate whether you think the learning was positive or negative.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
[ ]	a) Mother	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	b) Father	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	c) Sister(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	d) Brother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	e) Grandmother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	f) Grandfather(s)	[ ]	[ ]



[ ]	g)	Other family	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	h)	Friends	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	i)	Teachers/School	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	j)	School-yard	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	k)	Religion (Church)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	l)	Books	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	m)	Magazines	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	n)	Television	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	o)	Newspapers	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	p)	Other (please specify)	[ ]	[ ]

Please comment

9 For your life and relationship today, do you think your early learning about being a sexual person was sufficient to meet the needs you experience now?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Please comment

10 As a woman, or as a man, have you experienced problems in your role as

member of religious community	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]
close friend	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]
partner	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]
adult child (of your own parents)	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]

If answers are all ‘no’, go to question 12  
If any answer is ‘yes’, go to question 11

11 In your opinion, is there any connection between these difficulties and your early learning about being a woman?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Please comment

12 Looking back on your own journey of development as a woman, would you consider yourself

a)	very unhappy with it	[ ]
b)	not very happy with it	[ ]
c)	moderately happy with it	[ ]
d)	very happy with it	[ ]

Please comment

13 In your own learning as an adult, prior to this course, how much attention have you given to your personal growth and development as a sexual person?

- no attention [ ]
- very little attention [ ]
- some attention [ ]
- substantial attention [ ]
- Please comment

**PART 3**

You are participating in this course on sexuality and personal development as a student of adult education and/or as a practioner in the field:

14 In the course of your work, do issues pertaining to sexuality ever arise? Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

If answer is 'yes', proceed to question 10  
If answer is 'no', proceed to question 11

15 With regard to issues arising in work pertaining to sexuality, in the right-hand column below, please

- 1. Mark X for issues which you never encounter:
- 2. For the issues you do encounter, please rank order them from 1 through to a possible 13. No. 1 being the most common and No. 13 the least common.

<u>Issues</u>	<u>Frequency of Encounter</u>
a) Personal self-esteem	[ ]
b) Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]
c) Quality of couple relationship	[ ]
d) Fertility/Infertility	[ ]
e) Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]
f) Sexual abuse	[ ]
g) Parenting	[ ]
h) Sexual orientation	[ ]
i) Sexual identity	[ ]
j) Sexual morality	[ ]
k) Physical violence	[ ]
l) Psychological oppression	[ ]
m) Other, please specify	[ ]
Please comment	



People can experience different levels of ease, comfort, discomfort, in encountering or working with others' individual experiences of sexuality.

16 Using a scale of 1 - 6 indicated below, please tick how you feel, or think you would feel, working with people on the issues named?

Scale of comfort levels 1 - 6

- 1 = Very comfortable
- 2. = Comfortable
- 3 = Reasonably comfortable
- 4 = Not very comfortable
- 5 = Uncomfortable
- 6 = Very uncomfortable

	1	2	3	4	5	6
a) Personal self-esteem	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b) Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c) Quality of couple relationship	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d) Fertility/Infertility	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e) Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
f) Sexual abuse	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
g) Parenting	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
h) Sexual orientation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
i) Sexual identity	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
j) Sexual morality	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
k) Physical violence	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
l) Psychological oppression	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
m) Other, please specify	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

17 Is there any type of person, particular group of people, or type of problem in relation to sexuality with which you experience, or might experience, difficulty? Please describe. Yes [ ] No [ ]

18 Do you think there is a value in working with adults in relation to their personal sexual growth and development? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Please comment

19 In your opinion, as an, are there adequate learning resources available for adults in relation to their growth and development as sexual persons? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Please comment.

20    Has your training to date as an adult education student/practitioner equipped you to work with people in terms of their growth and development as sexual persons?    Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

21    As a student/practitioner of adult education, what benefits do you hope to gain from pursuing a course in personal sexuality? Please describe.

22    Are you willing to be contacted during and/or after the course with a view to assisting in a research project on sexual learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

**NB    Please fill in your name, address and telephone number (if any) below:**

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....



**APPENDIX C<sup>1</sup>**  
**GROUPS 3,4 AND 5**

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP No .....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**

**Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.**

**PART 1**

- 1

Has the personal development course in sexuality been a satisfying experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

- 2

Has the course been a learning experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

During the course you were invited to reflect on different areas and stages of sexual learning in your life. As a result of this reflection, did you become aware of gaining any new significant insight about yourself and/or your relations through reflecting on these areas and stages?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

If the answer is ‘no’, please go to question 11

If the answer is ‘yes’, please number, in order of importance for you, from 1 to 5 only, the topic areas in which you think you gained most insight, ‘1’ being the most important, ‘5’ being the least important. Please add any topic you wish, not indicated below.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>
a)	Early childhood learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
b)	Puberty and adolescence	<input type="checkbox"/>
c)	Sexual scripts	<input type="checkbox"/>
d)	My Body	<input type="checkbox"/>
e)	Sexual Profile	<input type="checkbox"/>
f)	Fertility and sexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>
g)	Parenthood	<input type="checkbox"/>
h)	Discerning my wish/achieving my goal	<input type="checkbox"/>
I)	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please comment



4      Have the insights gained on the course affected your self-image?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

5      As a result of the insights gained on the course, has anything  
changed in your way of behaving?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

6      As result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed  
in your relationships?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

7      As a result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed  
in your relationships (for example, with your partner, parents,  
children, community, relatives friends, colleagues?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

8      Has the learning on the course revealed any areas of difficulty for  
you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning  
about sexuality?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

9      If the learning on the course revealed areas of difficulty for you in  
your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about  
sexuality, has it enabled you to address these difficulties?      Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

- 10

How important would you rate the learning achieved by you on this course?

unimportant [ ]

fairly important [ ]

very important [ ]
- 11

What one word best describes for you the quality of learning brought about by doing this course?

Informative [ ]

transformative [ ]

factual [ ]

liberating [ ]

superficial [ ]

emancipatory [ ]

other [ ]

Please explain

**PART 2**

- 12

In your opinion, is it possible to acquire what one needs to learn about sexuality during childhood and adolescent years to meet the needs of adulthood?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Please explain

- 13

In your opinion, is there a need for education in adulthood about sexuality?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Please explain



**PART 3**

The context of the learning was in a group, over a period of time, with a structured though flexible programme.

14

In your opinion, did the structure of the programme (e.g. specific themes, in the sequence followed, facilitate learning for adult sexuality?

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

Please comment

15

In your opinion, did hearing other group members' experiences of learning about sexuality contribute to your insight and learning?

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

Please comment

16

In your opinion, did having persons of the opposite sex as members of the group

contribute positively to the learning

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

contribute negatively to the learning

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

17

In your opinion, did having a group facilitator contribute to the learning?

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

In your opinion, is an adult education course an appropriate place for adult learning about sexuality?

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

Please comment

426

**PART 4**

Reflecting on your experience of the course, as a student/practitioner of adult education:

- 19

Do you think this type of learning should be made available to all adults?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain
- 20

Do you think courses of this type on personal sexuality should be part of the normal repertoire of adult education?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain
- 21

Do you think your learning on the course will contribute to your own work?

Yes ☐

No ☐

**NB Please fill in you name, address, and telephone number (if any) below and indicate if you are willing to be interviewed.**

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....

WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED ☐  
NOT WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED ☐



**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.,.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 1**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**

Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

SEX: Female [ ] Male [ ]

AGE GROUP: 45-54 [ ] Under 25 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ]  
55-64 [ ] 65-74 [ ] 75 and over [ ]

STATUS: Single and living alone [ ] Religious/Ordained [ ]  
Married or Partnered [ ] Separated/Divorced [ ]  
Widowed [ ]

CHILDREN: Yes [ ] No [ ]

If you have children, are some [ ] or all [ ] or none [ ] living at home?

EDUCATION STANDARD ACHIEVED:

Primary [ ] Group Certificate [ ] Intermediate Certificate [ ]  
Technical [ ] Leaving Certificate [ ] College/University [ ]

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS, IF ANY:

OCCUPATION(S)

PRESENT WORK SITUATION:

Full-time Homemaker [ ] Unemployed [ ] Employed [ ]  
Self-employed [ ] Retired [ ] Student [ ]



**PART 1**

Sexuality has to do with the experience of self as a woman or as a man, and in relationship. It touches upon issues of self-image, love, partnership, desire, intimacy, fertility, gender, power and self-expression.

1    Each person has their own experience of learning about sexuality in childhood and adolescence. Have you thought about and questioned your experience

- |    |             |       |
|----|-------------|-------|
| a) | not at all  | [   ] |
| b) | a little    | [   ] |
| c) | moderately  | [   ] |
| d) | quite a lot | [   ] |

Please comment

2    As a child and adolescent, how much attention was given to your learning about sexuality?

- |          |       |
|----------|-------|
| None     | [   ] |
| A little | [   ] |
| A lot    | [   ] |

Please comment

There are many different sources from which one learns about sexuality. The learning can be positive or negative.

3    Please number in order of importance for you, in the boxes on the left-hand side below, the 5 (five) sources from which you learned most as a child and adolescent about your sexuality, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

In addition, please tick the boxes on the right-hand side to indicate whether you think the learning was positive or negative.

