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Knowing Sex
Formal and Informal Sex Education

by

Priscilla Murray

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**at
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

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Abstract

Knowing Sex: Formal and Informal Sex Education

What is the role of formal sex education? What is the need and what is the possibility?

This thesis claims that the knowledge which we have of the world, of ourselves and of others and therefore our knowledge of sexuality, can be usefully explored by reference to empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge. This classification provides a way of questioning and of understanding the ideas and practices which constitute our knowledge and which shape our lives and it provides a framework in relation to which educators, and more specifically sex educators, can think about and evaluate curriculum.

The role of each of these forms of knowledge in our lives is discussed in detail, with particular reference to our knowledge of sexuality. It is argued that a sex education curriculum which emphasizes the teaching of information and skills so that students will be able to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and from sexually transmitted disease does not constitute a comprehensive sex education programme. The understandings of sexuality which are conveyed through discourse, and which can be identified and challenged by a critical perspective, are examined; and the claim that there is a need for the development of a critical and an ethical understanding in relation to issues of sexuality is supported.

The way that formal sex education might usefully be understood in relation to empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge and in relation to the informal sex education which is learned by individuals as they grow up within a social setting is explored and a critically based sexuality curriculum is proposed.

Acknowledgments

One begins at the beginning and proceeds until one comes to the end. All this seems obvious, but in the process many things are discovered which could not have been predicted, yet which have made the journey what it is. In my research about our sexual understandings and practices and about sex education, I have gained empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge. However, I recognize that what has been learned has been learned in an exchange with others to whom I am related in many different ways and I am grateful to those who have stimulated my thought, challenged my assumptions, enlivened my wish and enlarged my care. These include authors from many different social and historical contexts, professors, fellow students, colleagues at conferences and workshops and students in the courses I have taught at Dalhousie University and at St. Mary's University.

In particular I wish to thank the three members of my supervisory committee, Professors William Hare, Ann Manicom and Ravi Ravindra. They come from the fields of philosophy, sociology, physics and comparative religion and together illustrate the value of the interdisciplinary nature of the field of education. Separately and collectively, they have brought intelligence, careful thought and good will to our discussions and I have always benefited from the exchanges we have had. They have conveyed both an expectation for a high standard of thought and a confidence in me and I am grateful for the demand I have felt and for the support I have been given.

Professor Robert Berard was very helpful in guiding the early stages of my doctoral studies. The office staff in the School of Education, especially the Graduate Secretaries, Rose Pritzker and Jackie Gilby, have always been cheerful and available and they have been very knowledgeable about the technical details of the process. I received the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship from 1989 until 1992 and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship from 1990 until 1993 and I gratefully acknowledge the support from the Killam Trust and from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which allowed me the freedom to pursue the inquiry which has constituted my doctoral work.

I come to an end of this stage of my studies with the conviction that the journey has been worthwhile, with a realization of how much there is to learn and with an even greater belief in the value of a thoughtful and careful reflective inquiry which is guided by a concern for the question "What is a good life?".

Part One: Introduction

Chapter One

Of Sex, Education and Philosophy

In what does [philosophy] consist, if not in the endeavor to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?... an "asceticism", an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought. Michel Foucault

What is the role of formal sex education? What is the need and what is the possibility of sex education? I am interested in questions about sex and the role which sex plays and might play in our lives. Therefore I am interested in sex education. This interest is related to the question "What is a good sex life?" which has intrigued me for a long time.

When I was in high school, I was asked to complete a personality profile in a competition to represent Canada at an international youth conference. For each of the many statements in the questionnaire, a number was to be chosen to indicate a response from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was a psychological test used in industry at that time to assess employee attitude and, apart from the difficulties with the test itself, it was clearly inappropriate for high school students. Many of the questions were irrelevant to our situation. But the statement with which I had the most difficulty was one which read "I have a good sex life." If I agreed, which is what I wanted to do, for I was happy in my body and in my relationships, I wondered what that would be considered to be saying from "their" point of view. Would it mean to the readers, who would conclude from this that they knew something about me, that I was sexually active or very active? On the other hand, if I disagreed, because I was not sexually active at that time, I wondered what that would convey. Would it be interpreted as a sign of unhappiness or would it raise a question about abuse? I pondered over this question for a long time without realizing that the first rule of these tests is never to try to second guess the creators or the readers. And although I haven't yet determined how to answer that question, the question about what a good sex life is has interested me ever since.

Questions about what a good sex life is and how it might be achieved are questions about the quality of our lives which are closely related to the perennial question, 'What is a good life?'. These questions of value are far more difficult to answer than questions of information or of technical skill, but they are questions which we need to address. Otherwise, we cannot question the understandings and practices which constitute our reality and shape our lives, nor can we inquire into the forces that have produced the particular ways we think and act, or wonder how our situation might be changed. Otherwise we cannot ask what is of value, how we might work toward it and what the consequences might be. Otherwise we cannot raise questions about what sex education is needed and what sex education is possible. The difficulty of answering these questions is related to the difficulties of specifying the meanings of 'good' and of 'sex life'; that is, to the difficulties of interpretation and of communication in relation to issues of sexuality. We act and we make decisions, individually and collectively, based upon our understandings of the terms and of the issues, but perhaps our understandings could be clarified and enlarged through education so that the quality of our lives might be enhanced.

I return to the question 'What is a good sex life?' Do I have a good sex life? Clearly this is not only a question of whether I am free of any sexually transmitted disease or whether I am able to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, nor can it be answered by a quantitative review of the number and intensity of my orgasms. But what else does it involve? Does it ask whether I am happy with my own sexuality? Or is it more a question about what kind of sexual activities I engage in or don't engage in? Can this question be answered without a consideration of my sexual relationships? Doesn't it also raise the question of 'Do we have a good sex life?' And who does that include? Clearly, it must involve the ones who are closest to me but my sex life or our sex life is not unrelated to the sex life of the society in which we live. Do we, as a society, have a good sex life? What is our sexual reality? How is it shaped and how does it shape our lives? What are our possibilities, individually and collectively, with respect to it?

While there may be many individuals in our society who have a good sex life there are many who do not. Violence and alienation characterize many sexual relations in modern western society. Rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse of women and children, and, in a similar but less obvious way, sexual harassment are all forms of sexual coercion. These forms of violence always inflict emotional damage as well as physical hurt.

Pornography and prostitution, which commercialize sexuality and sexual violence, make use of sexual oppression in order to make a profit. Advertisers, who use sexual images in order to sell their merchandise, manipulate our sexual responses for their own purposes. Within the context of a capitalistic and free enterprise economic system, the commodification of sex, of women and of women's bodies is both a cause and a result of the objectification of sex, of women and of their bodies.¹ This objectification is expressed in the way women's bodies and body parts are displayed, eroticized and manipulated in advertising. Publicity succeeds by persuading us to buy, and therefore competition for consumer attention results in the use of more and more blatantly sensational images in order to attract notice. As we get accustomed to sensational images, more violent or more sexually explicit material is used in order to gain our attention. Since sex is associated with the most intimate experiences of our lives and violence is related to our deepest fears, images of and references to these cannot be ignored. For this reason sex, violence and violent sexuality sell, and the images which are presented shape our notions of sexuality. Is exciting sex good sex? It becomes increasingly difficult to define the difference between pornography and advertising, between pornography and films or television programming for the general public since sexual innuendo and explicit sexual portrayal, often with suggestions of violence, pervade the media. Each of us is influenced by this context of violence and sexual display.

All of these forms of overt sexual violence are primarily perpetrated by men on women although sometimes the victims are children. The asymmetric power relationship between men and women, built upon the patriarchal understanding that women are for men, is supported by and reflected in the stereotypical images of men as powerful and women as seductive. In this relationship the possibility of violence is always present. Sexual violence is a gender issue which reveals and constructs relations of domination and subordination between males and females in the society and it is therefore an issue for both males and females. But power relationships which structure our sexuality do not only exist between males and females, they exist among males and among females as well. The

¹ Sexual exploitation is always a result of the abuse of power in relation to sexuality, but it is not confined to capitalist systems. The abuse of power in relation to sexuality may be expressed through the commodification of sex in capitalistic societies which do not otherwise constrain this public display of sexuality.

assumption of dominance or the need to negotiate position with respect to power shape our sexual lives in ways we are not conscious of. The sexual violence in the society is a factor which both reveals and constructs our sexuality, male and female, although individuals will have different experiences of sexual violence. The eroticization of domination and submission perpetuates the cycle of rape, sexual abuse, pornography and sexual violence. The eroticization of domination and submission reflects and affects all relationships between males and females, in the home, in the work-place, and in social situations, as well as all sexual relations, whether they are homosexual or heterosexual. Sexual violence and the commodification of sex, of women and of their bodies provide evidence of a widespread depersonalization of sex. An emphasis on sexual gratification and sexual conquest unconnected to caring relationships may lead to experiences of alienation and loneliness, yet these kinds of sexual relationships are commonly represented and glorified in the mainstream and the pornographic media. The cultural belief in individualism has had many positive consequences; however, it also leads to a decreased emphasis on the necessity to make and sustain connections with others.²

What is a good sex life? And what is the present reality? How can we move from the present situation towards a better situation? Education provides a possibility for this change. If we see what the situation is, what it might be and how a movement in that direction could be achieved, change is possible. Educational processes are often concerned with the technical details which would ensure an efficient and productive movement towards some goal that has been assumed or established, but the assessment of the actual situation and a continuous evaluation of the aims are also necessary concerns of education.³ More importantly, educators need to develop students' ability to raise these questions, so that the inquiry about what the situation is, what the goals should be and how they might be achieved can be continued.

² The consequences of a belief in individualism are discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

³ Educational research may focus on the efficacy of programs in achieving stated goals or it may evaluate the goals themselves.

We are faced with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, if we see that we do not have the information, the knowledge or the understanding which would enrich and enlarge our sexual relationships and our relationship to our sexuality, individually or collectively, and if we see that an inquiry about what a good sex life is would permit an examination of and a reflection about the ways we live and about how we might live in relation to issues of sexuality, then sex education is required. Yet, if sex education is required, then do we not first of all need to understand what information is needed, what assumptions and attitudes are operating and ought to be questioned and what would be a better way? Yes and no. We need to begin from where we are, searching for and teaching the information we think will be useful, conveying the understandings and the attitudes which we have but we need to bring a willingness to inquire which may result in a reevaluation of our understandings and attitudes and a reassessment of the information which is needed.

A Philosophical Methodology

Questions about education very soon lead to a philosophical reflection. Since formal education is an intentional undertaking which involves efforts to convey information, to transmit values and understandings or to teach useful methods and techniques, questions about what to teach, that is, about what information is needed, what values and understandings are worthwhile and what needs to be accomplished are fundamental. The purpose of formal education which wishes to foster the maturation and growth of understanding and to increase the capability of individuals is always developmental. Education is education for a better life. But what is a good life?

This was the central question raised in *The Republic* by Socrates and his friends in the fourth century B.C.E. in Athens, and it is the question which must be raised again and again. The question "What is a good life?" is related to questions of both individual and social morality, to goodness and to justice, and to right action in the widest sense. In *The Republic*, it is suggested that education is required in order to bring about and to maintain the just society which Plato had outlined. Formal education, at any time, may allow the vision which some have had about a good life to be realized, but it may also allow the question about what a good life is to be raised again. Or, it may be merely an institutional form followed because of choices made in the past, but without vision and without

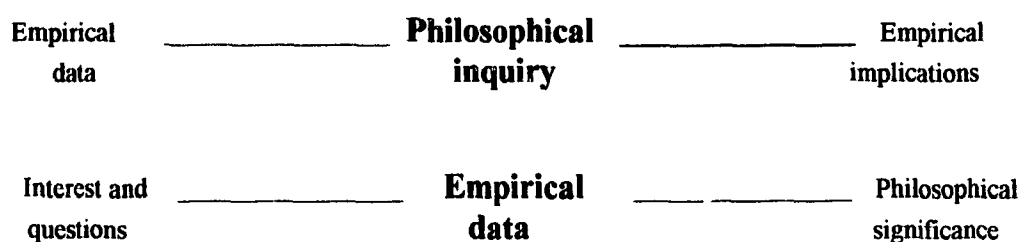
question. Although the answers which have been given in the past by others have a historical influence, the question "What is a good life?" can only be asked by individuals who see the situation from their own perspective, and it cannot be answered except in a particular context. The situation changes, we change, and not everything has been taken into account. It is a question for all of us, but it must be asked by each one of us, again and again. It is a question which needs to be informed by our lives so that it can enrich our lives.

A philosophical approach to issues in education begins with the big questions such as "What is a good life?" "What is knowledge?" and "What is worth knowing?", "What is learning?" "How can we think about these issues?", then wonders how these questions might be usefully explored. The aim of a philosophical method is not primarily to find answers, but it is to clarify and to enlarge the questions, for the heart of philosophy is inquiry. And it is to propose ways to frame the questions and answers, that is, ways to make sense of the world. In the effort to clarify and to enlarge the questions, both the questioner and the questioned are often clarified and enlarged. But answers are not irrelevant. Although answers to the largest questions cannot be proved true in the way that empirical claims may be proved true or false, we need to find the best answers we can, all the while remembering that we are searching for better answers. Therefore the point is not to prove particular answers right or wrong, but to be prepared to give up the answers we have relied upon when they are no longer the best way of framing and benefiting from experience.⁴ However, unless the questions arise out of experience and unless there are practical consequences of the process of inquiry, then the philosophical approach to educational issues may seem irrelevant and merely speculative or entirely theoretical. Although remarks of this kind have sometimes been made about philosophy, the fact that these criticisms are sometimes valid does not mean that they are necessarily or even generally true.

The philosophical approach may also be understood by contrasting it with the inductive method of research. The inductive approach may be based upon research which is interpreted by qualitative or quantitative methods, but in either case the emphasis is on the gathering and the analysis of experiential or experimental data and on answering

⁴ In this case better is better than best!

questions of process or meaning. Conclusions are justified by the evidence. Reliability and validity are required although qualitative and quantitative approaches meet the demands for these standards differently. Yet, if the answers which are discovered do not support our highest aspirations and our larger concerns they may seem insignificant and merely trivial. Inductive research may serve our highest aims and philosophical inquiry may inform our immediate experience. The gathering of data and its interpretation will not appear worthwhile without a relationship to philosophical concerns and philosophical inquiry will not be useful unless it has experiential relevance. At best, the two approaches support one another, and include one another, even though the emphases, the starting positions and the dominant methodologies are different in each of them.



The difference between the philosophical and the experiential approaches might be usefully explored by analogy to the difference between theoretical and experimental physics. Neither of these disciplines can be carried on without including the methods and the discoveries of the other, yet we speak of them as separate areas of concern in order to refer to their different emphases. Although theoretical physics may be speculative, it may shape new ways of looking at the data, new ways of making sense of the material which will have an important impact upon empirical work. This has been understood to be especially useful at those times when the limitations of the operating paradigm have become apparent.⁵ During times of what Kuhn (1962) has called 'normal science', theoretical physicists examine the limits of current assumptions and even propose alternate models, but unless a need is perceived, this activity may seem irrelevant and 'merely'

⁵ See Kuhn (1962) for a useful discussion of the way scientific knowledge is shaped within the scientific community and a model of the process of the way that theoretical understandings are changed.

speculative to those who are actively engaged in solving the problems they see. Experimental physicists produce technological results by application of the accepted theory, but they also are the ones who, by uncovering anomalies, can discover the limitations of that theory. Empirical data which has no relation to any theory is merely data and can have no significance. Apart from these two different approaches there is also a need for the questions which ask "What is worthwhile knowing?" and "What should we do?". But, as Einstein observed (1939, p. 45), these questions cannot be regarded as questions of physics, for they are meta-physical questions. However, they need to be asked in relation to physics for they are important questions about our relationship to physics.

The philosophical approach to education may include both of these two kinds of questions: theoretical educational questions: "How can we think about education?" and "How can we frame theoretical models which may be usefully applied?" and meta-educational questions: "What is worth knowing?" and "What is a good life?". Both kinds of questions are needed, although there may be an emphasis on one or the other. In either case, the questions need to be related to practical concerns. They arise out of experience and have practical implications. The responses to such questions cannot be true or false in the same way that empirical claims may be, but they may be useful or not. They may reveal assumptions we have taken for granted; they may reveal the implications of these assumptions and they may question them. They may bring an increased awareness of the nature of the problems; they may clarify the issues, enlarge feeling and give hope – or they may not.

The dominant research methodology within the field of education changes over time and may be different in different locations. At any time and in any place, the methodologies which are not dominant are put in question with respect to the dominant methodologies. For example, in the context where qualitative empirical research methodology is dominant, quantitative research and even philosophic inquiry may appear to be less obviously justifiable. A research project relying upon either of these methods may be challenged by questions from the perspective of the understandings of the qualitative method. Quantitative researchers might be asked questions about their assumptions of objectivity, about the meaning of relevant concepts and about the inescapable influence of the researcher. Philosophic researchers might be asked questions

about the relationship of their study with practice and about the validity of any claims which are made. However, qualitative research may be questioned about the validity, reliability and impartiality of the methods used. Philosophic interests may question the value or the significance of inductive research and of the experimental procedures. Representatives of the three different approaches may realize that no single methodology needs to be exclusively relied upon, and they may then realize the value of a discussion about the differences and the respective strengths of each of these approaches. Questions which act as an impetus for a reflection about the methods which are used in research can benefit any study, but questions which result from the assumption that no other approach except the one the researcher is interested in has any validity always limit research.

The above may sound like an apology for philosophic methodology. And so it is, but in the sense of defense and not in the sense of regretfully acknowledging an error made. Just as both theory and practice are required for praxis, so both philosophy and empirical study are necessary in order to be able to make responsible decisions. Philosophical inquiry and empirical research begin differently, but each needs to include and can benefit from what the other has discovered in content and in method.

This thesis is primarily a philosophic inquiry about the questions which arise in relation to formal sex education. It relies upon empirical information about informal and formal sex education and it has practical implications, although questions about how this material can be usefully be understood and what the significant issues are constitute the central focus of the thesis.

About sex education

The question "What is a good sex life?" remains a question. It fuels and shapes the inquiry into the role of formal sex education.

Our sexuality is expressed in our physical relationships with others. It is the way we are related to ourselves and to others, male or female, through our bodies. It is as general as this statement suggests: since we are embodied, gendered and social creatures, we are sexual creatures and our sexuality pervades our lives. But it is also more specific, referring to intimate passionate relationships, to acts of reproduction and to erotic

expression. These two levels of sexuality, the more intimate and the more general and which refer to our selves and our relationships as naked and as clothed, are dialectically related. Beliefs and practices with respect to one affect the way we understand and behave with respect to the other.

Although we learn about sex and sexuality in the social setting in which we live beginning in early childhood, we can also reflect upon the knowledge which we have and the knowledge which we could have. What can we know of sex? What can we learn of sex? How can we think of sex? How can we gain information, knowledge and understanding about sex which will enrich our lives? There are many different kinds of questions about sex which cannot all be answered in the same way, for there are many different kinds of knowledge about sexuality. In this thesis I claim that it is useful to examine our knowledge of sexuality in relation to four different categories of knowledge – the empirical, the social, the critical and the ethical which can respond to four different kinds of questions.

Human action relies upon an interplay between the empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge. In the most simplistic formulations, an empirical inquiry asks "How can we do what we wish?"; a social inquiry ponders "What does it mean? and "Who are we?" and an ethical inquiry wonders "What should we do?" and "How shall we make our choices?". A critical inquiry is a more reflective inquiry for it raises questions about the assumptions and the political relationships which have produced the social reality in which we live and asks "Why were these choices made?". A critical inquiry may raise questions about how and why the meanings and the values which define our social reality have developed and about the implications of these particular perspectives, whereas a social inquiry is concerned with a description and clarification of meanings so that communication might be enhanced. All of these forms of knowledge operate together in the formulation of plans for action which can be based upon a realistic assessment of the situation and a knowledge of the forces which have produced it. They may be informed by our wish for an improvement in the quality of life and they may take into account what is possible.

In order to make this claim – that it is useful to examine our knowledge of sexuality in relation to these four categories of knowledge – I discuss these ways of

knowing and point out the kinds of questions about sexuality each of these could address. It will be clear that these categories of knowledge are closely related to one another and that a division is somewhat arbitrary. The fact that this is so, that there are cases when we might be unable to distinguish whether an inquiry is either a social or a critical inquiry, or when we might not be able to separate these from one another, does not invalidate the usefulness of the distinctions which are being made. And, as will be discussed later, although the point might be made that ethical concerns are always contained in a critical inquiry, this does not deny the value of separating these for purposes of analysis. The question which needs to be raised about the usefulness of the proposed classification of knowledge about sexuality is: "Does it clarify some areas of concern which can more usefully be examined in this way, so that the understandings gained can be brought together again in response to the more general questions about sexuality?"

If these categories of knowledge about sexuality are useful ways to inquire about what we could know about sexuality, then a formal sex education programme can be shaped and evaluated with respect to these ways of knowing. Every formal sex education programme teaches some people, who already have some knowledge, some information and some understanding about sexuality in relation to empirical, social, critical and ethical questions about sexuality. The content and, perhaps more importantly, the attitudes in relation to these areas, will have been learned informally to a large extent. What can be learned and what needs to be learned, what can be taught and what needs to be included in any formal sex education programme in each of these four different categories will depend upon what has already been learned formally and informally.

This thesis explores the way that formal sex education might usefully be understood in relation to empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge and in relation to the informal sex education which is learned by individuals as they grow up within a social setting. Formal sex education always needs to be related to the informal education which takes place, but because the informal education varies from time to time and from place to place, formal education needs to remain agile and responsive. It needs to comprehend the students' knowledge, that is, it needs to take the information, the misinformation, the assumptions and attitudes, the ideas and the goals which they have, into account because these need to be examined and questioned and augmented. It needs to be based upon the best understandings of a good sex life, but it ought not to be

constrained by any conventional view, for this too needs to be examined, questioned and augmented. A formal sex education programme needs to convey ways in which the examination, the questioning and the inquiry of our sexual understandings and practices can be continued by teaching the values of and the ways of empirical, social, critical and ethical knowing.

Formal sex education needs to be related to the empirical content of informal education and to its impact; it needs to be concerned with the study of the meanings conveyed in informal and formal education and what their implications for social relationships are; it needs to be involved in a critique of the assumptions which shape our practice and understandings and of the power relations which determine our social and political reality; but it always also needs to return to the question which can remind us of our aspirations: "What is a good life?"

The understanding that our knowledge, which we express through language and through practice, is socially constructed in an on-going exchange with others is a fundamental tenet of the thesis and this perspective is discussed in the rest of this first chapter, along with some preliminary remarks about the way that we learn to understand gender and sexuality through our early experiences. In the second chapter, I discuss knowledge more generally, some ways of categorizing knowledge and the reasons I have chosen to discuss empirical, social, critical and ethical ways of knowing. Each of these forms of knowing and how they are related to knowledge about sexuality and to issues of sex education are discussed in more detail in the following four chapters.

Since formal sex education needs to be related to the informal sex education which takes place, that is, it needs to take into account what has already been learned and it needs to bring a reflection upon what is being taught informally, I discuss, in the seventh chapter, the informal sex education process as it takes place in early childhood, and in early adolescence, with particular reference to the way in which a group of young girls undertakes to learn about becoming sexy and sexual. In the final chapter, I reflect upon the questions of formal sex education in relation to the four categories of knowledge and I suggest some possible implications of this study for teachers, for students and for the curriculum and I propose a critically based sexuality curriculum which takes the form of

inquiry through a guided exchange among individuals which will educate the students to become empirical, social, critical and ethical knowers in relation to issues of sexuality.

Learning sex

The word 'sex' refers to both the category of gender and to erotic relationships and their physical expression; it refers to who we are and what we do. These aspects are related to one another in many ways, but what those relationships are and how they have developed is not obvious. The ambiguity of the reference of the word 'sex' is an indication of the complexity of the issues involved and the difficulties of understanding the role of sex in our lives, but it is a rich and important area of investigation, which is likely to reveal much about ourselves, individually and collectively.

Our identities as male or female and our understandings about gender and about how to behave sexually are learned as we live within a social setting. The complex learning process by means of which individuals develop self-understandings and acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills which are required for participation in the culture, but which does not take place as a result of biological development, is called socialization. This process cannot not take place. It links the individual to the society and provides a cohesiveness among a diversity of individuals and a continuity over time. It allows individuals to participate in the shared social reality which has been constructed in the ongoing history of the community.

Learning our social reality

Every human society is organized linguistically and politically. As we grow up within a society, we learn language and we learn the social customs – the way things are said and the way things are done. Through this, we come to share a conceptual framework which carries certain fundamental assumptions. These assumptions shape the way we understand what we experience. The common-sense knowledge of everyday reality which is generally unquestioned and which carries the background of structure and meaning in the culture holds a privileged position for it shapes and expresses our understanding of the world. It constitutes "the reality *par excellence*" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 35) in which and through which we exist. This shared reality is the

result of a complex interaction of social, economic and political relations. Our understandings which can be articulated, our stated beliefs and our institutional practices emerge out of our fundamental stance and we are in turn shaped by these in the ongoing historical process of the social construction of reality. As McLaren puts it: "We do not stand *before* the social world, we live *in the midst* of it" (McLaren, 1989, p. 169). This understanding had been earlier articulated by Dewey in the principle of continuity of experience which states that "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (1938, p. 35).

Through our experiences, we come to understand what is admired, what is forbidden, who is valued, who has power, who can speak with authority, who will be heard, and what is permitted and expected of individuals who occupy certain positions in the social order. We ourselves are admired or censured, valued or rejected, we experience power or powerlessness, we are heard or ignored, and we find ourselves occupying a certain position in the social order. We act and we understand in relation to all this. So although each of us learns to be a member of the society and we share many assumptions and values, each of us occupies a unique position in it and each of us has a somewhat different perspective from which we see and experience the social reality which has shaped us and in which we live.

The expression 'our social reality' is a useful construct, but its meaning cannot be given with any precision and a discussion of the reasons for this will be helpful for understanding its role. When we speak of 'our social reality', who 'we' are is ambiguous unless it is specified or made clear in the context. Although the group of individuals referred to with this pronoun will always include myself, it also refers to the others in any of the groups of which I am a member – my family, my community, my society, my culture, all women, or all human beings, to name only a few of the groups to which I belong. The membership of some of these groups is not so easily identified and the meaning of the terms which identifies the group may be understood in many ways. For example, the meanings of 'family' and 'community' are particularly variable.

Each group consists of an unlimited number of sub-groups whose members share some characteristic selected as noteworthy for a specific purpose. The groups of

Caucasian Canadian women are members of the group of Canadian women and of the group of women of European descent but they are also members of the group of all women. The possible groupings are infinite. Consider, for example, urban women, unemployed women, women who live in poverty, women who are interested in environmental issues, mothers, and lesbian women. I have something in common with all other women and yet I am unlike any other woman.

The identity of any group is defined with reference to others who are not members of the group, that is, with what these individuals have in common which others do not share. The identification and the characterization of a group is determined for a particular purpose.⁶ The identification and characterization of a group is always a political act which has social and practical implications because the identification and the characterization of groups establishes relationships and grants or withholds status and privilege. In order to examine the social reality questions may be asked about the way that the groups in it have been established, how they are understood, how they are treated, how they understand themselves and what difference membership in any group make in the lives of the individuals involved. At the same time, it must be remembered that the identity and the interests of the person answering these questions makes an important difference, since each individual views the situation from a different perspective. "There can be no theory, no method, and no knowledge as a product of these that is not made by men and women and made from a definite standpoint in the society and in the interests of those who make it" (Smith, 1990, p. 32).⁷

⁶ It is clear, for example, that the identification of heterosexuals, homosexuals, or bisexuals makes some feature or features of those individuals who are so identified, significant. Since there are very few people with whom each of us are involved in an intimate sexual exchange, it is not only a matter of sexual concern: why sexual orientation is considered to be a significant identifying feature.

⁷ This kind of statement points to the obvious, but often unnoticed fact, that each person sees from a particular position, not only in a physical and geographical sense, but in a historical and experiential sense as well. What we see will be affected by our own past and by our present situation and state. It does not imply that everyone is merely self-interested. An individual can learn of others and can gain an understanding of others' situations. A wise and compassionate person will see the world differently than a foolish

The membership of any group is defined and the members are identified by reference to their shared social reality. But this 'social reality' is continuously changing and each person's experience of it and understanding of it is different from every other's. The shared social reality consists of the conditions which the individuals in the group experience as well as the processes and social relations by which these conditions have been historically shaped and are maintained.

The social reality in which we live is not the same as any particular person's understanding of it, although these are not unrelated. What is said of the situation and what is accepted as true about it will affect the individuals in that situation. When I speak of 'my social reality', it is not something which exists apart from myself and which I can have or dispense with, nor is it something which exists apart from the larger net of social relations in which I live. It is the way it is because I am this particular individual with these attributes, these talents, these limitations, this body; because I am a member of this family and not another; because I grew up in a particular community at a certain historical moment, in, for example, a technologically advanced society with a capitalist economy. The experiences I have had are not isolated from the larger society: my social reality is defined in relation to *our* social reality.⁸ The fact that I am a woman, for example, affects all of my experiences. If I had been a male growing up in the same situation, I would have had very different experiences, due to physiological differences but also because males are treated differently than females are and because there are different expectations of males and of females. Understandings of gender which are part of the social reality we live in influence my experiences and my understandings of them and of myself.

and self-occupied person does, and, although they will each see the world from their own perspective, their interests will be very different.

⁸ The term 'my social reality' refers to my own situation. It includes the facts of my experience which have been influenced by the way these facts have been and are understood. Yet I might not understand my social reality and I might make statements about my social reality which are false. The term 'our social reality' is a more ambiguous term which cannot be precisely defined, nor can its reference be specifically located. It is a useful concept only if it is understood that its characteristics cannot be fixed.

Our social reality changes continuously because of the dialectical relationship between the groups and individuals who participate in the society and the social relations which identify that society. Individuals respond to and react against circumstances, they accede to and they resist doing what is expected of them. Choices made within the limits set by the social structures change the circumstances and the relations which constitute the social reality. Conflicting aims of individuals and groups require constant negotiation and the results produce and reflect shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. On a societal level these changes are manifested in changes in the ruling discourses – in what we say we know – and, in turn, these are reflected in the institutional practices and in the political and social policies.

The recognition that our reality is socially and historically constructed is a result of the realization that it might have been otherwise. This realization leads to questions about what the particular understandings, beliefs and practices are which characterize our social relations, how they have developed and how they are maintained.

Learning gender

One of the fundamental categories of social organization, which shapes all of our relationships is gender. Each of us is born either male or female and this fact affects every aspect of our lives. Every culture has understood the biological identification of gender to be a significant feature of the individual and has used this distinction as a fundamental organizing category of social relations. The activities and the characteristics which are regarded as masculine or feminine, that is, as appropriately belonging to males or to females, vary from time to time and from culture to culture. So although being male or female is a biological fact, it is always also a social fact.

The understanding of the importance of social forces in the expression of gender has been supported by anthropological studies. In 1935 Margaret Mead documented the variety of masculine and feminine roles and temperament which she had observed in three different tribes in New Guinea. She concluded that the characteristics of temperament which males and females are expected to have and the roles which males and females are expected to play are culturally selected (Mead, 1963, [1935], p. 280) and that although there is a great range of expression possible for both males and females, most individuals

act within the range of behaviors which are expected and which have been established in their social setting.

In any setting certain characteristics and actions will be approved and supported while others will be disapproved and considered aberrant. When some features are valued in males and others in females, masculinity and femininity are understood differently. When some activities are identified as masculine and others as feminine, the range of activities open without social penalty to either males or females is limited. Since 'masculine' and 'feminine' refer to the characteristics prized in one sex or another or to the activities expected of someone of one sex and not the other, the expressions 'a masculine male' and 'a feminine female' are not redundant, but indicate approbation while the expressions 'a feminine male' and 'a masculine female' indicate censure.

The recognition that different cultures have had different understandings of gender raises questions about what the particular beliefs about gender which are culturally dependent are, how they have developed, how they are sustained, how these notions are conveyed to individuals and what the consequences of these are for the society and for individuals within the society. Feminist theorists have raised many questions about our concepts and our practices of gender, about how they are constructed and maintained and how they affect all our experiences. They have pointed out that in our society, and in many others, gender relations reflect and support patriarchal assumptions. Millett, for example, claims that the assumption of the dominance of men and the subordination of women and the practices associated with this constitutes the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power (Millett, 1969, p. 33). The consequences that assumptions of patriarchy have had for women and for men can be examined in the light of the understanding that socially constructed notions of gender are not inevitable. Since gender is such a centrally important feature of the society, the women's movement's questioning of previously taken for granted ideas about gender is an extremely radical act (Mackie, 1987, p. 38). In her claim that "The single most important advance in and result of feminist theories is that the existence of gender has been problematized" (1990, p. 21), Jane Flax points to the significance of questioning the assumptions about gender. The existence of gender cannot be denied as either a biological or as a socially constructed fact, but the particular forms in which gender relations have been understood in any setting can be and should be questioned.

Learning sexuality

Sexuality, like gender, is socially constructed. However, since our sexuality is determined by the ways we are related to ourselves and to one another, as we are male or female, our understandings of sexuality are greatly influenced by our understandings of gender. Our sexual behaviors are shaped and mediated by meanings, by custom and by institutional practices which have been formed by the interaction of many forces in an on-going historical process.

Sexuality is something which society produces in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate, and those who resist. Sexuality is not given, it is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency. (Weeks, 1986, p.25)

Every society has organized and regulated erotic life, but there is an immense variety in the ways human sexuality has been expressed in different cultures for our sexuality is highly malleable, "both in the objects toward which it may be directed and its modalities of expression" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 67). The cultural beliefs about intimate sexual exchange and the practices which are related to the regulation of desire connect the interests of society in protecting citizens and in the economic, medical, pedagogical, and political implications of population growth or decline and the interests of individuals in the life of the body, in the production and the satisfaction of desire, in reproductive possibilities and responsibilities, and in the emotional force of erotic relationships. The beliefs about intimate sexual exchange affect every aspect of our lives because they affect our understandings and our practices about how we are related to ourselves and to others, as males or as females, that is, it is related to our understandings of sexuality in the most general sense.

As we grow, we develop physically and become sexually mature. And as we grow within the human community, we learn sex. We learn how to behave and what to believe within the context of the shared social reality in which we live, although each of us is located uniquely in that social reality. Primary sexual socialization generally takes place within the family, but the family does not exist in isolation from the larger societal context.

Each family's understandings and practices have developed within the culture; each person and each family reveals one way of expressing that reality. The importance of early experiences was pointed out in relation to gender socialization, for early experiences establish fundamental attitudes which affect all our relationships with ourselves and with others. "The child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 154). The experiential learning which takes place initially within the family provides the emotional ground for all subsequent learning. Negotiation is then required as individuals interact with one another.

The way we manifest and understand our sexuality is a product of individual, social and historical forces which bring together "gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires, fantasies" (Weeks, 1986, p.15) and which are expressed publicly in and conveyed by "moral treatises, laws, educational practices, psychological theories, medical definitions, social rituals, pornographic and romantic fiction, popular music and commonplace assumptions" (Weeks, 1986, p.16). There is a complex interplay between an individual's experience of sexuality and the interpretation of that experience, from the individual's perspective or from other points of view. Physical expressions of sexuality are individual and unique, but they take place because of and are understood in relation to the larger context of the life of the individual and in relation to the cultural assumptions, customs and values.

In an interesting paradox, the attempt to say something which will be true of all sexual experiences ends by sounding false about every sexual experience, for sexuality is one of the most personal, the most intimate, the most ambiguous and the most individual of experiences: it is related to body, to desires, and to the sense of the self. It is a locus of pleasure and danger, and of power and vulnerability. It is expressed in relationships which may bring us closer to one another or which may reveal and increase our isolation and our separation from one another. The highest forms of love and the most violent and depraved forms of hatred have been expressed in sexual relationships and yet there are sexual relationships which seem to have no emotional component. Sexual expression is related to the possibility of reproduction and therefore with the wish to have children and with the social, economic and moral responsibility of having children, yet sexual activity is not limited to reproductive acts. The birth of a child has implications for the individuals

involved and the growth of the population has economic and social consequences for the local and the global community.

Carole Vance has pointed out that "the hallmark of sexuality is its complexity: its multiple meanings, sensations and connections" (Vance, 1989, p. 5). The meanings that any of our sexual experiences have are related to our images of ourselves, our expectations, our values, our beliefs, our fears and our desires and these have been shaped by our own experiences within the social context. Our sexuality is mediated by personal experiences which have shaped our psyche and by the societal understandings of gender, of moral behavior and of the value of human relationships. Understandings of sex are related to the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual aspects of life of each human being. The functions and the pleasures of the body and social and political policies are linked together by strategies of knowledge and power which have economic and ideological implications and purposes. As Foucault has remarked, "Sex is a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species" (1990, Volume 1, p.146).

Sex education is taught informally by all those whom we encounter in every social setting. The sexual understandings of the society in which we live are conveyed in all of our social interactions, by the media and through the institutional practices which govern our educational, legal, medical, religious and political experiences. The individual is not merely a passive recipient or victim of socialization, receiving and repeating the societal understandings which are conveyed. In responding, each person participates in the ongoing construction of sexuality. That response, which may not be the result of reflection and of a conscious decision, may be viewed as collaboration or as resistance by someone who is interested in a particular outcome in the process. However, the fact that there is the possibility of change, or, more strongly, that there is an inevitability of change, offers hope that the changes might bring about a better situation. The belief that we can intentionally produce desirable changes is the fundamental belief of formal education. This may be accomplished either by introducing students to new experiences and new information which will augment earlier and perhaps inadequate social learning and thereby change their situation or by teaching students to reflect upon their situation so that they could actively intervene in the ongoing process which constitutes their life.

The recognition that what our sexuality is has been shaped within the cultural context and that our experiences are affected by the larger social relations raises questions about the practices which have resulted in these experiences, the ways these have been initiated and sustained, their consequences and about what kinds of alternatives are possible. Although each individual has a unique situation in the larger cultural context, societal beliefs and assumptions influence the life of every person in the society. Understanding the forces which shape the ways we live and to which we respond allows questions about the ways we might live. Understandings of gender and of sexuality are learned both formally and informally, through curriculums which have been selected and through the processes of social exchange which convey information and attitudes. Seeing what we have learned about gender and about sexuality raises questions about what we would wish to know. An examination of our informal sex education raises questions about a formal sex education.

Questions about where we are and where we wish to go with respect to our knowledge about sex are related to the more difficult questions of who we are and who we wish to become. Answers to these questions shape the decisions of content and method in a sex education curriculum. But the question "What do we need to know about sex through a sex education programme?" cannot be answered without first of all addressing more fundamental questions about knowledge and about what kind of knowledge is involved in the knowing about sexuality which can be addressed in sex education programmes. In the next chapter I speak about knowledge more generally and then in the four chapters which follow I discuss the empirical, the social, the critical and the ethical ways of knowing, focusing on these forms of knowledge in relation to sexuality, before going on to speak of sex education programmes in the later chapters.

Part Two: Knowing and Knowing Sex

Chapter Two

Understanding Knowledge

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? T. S. Eliot

The knowledge which we have influences our lives. What we do and who we are, separately and collectively, are linked to the knowledge we have. This knowledge expresses our relationship with the world, with others, with ourselves and with the unknown. And our actions, that is, how we live and what we do, express our knowledge, revealing the relationships we have.¹ Gained through past experience, both culturally and individually, our knowledge structures the future. We see, we think, we act from the knowledge which we have as we respond to present circumstances and we learn as the new experiences and the new impressions which are produced change our knowledge.