<u>Number</u>		<u>Source</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
[ ]	a)	Mother	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	b)	Father	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	c)	Sister(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	d)	Brother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	e)	Grandmother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	f)	Grandfather(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	g)	Other family	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	h)	Friends	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	i)	Teachers/School	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	j)	School-yard	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	k)	Religion (Church)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	l)	Books	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	m)	Magazines	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	n)	Television	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	o)	Newspapers	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	p)	Other (please specify)	[ ]	[ ]

Please comment

- 4

For your life and relationship today, do you think your early learning about being a sexual person was sufficient to meet the needs you experience now?

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

Please comment

- 5

As a woman, or as a man, have you experienced problems in your role as

member of religious community

close friend

partner

adult child (of your own parents)

Yes

[ ]

No

[ ]

If answers are all ‘no’, go to question 12  
If any answer is ‘yes’, go to question 11

- 6

In your opinion, is there any connection between these difficulties and your early learning about being a woman?
- Yes

[ ]
- No

[ ]

Please comment

- 7

Looking back on your own journey of development as a woman, would you consider yourself

a)

very unhappy with it

[ ]

b)

not very happy with it

[ ]

c)

moderately happy with it

[ ]

d)

very happy with it

[ ]

Please comment



- 8

In your own learning as an adult, prior to this course, how much attention have you given to your personal growth and development as a sexual person?
 

no attention [ ]
 very little attention [ ]
 some attention [ ]
 substantial attention [ ]
- Please comment

PART 3

You are participating in this course on sexuality and personal development as a teacher/counsellor:

- 9

In the course of your work, do issues pertaining to sexuality ever arise?
 

Yes [ ]
 No [ ]

If answer is ‘yes’, proceed to question 10  
 If answer is ‘no’, proceed to question 11

- 10

With regard to issues arising in work pertaining to sexuality, in the right-hand column below, please
 

1. Mark X for issues which you never encounter:

2. For the issues you do encounter, please rank order them from 1 through to a possible 13, No. 1 being the most common and No. 13 the least common.

<u>Issues</u>		<u>Frequency of Encounter</u>
a)	Personal self-esteem	[ ]
b)	Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]
c)	Quality of couple relationship	[ ]
d)	Fertility/Infertility	[ ]
e)	Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]
f)	Sexual abuse	[ ]
g)	Parenting	[ ]
h)	Sexual orientation	[ ]
i)	Sexual identity	[ ]
j)	Sexual morality	[ ]
k)	Physical violence	[ ]
l)	Psychological oppression	[ ]
m)	Other, please specify	[ ]
Please comment		

People can experience different levels of ease, comfort, discomfort, in encountering or working with others' individual experiences of sexuality.

- 11      Using a scale of 1 - 6 indicated below, please tick how you feel, or think you would feel, working with people on the issues named?

**Scale of comfort levels 1 - 6**

- 1      =      Very comfortable
- 2.     =      Comfortable
- 3      =      Reasonably comfortable
- 4      =      Not very comfortable
- 5      =      Uncomfortable
- 6      =      Very uncomfortable

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
a)    Personal self-esteem	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b)    Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c)    Quality of couple relationship	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d)    Fertility/Infertility	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e)    Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
f)    Sexual abuse	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
g)    Parenting	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
h)    Sexual orientation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
i)    Sexual identity	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
j)    Sexual morality	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
k)    Physical violence	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
l)    Psychological oppression	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
m)    Other, please specify	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]



- 12

Is there any type of person, particular group of people, or type of problem in relation to sexuality with which you experience, or might experience, difficulty? Please describe.

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- 13

Do you think there is a value in working with adults in relation to their personal sexual growth and development?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 14

In your opinion, as a teacher/counsellor, are there adequate learning resources available for adults in relation to their growth and development as sexual persons?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment.
- 15

Has your training to date as a teacher/counsellor equipped you to work with people in terms of their growth and development as sexual persons?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 16

As a teacher/counsellor, what benefits do you hope to gain from pursuing a course in personal sexuality? Please describe.
- 17

Are you willing to be contacted with a view to further assisting in the research project on learning needs and opportunities in adulthood in relation to personal sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

**NB** Please fill in your name, address and telephone number (if any) below:

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**



**Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.**

**PART 1**

- 1

Has the personal development course in sexuality been a satisfying experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

- 2

Has the course been a learning experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐
- Please comment

During the course you were invited to reflect on different areas and stages of sexual learning in your life. As a result of this reflection, did you become aware of gaining any new significant insight about yourself and/or your relations through reflecting on these areas and stages?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

If the answer is ‘no’, please go to question 11

If the answer is ‘yes’, please number, in order of importance for you, from 1 to 5 only, the topic areas in which you think you gained most insight, ‘1’ being the most important, ‘5’ being the least important. Please add any topic you wish, not indicated below.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>
a)	Early childhood learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
b)	Puberty and adolescence	<input type="checkbox"/>
c)	Sexual scripts	<input type="checkbox"/>
d)	My Body	<input type="checkbox"/>
e)	Sexual Profile	<input type="checkbox"/>
f)	Fertility and sexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>
g)	Parenthood	<input type="checkbox"/>
h)	Discerning my wish/achieving my goal	<input type="checkbox"/>
I)	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please comment

- 4

Have the insights gained on the course affected your self-image?

Yes ☐  
No ☐
- Please comment

- 5 As a result of the insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your way of behaving?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 6 As result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationships?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 7 As a result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationships (for example, with your partner, parents, children, community, relatives friends, colleagues?)
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 8 Has the learning on the course revealed any areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please comment
- 9 If the learning on the course revealed areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality, has it enabled you to address these difficulties?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please comment
- 10 How important would you rate the learning achieved by you on this course?
- unimportant [ ]  
fairly important [ ]  
very important [ ]
- 11 What one word best describes for you the quality of learning brought about by doing this course?
- Informative [ ]  
transformative [ ]  
factual [ ]  
liberating [ ]  
superficial [ ]  
emancipatory [ ]  
other [ ]
- Please explain



**PART 2**

- 12

In your opinion, is it possible to acquire what one needs to learn about sexuality during childhood and adolescent years to meet the needs of adulthood?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain
- 13

In your opinion, is there a need for education in adulthood about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

**PART 3**

The context of the learning was in a group, over a period of time, with a structured though flexible programme.

- 14

In your opinion, did the structure of the programme (e.g. specific themes, in the sequence followed, facilitate learning for adult sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 15

In your opinion, did hearing other group members' experiences of learning about sexuality contribute to your insight and learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 16

In your opinion, did having persons of the opposite sex as members of the group

contribute positively to the learning

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

contribute negatively to the learning

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain
- 17

In your opinion, did having a group facilitator contribute to the learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 18

In your opinion, is an adult education course an appropriate place for adult learning about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

**PART 4**

Reflecting on your experience of the course, as a  
teacher/counsellor:

19

Do you think this type of learning should be made available to  
all adults?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

20

Do you think courses of this type on personal sexuality  
should be part of the normal repertoire of adult  
education?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

21

Do you think your learning on the course will contribute  
to your own work?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

**NB Please fill in you name, address, and telephone number (if any) below and  
indicate if you are willing to be interviewed.**

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....

WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED [ ]  
NOT WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED [ ]



**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 1**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**

Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

SEX: Female [ ] Male [ ]

AGE GROUP: 45-54 [ ] Under 25 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ]  
55-64 [ ] 65-74 [ ] 75 and over [ ]

STATUS: Single and living alone [ ] Religious/Ordained [ ]  
Married or Partnered [ ] Separated/Divorced [ ]  
Widowed [ ]

CHILDREN: Yes [ ] No [ ]

If you have children, are some [ ] or all [ ] or none [ ] living at home?

EDUCATION STANDARD ACHIEVED:

Primary [ ] Group Certificate [ ] Intermediate Certificate [ ]  
Technical [ ] Leaving Certificate [ ] College/University [ ]

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS, IF ANY:

OCCUPATION(S)

PRESENT WORK SITUATION:

Full-time Homemaker [ ] Unemployed [ ] Employed [ ]  
Self-employed [ ] Retired [ ] Student [ ]



## PART 1

- |   |  |         |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Are you involved in any community or voluntary service group?  | Yes [ ] |
|   |  | No [ ]  |
| 2 | Have you participated in any personal development courses before?  | Yes [ ] |
|   |  | No [ ]  |
|   | If answer is 'yes', go to question no.3  |         |
|   | If answer is 'no', go to question no.4   |         |
| 3 | Which of the following types of course(s) have you attended?   |         |
|   | a) self-awareness?   | [ ]     |
|   | b) assertiveness?  | [ ]     |
|   | c) parenting?  | [ ]     |
|   | d) communication skills?   | [ ]     |
|   | e) sexuality self-awareness?   | [ ]     |
|   | f) other? (please specify)   | [ ]     |
| 4 | Which one of the following <u>best</u> describes your reason for choosing this course from the options available?                                    |         |
|   | a) To learn more about myself as a woman or as a man   | [ ]     |
|   | b) To build my self-confidence   | [ ]     |
|   | c) To better my relationships  | [ ]     |
|   | d) To improve my parenting skills  | [ ]     |
|   | e) To enhance my skills as an adult educator   | [ ]     |
|   | f) To enhance my work  | [ ]     |
|   | g) To facilitate personal development courses  | [ ]     |
|   | h) To increase my comfort with the subject of sexuality  | [ ]     |
|   | i) Other reason. (please specify)  | [ ]     |
| 5 | If you have not attended a course on sexuality before, which <u>one</u> of the following best describes your reason for not doing so? Was it because |         |
|   | a) you did not have the interest?  | [ ]     |
|   | b) you did not feel the need for it?   | [ ]     |
|   | c) such a course was not available?  | [ ]     |
|   | d) other reasons? (please specify)   | [ ]     |

**PART 2**

Sexuality has to do with the experience of self as a woman or as a man, and in relationship. It touches upon issues of self-image, love, partnership, desire, intimacy, fertility, gender, power and self-expression.