Human knowledge is a social phenomenon. When my experiences and perceptions are externalized and given form, the expression of the experiences and perceptions is available for others or for myself in memory. These expressions or 'significations', as Berger and Luckmann call them, are public but they are not always verbal. Language systems are an important way of communicating but there are many other forms of expression – by gesture and movement, through form and through sound. Not all of what we know can be said in words, but all our expressions serve as vehicles of social exchange which may be known, or which may be learned, recalled, examined, organized, questioned, compared, explained or enjoyed, and through them we know, or learn, recall, expect, examine, organize, question, compare, strive for, explain or enjoy experiences. Our ways

¹ 'Knowledge' here includes our beliefs, our skills, our notions, and our feelings, used in its most general sense to refer to our relationship with what we see, feel, and experience.

of learning, recalling, expecting, organizing, questioning, comparing, striving for, explaining and enjoying our experiences constitute our knowledge.

The knowledge which we have includes our conceptual and linguistic frameworks, our basic assumptions, our fundamental notions of what is true, what is real and what is worthwhile, our attitudes, our beliefs and our understandings as well as statements and theoretical explanations about the world, about others, about ourselves and about events which take place.

Conceptualizing knowledge as a relationship between the knower and the known in which the knower defines, orders, appreciates and understands what is encountered and through which the knower makes choices and operates in the world does not identify the nature of that relationship for there are many ways of making sense of and responding to the world. But a cultural reliance on certain ways of knowing, or a belief in the validity of only some forms of knowledge and a denial of the value of others affects the relationships we might have with the world and shapes our social reality. The content of our societal knowledge depends upon the methods which have been used and upon what has been considered important. This determination is made culturally by those within the society who have had positions of authority and who have been heard. What we know as individuals depends both upon the framework of knowledge which has been socially constructed and upon our own position with respect to the social order, that is, upon our own experiences and the ways that we have at our disposal to make sense of those experiences.

Thought with feeling

The knowledge which we have of the world always involves thought, feeling and perception. This is true not only of knowledge about emotionally charged subjects such as sexuality, but it is true of all knowledge. The notion that knowing is an intellectual activity which can be and ought to be independent of feeling is a particular belief about knowledge which restricts the understanding of knowledge and which affects our quality of life. The characteristic which distinguishes human beings from animals is the possession of a certain quality of mind which is associated with the possibility of a corresponding quality of inquiry and knowledge. This level of mind, which may be called 'the reasoning mind' is not

only intellectual, but at its best permits human beings to act intelligently, sensitively and perceptively and to produce change. We live in the world as embodied creatures and therefore our vocabulary, our ideas, our feelings and our perceptions make sense with reference to our experience. We are related to the world through thought, feeling and perception. We characterize our relationship with the world in terms of these three different avenues, but this division is a conceptual choice which allows and also shapes an analysis of our experiences. Our understanding of the world and of our place in it and of our relationship to others is a result of thought, feeling and perception and this understanding informs our decisions and influences our actions.

In the western philosophical tradition, reason has generally been regarded as the faculty needed to acquire knowledge. When the emotions are contrasted with the rational faculty, they are regarded as personal and irrational, requiring direction and control, in order to prevent them from interfering with thought. Such a view is based upon the belief and reaches the conclusion that thoughts are non-emotional, that what is rational is non-emotional, that emotions are irrational and interfere with the processes of thought. *The belief in the value of thought*, which can be separated from the emotions, is a result of an association of knowledge with logical and analytical deductive thought processes which can draw conclusions from established premises by an application of accepted rules of operation. This definition of knowledge devalues the role which emotions can play and needs to play in cognition and it has profoundly influenced the way we live. This view suggests that thought and feeling can and should be separated, that an emotional person is irrational, and that a person who is able to be rational has been able to suppress or to ignore their emotions and is able to act and think without any influence from the emotions. The belief in the possibility of a separation between thought, which is valued, and emotion, which is regarded as needing to be controlled, has been accompanied by a belief in an association of reason with men and of emotions with women. These ideas have together been important characteristics of our patriarchal and rationalistic society and have been influential in determining understandings of gender and in shaping relationships between individuals within the society.

Apart from the belief in the exclusive validity of empirical and analytic knowledge, it has been understood that knowledge includes practical reason and reflective judgment

and that these require the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues.² Outside science, human knowledge has always relied upon both thought and feeling. The best of philosophy, literature, art, music and political understandings are the result of a combination of a high quality of thought and of feeling and inspire both in response. The understanding of the meaning of the terms 'knowledge' and 'cognition' as terms which do not include 'judgment', 'interest' and 'emotion' is a particular construction of knowledge based upon a scientific world view which defines knowledge with reference to itself and then proves that any other form of knowledge is invalid or that it is not even a form of knowledge.

However, many philosophers have questioned the validity of this equation of science with knowledge and have analyzed the implication of what Habermas has called 'scientism' (Habermas, 1978). Apart from an impoverishment of understanding, the belief in the instrumental form of scientific knowledge and in the necessity of a universality and objectivity of knowledge has structured our social reality, and consequently our sexual reality, in many ways³ and this perspective has left a legacy within our language. Our understandings of rationality, of truth, of objectivity, of knowledge, of masculinity, of femininity, and of what is of value has been shaped within the context of the scientific and rationalistic assumptions of modernism.

Because of the very close relationship between emotions and values, and because of the cultural mistrust of emotions which was established during the Enlightenment, an increasing separation of the realms of fact and of value and a denial of the possibility of a validity of knowledge about values accompanied the rise of science and the positivist claims about empirical and analytic knowledge. One of the consequences of the belief in

² Plato points out that the philosopher, who is worthy of ruling, requires "courage, greatness of mind, quickness to learn and a good memory" (1980, p.285).

³ Critical social science has recognized that the forms of knowledge which we rely upon shape our beliefs, our customs, and our institutional practices – they affect the lives we live. Fay (1975), and Bernstein (1985) show the ways different assumptions about knowledge affect the ways in which we live. Some of the ways that a scientific and positivistic perspective about knowledge has affected our understandings of sexuality and our sexual practices will be examined in Chapter Three of this thesis.

the possibility and the desirability of the separation of thought and feeling was an increased differentiation between what was regarded as an objective knowledge of reality and a subjective judgment of value. This has sometimes led to a belief in ethical relativism. Alternately, some philosophers have argued that moral judgments can be said to be claims which are based upon "reasons which will be found compelling when looked at impartially and objectively, that is to say, taking all relevant facts and interests into account and judging the matter as fairly as possible" (Scheffler, 1985, p. 140). However, as Weber realized in his exploration of value judgments, there can be no ultimate rational foundation for the basic values which we accept (see Bernstein, 1985, p. 48-49). Unless we agree about the fundamental values, we will not be persuaded by the logic which depends upon them.

Kant had identified the difference between scientific knowledge which has theoretical and non-metaphysical validity, and morality which has metaphysical validity but which cannot be proved true by rational argument or by inductive demonstration, and he examined the limits of rational and theoretical knowledge of experience in order to show its inapplicability in the domain of practical or moral reason (1965, p. 29). Einstein made a similar distinction: "For science can only ascertain what is, but not what should be, and outside of its domain value judgments of all kinds remain necessary" (1954, p. 45). Both Kant and Einstein differentiated between the knowledge of process and the religious or the moral aspiration which might lead to insight into and knowledge about suprapersonal goals and states, "which neither require nor are capable of rational foundation" (Einstein, 1954, p. 45). Both Kant and Einstein acknowledged the importance of each of these modes of human reason, although they saw them as clearly separable.

Yet despite all the talk of objectivity and value-neutrality, even the physical and social sciences and all of our understandings of the world are based upon and make use of certain assumptions and value-judgments. Observation and description are value-laden and depend upon the attitudes which are held. Observation always involves selection from a field of impressions and description depends upon observation, upon the linguistic and conceptual framework, the choice of words and upon the understanding of meanings.⁴

⁴ A description always reveals a great deal about the person who has made the observations. However, the decision whether or not something fits a certain description is

Observations, descriptions and explanations are always made by some one, that is, from some perspective.

Since sexuality is one of the most personal and one of the most value-laden aspects of our lives, knowledge about sexuality cannot be independent of our individual and our cultural attitudes about sexuality which are largely emotional. Our emotional responses about sexuality – our fears, our delight, our disgust, or our interest about sexuality – will be a result of what we know through experience and through exchange with others and at the same time they affect what we can know and what we experience. On the other hand, the knowledge which we have, individually and culturally, reveals the emotions and the value-judgments which have shaped those understandings and the practices.

Our understandings of what is normal are based upon our value judgments. For example, definitions of homosexuality as abnormal and as unnatural express judgments and reflect our emotional responses, but they also shape our emotional responses. The contempt for homosexuality revealed in the claim that it is abnormal or unnatural will affect what can be seen and what can be known about homosexuality and about sexuality more generally. This is true for us as individuals, whether we are homosexual or not, and for us collectively, for our individual attitudes are not formed independently of the societal understandings and attitudes. Legal sanctions against homosexual behaviors and political and social policies which discriminate against homosexuals reflect cultural attitudes and valuations about homosexuality and they influence the way individuals view homosexuality. Knowledge about homosexuality is constructed within the emotional field and is not independent of it.

an act of classification. This requires less thought and reveals less of the feelings and the understandings of the person involved. The choice and the design of a scientific experiment or of a questionnaire to be answered will depend upon the designers and will reveal their attitudes and values – the knowledge discovered from the experiment and from the questionnaire and their interpretation will be in relation to the original choice and design.

The ideal of a detached and impersonal objective knowledge requires not an absence of emotions and values but a particular expression of them.⁵ The assumption that knowledge can be and should be independent of emotional response and of any considerations of value conceals the way that emotions, interests and attitudes shape our knowledge. A denial of the role which feelings and attitudes play in the production of knowledge and in learning does not mean they do not play an important role, but ensures that their role will not be examined.⁶

Knowledge cannot exist without thought or without feeling. The quality of knowledge reflects both the quality of the thought and the quality of the feeling. Low level thought or low level feeling may detract from the knowledge which we can have. It may seem obvious that knowledge cannot be obtained or utilized without an appropriate level of thought, but it is not so clear that without appropriate feeling, knowledge is a mechanical and useless activity. In order to think deeply, one must feel deeply, although one might follow rules of logic quickly or well without feeling. But in order to feel deeply, one must think deeply, although one might experience strong emotions without bringing thought to bear. Either activity, thought without adequate feeling or feeling without adequate thought, may be regarded as less than what human knowledge might be and therefore as irrational.

Knowledge, without compassion, is a dangerous commodity, for knowledge always reveals and bestows some power. Without compassion, without care for others, the power which always accompanies knowledge becomes potentially exploitative, abusive

⁵ The suggestion that "Big boys don't cry" does not mean that "Big boys don't care" but if there is no accepted way of expressing emotion, the emotion is very often repressed or denied. All our relationships are colored by our emotional attitudes. Hostility, indifference, and care are different forms of the emotional response to others.

⁶ It has been suggested, for example, that Freud proposed his theory of female sexual and psychic development because of the abhorrence which the psychologists felt when they were told of the trauma Freud's patient suffered as a result of being sexually abused by her father. They could not accept this and Freud then sought to explain why a daughter would tell such unbelievable falsehoods (Masson, 1984).

and dominating. A lack of compassion does not mean an absence of feeling. Hostility and indifference are also emotional attitudes. Our knowledge is informed and shaped by our disposition: if it is not shaped by *phronesis*, the disposition to act truly and justly, then it will be shaped by the disposition to act selfishly and carelessly or in some other way; if it is not motivated by the wish to become more responsible and more able to act truly, then it will be motivated by fear or by greed or by some other disposition.

Understanding the importance of the emotions in the production of knowledge, for learning and for making choices raises questions about our emotional life. It raises questions about what it is, how it has developed, what emotions might be appropriate, and how feeling can be educated. Accepting that feelings are indispensable to reliable knowledge does not mean that uncritical feeling should be substituted for supposedly dispassionate investigation nor that all feelings should be trusted (Jagger, 1989, p. 163). Just as thought without a fitting quality of emotion may end in manipulation or tyranny, feeling without a certain level of thought may result in sentimentality or violence. The understanding that emotions play a vital role in the construction and the application of knowledge indicates the need for a reflexive inquiry about the emotional attitudes which shape our conceptual knowledge. An understanding of the connections among thought, feeling and value judgments leads to the recognition that the reconstruction of knowledge is inseparable from the reconstruction of ourselves (Jagger, 1989, p. 164).

Since knowledge depends upon both thought and feeling, education must be involved with the development of both attitude and intellectual ability. Dewey speaks of the requirement to cultivate the attitudes of open-mindedness, of whole-heartedness, and of responsibility in facing and understanding consequences in students so that they will be able to use the best methods of inquiry and testing and points out that "no separation can be made between impersonal, abstract principles of logic and moral qualities of character" (Dewey, 1964, p. 228).

In this section I have argued that the understanding of any particular subject depends upon the emotional attitudes, but also that the production of knowledge depends upon and reflects both the thought and feeling which have been brought. The belief that feelings can be dissociated from cognitive functions and that knowledge is the result of an impartial analysis of observational material masks the role that emotions play and how

knowledge is determined by the perspective of the knower. Value judgments also require and depend upon both thought and feeling. They are based upon and result in a form of knowledge, which may be called ethical knowledge, and which is different from the empirical knowledge of process. Sometimes both of these forms of knowledge have been regarded as important and valid forms of knowledge, sometimes ethical knowledge has been considered to be less valid than knowledge which has been said to be objective, however, in practice these two different forms of knowledge cannot be separated.

Understanding knowledge

Since all knowledge involves thought, feeling and perception, the quality of our knowledge depends upon the quality of all three components. This thesis is concerned to show that the knowledge which we have of the world, of ourselves and of others and therefore our knowledge of sexuality, can be usefully explored by reference to four different categories of knowledge – the empirical, the social, the ethical and the critical. These categories of knowledge refer to the level of *episteme*, the level of operation of the human mind which thinks, feels and perceives and which seeks and finds order, reason and value in the world. These forms of knowledge depend upon the use of language. Without language one cannot recognize perceptions or think about or care about what happens, but, on the other hand, the use of language always implies thought, care or the recognition of perceptions. It is useful to point out, however, that the use of language does not require an ability to speak, for there are many forms of language use; nor does the ability to speak imply language use. A parrot who mimics the sound of words, for example, does not therefore have a language.

Empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge correspond and respond to different human interests and concerns. These four categories of knowledge are not the only kinds of knowledge that we might have, nor is this classification the only way that knowledge could be analyzed, but the discussion of knowledge in these terms provides a framework for questioning and examining the knowledge which shapes our lives and it provides a framework in relation to which educators, and more specifically sex educators, can think about and evaluate curriculum. These four categories of knowledge or processes of inquiry establish and reveal different kinds of relationships with the world. They function differently and they serve different human purposes although they are

related to one another and operate together and they cannot in practice be separated. The difference between them can be characterized briefly by identifying the kinds of questions each of these forms of knowledge address, as I have done on page 11, above.

The classification of knowledge that I have suggested here, does not specifically include spiritual knowledge, (*gnosis* in Greek) nor does it include carnal or experiential knowledge. Both of these forms of human knowledge are significantly related to the knowledge of the mind, but they are not knowledge of the mind. Our knowledge about the world, about others and about ourselves, which can be articulated – in other words, our perceptions, our thoughts and our cares, as recognized – is not independent of the particular experiences we have had. One might speak of these experiences which are always in the body, as pre-thought, pre-care, and pre-recognition,⁷ although they take place continuously. They are the material we know about, or that we perceive, care about, and think about.⁸ An experience is always particular and unique, but even naming or describing an experience places it in the realm of a more general category and imposes and expresses our conceptual framework and our own perspective. The experience is no longer only what it is.

Our knowledge is always related to our experience. There is an increasing recognition that our knowledge is affected by our past experiences. This realization is both a result of the understanding that knowledge is always from some perspective and a cause of the understanding that knowledge is always from some perspective. But our knowledge also affects our future and shapes what we will do and what we will experience. This claim is the very *sine qua non* of education. How it does and what we ought therefore to teach is not so clear. Every educational programme needs to take account of experiential knowledge and every educational programme will also have material consequences in the lives of the students which will need to be evaluated for every educational programme is related to the past and to the future of the students.

⁷ That is, they are experiences which are pre-cognition and pre-recognition.

⁸ Although I have made a case to suggest that thought always includes feeling and perception, I hesitate to omit the repetition of the three components each time I refer to this, since our usual and habitual understandings are very strong.

All students, for example, will have had experiences which have influenced their understandings of gender, their attitudes about their body and their feelings of self-esteem. These experiences are not part of the formal sex education curriculum and educators have no choice with respect to these. Students who have been sexually abused or who have been in physically or emotionally abusive relationships will know about sex differently than those who have been affirmed and loved in the home and by their friends and lovers. But all this is obvious. Students who have been sexually active will have a different knowledge base than students who have not, yet in either case, they are sexual persons with sexual knowledge. This is quite separate from the kinds of information about sexuality which students may have, irrespective of whether or not they have been sexually active, such as that the consistent and correct use of condoms can prevent unwanted pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted disease.

Information about sexual activities and how to produce desired outcomes or how to prevent undesired ones and practical experiences which will allow this information to be utilized are important components of sex education, but thought about sexual understandings and experiences, which always carries feeling and influences feeling, requires more than correct information.⁹ The ability to apply the knowledge which we have, that is, to use that knowledge to make changes in our lives, requires discrimination and an acknowledgment of the responsibility for the choices which are made. A reflective inquiry about sexuality may provide a way to be somewhat freed of the experiences we have had in the past or of the conclusions which we have reached as a result of particular experiences. An exchange with others or about others' experiences may enlarge the understanding of the human situation and foster compassion. Ideally, a sex education programme will change the sex lives of the students for the better – so that they might be healthier, happier, freer, more loving and more joyous in their lives as male or as female and in their relationships to others, who are male and female, than if they had not taken the course. Otherwise, why bother?

⁹ The component of sex education which includes practical lessons, such as choosing condoms, learning how to use them, or gaining assertive dialogue skills is included in empirical knowledge. Learning such experiential skills is related to sexual experiences, but students are not thereby having sexual experiences.

Teachers should be aware that the way they treat students in the class is experienced by the students. This is the aspect of the sex education class which is closest to an experiential learning about sex. These experiences and the experiences with their peers inside and outside the classroom may shape their understandings as much as or more than the ideas which are discussed, although they are not part of the curriculum. So although sex education is about experiences of sex in many senses, experiential knowledge of sex is not a part of the sex education curriculum.

I pointed out, above, that experiential knowledge can be said to be pre- or post-cognition, although experiences are always taking place and are therefore concurrent with thought. On the other hand, spiritual knowledge is knowledge which is beyond language and beyond the understanding of the ordinary mind. To be informed by knowledge which is ineffable, or to live in the light of an understanding of the deepest truths, requires such a radical transformation of the human being that it is often described as a rebirth.¹⁰ Every tradition speaks of the knowledge which cannot be told and which cannot heard.¹¹ But although the saints and sages in every tradition speak of this knowledge, they point out at the same time that all language and all representation are inadequate. As we are, our relationship to the level of the spirit is through our aspiration, through our wish to understand the meaning of our existence, to live rightly and to see truly. The attempt to define the characteristics of the highest level, of the Good, as Plato spoke of it, or of God, the term often used in a religious context, is from the level of the mind and depends upon the use of analogy or metaphor.¹² Efforts to live more compassionately, to gain a clearer

¹⁰ "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (*Mark* 4:12) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (*John* 3, 3,6) "If the doors of perception were cleansed, then we would see everything as it is: infinite." William Blake.

¹¹ In the Chandogya Upanishad the story is told of Svetaketu who had studied the scriptures for twelve years and considered himself very knowledgeable. His father asked him, "Svetaketu, have you asked for the knowledge by which you could hear what cannot be heard and by which you could know what cannot be known?"