6 Each person has their own experience of learning about sexuality in childhood and adolescence. Have you thought about and questioned your experience

- |    |             |     |
|----|-------------|-----|
| a) | not at all  | [ ] |
| b) | a little    | [ ] |
| c) | moderately  | [ ] |
| d) | quite a lot | [ ] |

Please comment

7 As a child and adolescent, how much attention was given to your learning about sexuality?

- |          |     |
|----------|-----|
| None     | [ ] |
| A little | [ ] |
| A lot    | [ ] |

Please comment

There are many different sources from which one learns about sexuality. The learning can be positive or negative.

8 Please number in order of importance for you, in the boxes on the left-hand side below, the 5 (five) sources from which you learned most as a child and adolescent about your sexuality, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

In addition, please tick the boxes on the right-hand side to indicate whether you think the learning was positive or negative.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
[ ]	a) Mother	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	b) Father	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	c) Sister(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	d) Brother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	e) Grandmother(s)	[ ]	[ ]



[ ]	f)	Grandfather(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	g)	Other family	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	h)	Friends	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	i)	Teachers/School	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	j)	School-yard	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	k)	Religion (Church)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	l)	Books	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	m)	Magazines	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	n)	Television	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	o)	Newspapers	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	p)	Other (please specify)	[ ]	[ ]

Please comment

9 For your life and relationship today, do you think your early learning about being a sexual person was sufficient to meet the needs you experience now?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Please comment

10 As a woman, or as a man, have you experienced problems in your role as

member of religious community	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
close friend	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
partner	Yes [ ]	No [ ]
adult child (of your own parents)	Yes [ ]	No [ ]

If answers are all 'no', go to question 12  
 If any answer is 'yes', go to question 11

11 In your opinion, is there any connection between these difficulties and your early learning about being a woman?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Please comment

12 Looking back on your own journey of development as a woman, would you consider yourself

a)	very unhappy with it	[ ]
b)	not very happy with it	[ ]
c)	moderately happy with it	[ ]
d)	very happy with it	[ ]

Please comment

- 13

In your own learning as an adult, prior to this course, how much attention have you given to your personal growth and development as a sexual person?
- no attention

[ ]
- very little attention

[ ]
- some attention

[ ]
- substantial attention

[ ]
- Please comment

**PART 3**

You are participating in this course on sexuality and personal development as an adult educator:

- 14

In the course of your work, do issues pertaining to sexuality ever arise?
- Yes

[ ]
- No

[ ]

If answer is 'yes', proceed to question 15  
If answer is 'no', proceed to question 16

- 15

With regard to issues arising in work pertaining to sexuality, in the right-hand column below, please

1.

Mark X for issues which you never encounter:
2.

For the issues you do encounter, please rank order them from 1 through to a possible 13, No. 1 being the most common and No. 13 the least common.

<u>Issues</u>	<u>Frequency of Encounter</u>
a) Personal self-esteem	[ ]
b) Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]
c) Quality of couple relationship	[ ]
d) Fertility/Infertility	[ ]
e) Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]
f) Sexual abuse	[ ]
g) Parenting	[ ]
h) Sexual orientation	[ ]
i) Sexual identity	[ ]
j) Sexual morality	[ ]
k) Physical violence	[ ]
l) Psychological oppression	[ ]
m) Other, please specify	[ ]
Please comment	



People can experience different levels of ease, comfort, discomfort, in encountering or working with others' individual experiences of sexuality.

16      Using a scale of 1 - 6 indicated below, please tick how you feel, or think you would feel, working with people on the issues named?

**Scale of comfort levels 1 - 6**

- 1        =        Very comfortable
- 2.       =        Comfortable
- 3        =        Reasonably comfortable
- 4        =        Not very comfortable
- 5        =        Uncomfortable
- 6        =        Very uncomfortable

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
a)    Personal self-esteem	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b)    Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c)    Quality of couple relationship	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d)    Fertility/Infertility	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e)    Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
f)    Sexual abuse	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
g)    Parenting	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
h)    Sexual orientation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
i)    Sexual identity	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
j)    Sexual morality	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
k)    Physical violence	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
l)    Psychological oppression	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
m)    Other, please specify	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

17     Is there any type of person, particular group of people, or type of     Yes    [   ]  
problem in relation to sexuality with which you experience, or     No    [   ]  
might experience, difficulty? Please describe.

18     Do you think there is a value in working with adults in relation to     Yes    [   ]  
their personal sexual growth and development?     No    [   ]

Please comment

19     In your opinion, as an adult educator, are there adequate learning     Yes    [   ]  
resources available for adults in relation to their growth and     No    [   ]  
development as sexual persons?

Please comment.

19     Has your training to date as an adult educator equipped you to     Yes    [   ]  
work with people in terms of their growth and development as     No    [   ]  
sexual persons?

Please comment

20     As an adult educator, what benefits do you hope to gain from  
pursuing a course in personal sexuality? Please describe.

21     Are you willing to be contacted with a view to further assisting in the  
research project on learning needs and opportunities in adulthood in  
relation to personal sexuality?

Yes    [   ]  
No    [   ]

**NB     Please fill in your name, address and telephone number (if any) below:**

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....



**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**

Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

**PART 1**

- 1

Has the personal development course in sexuality been a satisfying experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

- 2

Has the course been a learning experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐
- Please comment

During the course you were invited to reflect on different areas and stages of sexual learning in your life. As a result of this reflection, did you become aware of gaining any new significant insight about yourself and/or your relations through reflecting on these areas and stages?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

If the answer is ‘no’, please go to question 11

If the answer is ‘yes’, please number, in order of importance for you, from 1 to 5 only, the topic areas in which you think you gained most insight, ‘1’ being the most important, ‘5’ being the least important. Please add any topic you wish, not indicated below.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>
a)	Early childhood learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
b)	Puberty and adolescence	<input type="checkbox"/>
c)	Sexual scripts	<input type="checkbox"/>
d)	My Body	<input type="checkbox"/>
e)	Sexual Profile	<input type="checkbox"/>
f)	Fertility and sexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>
g)	Parenthood	<input type="checkbox"/>
h)	Discerning my wish/achieving my goal	<input type="checkbox"/>
I)	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please comment

- 4

Have the insights gained on the course affected your self-image?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment



- 5 As a result of the insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your way of behaving?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 6 As result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationships?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 7 As a result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationships (for example, with your partner, parents, children, community, relatives friends, colleagues?)
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 8 Has the learning on the course revealed any areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please comment
- 9 If the learning on the course revealed areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality, has it enabled you to address these difficulties?
- Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please comment
- 10 How important would you rate the learning achieved by you on this course?
- unimportant [ ]  
fairly important [ ]  
very important [ ]
- 11 What one word best describes for you the quality of learning brought about by doing this course?
- Informative [ ]  
transformative [ ]  
factual [ ]  
liberating [ ]  
superficial [ ]  
emancipatory [ ]  
other [ ]
- Please explain

**PART 2**

12

In your opinion, is it possible to acquire what one needs to learn about sexuality during childhood and adolescent years to meet the needs of adulthood?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

13

In your opinion, is there a need for education in adulthood about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

**PART 3**

The context of the learning was in a group, over a period of time, with a structured though flexible programme.

14

In your opinion, did the structure of the programme (e.g. specific themes, in the sequence followed, facilitate learning for adult sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

15

In your opinion, did hearing other group members' experiences of learning about sexuality contribute to your insight and learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

16

In your opinion, did having persons of the opposite sex as members of the group

contribute positively to the learning

contribute negatively to the learning

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]  
Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

17

In your opinion, did having a group facilitator contribute to the learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

18

In your opinion, is an adult education course an appropriate place for adult learning about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

451



**PART 4**

19            Reflecting on your experience of the course, as a member of staff of a university centre for adult and community education and as a practitioner in the field:

Do you think this type of learning should be made available to all adults?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

20            Do you think courses of this type on personal sexuality should be part of the normal repertoire of adult education?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

21            Do you think courses of this type on personal sexuality should be part of the normal repertoire of adult education?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

22            What level of priority would you assign to the theme of courses in personal sexuality in the overall curriculum of adult education in the university?

Very high [ ]  
High [ ]  
Medium [ ]  
Low [ ]  
No [ ]

23            Do you think your learning on the course will contribute to your own work?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

**NB Please fill in you name, address, and telephone number (if any) below and indicate if you are willing to be interviewed.**

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE NO.....

WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED [ ]  
NOT WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED [ ]

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO.....**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 1**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**



Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

SEX: Female ☐ Male ☐

AGE GROUP: 45-54 ☐ Under 25 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐  
55-64 ☐ 65-74 ☐ 75 and over ☐

STATUS: Single and living alone ☐ Religious/Ordained ☐  
Married or Partnered ☐ Separated/Divorced ☐  
Widowed ☐

CHILDREN: Yes ☐ No ☐

If you have children, are some ☐ or all ☐ or none ☐ living at home?