¹² See Plato's discussion of the good using the metaphor of the cave, of the sun and the line in *The Republic*.

insight and a larger understanding and to become freed of the self-occupation of our fears and desires are efforts in the direction of living in relation to what is sacred, that is, in relation to that which provides the standard by which we might make choices and in relation to which our lives have meaning and value and yet which is not of our own making. Ethical systems which speak about how we ought to live in human society are elaborated through the use of reason, yet unless it is evident that they are related to and inspired by a higher level of knowledge and understanding, then they will appear to serve a negative function, preventing us from destroying one another, or that they are merely conventional. Unless they are related to and inspired by a higher level of knowledge and understanding then they will reflect or serve the interests of those who are in positions of power. These individuals may be trying to find a way to take everyone into account or they may be largely self-interested.¹³ So although I do not further discuss spiritual knowledge in this thesis, it may be directly or indirectly related to ethical knowledge and to ethical questions about sexuality and it may shape our social knowledge of sexuality by its influence upon the understandings of meaning of sex. Historically, religious and cultural traditions have been concerned about sexuality and have taken and stated many strong positions. These claims may be understood in relation to spiritual understandings about sexuality or they may be seen from a different perspective.

The wish to become more compassionate or to gain a clearer insight into the relationships between everything or to develop a larger understanding or to become freer of self-occupation, which is a wish informed by a spiritual aspiration, can be awakened and supported through a sex education programme.¹⁴ Sex education may provide information

¹³ Since the Enlightenment the predominant attitude in the west has been humanistic. This attitude does not acknowledge that there can be a knowledge or an authority higher than the *rational* human mind and therefore supposes that all ethical systems or political and legal systems are merely conventional or that they must reflect or serve the interests of those in power. This is neither a universal nor a necessary conclusion.

¹⁴ We may realize that we are less compassionate than we imagine we are or that we are less compassionate than we wish we were and such a realization may motivate us to learn how to behave more compassionately and to understand what stands in the way of our own wish. The wish to be compassionate or to live rightly is a property of the conscience which can be awakened but which cannot be produced. The development of an

and knowledge so that our wishes, whatever they are, may be acted upon. Scientific research and empirical knowledge enable us to predict and to control the outcome of many processes and we expect that with further research more processes will be subject to our control. When we are satisfied with ourselves and we only want to change the conditions in which we live, we will be satisfied with the aspect of education which can teach us to discover and to use technical laws so that we might produce desired changes. But a sex education programme may also provide a way of questioning our individual and our collectively accepted understandings and it may deepen the level of concern we have for others. A sex education programme may help to develop a way of making and reflecting upon our choices, through an empirical, a social, a critical and an ethical inquiry.

Categorizing knowledge

The categorization of knowledge into empirical, social, ethical and critical is not an original classification. It is related to Aristotle's discussion of the crafts, of political and legislative matters, and of contemplative study, that is, of *techne*, *politike*, and *theoria*. These forms require technical skill, practical intelligence, and understanding and they are distinguished by their different purposes for production, for political, social and ethical decision making, and for the discovery of truth. Van Manen (1977) speaks of the empirical-analytic, the hermeneutic-phenomenological and the critical-dialectical traditions in the social sciences which are associated with distinct ways of knowing (p.205). These separate perspectives correspond closely to the Aristotelian classification of *episteme*. An analysis of the understandings of the positivist, the interpretive and the critical traditions in the social sciences reveals that each of these traditions emphasizes one or another of these epistemological processes.¹⁵ By themselves each of these approaches conceptualizes knowledge too narrowly and is unable to account for the richness and the complexity of the knowledge we have of the world.

empathetic concern for others is one of the most important functions of a sex education program.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this point see the texts by Bernstein (1985), Carr & Kemmis (1986), Fay (1975) and Habermas (1978).

Drawing on the Greek tradition, Jurgen Habermas has proposed that knowledge should be understood as a combination of three distinct methodological approaches each of which can be related to a human cognitive interest.¹⁶ He suggests that all of these need to be included in the development of social and political theory and policy and he has attempted to establish an epistemological framework for this synthesis by demonstrating the requirement of each of these ways of knowing. He points out that "the approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a *technical* cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a *practical* one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the *emancipatory* cognitive interest" (Habermas, 1978, p. 308). Richard Bernstein argues that "an adequate, comprehensive political and social theory must be at once empirical, interpretive, and critical" (Bernstein, 1985, p. xiv). Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis (1986) speak of the need for a critical social science which would combine the understandings of science, of human action and of the constraints which have shaped the past in order to make practical decisions.

In another mode, science, art, religion and philosophy are also distinct forms of knowledge or ways of understanding the world. These correspond to different human interests which no individual can be completely without, although because the terms 'scientist', 'artist' and 'philosopher' are used to identify particular professional occupations, it seems as if only some people are occupied with these concerns and that they are, in general, exclusive of one another. But every human being has an interest in science – in an explanation of events and in the application of understandings reached for prediction and control; in art – in an appreciation of the forms of the world; in religion – in an inquiry about the meaning and purpose of human existence; and in philosophy – in a concern about ethical and aesthetic values and about the limits and the possibilities of human thought and action. These interests motivate even rudimentary inquiries about the world, inspire the expression of feeling, allow us to understand one another and influence choices,¹⁷ although individual talent, experience and training are all required in order to reach and to express the highest quality of scientific, artistic, religious and philosophic understandings. What is regarded as true and as worthwhile is determined within the

¹⁶ The cognitive interest refers to both thought and to feeling.

¹⁷ For a further development of these ideas, see Murray (1991).

tradition in the societal context and these understandings will influence what can be discovered and expressed and what will be accepted within the formalized disciplines of science, art, philosophy and religion.

Another way of classifying ways of knowing, using a metaphor of silence, hearing and voice to represent different kinds of relationship with the world, with others and with the self, has been proposed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule in *Women's Ways of Knowing*. They listened to women speak of how they learn, how they decide what is true, what serves as authoritative for them, how they express what they know, how they see themselves and how they make moral decisions. They then grouped the responses into five epistemological categories.

Silence, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless, voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; received knowledge, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own; subjective knowledge, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited; procedural knowledge, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and constructed knowledge, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing (p.15)

The five categories of knowledge outlined in *Women's Ways of Knowing* represent different ways of seeing one's own agency with respect to knowledge rather than different forms of knowledge understood in relation to different purposes, so these 'ways of knowing' cannot be considered as parallel to the other methods of classification referred to here. But, within the category of procedural knowledge which the authors speak of as objective knowledge, they distinguish between a separate form of knowing, which closely resembles an empirical-analytic approach, and a connected form of knowing, an empathetic process which is related to an interpretive approach to knowledge, two forms of knowledge with different purposes.

Although these several ways of classifying knowledge are not equivalent, there are some common elements and the classification of knowledge as empirical, social, ethical and critical, which I propose, is closely related to these categorizations. I intend to discuss each of these kinds of knowledge by outlining the functions which they serve and the methods which they rely upon. As remarked earlier, these ways of knowing – the empirical, the social, the ethical and the critical – operate together and cannot be understood independently. The supposition that they can be distinguished sharply one from another is a heuristic device, useful for purposes of analysis.

Knowledge and Sex Education

The four kinds of knowledge which I have outlined here are related to one another in complex ways. Critical knowledge assumes ethical knowledge, but ethical claims need to be evaluated by critique. Each of these forms of knowledge relies on the understanding of meaning determined within the social context, and these meanings reflect the values which are held. All of these forms of practical knowledge are context-dependent which means that what is known and what can be known depends upon the perspective of the knower, whether that knower is an individual or a collective. The perspective or the point of view of an individual or of a society refers to the beliefs and understandings which have developed through experience, that is, because of what has happened historically and the response which these events have generated. It includes the self-understandings which result from the experiences and the effects of the understandings of others.

Empirical knowledge, regarded as technical knowledge, requires accurate information and the development of the appropriate skills and techniques for its application, whereas the term "practical knowledge" refers to a *praxis* which requires discrimination and understanding. However, empirical knowledge always has practical implications. With an exclusive reliance upon empirical knowledge, the understanding of meaning is taken for granted. Nor is empirical knowledge concerned with understanding the way that the relations of power affect the production of knowledge, but accepts the relations as they are, without question, and accepts whatever goals are presented as technical challenges to be achieved. These practices make the perspective of the knower, as individual or as a collective, invisible, although upon reflection, it is clear that scientific knowledge is always dependent upon a particular set of understandings determined within

a particular social context.¹⁸ It is always motivated by decisions of value and has ethical implications. Far from being the only valid form of knowledge, empirical knowledge does not even exist without the understandings of social, ethical and critical forms of knowledge. Without a reflection about the assumed meanings, the values and the operations of power, the meanings, values and ruling practices which are present, form part of the hidden curriculum in any educational process and they are transmitted unknowingly or unintentionally.

This thesis argues that empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge can guide human action. We make choices based upon our understandings of value; we are able to realize our intentions if we have a knowledge of the processes involved and the technical understanding which would enable us to effect change; we understand ourselves, one another and the world in relation to a shared understanding of meaning which orders experience; and we are able to evaluate and to take responsibility for our individual and collective decisions through a reflective inquiry which examines the past and understands that we are related to the future. These remarks are remarks about our actions and about our knowledge of the world in the most general sense, but our actions which are related to sex and our knowledge of sexuality constitute a particular subset of our actions and of our knowledge and therefore it too relies upon empirical, social, critical and ethical forms of knowledge.

Our knowledge is changed by a process of education. This may be accomplished by an introduction of information, of new ways of seeing, or of other ways of doing things; by a questioning of what has been relied upon and taken for granted; or by dealing with problems which need to be worked on by means of which new knowledge is discovered. Education takes place informally and it may also take place formally. We learn as a result of our experiences and in exchange with others but educational materials and procedures may also be selected and these decisions may be carried out intentionally.

¹⁸ What will be accepted as science is determined by the established scientists within the scientific community. See Kuhn (1962). However, the scientific community is also influenced by the larger societal organizations of power relationships. The goals of science are related to the interests of the society.

Formal educational decisions are the result of the recognition of a need in relation to the knowledge which we have. If the perceived need is in relation to the question "How can we accomplish what we wish?" the emphasis will be upon finding ways to answer empirical questions and upon teaching students how to have control over material processes. And we always have these kinds of questions. We wish to be able to predict and to control events, to produce desired outcomes, and to fulfill our needs. When we do not perceive any other kind of inadequacy in the knowledge which we have or when we believe that this is the only kind of knowledge which is possible then it will seem that empirical knowledge is the only kind of knowledge which needs to be addressed in the formal educational process. When we have no questions about what we should do; about who we are and how we can find a common understanding and a connection with others; and about the processes which have determined the social relations in which we live or when we do not question our ethical, social and political situation, we do not recognize the role played by ethical, social and critical forms of knowledge.

A perceived inadequacy is a recognition of ignorance, or a recognition that the current conditions are unacceptable and that they are produced by and maintained by ideas and practices which support the operations of power as they are and that they might be otherwise. The first is generally a recognition of an individual lack and the second is a recognition of systemic assumptions which are no longer acceptable. Education may address either or both of these.

But whether it is intentional or not, whether it is recognized or not, every educational programme has empirical, social, critical and ethical content. Every course conveys information and teaches particular skills and techniques; it relies upon and transmits certain understandings of meanings and of human beings; it questions or accepts without question the societal beliefs and practices; and it arises from and carries assumptions of value.

Sex education is concerned with the development of knowledge of sex. It is concerned with issues related to both gender and physical sexual relationships. Questions about what should be taught and how it should be taught are pertinent in the development of sex education curriculum and questions about what is taught and what the

consequences are for students are relevant in an evaluation of formal or informal sex education programmes.

Every programme of sex education conveys information, understandings about relationships, attitudes of inquiry, and values. These four kinds of knowledge, that is, the empirical, the social, the critical and the ethical, are taught in every sex education course whether or not they are explicitly recognized or acknowledged. What is taught and how it is taught in each of these four categories will affect the learning which takes place and thereby will have an influence on the students' lives. Every sex education programme is empirical, social, ethical, and critical. An informal sex education conveys some information which will be more or less accurate and more or less adequate and it teaches certain understandings and attitudes, which shape our understanding of value and which affect all our relationships.

Every formal sex education programme also has empirical, social, ethical, and critical components although each of these may not be explicitly acknowledged. It may be concerned with teaching necessary information or a particular selected set of facts. It may be interested in increasing the understandings of meanings and in fostering relationships, in the recognition and examination of values, or in conveying certain meanings and values and in fostering certain kinds of relationships. It may intend to encourage a reflective assessment of assumptions and beliefs, to support an examination of the social and cultural forces which shape our lives and to develop an awareness of our capacity to transform our lives or it may intend to ensure that certain assumptions and beliefs are accepted.

Every formal sex education programme will have a declared curriculum, but it will also impart knowledge which is unintended, that is, it will also have a hidden curriculum. The results of any formal programme of sex education will be due to both the intended and the unintended curriculum. A sex education programme which is not aware of its empirical, social, ethical and critical components will still convey knowledge in each of these areas. A comprehensive sex education programme addresses the empirical, the social, the ethical and the critical aspects of knowledge about sexuality and a comprehensive evaluation of any sex education programme examines the content and the effects within each of these four categories.

Ideally, sexuality education encompasses sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. Classrooms address anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system, gender roles, identity, and personality, and thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships. Students discuss and debate ethical and moral concerns, and group and cultural variations. At its best, sexuality education is about social change – about helping to create a world where all people have the information and the rights to make responsible sexual choices – without regard to age, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. (Haffner, 1992, p.vii)

* * *

This chapter provides a general introduction to the topic of the knowledge which is developed in relation to four different ways of knowing in the next chapters. In the next four chapters each of these ways of knowing and their relationship to knowledge about sexuality and to sex education will be discussed in more detail. I begin with a discussion of empirical knowledge, since this form of knowing, which has been equated with scientific knowledge, has become the paradigm of knowledge in the modern western world. Since conventional sex education curricula concentrate on the teaching of empirical information and technical skills which are considered to be needed, the implications of an exclusive reliance upon empirical knowledge in a sex education programme are examined.

Chapter Three

Empirical Knowledge

Understanding empirical knowledge

What happens when?... How can I...?

Empirical knowledge of the world is that knowledge which can be gained through observation and which can be tested by reference to experience. It is a knowledge which consists of statements of fact and of the laws which are generated or 'discovered' by the theoretical understandings of these facts. It is a knowledge of processes which take place in time and of the laws of causality which govern these processes. Empirical knowledge is judged to be useful or true in relation to its ability to successfully predict events. The ability to predict events is related to a possibility of control, for if the relevant natural laws are known, then insofar as the necessary conditions can be produced, the expected results will follow.

As Habermas suggests, the empirical sciences disclose reality subject to "the cognitive interest in technical control over objectified processes" (1978, p. 309). This knowledge is manifested in the production of goods and services which can satisfy our needs and desires and in the accomplishment of our goals. It is an expression of our ability to effect change and therefore of our power in the world. Empirical sciences ask "What is the situation?", "Why did this happen?" and "How can we accomplish our aims?" both at very rudimentary levels about ordinary experience and at the most advanced levels and in relation to very abstract concepts. The predominant concern of systematically organized empirical knowledge or scientific knowledge¹ is with the accuracy of

¹ Empirical knowledge and scientific knowledge became synonymous terms as modern science developed, although the term scientific knowledge is often understood to be the result of rigorous experiment and conceptualization in relation to accepted scientific theory – the knowledge which has been 'proven' by scientists. Remarks which are prefaced by "Science has shown that" often carry authority. Empirical knowledge is understood to include scientific knowledge and the more common sense level of

information, with the power of theories to explain the processes involved and with the efficiency and the effectiveness of techniques which might be used to produce the desired outcomes.

We have gained much power through the tremendous technological advances which have accompanied advances of scientific knowledge. We build skyscrapers, fly from one continent to another, communicate electronically, and cure many diseases. There is a strong expectation that through science we will be able to discover how to deal with many of the difficulties we now face, individually and globally – with, for example, problems of dwindling energy reserves, with environmental pollution, with AIDS, with population control, with depression, with infertility and impotence – and there is little doubt that scientific research will find solutions to many of the problems it has set out to solve.

Although the term 'the scientific revolution' specifically refers to the changes which took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the assumptions, procedures, methods and aims within the sciences, it can also be more widely applied to the fundamental change in the understanding of rationality which followed upon the success of science. The scientific revolution was accompanied and supported by the rationalistic and empiricist philosophies of the Enlightenment, which believed the reasoning mind to be the highest authority. The kinds of evidence which were regarded as acceptable consisted of rational and deductive argument or empirical and inductive demonstration. Scientific methodology, which relies upon a combination of observation and reason, of theory and experiment, of hypothesis and test, was increasingly applied in all areas of research as the dogmatism of ecclesiastical authorities and the rationalism of the scholastics was rejected.

The experimental methodology of modern science was articulated early in the seventeenth century by Francis Bacon. He believed that the laws of nature could be discovered through observation and experiment and that as more and more of the laws

experiential knowledge and understanding of events. A scientific understanding equates knowledge with scientific or empirical knowledge.

were discovered, events could more easily be controlled to 'improve' the human situation. "Human knowledge and human power meet in one; for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced" (1947, p. 80).

Early in the nineteenth century Auguste Comte enthusiastically endorsed the scientific method as the best way to understand social phenomena. He claimed that humanity had passed through the stages of relying upon theological and metaphysical explanations to the final stage of seeking scientific or positive explanations of events in the service of humanity (Comte, 1947). He sought to establish the foundations of "Social physics" or of the "social sciences" in the study of human action and social organization and dismissed any non-scientific approach. He did not believe that there were other questions to be asked besides the ones which science could answer.

Psychology, medicine, history, politics and economics have been greatly influenced by the understandings of science and by the interests, methodology and criteria of science particularly as they had developed in relation to the physical sciences. The satisfaction of humanity's needs and desires in every area of concern depends upon empirical or scientific knowledge. The beliefs that the only kinds of questions which need to be asked are those which are asked about process and that the scientific method, as it has developed, is the only way to discover truth are beliefs which are based upon the assumptions of the possibility and the necessity of the separation of knowledge from interest, from personal perspective and from understandings of value and of the universality and objectivity of scientific knowledge.

The belief that knowledge is that relationship with the world which yields a steady increase of human control over the physical and social environment and that only logical or empirical statements can represent truth is a belief in science as the paradigm of knowledge. This belief is a dominant characteristic of the modern western world. Modern positivism strengthens science's belief in itself, in "the conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science" (Habermas, 1978, p. 4).

The assumption of an *exclusive* validity of empirical and analytic knowledge rests upon the assumption that statements describe facts. But statements are always made by

someone. They are made from some point of view, with some understanding of the meaning of the terms used and with some intention. They reveal a particular way of seeing and of expressing something about the world. The acceptance of an association of words with things and processes and of statements with facts renders the particular perspective and the conceptual frame of reference, by which the meanings and the validity of the propositions are established, invisible. It masks the ambiguity and the complexity of our relationship with the world. Empirical-analytical methods cannot answer questions about the meaning of terms and concepts, about values, about human purposes, or about the meaning of human life. From a scientific point of view, answers to these questions are considered to be outside the realm of testability, and therefore the answers are regarded as being dependent on personal opinion or subjective judgment rather than on knowledge. Yet while the success of scientific knowledge cannot be denied, such knowledge is always shaped by goals which have been chosen from a particular point of view and they are understood within the social context. Scientific explanation depends upon the assumption that the meanings of the descriptions of situations and statements of the problems and hypotheses are unproblematic. An understanding of meaning has already been accepted. As Habermas has remarked, "Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation" (Habermas, 1978, p. 309).

To deny the exclusive validity of empirical and analytic knowledge is not to deny that empirical and analytic knowledge has validity as one form of knowledge which operates in conjunction with other forms of knowledge. It is a useful and valuable form of knowledge which can be utilized to serve our needs and to satisfy our desires, but the prioritization of our needs and a determination about which of our desires ought to be satisfied requires other forms of knowledge. There are many other questions besides scientific questions which need to be answered and, individually and collectively, we need to know how to respond to those questions.²

² For example, scientific knowledge about reproductive processes and reproductive technology has developed rapidly and we are able to manipulate many aspects of reproduction. There is not only a concern about the physical consequences of actions which might be taken but there is also a widespread concern about the possible social and personal consequences of the new capabilities we now have – and we ask 'What does this mean?' and 'What ought we to do?'. There are more questions than 'How can we do this?' and 'What do you want to do?'. Williams (1986), for example, raises the questions "Do

Modern sexual theory

Just the facts, ma'am. Jack Friday

Empirical knowledge of sex has an important function. Questions about processes, about the results of actions, about how to prevent unwanted outcomes or how to ensure desired ends are empirical inquiries. Empirical knowledge conveys a power which is related to the possibility of control over events, and it is therefore a kind of knowledge which we wish to cultivate. Empirical knowledge about sexuality is concerned with information about sexual development, sexual functioning and sexual activities, with explanations of the processes involved and with techniques which will produce desired outcomes.

Questions of human biology, chemistry, anatomy and physiology are empirical questions. Knowledge of the body and of the physical processes which take place as individuals mature sexually and grow older may be gained through empirical studies. The facts about the physical aspects of sexual relationships, about the reactions of the body in the cycle of sexual response, the variety of erotic and orgasmic experiences, and the processes involved in reproduction, can be described empirically. Biomedical research has discovered a great deal about ways to prevent and to cure sexual disease and dysfunction and to understand and control conception and reproduction. Sexual researchers study sexual activities and sexual relationships, using a biomedical or psychological model, assuming the possibility of a value-free and unbiased scientific knowledge of sexuality and believing that with a scientific knowledge of sexuality and an understanding of the processes involved, we will be able to improve our sexual relationships and our lives.

There are many facts about our sexuality which may be described and explained, although the selection of facts will always be determined by the interest which guides the

the new reproductive technologies encourage women to see themselves primarily as mothers?" (p. 9) and "What criteria are used to grant access to the latest technologies?" (p. 15).

inquiry. A medical interest will concentrate upon the physical processes which are involved in sexual experiences, with, for example, the role of the nervous system, of hormones, of the circulatory system, with changes in muscle tension; it will be concerned with the possibility of the transmission of disease through sexual exchange and with understanding methods for the prevention and cure of sexually transmitted diseases, with ways to prevent unwanted pregnancy and with ways to ensure reproductive health. A psychological therapeutic interest will be concerned with the diagnosis and cure of sexual dysfunction and psychological problems associated with sexual relationships. A political interest will wish to deal with the kinds of sexual interactions which cause problems in the society and which need to be regulated through legal and political decisions.³

The history of knowledge of sexuality parallels the history of knowledge in the modern world, although the science of sexuality developed later than the corresponding development within other fields because of the taboos which prevented an open discussion and study of sexual topics.⁴ However, a major transformation in sexual theorizing took place around the beginning of the twentieth century. The development of the scientific study of sex was related to the public concern in Europe about prostitution, about the spread of venereal disease and about eugenics in the nineteenth century (Irvine, 1990; Weeks, 1984). The recognition of the need for intervention, along with the increasing understanding of the possibility of control because of advances in medicine and because of

³ These interests exist within a complex network of social relations. Although the identification and selection of concerns and problems which need to be solved define an area of study, they arise out of particular ways of speaking, ways of seeing and ways of acting in which the meanings of terms and concepts are accepted.

⁴ See Irvine (1990) and Allgeier & Allgeier (1988) for discussions of the difficulties which early sex researchers faced. Researchers have pointed out that societal beliefs and ethical considerations have often constrained the scientific research about sexuality. The fact that this is true does not obviate the fact that scientific research is also a response to and is understood in relation to societal beliefs and ethical considerations. Aronoff, McCormick & Byers (1994) identify similar difficulties which they claim are currently associated "with conducting and disseminating sex research in an erotophobic culture" (p. 46).

the hope that society could be studied and controlled rationally, led to the gradual emergence of the scientific study of sex. The political regulation of sexuality, which was made possible as knowledge about sexuality developed, accompanied the social reform movements in England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Modern sexual theory reveals an enthusiastic commitment to a scientific approach in the study of sexuality which assumes that its understanding of sexuality is value-free and which expects that sexual activity can and should be managed "for individual and social well-being" (Robinson, 1976, p. 2). As Robinson describes it, the thinking about sex which had previously consisted of statements of assorted prejudices became explicit and systematic as the scientific perspective and methods were brought to the study of sex (1976, p. vii). He claims that modern sexual theorists such as Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson have not only "contributed a significant body of facts about human sexuality but [they] have fashioned distinctive ways of thinking about human sexual experience as well" (1976, p. viii). He suggests that modern sexual theory is a reaction against and an antidote to Victorianism, implying that the 'Victorians' were repressed sexually and did not acknowledge or understand their sexuality whereas the scientific approach is free from the limitations of Victorian moralism. He, like the early researchers, reveals an optimistic belief in the possibility of a value-free and objective knowledge of sexuality which would allow individuals and societies to make informed choices and which would increase personal and social well-being.

Alfred Kinsey's wide ranging statistical studies of sexual behavior which began in the 1930s marked a radical departure from earlier studies of human sexuality in scope and in detail. Robinson argues that Kinsey has been this century's foremost sexual demystifier for he examined human sexuality with dispassion. In *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* Kinsey himself claimed a tolerance and a moral disinterestedness about sexual activity and declared "This is first of all a report about what people do which raises no question of what they should do" (1963, p. 7). To the scientist, Kinsey said, sex "is a biologic function, acceptable in whatever form it is manifested" (p. 263) and he felt that no one's

sexual practice should be condemned. In order to maintain this detachment, Kinsey discussed sexual behavior in terms of 'sexual outlet', "a concept essentially quantitative, morally indifferent, and – no unimportant matter – colorless" (Robinson, 1976, p. 118). However, this point of view takes the male experience of ejaculation as the model and regards every outlet, defined as any activity which results in orgasm (Kinsey, 1963, p. 192), as equivalent. It defines the female experience in relation to the male experience and ignores understandings of value, social and moral conventions, emotional involvement and questions of relationships, that is, it ignores the human social, political and ethical concerns. The claim that every sexual act can be described by reference to orgasm or that every orgasm is equal is either a heuristic device or a personal and ethical judgment, rather than a fact, and most of us, who have experienced more than one 'outlet', would disagree.

However, Kinsey's work has had many benefits. For example, reports that most people masturbate (1963, p. 339) and do not become insane or have terrible physical problems have freed many from feelings of fear and guilt which they otherwise might have had by accepting the validity of previous statements which, while purporting to be medical and empirical truths, reflected earlier values and assumptions.⁵ As well, Kinsey's documentation of the frequency of homosexual acts in the whole population and his insistence that homosexuality requires no explanation and no moral judgment and therefore no reform or no cure was needed has influenced a gradually increasing tolerance for homosexuality. Although Kinsey's aim was primarily taxonomic, his work has served a valuable and therapeutic function, because with the collection of all this data, understandings of 'normal' were redefined. However, the term 'normal' is always an ambiguous one, which is invariably accompanied by some value judgment. It may, for example, be understood to mean 'accepted', 'expected', 'acceptable', 'without difficulty', 'natural', 'common', 'good' or 'usual'. Each of these words has associations which influence and reveal attitudes. The term 'normal' may be intended or understood to be merely descriptive, but it also has a prescriptive sense. The description of 'normal' sexuality, constructs notions of sexuality, of masculinity and of femininity and these descriptions become normative. An empirical description of the way a particular group of individuals

⁵ Brecher points out that Kraft-Ebing's belief that masturbation leads to insanity arose out of his observations that insane people masturbated (1969, p. 104).

live does not merely describe the way that all individuals would live or should live, but describes the way this group of individuals has come to live in a particular social and historical context.

As de Beauvoir (1974, p. 56) has remarked, psychoanalysis and the science of human sexuality and of human behavior which offer normality or naturalness as a substitute for morality influence human action as much as prescription, while maintaining that scientific truth is objective and impartial. The description of certain kinds of behaviors as 'normal' or 'natural' makes the political and social causes and implications of these identifications invisible.

Since Kinsey's work, which began in the 1930's, statistical studies of sexual attitudes and behaviors have been an important source of self-reported quantitative information about who does what with whom how often, but no other survey has served the same function as Kinsey's. Although there have been many questions about his research methodology, his work documented the great range of human sexual activity in the population. Since then statistical studies have been undertaken to identify changes in sexual behaviors in comparison with the Kinsey data or to gather information for a specific purpose. The kinds of questions which are then asked are determined by the purposes of the study. Answers are not only limited by the kinds of questions which are asked, but they may be limited to either a 'yes' or 'no' or to a numerical choice.⁶ The answers are then summarized and interpreted according to the understandings of meanings of those who have set the questions. Policy decisions may then be made based upon the available information. However, although some information is gained through such studies, we know very little about the people who have been questioned; we know only how they have responded to certain questions in a particular setting. The information gained in these studies is limited by the questions and by the understandings of the researchers and of the respondents and by the way in which the data which is gained is interpreted.

⁶ The questionnaire I referred to at the beginning of Chapter One is a good example.

Researchers, therapists, and educators in human sexuality are often associated with the fields of medicine or psychology, because when the physical and psychological processes of maturation and sexual relationships are studied, medical and psychological therapies may be developed. Therapeutic efforts always have a goal which may or may not be specifically defined. The ideal of normal and healthy men and women and of normal and healthy sexual relationships is a valuable one, yet our understandings of gender and of sexuality in relation to which the therapies are developed are socially constructed and greatly influenced by the knowledge which 'experts' have (Ehrenreich & English, 1989). When this knowledge is granted the authority of scientific knowledge, its validity is assumed. However, empirical knowledge of sexuality assumes that the social and ethical understandings which are accepted are unproblematic and leaves unquestioned their meanings, the implications these ideas have for people's lives and the way they have developed. These meanings and the understanding of the way in which choices have been made may be made visible through a critical analysis.

In the empirical methodology which emphasizes the study of physiology, sexual technique and the achievement of measurable results, the body is regarded as an object which can be known and controlled and sexual relationships are seen as mechanical processes which can be learned. Without an accompanying awareness of the importance of the personal experiences of body and of sexuality and of the exchange between individuals and which acknowledges the place of social and ethical understandings in sexual relationships, an exclusive reliance upon an instrumental or scientific understanding of sexuality may seem depersonalized and trivial. So, although the scientific method has proved valuable in achieving certain ends, an exclusive reliance upon empirical knowledge is limited.

Empirical knowledge and sex education

*Mother, mother, may I learn all about swimming in the sea?
Yes, my darling daughter, but don't go near the water.*

Empirical knowledge about sexuality which answers questions about process may be gained through independent research or through learning what others have discovered. Both of these require cognitive and technical skills. Since empirical knowledge may give a

possibility of control over events in the future, the goals we have determine what information and which skills will be considered useful to know.

When knowledge about sexuality is understood to be empirical knowledge, decisions about the curriculum content and methodology of a formal sex education programme, that is, about what to teach and how, require a selection of the factual information and the technical skills which should be included. Educators must decide what information about sexual development, sexual functioning and sexual activities will be taught, what explanations of the processes involved should be included and which techniques need to be learned. With this model of education, each of three main elements in the educational process – the teachers, the curriculum and the students – are considered separable. When knowledge is considered to be empirical knowledge, the curriculum, which consists of the information and the cognitive and technical skills which are considered useful, becomes the most important vehicle for this knowledge. It becomes the focus of the entire educational system. Teachers are expected to ensure that the students learn the relevant information and gain the requisite skills, and the students are expected to learn the facts and to gain the skills. The individual differences of the students and teachers are seen as challenges to remove, rather than as places from which to begin. Giroux points to the technical role which teachers are expected to play (1988, p. 4) when the educational process is standardized with curriculum materials and instructional packages. In the model which sees that education should convey empirical knowledge, the attitudes of the teachers and the students are not considered relevant except where they influence the learning of the information and skills which are included in the curriculum.

When empirical knowledge is regarded as the important knowledge which can be taught, sex education programmes will emphasize the study of physiology and the teaching of information and skills which will be useful in achieving desirable results or in avoiding negative consequences.

As adolescents begin to experience changes in their own bodies at puberty it is often felt that it is useful for them to know what to expect, to learn about the human

reproductive systems and to understand the wide range of physiological variation among individuals. The study of sexual anatomy, which some sex educators have called the plumbing part of the programme, constitutes the largest component of many sex education programmes, although many students do not feel that it is very useful. Bonnie Trudell quotes a student commenting about a course on sexuality "Just the stuff you had to know, I don't know if we'll ever use it" (1992, p. 211). Physical development takes place whether or not the processes are understood.

Recent studies have shown that adolescents are engaging in sexual activities at younger and younger ages (King, 1989; Bibby & Posterski, 1992). Unprotected sexual activity has resulted in adolescent pregnancies and has led to an increasing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among young people. Canadian youth have been identified as potentially at risk for HIV infection (King, 1989, p. 5) through unprotected sexual intercourse. The goals of sex education have been urgently defined in relation to these facts. In order to decrease the occurrence of these negative consequences of early sexual activity, sex education programmes are supported by all levels of government and by all levels of community. The report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Adolescent Reproductive Health recommends "that provincial and territorial health departments advocate more vigorously (to departments of education), mandatory sexual health education in school curricula" (Health and Welfare Canada, p. ix). There is a firm belief that "Effective sexuality education is the cornerstone of primary prevention. Therefore, it is essential that such education be universally available and accessible" (Health and Welfare Canada, p. 34). The majority of parents want their children to receive sexuality education in the public education system, so that they will have the knowledge they need to protect themselves from unwanted sexual advances, from sexually transmitted disease and from unplanned pregnancies.⁷ Although many parents wish their children to have the benefits of a sex education programme, many parents are opposed to some of the content in sex education programmes.⁸

⁷ Planned Parenthood Association of Nova Scotia reports that "Eighty-three percent of Canadian adults believe that sexuality education should be taught in the schools" (Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1990, p. 4).

⁸ This apparently paradoxical situation needs further investigation.

Empirical sex education in an empirical process

Sex education as protective discourse: Programmes which are designed to change adolescent sexual behavior in order to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and to decrease the incidence of STDs may be a useful part of the empirical process to achieve these goals. When the information which is selected for inclusion in a sex education programme is chosen only because of the perceived need to prevent unwanted pregnancy and disease, sex education becomes health education or AIDS education. In an empirical approach to sex education, an identification of the problems of adolescent pregnancy and of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, defines the programme. An example of this emphasis is implied in the *Canada Youth and AIDS Study*. The authors of this report title their final recommendations "Implications for AIDS education" (King, 1988, p. 138).

Once the goal of preventing unwanted adolescent pregnancies and STDs has been identified, then steps can be taken to achieve this goal. Since the negative outcomes are the result of unprotected sexual intercourse, they may be avoided by those who do not have unprotected sexual intercourse or by those who do not have sexual intercourse. Teaching about safe sex and about abstinence may both be part of the discussion about sexual decisions which will result in the desired outcomes, but there are some programmes, such as *Teen Aid* and *Sex Respect*,⁹ which promote abstinence only and do not discuss safe sex. The different goals of these programmes are reflected in their content. *Teen Aid* and *Sex Respect* emphasize the dangers of sex as a way of decreasing premarital sexual activity,¹⁰ rather than preventing sexually transmitted disease and

⁹ See Olsen et al (1992) for a review of these programmes.

¹⁰ Willa London spoke to teen-agers at a Dartmouth high school about the benefits of chastity by telling them that "condoms do not protect against AIDS and, in fact, have a failure rate as high as 35 percent" (*The Mail-Star*, January 26, 1994). There is no study which supports these figures. If condoms are not stored or used properly or if they are not used, they will have a high failure rate. Notwithstanding the possibility of breakage and failure, condoms used with a spermicide provide effective, but not absolute, protection against pregnancy and the transmission of HIV and other STDs. If condoms

adolescent pregnancy, although they may also point to the values of abstinence. Since many adolescents are engaged in sexual activity, the refusal to provide teenagers with the information which would permit them to practice safer sex puts these young people at risk of pregnancy, of STDs and of AIDS infection.

Information: The assumption that if individuals have accurate and appropriate information in an area, it will influence their decisions and behaviors is related to the belief in the rational and cognitive nature of human beings. In order to decrease the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and to halt the spread of STDs, policy makers and educators understand the need to ensure that young people have appropriate and accurate information about the processes which lead to either of these unintended consequences of sexual activity so that they can prevent them. Young people need accurate information about reproduction, about the menstrual cycle, and about methods of birth control; and they need information about the varieties of STDs, the ways they are transmitted and how they can be avoided. To determine what information should be included in the curriculum many studies have questioned young people about their knowledge of AIDS and of the manner that HIV is transmitted. The Canada Youth and AIDS study found that respondents knew more about AIDS than other STDs but that misconceptions about AIDS and about methods of effective protection against it were not uncommon. Although many young people have a lot of information about sex and birth control and about AIDS and other STDs from family, peers, school and the media, much of this information is vague or contradictory and they themselves recognize the need for additional factual material which is frank, accurate and unbiased (King, p. 133). Even if only a minority of young people do not have the information which they need to prevent unwanted pregnancies and the transmission of STDs, then there is a need to find effective and efficient ways to convey the requisite knowledge, making use of all the sources of information which young people have – family, peers, school, media, and health service practitioners. What information is relevant and required to achieve the desired results may

are used with an oil-based lubricant, their strength will be markedly diminished. Up to half the condoms lubricated with these kinds of oils failed a laboratory airburst test (*Consumer Reports*, March 1989). *These facts need to be conveyed.*

be determined by empirical research, such as that carried out in the study of Canada Youth and AIDS.

Skills: However, even if individuals have the relevant information, they will not necessarily make use of it; although, it is true that if individuals do not have accurate and appropriate information, they cannot benefit from it. Studies consistently show that the proportion of young people who know about the dangers of certain sexual practices is higher than the proportion of young people who regularly take the necessary precautions.¹¹ In order to achieve the goal of reducing adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease it is necessary to determine what other factors are involved so that the appropriate interventions may be introduced.

Fisher discusses structural and psychological barriers which prevent adolescents from practicing safer sex (Fisher, 1990a). Structural barriers include all the external obstacles to effective prevention. In order to prevent pregnancy and to avoid STDs adolescents are required to perform a series of complex behaviors which are often socially disapproved, such as purchasing condoms or getting birth control counselling. These activities have immediate costs and only uncertain benefits. Strategies which would be useful in this sequence are rarely taught. Not engaging in preventive behaviors has only uncertain risks, but the sexual payoffs are immediate. Sexually active young people may avoid pregnancy and reduce the possibility of contracting a sexually transmitted disease if they take the appropriate measures, but effective and consistent contraceptive and prophylactic use depends upon being able to take and then actually taking a series of steps, which includes learning the relevant information, learning how to acquire the necessary devices and learning the practical and social skills required to make consistent use of them in a sexual relationship.

Explicit scriptlike information concerning how adolescents may bring up, negotiate, and observe sexual limits, or concerning nonintercourse sexual options, is rarely available to teenagers today. (Fisher, 1990a, p.76)

¹¹ See, for example, King (1988), Matlicka-Tyndale (1991) and Fisher (1990).

Psychological barriers, that is, internal feelings, thoughts and fantasies which promote sexual activity and inhibit preventive behaviors, also need to be understood. Adolescents who are erotophobic (mostly negative in their feelings about sex) may be embarrassed to talk about sex and are less likely to learn information about sex-related prevention, to take the necessary sex-related public steps involved in prevention, to anticipate having sexual intercourse or to have the appropriate protection when they do engage in sexual activity and they are less likely to be able to communicate in discussion with their partners than adolescents who are erotophilic. It is also worth noting that erotophobic sex and health educators are less likely to teach students useful information about effective contraceptive methods than educators who are erotophilic (Yarber & McCabe, 1984).¹² Cognitive barriers include the lack of appropriate information and the possession of inaccurate information or beliefs such as "My partner will leave me if I set limits", or, "In a town like we have you know who's been with who or who has a good chance of having been around and you know who they've been with", "What are the chances? It won't be me" or "Condoms ruin the spontaneity of sex".