EDUCATION STANDARD ACHIEVED:

Primary ☐ Group Certificate ☐ Intermediate Certificate ☐  
Technical ☐ Leaving Certificate ☐ College/University ☐

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS, IF ANY:

OCCUPATION(S)

PRESENT WORK SITUATION:

Full-time Homemaker ☐ Unemployed ☐ Employed ☐  
Self-employed ☐ Retired ☐ Student ☐

**PART 1**

- 1

Are you involved in any community or voluntary service group?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- 2

Have you participated in any personal development courses before?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

If answer is 'yes', go to question no.3

If answer is 'no', go to question no.4
- 3

Which of the following types of course(s) have you attended?

a) self-awareness?

[ ]

b) assertiveness?

[ ]

c) parenting?

[ ]

d) communication skills?

[ ]

e) sexuality self-awareness?

[ ]

f) other? (please specify)

[ ]
- 4

Which one of the following best describes your reason for choosing this course from the options available?

a) To learn more about myself as a woman or as a man

[ ]

b) To build my self-confidence

[ ]

c) To better my relationships

[ ]

d) To improve my parenting skills

[ ]

e) To enhance my skills as a marriage counsellor/facilitator

[ ]

f) To enhance my work

[ ]

g) To facilitate personal development courses

[ ]

h) To increase my comfort with the subject of sexuality

[ ]

i) Other reason. (please specify)

[ ]
- 5

If you have not attended a course on sexuality before, which one of the following best describes your reason for not doing so? Was it because

a) you did not have the interest?

[ ]

b) you did not feel the need for it?

[ ]

c) such a course was not available?

[ ]

d) other reasons? (please specify)

[ ]



**PART 2**

Sexuality has to do with the experience of self as a woman or as a man, and in relationship. It touches upon issues of self-image, love, partnership, desire, intimacy, fertility, gender, power and self-expression.

6 Each person has their own experience of learning about sexuality in childhood and adolescence. Have you thought about and questioned your experience

- |    |             |     |
|----|-------------|-----|
| a) | not at all  | [ ] |
| b) | a little    | [ ] |
| c) | moderately  | [ ] |
| d) | quite a lot | [ ] |

Please comment

7 As a child and adolescent, how much attention was given to your learning about sexuality?

- |          |     |
|----------|-----|
| None     | [ ] |
| A little | [ ] |
| A lot    | [ ] |

Please comment

There are many different sources from which one learns about sexuality. The learning can be positive or negative.

8 Please number in order of importance for you, in the boxes on the left-hand side below, the 5 (five) sources from which you learned most as a child and adolescent about your sexuality, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

In addition, please tick the boxes on the right-hand side to indicate whether you think the learning was positive or negative.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
[ ]	a) Mother	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	b) Father	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	c) Sister(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	d) Brother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	e) Grandmother(s)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	f) Grandfather(s)	[ ]	[ ]

[ ]	g)	Other family	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	h)	Friends	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	i)	Teachers/School	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	j)	School-yard	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	k)	Religion (Church)	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	l)	Books	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	m)	Magazines	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	n)	Television	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	o)	Newspapers	[ ]	[ ]
[ ]	p)	Other (please specify)	[ ]	[ ]

Please comment

9 For your life and relationship today, do you think your early learning about being a sexual person was sufficient to meet the needs you experience now?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Please comment

10 As a woman, or as a man, have you experienced problems in your role as

member of religious community	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]
close friend	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]
partner	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]
adult child (of your own parents)	Yes	[ ]	No	[ ]

If answers are all ‘no’, go to question 12  
 If any answer is ‘yes’, go to question 11

11 In your opinion, is there any connection between these difficulties and your early learning about being a woman?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Please comment

12 Looking back on your own journey of development as a woman, would you consider yourself

a)	very unhappy with it	[ ]
b)	not very happy with it	[ ]
c)	moderately happy with it	[ ]
d)	very happy with it	[ ]

Please comment



- 13

In your own learning as an adult, prior to this course, how much attention have you given to your personal growth and development as a sexual person?
- no attention [ ]

very little attention [ ]

some attention [ ]

substantial attention [ ]

Please comment

**PART 3**

You are participating in this course on sexuality and personal development as a voluntary marriage counsellor/facilitator

- 14

In the course of your work, do issues pertaining to sexuality ever arise?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

If answer is ‘yes’, proceed to question 10  
If answer is ‘no’, proceed to question 11

- 15

With regard to issues arising in work pertaining to sexuality, in the right-hand column below, please
1.

Mark X for issues which you never encounter:
2.

For the issues you do encounter, please rank order them from 1 through to a possible 13, No. 1 being the most common and No. 13 the least common.

<u>Issues</u>	<u>Frequency of Encounter</u>
a) Personal self-esteem	[ ]
b) Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]
c) Quality of couple relationship	[ ]
d) Fertility/Infertility	[ ]
e) Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]
f) Sexual abuse	[ ]
g) Parenting	[ ]
h) Sexual orientation	[ ]
i) Sexual identity	[ ]
j) Sexual morality	[ ]
k) Physical violence	[ ]
l) Psychological oppression	[ ]
m) Other, please specify	[ ]
Please comment	

People can experience different levels of ease, comfort, discomfort, in encountering or working with others' individual experiences of sexuality.

16      Using a scale of 1 - 6 indicated below, please tick how you feel, or think you would feel, working with people on the issues named?

**Scale of comfort levels 1 - 6**

- 1        =        Very comfortable
- 2.       =        Comfortable
- 3        =        Reasonably comfortable
- 4        =        Not very comfortable
- 5        =        Uncomfortable
- 6        =        Very uncomfortable

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
a)    Personal self-esteem	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b)    Genital sexual expression/relating	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c)    Quality of couple relationship	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d)    Fertility/Infertility	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e)    Gender inequality/discrimination	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
f)    Sexual abuse	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
g)    Parenting	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
h)    Sexual orientation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
i)    Sexual identity	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
j)    Sexual morality	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
k)    Physical violence	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
l)    Psychological oppression	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
m)    Other, please specify	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]



- 17

Is there any type of person, particular group of people, or type of problem in relation to sexuality with which you experience, or might experience, difficulty? Please describe.

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- 18

Do you think there is a value in working with adults in relation to their personal sexual growth and development?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 19

In your opinion, as a voluntary marriage counsellor/facilitator, are there adequate learning resources available for adults in relation to their growth and development as sexual persons?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment.
- 20

Has your training to date as a voluntary marriage counsellor/facilitator equipped you to work with people in terms of their growth and development as sexual persons?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 21

As a voluntary marital counsellor/facilitator, what benefits do you hope to gain from pursuing a course in personal sexuality? Please describe.
- 22

Are you willing to be contacted during and/or after the course with a view to assisting in a research project on sexual learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

**NB** Please fill in your name, address and telephone number (if any) below:

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

.....

TELEPHONE NO.....

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GROUP NO 8**

**QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

**Before answering the questions, please read through whole questionnaire**



Please answer the questions by a) placing a tick in the appropriate boxes and b) writing comments where asked.

**PART 1**

- 1

Has the personal development course in sexuality been a satisfying experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

- 2

Has the course been a learning experience for you?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

During the course you were invited to reflect on different areas and stages of sexual learning in your life. As a result of this reflection, did you become aware of gaining any new significant insight about yourself and/or your relations through reflecting on these areas and stages?

- Yes ☐  
No ☐

If the answer is ‘no’, please go to question 11

If the answer is ‘yes’, please number, in order of importance for you, from 1 to 5 only, the topic areas in which you think you gained most insight, ‘1’ being the most important, ‘5’ being the least important. Please add any topic you wish, not indicated below.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>
a)	Early childhood learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
b)	Puberty and adolescence	<input type="checkbox"/>
c)	Sexual scripts	<input type="checkbox"/>
d)	My Body	<input type="checkbox"/>
e)	Sexual Profile	<input type="checkbox"/>
f)	Fertility and sexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>
g)	Parenthood	<input type="checkbox"/>
h)	Discerning my wish/achieving my goal	<input type="checkbox"/>
I)	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please comment

- 4

Have the insights gained on the course affected your self-image?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

Please comment

- 5

As a result of the insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your way of behaving?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain
- 6

As result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationships?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain
- 7

As a result of insights gained on the course, has anything changed in your relationships (for example, with your partner, parents, children, community, relatives friends, colleagues?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain
- 8

Has the learning on the course revealed any areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 9

If the learning on the course revealed areas of difficulty for you in your adult relationships as a result of your early learning about sexuality, has it enabled you to address these difficulties?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 10

How important would you rate the learning achieved by you on this course?

unimportant [ ]  
fairly important [ ]  
very important [ ]
- 11

What one word best describes for you the quality of learning brought about by doing this course?

Informative [ ]  
transformative [ ]  
factual [ ]  
liberating [ ]  
superficial [ ]  
emancipatory [ ]  
other [ ]

Please explain



**PART 2**

- 12

In your opinion, is it possible to acquire what one needs to learn about sexuality during childhood and adolescent years to meet the needs of adulthood?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

- 13

In your opinion, is there a need for education in adulthood about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please explain

**PART 3**

The context of the learning was in a group, over a period of time, with a structured though flexible programme.

- 14

In your opinion, did the structure of the programme (e.g. specific themes, in the sequence followed, facilitate learning for adult sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

- 15

In your opinion, did hearing other group members' experiences of learning about sexuality contribute to your insight and learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment

- 16

In your opinion, did having persons of the opposite sex as members of the group

contribute positively to the learning

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

contribute negatively to the learning

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]
- Please explain
- 17

In your opinion, did having a group facilitator contribute to the learning?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 18

In your opinion, is an adult education course an appropriate place for adult learning about sexuality?

Yes [ ]  
No [ ]

Please comment
- 464

**PART 4**

Reflecting on your experience of the course, as a voluntary marriage counsellor/facilitator:

- 19

Do you think this type of learning should be made available to all adults?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain
- 20

Do you think courses of this type on personal sexuality should be part of the normal repertoire of adult education?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain
- 21

Do you think your learning on the course will contribute to your own work?

Yes ☐

No ☐

**NB** Please fill in you name, address, and telephone number (if any) below and indicate if you are willing to be interviewed.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

.....

TELEPHONE NO.....

WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED ☐

NOT WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED ☐



**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE  
PRIMARY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

**Objective**

The objective of the interview is to allow the maximum freedom to the participant to tell his or her sexual story while also maintaining focus on the themes related to the research project. These are:

1. adequacy of personal childhood sexual learning for adulthood;
2. adult sexual learning needs;
3. adults as educators of children's sexuality;
4. the potential role of adult education for personal sexual development.

**1. Adequacy of personal childhood sexual learning for adulthood:**

- type and quality of personal pre-adult sexual learning, both positive and negative;
- sources of learning;
- self-perception as gendered;
- perception of socio-cultural context of sexual learning;
- effects of pre-adult sexual learning;
- personal sense of sexuality in adulthood;
- inadequacy/adequacy of early sexual learning for adult experience.

**2. Adult sexual learning needs:**

- experience of life choices in relation to personal sexuality;
- challenges to sexual self in adulthood;
- experience of adult sexual relationships;
- unexpected sexual issues arising in adult relationships;
- experiences of match/mismatch between theoretical learning and practice;
- experience of sexual partnership - equality, mutuality, adjustment;
- experiences of sexual intercourse and intimacy;
- experience of celibacy;
- experience of parenthood;
- experience of changes in relationship;
- experience of changes in personal sexual and relational needs;
- personal development in sexual relationship.

### **3. Adults as educators of children's sexuality:**

- perceptions of children's learning needs about sexuality;
- perceptions of own children's learning about personal sexuality;
- similarity/difference between children's sexual learning and own pre-adult learning;
- experiences as parent/teacher in relation to educating in personal sexuality;
- comfort/discomfort with role of sexual educator;
- aims and objectives of children's sexual education;
- perception of socio-cultural influences on attitudes relating to education in sexuality.

### **4. The potential role of adult education for personal sexual development:**

- experiences of education in adulthood in relation to personal sexuality;
- experiences of adult education in relation to personal sexuality;
- appropriateness of an adult education forum for adult sexual learning;
  - benefits of adult education in personal sexuality.



### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

#### **GROUP 9 - ADULT EDUCATORS FROM UNIVERSITY STAFF**

##### **Objectives**

1. To engage members in reflective discussion on personal development as a subject for transformative learning in adult education.
2. To acquire members professional opinion on personal sexuality as a subject for transformative learning in adult education.

##### **Themes for exploration**

- Characteristics of adult maturity.
- Personal development as part of adult education's transformative learning curriculum.
- Personal development as part of adult educators' training curriculum.
- Personal sexuality as theme for personal development courses.
- Implications of inclusion of personal development in sexuality on adult education curriculum.
- Approach to progressing inclusion of personal development in sexuality in critical adult education.
- Any contributions to subject group members wish to make.

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### GROUP 10 - PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

##### Objectives

1. To engage members in reflective discussion on personal sexuality as a subject for transformative learning in adult education.
2. To acquire members professional opinion on personal sexuality as a subject for transformative learning in adult education.

##### Themes for exploration

- Characteristics of adult maturity.
- Personal development in adulthood.
- Role of sexuality in personal development.
- Socio-political implications of personal sexuality.
- Perception of role of critical adult education in relation to personal sexuality.
- Implications of inclusion of personal development in sexuality on adult education curriculum.
- Any contributions to subject group members wish to make.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akeroyd, A.V. (1991) "Personal information and qualitative research data: Some practical and ethical problems arising from data protection legislation" in N. G. Fielding and R.M Lee (eds.), *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*, Newbury Park, CA, Sage
- Alheit, P. (1995) "The 'Biographical Question' as Challenge to Adult Education", *Scottish Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp.75-92
- Allman, P. (1988) "Gramsci, Freire and Illich: Their contribution to Education for Socialism" in T. Lovett (ed.), *Radical Approaches to Adult Education*, New York, Routledge
- Antikainen, A. (1998) "Life-Histories of Learning, the 'Learning Society' and Globalization", *World Congress of the International Sociological Association*, Montreal, Canada, Glotexts.htm
- Atkinson, R. (1998) *The Life Story Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods, Volume 44, London, Sage
- Bagnall, R. G. (1990) "Skills Training for Adult Educators: Necessary But Not Sufficient", *International Journal of University Adult Education*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, pp. 57-67
- Baker Miller, J. (1978) *Towards a New Psychology of Women*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Bancroft, J. (1989) *Human Sexuality and its Problems*, London, Churchill Livingstone
- Barr, J. (1999) *Liberating Knowledge: research, feminism and adult education*, Leicester, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1998) "Women, Adult Education and Really Useful Knowledge" in J. Crowther and I. Martin (eds.), *Popular Education and Social Movements in Scotland Today*, Leicester, NIACE, pp.70-82
- Barrett, M. (1991) *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault*, Oxford, Polity Press

- Barry, U. (1998) "Women, Equality and Public Policy" in Sean Healy and Brigid Reynolds (eds.), *Social Policy in Ireland: Principles, Practice and Problems*, Dublin, Oak Tree Press
- Bartkowski, F. (1988) "Epistemic Drift in Foucault" in I. Diamond and L. Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault*, Boston, North Eastern University Press
- Becker, W. H. (1993) "Feminism's Personal Question - for Men" in A. Jagger and P. Rothenberg (eds.), *Feminist Frameworks*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R. and Tarule, J. M. (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, New York, Basic Books
- Bell, G. H. (1985) "Can Schools Develop Knowledge of their Practice?" *School Organisation*, 5, pp. 175-184
- Bell, C. and Newby, H. (1976) "Husbands & Wives: Dynamics of Deferential Relationship" in D. L. Baker and S. Allen (eds.), *Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage*, London, Longmans
- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Block, J. H. (1984) "Psychological development of female children and adolescents" in J. H. Block (ed.), *Sex Role Identity and Ego Development*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass
- Bolton, F.G. (1983) *When Bonding Fails: Clinical Assessment of High Risk Families*, Beverly Hills, CA, Sage
- Bolton, F., Morris L. and MacEachron, A. (1989) *Males at Risk: The Other Side of Child Sexual Abuse*, California, Sage
- Bordo, S. (1993) "Feminism, Foucault and the politics of the body" in C. Ramazanoglu (ed.), *Up Against Foucault*, London, Routledge
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) "Reading the Slender Body" in M. Jacobus, E. Fox Keller and S. Shuttleworth (eds.), *Body Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, London, Routledge
- Braiden, O. (1996) "*Victims of Rape*", conference presentation at Violence Against Women Seminar/Workshop, Working Group on Violence Against Women, Office of the Tanaiste, Dublin, November 26th
- Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London, Routledge
- Brecher, E. (1972) *The Sex Researchers*, London, Panther Books



- Brod, H. (1994) "Some Thoughts on Some Histories of Some Masculinities: Jews and Other Others" in H. Brod and M.Kaufman (eds.), *Theorizing Masculinities*, London, Sage
- Brookfield, S. D. (1998) "Against Naive Romanticism: from celebration to the critical analysis of experience", *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No.2, pp. 127-142
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) "Using Critical Incidents to Explore Assumptions" in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Oxford, Jossey-Bass
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1987) *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1986) *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practices*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press
- Brown, P. (1990) *The Body and Society*, London, Faber and Faber
- Brownmiller, S. (1976) *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Burkitt, I. (1991) *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*, London, Sage
- Butler-Scally, D. (1996) *Sexuality: Revisioning the Future*. Paper presented at Se7en Conference: an interdisciplinary conference on intolerance and prejudice, University of Dundee, September 5th, unpublished
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1995) *Love, Marriage and Sexuality*, keynote address, Merriman Summer School, August, Ballyvaughan, Ireland
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1993) *Recovering Innocence: the learning outcome of a sexuality self-awareness course*, unpublished dissertation, Centre for Adult and Community Education, Maynooth
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1988) "Fertility in Mid-Life" in *Bulletin*, Vol. 42, No.110, pp.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1985), "Family Planning: Motivations and Conflicts" in *Bulletin*, Vol. 29: No. 113, pp.2-6
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1983), "Natural Family Planning: A Personal Perspective" in M. Reidy (ed.), *Ethical Issues in Reproductive Medicine*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan

- Cameron, D. and Frazer, E. (1996) "The Murderer as Misogynist?" in S. Jackson and S. Scott (eds.), *Feminism and Sexuality, A Reader*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1994), "Cultural Difference and the Lust to Kill" in P. Harvey and P. Gow (eds.), *Sex and Violence: Issues in representation and experience*, London, Routledge
- Capra, F. (1983) *The Turning Point: Science, Society And The Rising Culture*, London, Bantam Books
- Chodorow, N. J. (1990) "Psychoanalytic Feminism/Psychoanalytic Psychology" in D. L. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven, Yale University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1978) *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Berkeley, University of California Press
- Christ, C. P. (1991) "Why Women Need The Goddess" in S. Gunew (ed.), *Feminist Knowledge: A Reader*, London, Routledge
- Cixous, H. (1981) "The Laugh of the Medusa" in E. Marks and I. De Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms*, New York, Schocken Books
- Clandinin, J. D. and Connelly, F. M. (1998) "Personal Experience Methods" in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage
- Clulow C. and Mattinson, J. (1989) *Marriage Inside Out*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Collard, S. and Law, M. (1989) "The Limits of Perspective Transformation: A Critique of Mezirow's Theory", *Adult Education Quarterly*, Volume 39, No. 2, pp. 99-107
- Connell, R.W. (1995) *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1994) "The State, Gender and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal" in H. L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage
- Connolly, B. (1997) "Women in Community Education and Development - Liberation or Domestication in A. Byrne and M. Leonard (eds.), *Women in Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, Dublin, Colour Books
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1996) "Community Development and Adult Education: Prospects for Change?" in B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack and A. Ryan (eds.), *Radical Learning for Liberation*, Maynooth Centre for Adult and Community Education Occasional Series, No. 1, Centre for Adult and Community Education



- Corea, G. (1985) *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*, New York, Harper and Row
- Costello, A. Vellely, B. and Young, J. (1989), *The Sanitary Protection Scandal*, London, The Women's Environmental Network
- Courtney, D. (1987) "Demographic Structure and Change" in P. Clancy, D. Drudy, K. Lynch and L. O'Dowd (eds.), *Ireland: A Sociological Profile*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration
- Coward, R. (1983) *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Croghan, R. (1993) "Sleeping with the Enemy: Mothers in Heterosexual Relationships" in S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds.), *Heterosexuality: a feminism and psychology reader*, London, Sage
- de Beauvoir, S. (1972) *The Second Sex*, H. M. Parshley (ed. and trans.), New York, Vintage Books
- International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (1996) *Learning: the Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, Paris, UNESCO Publishing
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1998) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage
- Department of Education (1995) *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education*, Dublin, The Stationery Office
- Department of Education and Science (1998) *Green Paper: Adult Education in an Era of Learning*, Dublin, The Stationery Office
- Department of Health (1997) *Developing a Policy for Women's Health*, Dublin, The Stationery Office
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1995) *Women and Crisis Pregnancy*, Dublin, The Stationery Office
- Derrida, J. (1976) *Of Grammatology*, G. C. Spivak (trans.), London, John Hopkins University Press
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*, Kappa Delta Pi
- Dex, S. (1991) in S. Dex (ed.), *Life and Work History Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Developments*, London, Routledge
- Dickson, A. (1985) *The Mirror Within*, London, Quartet Books

- Dickson A. and Henriques, N (1992) *Menopause: The Woman's View*, London, Quartet Books
- Dinsmore, C. (1991) *From Surviving to Thriving: Incest, Feminism and Recovery*, Albany, State University of New York Press
- Dobash, R.E. and Dobash, R. P. (1996) *The Costs of Violence Against Women*, conference presentation at Violence Against Women Seminar/Workshop, Working Group on Violence Against Women, Office of the Tanaiste, Dublin, November 26th
- Dominice, P. (1990) "Composing Education Biographies: Group Reflection Through Life Histories in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Oxford, Jossey-Bass
- Dominian, J. (1976) *Authority*, London, Burns & Oates
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1975) *Cycles of Affirmation*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1971) *The Church and the Sexual Revolution*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd
- Dunne, J. (1993) *Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press
- Dworkin, A. (1983) *Right-Wing Women*, New York, Coward McCann
- Edwards, R. and Usher, R. (1998) "'Moving' Experiences: globalisation, pedagogy and experiential learning" in *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 159-174
- Egan, G. and Cowan, M. (1980) *Moving into Adulthood: Themes and Variation in Self-Directed Development for Effective Living*, Monterey, Brooks/Cole Publishing
- Egan, G. (1990) *The Skilled Helper: A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping*, Pacific Grove, Brooks/Cole Publishing
- Ehrenberg, M. and Ehrenberg, O. (1988) *The Intimate Circle: The Sexual Dynamics of Family Life*, New York, Simon and Schuster
- Ehrenreich, B. (1993) "The Politics of Talking in Couples: Conversus Interruptus and Other Disorders" in A. Jagger and P. Rothenberg (eds.), *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- Elias, J. L. (1982) "The Theory-Practice Split" in S. Merriam (ed.), *Linking Philosophy and Practice*, London, Jossey-Bass



- Erikson, E. (1965) *Childhood and Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Eschen, A. and Whittaker, M. (1993) "Family Planning: A Base to Build on for Women's Reproductive Health Services" in M. Koblinsky, J. Timyan and J. Gay (eds.), *The Health of Women: A Global Perspective*, Oxford, Westview Press
- Fagan, S. (1978) *Has Sin Changed?* Dublin, Gill and Macmillan
- Fahy, T., FitzGerald, J., Maitre, B. (1998) "*The Economic and Social Implications of Population Change*", paper to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, March 20th, Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute
- Faith, K. (1994) "Resistance: Lessons from Foucault and Feminism" in H. L. Radtke and H. K. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage
- Fernandez-Armesto, F (1995) *Millennium: A History Of Our Last Thousand Years*, London, Bantam Press
- Field, J. (1993) "Competency and the pedagogy of labour" in M. Thorpe, R. Edwards, and A. Hanson (eds.), *Culture and Processes of Adult Learning: A Reader*, New York, Routledge
- Finklehor, D. (1986) "Designing New Studies" in D. Finklehor (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*, Beverly Hills, CA, Sage
- Fiorenza, E. S. (1991) "Bread not Stone" in S. Gunew (ed.), *Feminist Knowledge*, London, Routledge
- Firestone, S. (1970) *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York, Bantam Press
- Fischer, K. (1995) *Autumn Gospel: Women in the Second Half of Life*, New York, Paulist Press
- Fleming, T. (1996) The Future of Adult Education: Learning Towards a New Democracy, in B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack, A. Ryan (eds.), *Radical Learning for Liberation*, Maynooth Centre for Adult and Community Education Occasional Series, No. 1
- Fraser, W. (1995) "Learning from Experience" in M. Mayo and J. Thompson (eds.), *Adult learning, Critical Intelligence and Social Change*, Leicester, NIACE
- French, M. (1994) "Power/Sex" in H. L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage

- Fontana, A. and Frey, J. H. (1998) "Interviewing: The Art of Science" in N. K. Denzin, and Y. S. Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage
- Fordham, F. (1953) *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Forward, S. (1990) *Toxic Parents: Overcoming the Hurtful Legacy and Reclaiming Your Life*, New York, Bantam
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, R. Hurley (trans.), Harmondsworth, Penguin
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A. Sheridan (trans.), New York, Vintage
- Frank, A. (1991) "For a Sociology of the Body: an analytical review" in M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B. Turner (eds.), *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, London, Sage
- Freire, P. (1985) *The Politics of Education*, South Hadley, Mass., Bergin and Garvey
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1972) *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- French, M. (1994) "Power/Sex" in H. L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage
- Freud, S. (1977) *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and other works*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Frye, M. (1990) "The Possibility of Feminist theory" in D. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, London, Yale University Press
- Gadamer, H-G. (1975) *Truth and Method*, London, Sheed and Ward
- Gerber, R. (1992) "Manipulated Lady", *The Independent on Sunday*, July 12th, pp 44-46
- Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Cambridge, Polity Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, Polity Press
- Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge, Harvard Press



- Gilligan, R. (1995) "Family Support and Child Welfare: Realising the Promise of the Child Care Act 1991" in H. Ferguson and P. Kenny (eds.), *On Behalf of the Child: Child Welfare, Child Protection and the Child Care Act 1991*, Dublin, A and A Farmar
- Gilmore, D. (1990) *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*, New Haven, Yale University Press
- Glaser, B. G. (1978) *Theoretical sensitivity: advances in the methodology of grounded theory*, Mill Valley, Ca., Sociology Press
- Gould, R. (1990) "The Therapeutic Learning Programme" in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, Oxford, Jossey-Bass
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1978) *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life*, New York, Simon and Schuster
- Groome, T. H. (1980) *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, San Francisco, Harper & Row
- Habermas, J. (1978) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 1, Life World and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, T. McCarthy (trans.), Boston, Beacon Press
- Halpern, E.S. (1983) *Auditing Naturalistic Inquiries: the development and application of a model*, unpublished PhD thesis, Indiana University
- Hart, M. U. (1998) "The Experience of Living and Learning in Different Worlds" in *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp.187-200
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1992) *Working and Educating for Life: Feminist and International Perspectives on Adult Education*, London, Routledge
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) "Liberation Through Consciousness Raising" in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, Oxford, Jossey-Bass
- Harvey, P. and Gow, P. (1994) in P. Harvey and P.Gow (eds.), *Sex and Violence*, London, Routledge
- Heaney, S. (1982) "Words Alone", Address, World Congress of the International Reading Association, July, Dublin
- Herman, J. L (1981) *Father-Daughter Incest*, Harvard University Press, Harvard
- Heise, L. (1993) "Violence Against Women: The Missing Agenda" in M. Kooblinsky, J. Timyan and J. Gay (eds.), *The Health of Women: A Global Perspective*, San Francisco, Oxford, Westview Press