An Eastern Shore guidance counsellor reported that students from the area never ask her for information on sexually transmitted diseases, because "most kids believe that they have a 'Divine immunity' and simply have no fear of it at all". Another guidance counsellor from the same area stated that "no student has ever come to me looking for birth control, they come when they *think* that they might be pregnant". (Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1990, p.11)

¹² Erotophobic health and sex educators are likely to convey attitudes of erotophobia to their students, thereby increasing their risk of having unprotected sexual encounters, unless they are so successful that their students become so negative about sex that they do not engage in sexual activity. Fisher points out that the adolescents who are at the most risk are those who are moderately erotophobic. Highly erotophobic teenagers will likely be too uncomfortable about their sexuality to engage in sexual activity (Fisher, 1990, p.81), although the associated consumption of alcohol changes this. Since the consumption of alcohol lowers inhibitions, it allows young people to engage in sexual activity even if they do not want to acknowledge their interest.

In response to the identification of the structural and psychological barriers for preventive behaviors, a programme for the development of skills for healthy relationships which can complement existing personal development and sex education programmes has been designed at Queen's University.¹³ Appropriate knowledge, skills and motivation are all required to enable adolescents to prevent unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease. The programme attempts to ensure that the relevant information is understood. It promotes and trains for assertive rather than aggressive or passive behaviors so that decisions can be discussed and acted upon; it familiarizes students with condoms and teaches them the steps which will be needed in their use and provides opportunities to practice scripts which will promote safer sex. This programme has been developed to allow teenagers to acquire "relevant scriptlike information that informs them how they may execute each step of the preventive behavior sequences in their own social milieu" (Fisher, 1990a, p. 89). The "behavioral-scripting, skills-training approach" has been successful in delaying the onset of intercourse and in increasing the use of contraceptives (Kirby, 1992, p. 283). James Sears points out that such a curriculum design "rests on a model of sexual decision making that places priority on *rationality*: the ability to weigh the costs and benefits of particular sexual behavior" (1992, p. 7) although it may be more accurate to suggest that it is a training to avoid the costs of sexual behaviors. Sex education becomes *a discourse of protection*¹⁴ which presents sexual

¹³ The program, *Skills for Healthy Relationships*, which is available from Health Canada in 1994, was piloted in four provinces in 1991-1992.

¹⁴ I am using the terminology suggested by Michelle Fine in her discussion of the discourses of sex education. The emphasis on protection in the AIDS education programs also constructs adolescent sexuality. The discourse of protection is related to the discourse of victimization which she discusses, but she focuses on female role as victim in relation to the male predator and chooses the term to emphasize this feature which is evident, especially in programs which reflect a double standard of expectation for males and females and those which are primarily designed to prevent pregnancy. In the sex education programs which have the goal of preventing both pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, both males and females need to practice 'protected' sex. Issues of gender and sexual orientation may be approached indirectly, for example, in some of the scripts, in *Skills for Healthy Relationships*, which model possible dialogue, the characters are given names which may be either male or female names or the names may intentionally indicate a reversal of roles, or a same sex encounter. The discussion of 'discourse' will be developed in Chapter Four.

activities as activities which may lead to pregnancy or which may put individuals at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

Accessibility: In order to ensure that young people have the relevant information and the necessary skills so that they can prevent pregnancy and STDs, they need access to sources of information and training within their schools and their communities; and in order to be able to make use of their knowledge, they will also need to have access to individual counselling and to be able to acquire contraceptive and prophylactic devices. The recognition of the need for accessibility has spawned discussions about the installation of condom machines in schools in some communities and has resulted in the establishment of some school based health clinics and in a closer association of some community based clinics with neighborhood schools.

School based clinics allow a high level of student involvement in the organization and the management of the clinic and in the identification of needs. This is one of the reasons for the strong support for the community based, student-driven model used at J. L. Ilsley High School in Halifax (Martell, 1993). But the establishment of clinics or making clinics more available for young people are methods of providing sexual health services. It does not provide a broad based formal sex education for all young people. The focus of sexual health services is therapeutic, both preventive and curative. These services may include education, counselling and clinical services provided by health care workers and they will benefit the individuals who wish to use the services based upon self-identified needs, but a certain amount of knowledge is required before adolescents can understand and identify their needs. So although the provision of easily accessible sexual health services is one component of the strategy which is needed to decrease the incidence of adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease, it is not sufficient. There is also need for a sex education programme which will give young people the relevant knowledge, so that they could make use of the services when needed.

Sex education programmes which are designed to reduce the risk of adolescents becoming pregnant or contracting sexually transmitted disease including HIV are often

included in the high school or junior high school curriculum because of the obvious dangers of ignoring this area of concern. Many of these programmes acknowledge that there is a need for this health education to take place in a context of sexuality education which "encompasses a positive awareness of sexuality and an understanding of one's 'maleness' or 'femaleness' and promotes positive attitudes and behavior which will benefit the individual, family and society in general" (Health and Welfare, 1990, p. 1). However, schools do not believe that they can offer more programmes and it is far from clear what other aspects of sexuality should be addressed, how they could be taught and evaluated and what kind of programme would not arouse controversy and resistance. So although sexuality education, including AIDS education, is overwhelmingly approved, it remains largely oriented to what sex educators have called 'plumbing and prevention', based upon the study of physiology and protective strategies.

The effectiveness of such programmes is measured by the observable consequences based on the rates of adolescent pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted disease (Kirby, 1992), but since there is such a complex combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behavioral intentions required to change sexual behaviors to produce these changes, the programmes may also be evaluated by assessing the effect on intermediate goals such as whether or not behavioral change can be identified (Rugg *et al.*, 1990). Programmes of sex education which are AIDS education and pregnancy prevention programmes are evaluated by measuring their effectiveness in producing particular expected results rather than on their role in educating young people for healthy sexuality, for a good sex life, or for raising questions about what a good sex life is.

Although there is a definite need for these 'techno-rational' programmes (Sears, 1992), the selection of content which results in a discourse of protection assumes that the meanings of terms are clear and precise, accepts the social relations as unproblematic, and assumes that autonomous choices should be constrained only by the need to avoid bringing harm on oneself or upon others. Because of their intention to convey empirical knowledge and the content which is selected to produce the desired ends, these educational programmes are themselves instrumental. However, they also carry understandings of meanings, represent social relationships and reveal ethical positions. In conveying the content, attitudes are also conveyed. Relationships are affected and approaches to questions of meaning, to the possibility of critique and to the understanding

of values are taught even if they are taught unconsciously. The curriculum includes empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge whether it is understood to include these forms of knowledge or not.

Sex education and empirical knowledge

But which facts, Jack?

The biomedical approach to sex education is one which can directly address the goals of preventing disease and unwanted pregnancies, and it has a scientific credibility which avoids some of the controversy associated with other decisions about the sex education curriculum. However, this material may be regarded by teens as irrelevant and unusable and sex education programmes often remain uninteresting and unhelpful to adolescents (Fisher, 1990a, p. 92). The fact that students can be completely uninterested in the formal sex education curriculum (Sears, 1992, p. 10), even though sex is an important topic for adolescents, may alert sex educators to difficulties of curriculum which need to be addressed.¹⁵ Students may have little interest in the technical terminology and in the details of the sexual systems, in, for example, the role of the Leydig cells, or of the fallopian tubes, but every student will be interested in what they believe to be related to their own situation, to their own questions and their own goals and every individual will be interested in the biomedical facts if they have a physical problem which is related to these facts. The information which is needed can be related to the students' interest in sexuality which is present, but this requires that we begin from the students' interests and questions or help them to discover interests and questions which can be furthered by a thoughtful and careful inquiry.

¹⁵ Students' lack of interest in sex education programs is one of the most striking anomalies in the field of sex education which should call for an re-evaluation of the paradigm of sex education. Kuhn's discussion of the structure of scientific revolutions provides a model for examining the process by which revolution might take place in other fields.

Teaching sex as biology, rather than including a biology of sex in the context of a larger study of sexuality, conveys a scientific view of sexuality which implies that sexuality and gender roles are biologically determined. The assumptions of biological determinism support culturally accepted notions of sex roles and stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity (Whatley, 1988). This belief prevents a questioning of the dynamics of the social relations which have produced and which maintain the particular understandings and practices in relation to sex and gender in the society. The scientific approach and the latest biological and medical 'facts' may not be wrong, but the assumption that this limited perspective is the only perspective is misleading and prevents a reflective evaluation of the way that the current social relations affect our lives.

There is more empirical knowledge about sexuality than is taught in a programme which is a protective discourse and which focuses on the biomedical facts. Facts about the variety of sexual customs and understandings which can be seen through cultural and historical studies may lead to questions about the assumptions of gender, race, sexual orientation and of the values which shape our lives. An examination of the facts which are related to questions about whether to have children or not, about reproductive technologies, or about pornography, as a few examples, may reveal the complexity of the issues involved which individuals and societies need to make decisions about. The facts about the incidence of rape, of sexual abuse and assault, and of date rape may be discussed or they may be ignored. If these facts constitute a central focus of a sex education programme, the programme may become a *discourse of violence*¹⁶. On the other hand, if these facts are not discussed in a programme, students may be unprepared to deal with dangerous situations in their own lives, some students may feel their own experiences are unique and see their situation as only a personal problem, and some students will remain unaware that these systemic problems exist and that they are based upon assumptions which may be questioned and transformed. Whatever their experience, students can be helped to consider the factors which have produced the social problems which exist, for although they are heirs to our social understandings, they also have responsibility for the future.

¹⁶ Sex education which Fine has identified as a discourse of violence will be discussed in the next chapter.

Empirical information and technical skills are important components in any sex education programme, but empirical knowledge is never the only knowledge which is taught in any sex education course. The selection of which facts to include and how those facts are discussed will influence the understanding of sexuality and the social knowledge of sexuality, which is conveyed through the curriculum. The selection and the presentation will also carry understandings of value, although these may be transmitted without an explicit recognition. Critical and ethical knowing will be taught in the way that students are encouraged to examine their choices and to reflect upon the facts which are in the curriculum. The curriculum consists of the empirical, social, ethical and critical knowledge which is learned in an educational process, that is, in the exchange between the teacher and the students about the subject. The social, ethical, and critical understandings of the teacher, as well as his or her empirical knowledge of the subject, are important components of the curriculum, as are the interest and the understandings of the students. The curriculum is developed in the exchange, as it is given form in a particular context. The empirical, social, critical and ethical understandings of the teacher and the students may change and develop through this process.

* * *

In the next chapter I discuss the social knowledge which is transmitted through discourse in sex education programmes. The attitudes and assumptions which are conveyed through the presentation of some facts rather than others and by the approval and disapproval of certain behaviors constitute the social knowledge which is a part of the curriculum and these shape the social knowledge which can be learned by the students. The attitudes and assumptions which characterize the different approaches to sex education are generally carried unconsciously, but they can be identified through a critical examination of the discourses which operate.

One of the reasons for pointing to a distinction between empirical knowledge and social knowledge is so that programmes might be evaluated with respect to the two different kinds of educational outcomes. In relation to the empirical content, the questions which might be asked are: "Is it true?", "Is it useful?" or "Does it work?", whereas the questions which might be asked about the component of social knowledge in a sex

education curriculum include: "As a result of the programme who do we become?", "What are the meanings which have been conveyed?" or "How is the part sex and the societal understandings of sex play in our lives understood?" The questions are different, yet both kinds of questions need to be asked.

Chapter Four

Social Knowledge

To make the real visible Jane Rule

Understanding meaning, understanding discourse

All epistemic knowledge is founded upon the understanding of meaning established and discovered within a social context in the ongoing exchange between individuals. All knowledge at this level is therefore social. Social knowledge, as a particular subset of knowledge, is knowledge of meaning which is a result of a communication among individuals and at the same time permits communication among individuals to take place. Social knowledge is the fundamental knowledge upon which all other knowledge is founded. It is the shared knowledge which permits relationship. Whether we realize it or not, we take part in an exchange of social knowledge in learning language or in using language and in all of our relationships with others. In learning a language and in coming to know the accepted practices of the society in which we live, we learn to participate with others in the socially constructed reality in which our lives are organized. Our own experiences are understood in relation to the cultural understandings, although each of us is situated uniquely in the society and no two people have the same set of experiences. Our choices are made in the light of the particular experiences we have had, which are understood in relation to the understandings and experiences of the family, of the community, of the society, and of the culture we belong to, that is, our choices are made in the light of the social circles in which we live and of our understandings produced in relation to these.

The peculiar relationship human beings have with the world is a result of the human ability to be related to experiences which are not spatially or temporally immediate.¹ This allows individuals to be significantly related to the past, to the present and to the future. It allows them to remember, to expect, to interpret and to know, to

¹ This also means that human beings are able to be related to immediate experiences in a similar way.

question, to organize and to reflect upon experiences. Hope, fear, memory, intention, meaning, knowledge, inquiry, order and self-consciousness emerge from and express these relationships. Language is a condition of and a result of these kinds of relationships. It occurs neither before nor after them, but with them. Because we are human, we have the possibility of a separation from experience and we can observe ourselves and our experiences which can then be identified and given significance by assignation. Through language, both verbal and non-verbal, human experience is made available to the individual who has the experiences and to others. But although I identify and signify my experience through language, I do not create language. I learn the language which already exists and which others already speak. "Language has the quality of objectivity. I encounter language as a facticity external to myself and it is coercive in its effect on me" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 53). I participate in the language which exists independently of myself. I understand meaning in the interaction between the subjective and the objective aspects of language and I discover meaning in the intersection of the individual and the collective understandings and use of the language. For the significance of the significations is always in the fact that they can be and are shared with others. Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that specifically human phenomena are always social and Wittgenstein (1963) points out that language is not a private affair. The meaning of language emerges within social relationships.

Interpretive inquiry, guided by the aim of understanding the social actions of ourselves and others, is interested in interpersonal communication, social meanings and the problems and possibilities of human relationships. An interest in the preservation and expansion of an inter-subjective and mutual understanding which is oriented towards action and towards the future guides an inquiry into the meanings of social exchange (Habermas, 1978, p. 310). An understanding of relationships and social exchange depends upon historical-hermeneutic forms of knowledge which can reach authentic insight about meaning. "Practical understanding is situated in the study of three types of human expressions: linguistic expression, nonverbal expressions, and actions" (Van Manen, 1977, p. 214). These verbal and non-verbal expressions, that is, what we say and what we do, establish and reveal relationships between individuals, but the meanings which these expressions of human exchange have can be understood only in relation to the social and historical context in which they are found. Their meaning can be understood only in relation to the ways they function and in relation to the understandings of others and to

the understandings which have been accepted in the past and which are now accepted. These expressions relate us to internal realities, to others, to the world and to normative reality. We make sense of the world through these and we act in relation to them.

At any particular time, there are certain ways of speaking and ways of acting which carry meaning in a societal context. Together these reflect and convey beliefs and values in taken-for-granted cultural perspectives which represent identifiable discourses. And although Dennis Carlson suggests that "we may even go so far as to say that beliefs and values do not exist prior to their discursive constitution" (1992, p. 34), it will also be true to say that discourse cannot exist without beliefs and values which establish meaning. The discourses and practices which are regarded as significant and meaningful influence and reveal what is regarded as true, as valuable or as relevant in particular geographic and historical contexts. The networks of discourse and practice which are accepted as legitimate are closely connected to the operations of power and to institutional structures in the society. They establish norms, set standards and organize social relations which both reflect and produce the assumptions and understandings which affect the lives of everyone in the community. Although discourse more specifically refers to what is said and practice refers to what is done, a separation between the two cannot be maintained. The term 'discourse' may therefore be used to refer to meaningful ways of speaking and of acting. As Cherryholmes points out, "Discourses are material practices, not simply interactions among people at the level of ideas" (1988, p.91). They determine and express the conditions of social life and they shape our subjectivities and all our relationships, how and what we think about ourselves and one another, how we act and what we do. What we know and what we understand is learned in relation to the discourses which are accepted at any time and to which we are exposed in the context of the ongoing social relations. The social knowledge which we have is learned and expressed through discourse.

The social knowledge or the understanding of meaning which I have or I might have is related to the on-going discourse, but it also depends upon my ability to make a connection through sign or through expression with another's experience, with a remembered experience or with a possible experience. This requires an empathetic imagination. In order for my understanding to be enlarged, a perception and a receptivity, an openness to someone other, to some other time or to something unknown is needed, so

that a connection with another or another's experience can be made.² The knowledge which is gained through this understanding does not explain relationships but rather it grasps, forges and reveals relationships – relationships with other people, relationships between myself and events, ideas or objects in the world, and relationships between concepts, between events and between objects which are mediated through language. Through empathy, an individual can come to know something more of the world or of another's view of the world and by this a larger sight can be gained. With this new view the experiential base is expanded. An increase of social knowledge or of the understanding of meaning enlarges the perspective from which facts can be known, statements or judgments can be made, explanations can be given and choices can be decided.

Since social knowledge depends upon relationship and an understanding of the meaning carried in discourse, the development of social knowledge will be related to the development of a greater or a deeper understanding of meaning along with the development of the ability to increase or enhance relationships.

² This is related to Weber's notion of *verstehen* (Weber, 1949). The way that the subjective experiences of others can be understood has been a central concern of interpretive sociologists. The difficulties of understanding another person are similar to the difficulties of understanding another culture. If I am different from another how can I share the experience of the other? Habermas examines the notion of the 'ideal speech act' which is presupposed in every speech act and which allows the speakers who have a communicative competence to reach a mutual understanding and a consensus about truth, freedom and justice and to discover the normative foundations of human society (Habermas, 1970). An ideal speech act is not merely an action that follows the rules as Habermas suggests, rather it is a process of a communicative exchange between individuals, who by coming to understand one another can reach a mutual understanding or a consensus and who, through this, can gain social knowledge. The process of coming to understand one another is a process which demands empathy, requiring an ability to listen, a willingness to hear and to gain a larger perspective. The possibility of a consensus about ideas or policies depends upon the existence of a deeper consensus, a shared understanding of meaning and view of reality which can be discovered but not proved. This shared understanding or social knowledge, which is an agreement of signification about experience, provides the foundation of empirical or of provable knowledge.

Discourse of sexuality

It may well be that we talk about sex more than anything else; we set our minds to the task; we convince ourselves that what is essential always eludes us; so that we must always start out once again in search of it. It is possible that where sex is concerned, the most long-winded, the most impatient of societies is our own. Michel Foucault

Our individual and cultural reality and our sexual reality is constructed through discourse. The way that sex and sexuality are spoken of, thought of, known and regulated affects our lives. The way we relate to ourselves and to others, male and female, through our bodies, is influenced by the current discourse of sexuality; and the way I relate to myself and to others, male and female, is influenced by the way I am related to this discourse.

Michel Foucault has pointed out that the history of sexuality is the history of the knowledge or of the discourse of sexuality rather than a history of the discovery of the truth about sexuality. "In discourse, power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault, 1990, Vol.I, p. 100). Since sex is a potent focus of power in relationships between men and women, between the old and the young, between professionals and their clients and between the state and individuals, the discourse of sexuality is an important way of regulating and organizing social relationships. Individuals' experiences of pleasure, of fear and desire and their concerns for the future can be linked to the interests of the state and this is accomplished through the techniques of power and knowledge about sexuality. The problematization of sex is related to the need for and the possibility of a management of the body and of human relations and it is related to the individual and the societal concern for a good life.

Foucault did not consider that power always took the form of a domination of one group over another, rather he used 'power' to refer to the various complex strategical situations in a society, which are always asymmetrical and dynamic (1990, Vol. I, p. 93). Thus for Foucault, techniques of power are really techniques of organization or of the ordering of social relations. He points out that relations of power cannot be eliminated, but that the forms these take are constantly changing. Discourse transmits and produces power, but it can also resist and question the operations of power. The history of

knowledge is the history of the organization of human society and of the production of human subjectivity and meaning. Foucault traces the history of human relations not to suggest that discourse may be disposed of or that power might be eliminated, but "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (Foucault, 1990, Vol. II, p. 9). Discourse carries a certain kind of emphasis which has been constructed in the on-going social relationships, but because it represents one kind of emphasis rather than another, it may be changed.

The meaning which sex has for us and the ways that sex is currently understood are reflected in the discourses which are now dominant and which organize the social relationships, but these understandings are related to the ways sex has been understood and social relationships have been organized in the past.

In the west, one of the major influences upon the culture has been the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Elaine Pagels points out that "the sexual attitudes we associate with the Christian tradition evolved in western culture at a specific time – during the first four centuries of the common era, when the Christian movement which had begun as a defiant sect, eventually transformed itself into the religion of the Roman Empire" (1988, p.xvii). As Christianity gained secular power and became the religion of the state, the Christian point of view in relation to sexuality was legitimated and became accepted discourse. The knowledge about sexuality which was considered to be true was the knowledge from the point of view of those in positions of power in the church. The perspective on sexuality, expressed by the early church fathers, was a discourse of sexuality as sin and this discourse continues to have a strong influence. Augustine, for example, regarded sexual desire as proof of and penalty for original sin and he claimed that a man is by nature ashamed of his desire (Pagels, 1988, p. 111). This view of sex and the related fear and abhorrence of women, who were regarded as dangerous sexual temptresses, intensified as the authority of the monastic church grew. The ideas and practices which together define a discourse of sin, with respect to sexuality, reflect and produce certain attitudes and assumptions about gender, about the body, about human purpose and about what is of value. They also convey attitudes and assumptions which affect the social and sexual reality of all the individuals within the social context. For example, who is to be considered virtuous and to be rewarded and who is to be regarded

as sinful and will be punished, both in this world and for eternity, are identified through this discourse. Carlson (1992) has identified the traditional sexual discourse³ as one which dichotomizes the body and mind or the spirit and flesh and regards sex as sinful except within a marital relationship for reproductive purpose. Within the discourse of sex as sin, heterosexuality is assumed to be the normal expression of sexuality and homosexuality is condemned as both sinful and unnatural.

Although the period which has been called the Enlightenment brought many changes in society and new discourses of sexuality, the discourse of sex as sin remained an important influence. The increasing reliance upon human cognitive and technical abilities was related to the rise of science and the subsequent industrialization in the society, to the growth of a capitalistic market economy and to the movement toward democratic rule. The rule of law, the moral order and state policies were increasingly regarded as applicable to all citizens, although those who held power and determined policy were middle-class males. The increasing differentiation between the public and the private domains, between professionals and their clients, between the ones who knew and the ones who did not, that is, between the ones who ruled and those who were ruled became associated with the distinction between males and females, between the bourgeoisie and the working classes, and between imperialistic powers and those who had been conquered. These associations were the result of and fueled unquestioned assumptions of gender, class and race which affected the lives of everyone in the culture. Middle class males constituted the ruling class. Within this social context, the nuclear family with the father as authoritarian patriarch was established as the ideal for private family life⁴ while democratic or representative government became the ideal in the public

³ This discourse is regarded as 'traditional' within the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, sexuality has been viewed differently within other traditions.

⁴ It is tempting to say that "Because middle class males constituted the ruling class, the nuclear family with the father as authoritarian patriarch was established as the ideal" but such a claim may suggest too simplistic a causal relationship. These two facts are not unrelated, but the ideal of the nuclear family is not merely a construct by men for self-interested purposes. It is also related to the historical patriarchal perspective, the economic structures and the church hierarchy, that is, to the ways in which society was organized.

domain⁵ The roles which individuals were expected to play were identified with respect to this ideal; traditions were reinterpreted to support it; and legal, economic, educational, medical and political policies were introduced to support it.

As the perspective and the discourse of rationality was brought to bear on everything: "One had to speak of sex, one had to speak publicly and in a manner that was not determined by the division between licit and illicit...one had to speak of it as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated, but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum" (Foucault, 1990, Vol. I, p. 24). The number of discourses of sex increased as sex was managed by legal, economic, medical and political interests, in order to maintain the social order and to support the ideal as it was understood by the ruling classes. Decisions about sex set up an orthodoxy and, by exclusion, a heterodoxy in relation to which the abnormal and the deviant were defined. The scientific method was applied to the study of sex to discover the truth about sex in relation to the sex which was considered normal or natural, although the understanding of 'normal' or 'natural' was established in relation to the ruling discourses. The discovery of truth about sex was related to an identification of acts; to the telling of desires, fantasies, memories and fears; to the interpretation of confessions by those who had the power to understand and to forgive; and to an explanation of the behaviors and the feelings which were expressed and interpreted in relation to the accepted discourses. With the assumption of a causal connection between events, once the processes were understood, therapies could be developed to cure the deviant and the abnormal.

Carlson (1992) identifies the optimistic belief that sexuality can be managed by social and political policy which can be rationally decided upon using objective scientific knowledge as the progressive discourse of sexuality. Neither the progressive discourse nor the traditional discourse, as they have been identified here, raise questions about the

⁵ The ideal and the reality of democratic or representative government in Europe, Great Britain, Canada and the United States reflected the private paternalistic ideal. Since only certain privileged members of the community could vote and rule, the system of government was, and perhaps remains, an oligarchy rather than a democracy.

societal assumptions of patriarchy, of the individual, of the religious and moral injunctions, or of rationality, but instead each speaks of the need and the responsibility for the individual to act rightly in relation to the recognized standards of behavior.

Discourse of individualism

In spite of an apparent contradiction, the discourse influenced by the religious traditions and the optimistic belief in the possibility of social regulation are related to a fundamental belief in individualism in modern western culture. The discourse of individualism – the belief that the individual is the most important element in the social order is a pervasive discourse in our social context. In a study of "the habits of the heart" of Americans, Robert Bellah and others (1985) conclude that the American belief in individualism determines the national character and shapes individual lives more than any other influence. The western world is what it is, in large part, because of the fierce individualism which is a fundamental characteristic.⁶ Our lives and our relationships are influenced by this discourse which reveals, reflects and expresses our assumptions and our attitudes to the world, to others and to ourselves. It also produces and shapes our assumptions and our attitudes and in this way affects all our relationships. The ideals of individualism have been most clearly and most strongly expressed in the United States of America, but they also identify the modern west and they increasingly influence every modern society.

The language of individualism speaks of and idealizes freedom, choice, autonomy, progress, reward based upon individual merit and effort, personal responsibility, individual rational decision making, independence, self-control and the empowerment and the fulfillment of the individual. The ideals of the Enlightenment, of rational humanism, of

⁶ It has been pointed out that patriarchy is a fundamental ideology of the culture (Millett, 1969, p.33). However, the patriarchal discourse has been a dominant ideology in more cultures than has the discourse of individualism. The effects of the acceptance of the patriarchal assumptions have been well-documented within the feminist critique and more will be said about the patriarchal discourse in Chapter Five of this thesis. Individualism is a characteristic which is more specific to the west, although other cultures are increasingly embracing the assumptions of individualism.

democracy, of science, of capitalism, the idea of evolution as progress, the understanding that nature, including the body, can be controlled and used for human purposes, and the technological successes of science support and are supported by notions of individualism. Bellah points out, "Our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society and for the world, are closely linked to our individualism. Yet, some of our deepest problems both as individuals and as a society are also linked closely to our individualism" (1985, p 142) for the emphasis on the understanding of ourselves as separate and autonomous individuals may lead to experiences of isolation, of loneliness and alienation, the power which individuals have may be used against others in violence and exploitation, the lack of any value recognized as higher than the individual may allow the more powerful to justify personal and self-centred pleasure-seeking even when it is at the expense of the less powerful. A feeling of the banality and lack of meaning and a feeling of purposelessness may result from the failure to acknowledge anything which has more value than the decision of an individual.

The fundamental discourse of individualism also affects our sexual relationships, that is, how we are related to our bodies and to others as males or as females both in ordinary circumstances and in intimate sexual relationships. The discourse of sexual individualism which supports the search for personal sexual autonomy and satisfaction is related to the discourse of individualism in the society. As well, it is a reaction against and a repudiation of restrictive understandings and practices which in the past condemned and punished masturbation, homosexual behaviors, and all forms of sexual expression except for certain kinds of activities within a monogamous marital relationship.⁷ Sexual individualism proposes that sexual choices be made on the basis of personal likes, dislikes, wants and needs, constrained only by the fact that others may not agree, by concerns of

⁷ During the sexual revolution of the sixties and the seventies new sexual freedoms were enjoyed especially by women – freedom from unwanted pregnancies as the Pill became widely available – freedom from the assumptions that women had to preserve their virginity to be marriageable – freedom from the assumptions that women did not enjoy sex – freedom from a reliance upon the sexual ethics which limited sex to heterosexual unions within the marital context – and both men and women set out enthusiastically on a search for sexual satisfaction. However, these freedoms did not mean that the fundamental assumptions about relationships were changed and many women found that they were expected to be sexually available for men because of these very freedoms.

health and by the need to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Sexual individualism is closely linked to the sexual discourse which Carlson (1992) has identified as libertarian. This discourse supports individual sexual freedoms limited by concerns for reciprocity and consensuality. The libertarian discourse predominates as sexual choice is increasingly regarded as a personal and private matter. The attitudes which Kinsey brought to his study of sexual behavior and which characterize much of the scientific study of sexuality are libertarian. These attitudes promote a valuable tolerance for diversity, but they leave questions about how individuals make choices and what the consequences of those choices are, unexamined. The assumption that individuals can choose freely makes the way that the social structures shape our choices invisible and masks the complexity of the psychological processes involved in our choices. Although a free enterprise economy depends upon the assumptions of libertarianism, within that economy success depends upon the ability to manipulate desires and to influence choice, that is, upon the understanding that our choices are not made independently of the influences we receive.

The libertarian position is related to principles of utilitarianism and to the associated beliefs in the value of the pursuit of happiness and in the truth of the pleasure principle. However, the subtlety of the position will be determined by the way that happiness and pleasure are understood. The enunciation of the pleasure principle forms the foundation of Freud's sexual and psychological theories. He claimed that the individual desire for pleasure and the urge to escape from pain motivates all our decisions (Freud, 1930, p.263). He realized that a simplistic explanation of this principle in terms of seeking sensuous rewards and avoiding physical suffering could not adequately explain all human activity and he developed much of his psychological theory about the relationship between the super-ego, the ego and the id to explain why human beings do not act in accordance with this way of understanding of the pleasure principle. Much of the difficulty which he encountered was a result of his identification of pleasure with immediate sensuous pleasure. However, there are many different kinds of pleasures: there are emotional and intellectual pleasures and states of well-being as well as physical and sensuous pleasures and feelings of energy. In addition, some have spoken of finding a state of deep joy which is not dependent upon the situation and the external circumstances. While physical and sensuous pleasures may be found in relationship with others, they can more easily be understood to belong to the individual. Emotional and intellectual pleasures are found primarily within social relationships and their quality

depends upon the quality of the relationship. Furthermore some pleasures may be gained in the sacrifice of other pleasures. The application of the pleasure principle, which is based upon an understanding of the individual as separate and upon pleasure as limited to immediate sensuous pleasure, cannot comprehend the complexity of the human experience of pleasure, yet it has influenced the most important psychological and sexual theories of modern western culture. Such an emphasis may result in heartless and alienating relationships. If, on the other hand, it is understood that pleasures may be related to many different aspects of human life and that sexual choices will affect physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual well-being of individuals, the complexity of sexual choice becomes evident.

Desires for social harmony may conflict with desires for physical satisfaction, or, desires for emotional connection may conflict with desires for freedom from commitment and responsibility. How shall we decide? Sexual choice is not only a matter which is related to an individual, it is a question of relationship between individuals and the individuals involved cannot be independent of their social context. The libertarian discourse of sexuality often assumes that the social relations which shape our choices are unproblematic, but, as it was noted above, such a position cannot comprehend the complexity of human sexuality.

The romantic discourse: The American Declaration of Independence, which claims that the right to pursue happiness is a fundamental human right, refers to the rights of the individual. The brief statement of the Declaration of Independence provides the emotional base of the American constitution. It is based upon and expresses the fundamental belief in individualism, but it is also based upon and expresses an optimistic belief that we will be able to find happiness. In this way, it is based upon and expresses a belief in the romantic discourse. The central feature of the romantic discourse is the assumption that everything will turn out well for the central figures.⁸ The romantic discourse is a pervasive discourse

⁸ This assumption is also a central feature of *the scientific discourse* which believes that with an increase in scientific knowledge human beings will be more and more able to achieve desired outcomes through the technical control of the processes involved. In this case, the central figures are human beings, 'the ones who can discover the knowledge of the laws of nature'. See Chapter Three for a discussion of the belief in science.

in the culture: it is conveyed through the media, it is used by advertisers, it appears in romance novels and it is one of the major themes found in many fairy tales. It is a major discourse of the informal sex education curriculum and it shapes the curricula of some formal sex education programmes.⁹

Many fairy tales conclude with "Then the prince married the princess and they lived happily ever after" although the actual content of the days which follow is left to the imagination. The assurance of future happiness constitutes the unstated conclusion of the themes in advertising and in the popular advice literature – if you do this and/or that and/or the other then you too will live happily ever after. This same motif, which is found in romantic novels and in the popular media, fuels our hopes and our expectations.¹⁰ The idea of becoming the one who will be irresistible and who will attract 'the prince' or 'the lover', so that the two may live happily ever after, is used to entice women into purchasing the right clothes and the right beauty products and into undergoing many bodily disciplinary practices. The myth of a fairy tale romance is augmented and exploited by advertisers who use it to sell perfumes, jewelry, clothes, and make-up which will achieve the look needed to play the role of the 'princess' and to sell other products which will be needed in 'the happy life' for the romantic discourse is used to fuel the capitalist economy.

Sandra Bartky (1990) examines the disciplinary practices of form, ornamentation, gesture, posture, and movement which females submit to in order to produce a body that is recognizably feminine in order to be successfully female. To be 'recognizably feminine' is to be attractive and seductive but not aggressively sexual, even if competent.¹¹ "Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centred on woman's body – not its

⁹ The romantic discourse shapes the 'Personal Development and Relationships' course and the sex education programs currently in use in the junior high schools in Nova Scotia.

¹⁰ See Germaine Greer's "Romance" in *The Female Eunuch* (1971) and Kilbourne's *Still Killing Her Softly* (1987).

¹¹ The "even if" here conveys the sense that women are now less frequently assumed to be incompetent and they are less restricted in their choices in certain areas. But although "femininity" is separated from questions of competence, it still conveys stereotypical understandings.

duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance" (Bartky, p.80). Naomi Wolf (1990) writes of beauty as the currency women are required to have to exchange for what they want, or for what they think will give them what they want; position, power, love, sexual satisfaction. Sexual attractiveness is not an end in itself, but it is regarded as necessary to gain love and happiness and the good life. The beauty myth perpetuates the ideas that women must be beautiful and that the achievement of the look which is said to be beautiful will bring success and happiness or will lead to sexual fulfillment. The myth is maintained since beauty and success define each other. If happiness and success have not been found, then more must be done. Many women believe that, by undergoing this or that discipline, they will become more sexually attractive, more desirable as a partner or that they will have greater self-esteem, and that with all this they will be happier. In the extreme they are willing to undergo cosmetic surgery to alter their bodies in a vain¹² quest for happiness. Yet whatever alterations are made at the surface, if the individuals involved otherwise remain the same, then all their relationships will be essentially unchanged.

Ideas of success and happiness are related to cultural norms and expectations and in the context of a patriarchal society, males may be seduced by the idea of becoming the ruler of a small kingdom which they will be able to rule with absolute, and perhaps benevolent, power, or by the idea of becoming the crown prince, able to enjoy the privileges of position. Within traditional heterosexual romance, sex roles have been stereotypically defined: females are beautiful, passive, and compliant; they need love, help and protection; males are tall, handsome, daring, powerful, knowledgeable, strong, even arrogant and rich (or they soon will be); they grant love and offer protection (Snitow, 1983) and they have women who serve and adore them. More recently the stereotypical understandings of males and females have undergone some change: females in romantic stories and in the media have become more assertive and more independent, they have intelligence and careers; they are more capable, more active and more interested in sex, money and power although they desire to have a romantic relationship and they wish to be 'swept off their feet by a love more powerful than they can resist'; males are more

¹² There are two senses of 'vain' that are relevant here – 'related to vanity' and 'in vain', that is, 'without hope of success'.

empathetic, more sensitive, more patient although they retain power, authority and independence in their relationships; and although mainstream literature and media focus on heterosexual romance, homosexual relationships are increasingly acknowledged. Now we imagine the 'new' prince and princess will live happily ever after and if we could only be like her – or like him – then we could too.

Marriage has been considered to be the appropriate culmination of a romantic relationship in modern western culture for it has been expected to inaugurate the 'happily ever after' period. Happiness is expected to be assured by the continuation of the romantic relationship, by the production of the ideal family life and by the possession of material wealth and consumer goods. Within that relationship, traditional expectations assumed that the family life would be the responsibility of the female and that the material welfare would be looked after by the male. Although these assumptions of the gender roles are changing, the belief in the possibility of the continuation of the romantic relationship, of the production of the ideal family life and of the possession of sufficient material wealth and consumer goods remains and if we fail to achieve any of these, we feel shortchanged.¹³

As Laws and Schwartz point out "Romanticism and personal fulfillment have been written into our American script for marital and family stability, and as a result a great many new emotional demands have been placed on the married couple" (1977, p. 137). If individuals do not feel happy or fulfilled in their marriage, they may feel entitled to end the marriage so that the individuals involved may look for another situation which will fulfill their dreams. The change in the understanding of the family as "a unit of society necessary for socialization, placement and economic and psychological security to viewing it as a locus for personal growth, love, and *self-fulfillment*" (Laws & Schwartz, 1977, p. 138), which is related to the belief in individualism and the force of the romantic discourse, has

¹³ Perhaps we feel that we have been deprived of our fundamental rights. The American Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". Since 1776 this has been regarded as a statement of the fundamental political principles of the United States although it is understood by Americans to speak of fundamental human rights which all countries should protect.

been one of the factors contributing to the rising divorce rate in North America. As it becomes evident that marriage cannot be depended upon to ensure the happy life, it is no longer considered as important as it once was. To be married, to stay married, and to find one's whole happiness within marriage is no longer socially required, although we still want the ideal romance, the ideal family life and sufficient¹⁴ material goods. We still want and we still expect to live happily ever after. The language of individualism suggests that each one of us must increasingly rely upon ourselves as the ones who will have the satisfying career, who can make independent decisions without interference, who can be the single parent who will take the part of both mother and father, who can be financially self-sufficient, who can have satisfying sexual relationships with others or with ourselves. And then we are surprised when we wake up and find ourselves alone and lonely and we wonder why we are not happy.

A sex-positive discourse which speaks of the value of all forms of non-coercive sexual expression and which emphasizes sexual prowess and performance, individual satisfaction and sexual fulfillment is an expression of a sexual individualism which is entirely consistent with the understandings of individualism. The affirmation of sexual rights and freedoms for all human beings can hardly be faulted. However, the way that these ideas are implemented needs to be carefully examined. What effects do the affirmation of separate and individual sexual rights have on sexual relationships? Do sexual rights and freedoms mean that each individual should be free to do whatever he or she wishes? As soon as that question is raised it is evident that it is necessary to add "providing others' rights are not harmed". But what are "others' rights" and how can they be protected? The complexity of some of the issues involved are evident in the debates about pornography. If the choices which some make offend the sensibilities of others, how can the issue be resolved? It has, for example, been argued – and I would suggest that it has been conclusively demonstrated – that pornography cannot not bring harm to

¹⁴ It is not possible to determine how much is sufficient although we speak as if this sentence has a quantitative meaning, but unless we are happy, then no amount of material goods will be sufficient and if we are happy, whatever material goods we have suffice.

individuals involved as pornographic subjects.¹⁵ And on a societal level, it cannot be denied that the widespread availability and accessibility of pornography affects the sexual reality of the society, and especially of the young people who are educated by these materials.¹⁶

The recommendation that all sexual activity which is private and consensual ought to be permitted and celebrated is not without its difficulties, for the whole notion of 'consent' is fraught with ambiguity. How do we identify and understand the differences between informed consent, persuaded consent, constructed consent and consent in exchange for money, food, gifts or love? How is consent measured? Is it consent if one person believes that the other has consented? Is it consent, if the consent is later withdrawn? There are also difficulties with the suggestion either that the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nations or that all sexual expression ought to be private. When women and children are harmed as a result of sexual violence in the home, public intervention is needed, but the definition of harm is not always agreed upon. Any depiction or reference to sexual practices and understandings in art, literature or in the

¹⁵ For discussions about the way that pornography harms the individuals involved, see texts by Cole (1989) and MacKinnon (1987) and the film, *Not a Love Story* (NFB, Klein, 1981).