- Holland, K. (1998) "Modelling posing as a scrupulous business" in *The Sunday Tribune*, March 1st, p.7
- Hondagneu-Sotelo P. and M. A. Messner (1997) "Gender Displays and Men's Power: The 'New Man' and the Mexican Immigrant Man in M. M. Gergen and S. N. Davis *Towards a New Psychology of Gender: A Reader*, London, Routledge
- hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, New York, Routledge
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1991) "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women" in S. Gunew (ed.), *Feminist Knowledge: A Reader*, London, Routledge
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) "Feminism: A Transformational Politic" in D. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven, Yale University Press
- Horton, M. and Freire, P. (1990) *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press
- Hurtado, A. (1996) "Strategic suspensions: Feminists of color theorize the production of knowledge" in N. R. Goldberger, J. M. Tarule, B. M. Clinchy and M.F.Belenky, *Knowledge, difference, and power: Essays inspired by women's ways of knowing*, New York, Basic Books
- Hynes, A. (1998) "Lack of insight on human sexuality highlighted", address to the Irish Medical Organisation Conference, Killarney, *The Irish Times*, Monday, April 20th, p.4
- Inglis, T. (1998) *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society*, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1997) "Empowerment and Emancipation" in *Adult Education Quarterly*, Volume 48, No.1, Fall, pp. 3-17
- International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (1998) *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO Publishing
- Irigaray, L. (1981) *This sex which is not One*, C. Porter (trans.), Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press
- Jackson, S. (1996) "Heterosexuality, Power and Pleasure", in S. Jackson and S. Scott (eds.), *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press
- Jacobs, J. L. (1994) *Victimised Daughters: Incest and Development of the Female Self*, London, Routledge



- Jacobus, M., Fox Keller, S. and Shuttleworth, S. (1990) *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, London, Routledge
- Jagger, A. (1990) "Sexual Difference and Sexual Equality" in D. L. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven, Yale University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1983) *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Totowa, N.J., Rowman and Allanheld
- Jansen, T. and van der Veen, R. (1996) "Adult Education in the light of the risk society" in P. Raggatt, R. Edwards and N. Small (eds.) *The Learning Society: Challenges and Trends*, London, Routledge
- Jarvis, P. (1983) *Adult and Continuing Education: Theory and Practice*, London, Routledge
- Jay, N. (1991) "Gender and Dichotomy" in S. Gunew (ed.), *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*, London, Routledge
- Jeffreys, S. (1990) *Anticlimax: a Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution*, London, The Women's Press
- John Paul II (1983) Address to Study Group on Natural Regulation of Fertility, July 3rd, 1982, in *The Family: Domestic Church*, Athlone, St. Paul Publications
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1981) *Familiaris Consortio*, London, Catholic Truth Society
- Johnson, R. (1988) "'Really Useful Knowledge' 1790-1850: Memories for Education in the 1980s" in T. Lovett (ed.), *Radical Approaches to Adult Education: A Reader*, New York, Routledge
- Judge, T. (2000) "Boys focus of sex information in new scheme aimed at dealing with underage pregnancies", *The Irish Times*, March 17th, p.2
- Jung, C.G. (1958) *The Undiscovered Self*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Kahn, R.L. and Cannell, C.F. (1957) *The Dynamics of Interviewing: Theory, Technique, and Cases*, New York, John Wiley and Sons
- Kane, E. (1985) *Doing your own Research*, London, New York, Marion Boyars
- Kaplan, H. (1974) *The New Sex Therapy*, New York, Brunner/Mazel
- Kappeler, S. (1995) *The Will To Violence: The Politics of Personal Behaviour*, Oxford, Polity Press

- Kaufman, M. (1994) "Men, feminism, and men's contradictory experiences of power" in (eds.), H. Brod and M. Kaufman *Theorizing Masculinities*, London, Sage
- Kauffman, L. (1989) in L. Kauffman (ed.), *Gender and Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell
- Kearney, R. (1986) *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press
- Keen, S. (1992) *Fire in the Belly*, London, Judy Piatkus Publishers
- Kelly, J.M. (1994) *The Irish Constitution*, G. Hogan and G. Whyte (eds.), Dublin, London, Butterworths
- Kelly, K. T. (1998) *New Directions in Moral Theology: The Challenge of Being Human*, London, Chapman
- Kerfoot, D. and Knights, D. (1994) "Into the Realm of the Fearful: Power, Identity and the Gender Problematic" in H. L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage
- Kimmel, M. S. (1997) "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" in M. Gergen and S. Davis (eds.), *Towards a New Psychology of Gender*, London, Routledge
- Kitzinger, C. (1994) "Problematizing Pleasure: Radical Feminist Deconstructions of Sexuality and Power" in H. L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage
- Klein, M. (1928) "Early stages of the Oedipus conflict", *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* Vol. 9, pp. 167-180
- Kolb, D. (1993) "The Process of Experiential Learning" in M. Thorpe, R. Edwards and A. Hanson (eds.), *Culture and Processes of Adult Learning*, London, New York, Routledge
- Kristeva, J. (1982) *Desire in Language*, L. Roudiez (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press
- Lacan, J. (1977) *Écrits: A Selection*. A. Sheridan (trans.), London, Tavistock
- Lake, F. (1986a) "Dynamic Cycle: Introduction to the Model", Lingdale Paper 2, *Clinical Theology Association*
- (1986b) *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychological Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd
- Laws, S. (1990) *Issues of Blood*, London, MacMillan
- Levinson, D. (1978) *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, New York, Knopf



- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, London, Sage
- Lips, H. M. (1994) "Female Powerlessness: A Case of 'Cultural Preparedness'?" in H. L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage
- Lovett, T. (1988) "Community Education and Community Action" in T. Lovett (ed.), *Radical Approaches to Adult Education: A Reader*, New York, Routledge
- Lowe, M. & Lowe Benston, M. (1991) "The Uneasy Alliance of Feminism and Academia" in S. Gunew (ed.) *Feminist Knowledge: A Reader*, London, Routledge
- Lowe, G. (1977) *The Growth of Personality: From Infancy to Old Age*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Lukinsky, J. (1990) "Reflective Withdrawal Through Journal Writing" in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Oxford, Jossey-Bass
- McCashin, A. (1996) *Lone Mothers in Ireland: A Local Study*, Dublin, Oak Tree Press
- McCracken, G. (1988) *The Long Interview*, London, Sage
- McCullagh, C. (1996) *Crime in Ireland: A Sociological Introduction*, Dublin, Cork University Press
- McGahern, J. (1990) *Amongst Women*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- MacKinnon, C. (1993) "Sex Equality: Difference and Dominance" in A. M. Jagger and P. S. Rothenberg (eds.), *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- (1990) "Legal Perspectives on Sexual Difference" in D. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven, Yale University Press
- Mahon, E., Conlon, C. and Dillon, L. (1998) *Women & Crisis Pregnancy: A Report Presented to the Department of Health and Children*, Dublin, The Stationery Office
- Mansfield, P. and Collard, J. (1988) *The Beginning of the Rest of Your Life: A Portrait of Newly Wed Marriage*, London, MacMillan Press
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. B. (1989) *Designing Qualitative Research*, London, Sage

- Marsick, V. (1990) "Action Learning and Reflection in the Workplace", in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Oxford, Jossey Bass
- Martin, B. (1988) "Feminism, Criticism and Foucault" in I. Diamond and L. Quinby (eds.), *Feminism & Foucault: Reflection on Resistance*, Boston, Northeastern University Press
- Martin, E. (1990) "Science and Women's Bodies" in M. Jacobus, E. Fox Keller and S. Shuttleworth (eds.), *Body Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, London, Routledge
- Maslow, A. (1968) *Towards a Psychology of Being*, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold
- Masters, W. and Johnson, V. (1970) *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, London: Churchill
- Masters, W., Johnson, V. and Kolodny, R. (1992) *Human Sexuality*, New York, Harper Collins
- Mayo, M. (1995) "Adult Education for Change in the Nineties and Beyond: Towards a Critical Review of the Changing Context" in M. Mayo and J. Thompson (eds.), *Adult Learning, Critical Intelligence and Social Change*, Leicester, NIACE
- Mayo, P. (1999) *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education*, London, Zed Books
- Mezirow, J. (1996) "Adult Education and Empowerment for Individual and Community Development, in B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack, A. Ryan (eds.), *Radical Learning for Liberation*, Maynooth Centre for Adult and Community Education Occasional Series, No. 1
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) "How Critical Reflection Triggers Learning" in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1985) "A Critical Theory of Self-directed Learning", in S. D. Brookfield (ed.), *Self-directed Learning: From Theory to Practice*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1981) "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education", *Adult Education*, Vol. 32, No.1, pp. 3-27
- Michelson, E. (1998) "Re-membering: the return of the body to experiential learning", *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 217-233
- Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1984) *Qualitative Data Analysis: a sourcebook of new methods*, London, Sage



- Miller, A. (1992) *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*, London, Virago Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) *Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries*, London, Virago Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1987) *For Your Own Good: the roots of Violence in Child-rearing*, London, Virago Press
- Millett, K. (1977) *Sexual Politics*, London, Virago Press
- Money, J. (1986) *Lovemaps*, New York, Irvington
- Moore, H. (1994) "The problem of explaining violence in the social sciences" in P. Harvey and P. Gow (eds.), *Sex and Violence: Issues of representation and experience*, London, Routledge
- Morris, J. (1972) "Three Aspects of the Person in Social Life" in R. Ruddock (ed.), *Six Approaches to the Person*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul
- O'Brien, M. (1981) *The Politics of Reproduction*, Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul
- O'Brien, S. (1997) "Garda who mocked rape victim 'thing of the past'", *Irish Independent*, June 14, p.6
- O'Connor, A. (1996) *Criminals: Inside the Minds of Criminals and Victims*, Dublin, Marino Press
- O'Faolain, N. (1996) *Are You Somebody?: The Life and Times of Nuala O'Faolain*, Dublin, New Island Books
- Office of the Tanaiste (1997) *Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women*, Dublin, The Stationery Office
- Ohannesson, J. (1983) *And They Felt No Shame: Christians Reclaim Their Sexuality*, Minneapolis, Winston Press
- Orbach, S. (1993) "Heterosexuality and Parenting" in S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds.), *Heterosexuality: a feminism and psychology reader*, London, Sage
- Parks, P. (1990) *Rescuing the 'Inner Child': Therapy for Adults Sexually Abused as Children*, London, Souvenir Press
- Parrinder, G. (1980) *Sex in the World's Religions*, London, Sheldon Press
- Patton, M.Q. (1990) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, London, Sage
- Paul VI (1968) *Humanae Vitae*, London, Catholic Truth Society

- Peters, J. (1989) *Frank Lake: The Man and his Work*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd
- Petrie, M. and Shaw, M. (1998) "Women, Adult Education and Really Useful Knowledge" in J. Crowther and I. Martin (eds.), *Popular education and social movements in Scotland today*, Leicester, NIACE
- Plummer, K. (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, London, Routledge
- Pinkola Estes, C. (1992) *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*, London, Rider
- Potts, M. and Selman, P. (1979) *Society and Fertility*, Plymouth, Macdonald and Evans
- Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) (1999a) *Prime Time*, current affairs television broadcast, Dublin, February 25th
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1999b) *States of Fear*, documentary television series, Dublin, Spring, 1999
- Ramazanoglu, C. (1993) "Love and the Politics of Heterosexuality" in S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds.), *Heterosexuality: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*, London, Sage
- Ramazanoglu, C. and Holland, J. (1993) "Women's sexuality and men's appropriation of desire" in C. Ramazanoglu (ed.), *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of some tensions between Foucault and Feminism*, London, Routledge
- Reidy, M. (1990) *Freedom to be Friends*, London, Collins
- Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Reitz, R. (1985) *Menopause: A Positive Approach*, London, Unwin Paperbacks
- Rhode, D. (1990) "Definitions of Difference" in D. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven, Yale University Press
- Rich, A. (1976) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York, W.W. Norton
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1980) "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in *Signs*, Vol 5. No. 4, pp. 3-32
- Richards, T. J. and Richards, L. (1998) "Using Computers in Qualitative Research" in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage



- Richardson, L. (1998) "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage
- Roberts E., Kline, D. and Gagnon J. (1978) *Project on Human Sexual Development, Family Life and Sexual Learning: A Study of the Role of Parents in the Sexual Learning of Children*, Vols 1-3, Cambridge, Mass., Population Education
- Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, Oxford, Blackwell
- Rogers, C. (1967) *On Becoming a Person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy*, London, Constable and Company
- Roman Catholic Church (1994) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Dublin, Veritas
- Rothfield, P. (1991) "Feminism and Subjectivity" in S. Gunew (ed.), *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*, London, New York, Routledge
- Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Rowland, R. (1984) "Reproductive Technologies: The Final Solution to the Woman Question" in R. Arditti, R. D. Klein and S. Minder (eds.), *Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?*, London, Pandora Press
- Rubin, L. (1990) *Erotic Wars*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- Ruddock, R. (1980) *Perspectives on Adult Education*, University of Manchester, Manchester Monographs
- Russell, D. (1983) "The incidence and prevalence of intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse of female children", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, No. 7, pp. 133-46
- Rutherford, J. (1988) "Who's That Man" in R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (eds.), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, London, Lawrence and Wishart
- Rutter, M. and Rutter, M. (1993) *Developing Minds: Challenge and Continuity Across the Life Span*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Ryan, A. B. (1997a) "Gender Discourses in School Social Relations" in A. Byrne and M. Leonard (eds.), *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, Dublin, Colour Books
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1997b) *Feminist subjectivites: sources for a politicised practice of women's personal development education*, unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

- Ryan, B. (1992) *Feminism and the Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement, Ideology and Activism*, London, Routledge
- Ryan-Larragy, E. (1997) *Rape: The Therapist's Perspective*, unpublished MA thesis, Dublin City University
- Ryan, S. (1997) "Interventions in Childbirth: The Midwives Role" in A. Byrne and M. Leonard (eds.), *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, Dublin, Colour Books
- Sawicki, J. (1988) "Identity Politics and Sexual Freedom: Foucault and Feminism in I. Diamond and L. Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Boston, North Eastern University Press
- Schatzman, L. and Strauss, A. L. (1973) *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall
- Schneiders, S. M. (1991) *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in The Catholic Church*, New York, Paulist Press
- Segal, L. (1987) *Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, London, Virago Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1990) *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1994) *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*, London, Virago Press
- Seidler, V. J. (1988) "Fathering, Authority and Masculinity" in R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (eds.), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, London, Lawrence and Wishart
- Shilling C. (1993) *The Body and Social Theory*, London, Sage
- Shreeve, C. (1987) *Overcoming the Menopause Naturally: How to Cope Without Artificial Hormones*, London, Century Arrow
- Shuttleworth, S. (1990) "Female Circulation: Medical Discourse and Popular Advertising in the Mid-Victorian Era" in M. Jacobus, E. Fox Keller and S. Shuttleworth (eds.), *Body Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, London, Routledge
- Smith, D. E. (1997) "Comment on Hekman's Truth and Method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited", *Signs*, No. 22, pp. 392-398
- Spelman, E. V. (1990) *Inessential Woman: problems of exclusion in feminist thought*, London, The Women's Press



- Stanage, S. M. (1995) "LifeLong Learning: A Phenomenology of Meaning and Value Transformation in Postmodern Adult Education" in S. B. Merriam (ed.), *Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education*, Malabar, Florida, Criegee Publishing Company
- Steele, T. (1995) "Cultural struggle or identity politics? Can there still be a 'popular' education?" in M. Mayo and J. Thompson (eds.), *Adult Learning, Critical Intelligence and Social Change*, Leicester, NIACE
- Storr, A. (1989) *Freud*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Strauss, A.L. (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Swimme, B. (1984) *The Universe is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story*, Santa Fe, Bear and Company
- Tennant, M. (1988) *Psychology and Adult Learning*, London, Routledge
- Thompson, J. L. (1996) "'Really Useful Knowledge': Linking Theory and Practice" in B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack, A. Ryan (eds.), *Radical Learning for Liberation*, Maynooth Centre for Adult and Community Education Occasional Series, No. 1
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1995) *Adult Learning, Critical Intelligence and Social Change*, M. Mayo and J. L. Thompson (eds.), Leicester, NIACE
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1988) "Adult Education and the Women's Movement" in T. Lovett (ed.), *Radical Approaches to Adult Education: A Reader*, New York, Routledge
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1983) *Learning Liberation: Women's Response to Men's Education*, London, Croom Helm
- Thompson, S. (1998) "A Mum at any age?", *The Irish Times*, January 26th
- Thorpe, M., Edwards, R. and Hanson, A. (1993) *Culture And Processes of Adult Learning, A Reader*, M. Thorpe, R. Edwards and A. Hanson (eds.), London, Routledge
- Tong, R. (1989) *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, London, Routledge
- Treichler, P. (1990) "Feminism, Medicine, and the Meaning of Childbirth" in M. Jacobus, E. Fox Keller and S. Shuttleworth (eds.), *Body Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, London, Routledge

- Turner, B. S. (1984) *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell
- Usher, R. and Edwards, E. (1995) "Confessing All? A Postmodern Guide to the Guidance and Counselling of Adult Learners", *Studies in Education of Adults*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 9-23
- Vickers, J. (1994) "Notes towards a Political Theory of Sex and Power" in L. Radtke and H. J. Stam (eds.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London, Sage Publications
- Walby, S. (1990) *Theorising Patriarchy*, Oxford, Blackwell
- Ward, E. (1984) *Father Daughter Rape*, London, Women's Press
- Warner, M., (1985) *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, London, Picador
- Webster, R. (1996) *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis*, London, Harper Collins
- Weideger, P. (1978) *Female Cycles*, London, The Women's Press
- West, L. (1998) "The Edge of a New Story? On paradox, postmodernism and the cultural psychology of experiential learning", *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 235-249
- Whyte, J. (1971) *Church and State in Modern Ireland: 1923-1970*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan
- Williamson, J. (1978) *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, London, Marion Boyars
- Winnicott, D. W. (1974) *"Playing and Reality"*, London, Pelican
- Wolf, Naomi, (1991) *The Beauty Myth*, London, Vintage
- Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG (1988) *Geography and Gender: An Introduction to Feminist Geography*, London, Hutchinson
- Woodhull, W. (1988) "Sexuality, Power, and the Question of Rape" in I. Diamond and L. Quinby (eds.), *Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Boston, North Eastern University Press
- Yeats, W. B. (1990) "The Circus Animals Dessertion" in A. Martin (ed.), *W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems*, London, Vintage Press
- Yin, R. K. (1994) *Case Study Research: design and methods*, Newbury Park, London, Sage



Zitter. S, (1994) "Coming Out to Mom: Theoretical aspects of the Mother-Daughter Process" in B. Greene and G. M. Herek (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, London, Sage