¹⁶ Acts which are now common in bars and strip clubs across Canada would have been unheard of a generation ago. Kirk Makin in *The Globe and Mail* (March 12, 1994) asks "Is this a golden age of liberalism and sexual freedom? Or is it North America's moral equivalent of the last days of Rome?" The criterion which can be applied in Canadian law to determine whether acts such as 'lap dancing' and public masturbation should be considered illegal, is whether or not these acts go beyond conduct which would be permissible when measured against the Canadian community standard of tolerance. The measure of community standards is clearly nebulous and varies from one region to another. It is difficult to legally argue a case which depends upon an identification of community standards and more and more cases of this kind are being thrown out of court. The sexual landscape is changing – the discourse and the understanding of the meanings of sexuality is continually changing and these changes in the sexual discourse affect our sexual relationships. In this same article Mr. Sewell, ex-mayor of Toronto, is quoted as claiming that as belief in the rights of the individual takes precedence, society forgets that "the individual functions best within a community of interests – even if it puts limitations on what is expected of you."

media is, by nature, public and cannot be universally either banned or allowed, but the questions about how a distinction can be made between erotica and pornography and what the role of the state should be in enforcing community standards involve many complex issues.

Our sexual desires, our understandings about our selves and our expectations of others, all of which influence our sexual choices, do not exist independently of the social context in which we live, yet individualism assumes that the individual is able to choose freely. Within the discourse of individualism, males and females have different scripts which reflect the patriarchal perspective. Judith Jordan (1987) points out that desire in males and females is socialized differently in adolescence and that this difference in gender socialization has a profound effect on sexual relationships. In the absence of traditional or religious customs and practices about sexuality, our preferences and desires are shaped most strongly by the social relations in the particular circumstances in which we live, and more generally by the media and advertisers.¹⁷

If physical wants conflict with emotional needs, or if an individual's wishes conflict with one another, how can a decision be made? If a young girl wishes to maintain a relationship yet does not wish to have sexual intercourse and sexual intercourse is a condition that her partner makes, whose choice is involved? If the participants in a relationship do not desire the same thing at the same time, what can the suggestion that sexual freedoms for both ought to be supported mean? Our sexuality does not exist independently of our relationships with others but is found within these relationships. It is found both within our relationship with the whole of the society and within our more personal relationships for sexuality is formed in relationships with others.

The language of radical individualism does not provide a way to articulate and to address our real concerns about community, about relationships and about larger

¹⁷ A glance at the kind of magazines that young teenage girls read, such as, *YM*, *Teen*, *Seventeen*, will make it obvious what young girls will come to like. And young boys interested in sex will find that their fantasies correspond to the models in *Playboy* or in advertisements! See Chapter Seven for a discussion of the way that desire is socialized differently in males and in females.

perspectives.¹⁸ However, in spite of the fact that an individualistic discourse logically tends to lead to a self-centred existence, Bellah *et al* (1985) claim that few have found that a life devoted to "personal ambition and consumerism" to be satisfactory except in a very fleeting way. And although the authors of *Habits of the Heart* did not find vast numbers of a selfish, narcissistic "me generation", they argue that the language of individualism limits the way people think (Bellah, 1985, p. 290) and constrains their possibilities of relationship.

In our patriarchal and individualistic culture, characteristics which have been admired in males, such as independence, self-reliance, assertiveness, strength, skill in performance, ambition and decisiveness are those which reflect and support the ideals of individualism. The characteristics of nurturing, compliance, empathy, understanding, care and compassion for others which support connection and which recognize our interdependence have been associated with the female role and have been regarded as valuable female traits and thus labelled 'feminine', for within the patriarchal discourse of individualism males and females have different scripts and females have been expected to support male aspirations.

Female roles and characteristics which have been regarded as feminine are less valued because of the assumptions and the language of both individualism and patriarchy. Although characteristics which have been considered masculine and feminine are not mutually exclusive, they are often considered to be opposites. When this is the case, feminine characteristics are regarded as negative when the masculine ones are valued and

¹⁸ In another social context, the dominant discourse might emphasize the obligation to maintain the social unit, whatever the cost to the individual. This is more often the perspective in traditional societies which have conservative values. Individuals may find the expectations carried in such a discourse oppressive and they may not find personal fulfillment in the situation. The language of obligation and commitment may not provide a way to address the real concerns about individual ability, responsibility and possibility. Either emphasis has advantages and disadvantages. However, the fact that there are both discourses which emphasize the individual as separate and discourses which emphasize the individual as related raises questions about how we might live.

seen as positive. Then feminine characteristics may be described as dependent, passive, weak, indecisive, lacking drive, and lacking understanding of principles of justice ¹⁹

The language of radical sexual individualism is not able to resolve the tension between the self and the other and always speaks for the self. The discourse of sexual individualism speaks as if an individual's sexuality exists independently of any encounter and as if it is unaffected by any relationship. This discourse corresponds with the image of sexual encounters in pornography and in sexual fantasies. But in reality, I am affected and touched by any sexual relationship and so is the other with whom I am involved. What is my responsibility in this? The assumption that the individual is separate from others leads to a denial of responsibilities and to the isolation of and the alienation of individuals from one another.

From the point of view of the tenets of individualism a relationship exists for the pleasure and the gratification of the individual. From the perspective of a concern for the self, others are valuable if they can give pleasure and can satisfy needs and desires, that is, others may be judged to be useful and pleasing or not. This perspective together with the

¹⁹ Statements made from this perspective point out that women "show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgments by feeling of affection or hostility" (Freud, 1925, pp. 257-258). Characteristics which have been labeled 'feminine' have their negative forms, but so do those attributes which are generally considered to be masculine. Force may be violent or aggressive, independence may lead to isolation, decisiveness may be insensitive and the use of power may become manipulative and coercive. Every character trait has both a positive and a negative side, but the positive expression of an attribute is valuable whether it is manifested by a male or by a female and the traits which have been labeled 'masculine' and traits which have been labeled 'feminine' are both necessary in any society and in any human being. The stereotypical description of either masculine or feminine characteristics cannot portray any person, male or female, for they each describe only part of the human response and are the results of impressionistic or relative kinds of statistical information, such as "The average male is taller than the average female" or "More women than men wish to be emotionally involved with their partner before engaging in sexual intercourse". Claims such as, "Unless a woman is short, she is not feminine" or "Unless a woman wishes to be emotionally involved before engaging in sexual intercourse, she is abnormal" do not follow from these statistical remarks, but they may be considered to do so.

view which sees the body as an object which can be controlled and the bodies of others as objects which can be used result in relationships in which power and control are important features and there is always the possibility of violence. The widespread sexual violence in the form of rape, child abuse, ongoing sexual abuse and sexual harassment reflects these cultural assumptions about relationships and about sex.

The language of radical individualism cannot justify the continuation of any relationship which does not satisfy the personal needs of the individuals involved. As a result, it seems obvious that sexual relationships should be discontinued when they are no longer regarded as fulfilling to those in the relationship and this view is increasingly applied to marital relationships. But the situation is often more complex: although both individuals in a relationship may agree, one may want to discontinue the relationship and the other may not wish to; and decisions about a marital relationship do not, in general, affect only two individuals.

But although we may speak of ourselves or of anyone either as a separate individual or as a person related to others, each of us is both of these. Each one of us has become who we are because of how we are related to others and how we are independent of others. We experience a constant tension between the requirements of being an individual and the requirements of being in relationship. How this is resolved constitutes the understanding of relationship and the understanding of relationship is one of the fundamental features of any culture or of any individual.

Although the dominant discourse in the culture is the discourse of individualism, the fact remains that we are also related to others since we live in a social context. Although we speak as if we can determine our own choices and decide for ourselves, sometimes we recognize that our ideas and our values have been formed in an exchange with others; sometimes, in spite of our tendency to think only of ourselves and our wish to maximize our own pleasure and comfort, we recognize an obligation to others and the need for commitment; sometimes we acknowledge and care for one another in the face of great difficulties and sometimes we recognize a purpose larger than our own which we wish to serve. Even though none of these understandings of obligation and connection can be justified or is valued within the discourse of radical individualism, such tendencies have mitigated the destructive consequences of individualism.

The affirmation of the individual has many positive aspects. The development of a sense of self-esteem and a recognition of individual moral responsibility are impossible without an acceptance of the separate self as valuable and an understanding of the possibility of independent action, yet the language of self-affirmation is very near to the language of self-assertion, self-aggrandizement, self-occupation, and selfishness. The language of individualism promotes the ideal of independence from the influence of others, from the past, from social and personal obligations, and in so doing it may deny the real value of relationships and the role played by others and by the social reality in the formation of the self. The notion of a completely independent self cannot be sustained, yet by speaking as if it can, the discourse of individualism may result in experiences of isolation, loneliness, and alienation from others. A good life cannot be lived alone and we do not find meaning in isolation from others.

de Beauvoir points to the ongoing struggle between the self and the other, in which the subject attempts to affirm itself by using or enslaving the other for its own purposes. This can be changed when others are recognized as individuals rather than as objects, but de Beauvoir emphasizes the difficulty of this:

It is possible to rise above this conflict if each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner. But friendship and generosity, which alone permit in actuality this recognition of free beings, are not facile virtues; they are assuredly man's highest achievement, and through that achievement he is to be found in his true nature. (1974, p. 130)

This "rising above" includes a consideration of relationship, without denying the importance of the development of the individual identity of each. It cannot be accomplished by an assignation of gender role, but only with a recognition that each person needs to become more than they are and that each might learn from others another way of being.

Social knowledge and discourse in sex education

Social knowledge about sex and sexuality is acquired as an understanding of meaning is gained in the relationships individuals have with others, with the world and with themselves. All learning is based upon social knowledge and all teaching conveys social knowledge. There can be no exchange without a discursive context although the participants may not be aware of the understandings, beliefs and values which shape the discourse and the knowledge. In a formal sex education programme the selection of the content, the methodological approach and the ways of speaking about the topics express the assumptions and the attitudes of the programme. But although the structure of the curriculum is an important factor, the interaction of the teachers and the students is even more significant in determining the social knowledge which is learned in a formal sex education programme for it is here that the assumptions and attitudes of both teachers and students, learned formally and informally, will be expressed and it is here that the assumptions and the attitudes might be affected through an exchange.

A formal sex education programme takes place within the larger societal context. The understandings about sexuality which are accepted within the culture constitute the background of all the sex education programmes. Although there are apparent contradictions in their basic tenets,²⁰ traditional Christian morality, the understandings of the Enlightenment, a belief in science, the patriarchal perspective and the assumptions of individualism influence the sexual discourse in the society and in the classroom. Some of these discourses are emphasized in certain curricula and by some teachers; some others are taught in other programmes or by other teachers. Most often many of the discourses which inform the formal programmes are taken for granted and remain unidentified.

²⁰ Because of the contradictions among the discourses which rule simultaneously, we cannot be right with respect to them all. If we do not recognize the contradictions in the discourses we may feel that it is a failure on our part and that we cannot be right. For example, we may feel that we cannot be virtuous in the way the traditional morality defines virtue and at the same time enjoy sex in freedom as it is expected within a libertarian discourse.

The meanings about sexuality which are conveyed in a sex education programme are conveyed through discourse. An identification of discourse names and makes visible some of the assumptions and attitudes which are carried in the ways we speak and the ways we act. Such an identification enables us to examine the implications of these assumptions and to question these assumptions, that is, such an identification allows a critical reflection about our social reality. Social organization does not proceed without discourse, but the assumptions which shape the discourse may be questioned if they are recognized. Similarly, sex education does not proceed without discourse, however if the assumptions which shape the discourse are recognized, they may be questioned. So although we cannot be free of discourse, we are free because, and to the extent, we can reflect upon the discourses which exist.

In a study of sex education programmes, Michelle Fine examined several perspectives on adolescent sexuality which are represented in sex education curricula and which give "structure and shape to silences and voices concerning sex education and school based health clinics" (1988, p. 30). She analyzed four discourses of female sexuality in the schools which respond to the perceived need to address issues of adolescent sexuality. She pointed out that the *discourse of sexuality as violence* emphasizes the relationship between sex and violence and focuses on sexual coercion and the dangers of sexual assault, disease, and incest. Such a programme which carries and conveys sex-negative attitudes may be motivated by a traditional conservative moral perspective which is related to the discourse of sex as sin or by the radical feminist perspective which examines the way that heterosexual relations have been shaped by patriarchal assumptions. Sex-negative attitudes which may result from the discourse of sexuality as violence do not necessarily discourage sexual activity although they may discourage the responsible use of contraception (Fisher, 1990a) and they may also prevent the development of loving and supportive relationships between adolescents.

A *discourse of sexuality as victimization* emphasizes the vulnerability of young women outside of marital relationships (and of young men in homosexual relationships) and teaches young people how to defend themselves against the dangers of disease, pregnancy, and exploitation. Fine points out that in this discourse "The paradoxical message teaches females to fear the very men who will ultimately protect them" (1988, p. 32). The facts that women are sometimes victims within a marital situation and that

women are not always victims outside a marital relationship are not addressed in this discourse. In this discourse and in the *discourse of sexuality as violence* young women (and sometimes young men) are identified as victims in sexual relationships. On the other hand, *the discourse of sexuality as individual morality* teaches the necessity for understanding the possible consequences of actions and promotes self-control, self respect and sexual decision making for premarital abstinence and suggests that the individual can become an independent agent and decision maker, although the morality implied is often a traditional morality related to the Christian understanding of sex as sinful, except in certain prescribed circumstances. These three discourses, as well as *the protective discourse* which was discussed in the previous chapter, are preventive discourses which emphasize the dangers of sexual relationships. Evaluations of programmes which rely upon these discourses often concentrate upon questions about whether they 'work' or not, that is, on whether they reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted disease and of adolescent pregnancies or upon whether they delay the initiation of sexual activity.

Fine (1988) points out that *the discourse of desire* is frequently absent in formal sex education curricula or, if it is present at all, it is whispered. Since desire is a part of the experiences of young men and women, the silence surrounding this aspect of sexual relationships may make the formal curriculum seem irrelevant and uninteresting. Sexuality involves both pleasure and danger. Since there are elements of both coercion and consent, adolescents may be both victims and agents. Sexuality is fraught with complexity and ambiguity and Carole Vance notes that "Just as agreeing not to mention danger requires that one's sexual autobiography be recast, agreeing not to speak about pleasure requires a similar dishonest alchemy, the transmutation of sexuality into unmitigated danger and unremitting victimization" (1989, p. 5). Subjective experiences of frustration and delight, of fear and of hope, of excitement and anxiety and of hesitation and certainty are the result of our past experiences and they influence all of our sexual relationships. Decisions must be made in the light of contradictory forces and feelings. Fine points out that although young women often realize that sexual negotiation cannot be separated from ideas of sacrifice and nurturance (1988, p. 35) there are too few spaces for adolescents to explore their sexual subjectivities and the complexities of the issues of gender, power, and relationships.

A silence about the experience of desire is, in fact, a potent discursive element which shapes the understanding of sexuality. Silence about desire or silence about sexuality either in the home or in the formal school curriculum does not mean that sexuality and desire is not a topic, but it means that the understandings which are conveyed cannot be reflected upon.²¹

Although the libertarian discourse, which supports individual choice and values diversity, is the predominant voice in the media, it is increasingly important in formal education programmes. It is the major discourse in human sexuality courses in university settings (Allgeier & Allgeier, 1988), in some positive discussions of sexuality for young people, for men and for women (Bell, 1981; Boston Women's Collective, 1971; Kitzinger, 1985) and in the non-fiction sex literature (Zilbergeld, 1978). It is also the fundamental discourse in school-based and community-based health clinics which respond to student requests for help with health questions and with concerns about sexuality, like the Teen Health Centre at J.L. Hsley High School in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Martell, 1993, p. 27) and the Gay and Bi-Sexual Youth discussion groups which are held in the offices of Planned Parenthood in Halifax, Nova Scotia where students appreciate the non-judgmental atmosphere in which they can get factual information and discuss personal issues.

The libertarian discourse may allow a sex-positive attitude to have a voice, but it may also serve to prevent a discussion about some issues. For example, a libertarian position may be used to defend pornography, prostitution, and all 'consensual' sexual acts with the claim that adults ought to be able to do whatever they wish. However, the ways that choice is constructed within a patriarchal and heterosexist society need to be examined. Although the assumption that a wish is a free and independent personal matter that we ought not to question is associated with the libertarian position, this assumption, which makes the argument for the libertarian position circular, cannot be maintained. The assumptions of the libertarian position and the understandings of meaning which are implied in this position need to be critically examined. Unless they are

²¹ There are many kinds of silences – silence may be a result of fear and oppression (Belenky *et al*, 1986) or of hatred or it may be the result of wonder and love. Inquiry may break the silence and may free individuals from fear and oppression or it may destroy a sense of wonder. We need to learn when to speak and when to remain silent.

recognized their influence remains invisible, but an identification and a questioning of the assumptions may enable us to free ourselves from them.

An example of a course which carries and conveys the romantic discourse is the compulsory course in the Junior High School curriculum in Nova Scotia, *Personal Development and Relationships*. The text and the curriculum guide outline discussions of the self, relationships, human sexuality and career planning. In the Programme Overview of the Curriculum Development Teaching Guide for this course the goals for each unit are stated clearly and the curriculum is developed so that teachers who have no experience or training in the area would be able to present the course. The unit on self-awareness and acceptance claims that it allows students "to develop a positive self-image and self-esteem, to recognize and to manage their feelings effectively, and to develop decision-making skills which can be transferred to all aspects of their lives"; the unit on Relationships provides "opportunities to develop skills in interpersonal relationships which will help students to make decisions about behavior that will allow them to feel good about themselves and to function positively"; the unit on Human Growth and Development ensures that "students have the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with pressures placed on them by their peers and by society"; and the unit on Career Planning "incorporates the various skills of self-awareness and of decision making which will enable students to be more prepared for future success and fulfillment in their lives" (Department of Education, Teaching Guide 125, 1991, p. 7-8). The suggestion that students who learn the material in this course will have positive self-esteem, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills which will allow them to function positively and to be prepared for future success reflects the romantic discourse which implies that everything will turn out well for willing participants in the educational process.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to deny the value of such goals. It would be like disagreeing with the value of the pursuit of happiness. But these goals are not easily achieved, they cannot be ensured by an accumulation of information or by learning to name and to define the personal skills which would be required. There are many factors involved in, for example, the development of an individual's feeling of self-esteem. Each individual in any classroom will have a personal and family background which is different from every other individual. Each student enters the classroom with a personal history, with some sense of themselves, and with some positive and/or negative feelings of self-

esteem. The relationships each person has with others in the class will be affected by these feelings and the classroom relationships will have an impact upon their sense of themselves. Although thought and exchange about the issues involved may be helpful in freeing individuals from the belief that their assumptions and attitudes are the only ones which could apply, teachers and students need to acknowledge and explore the complexities and the difficulties in gaining self knowledge and in developing self-esteem.²² Similar remarks might be made about each of the topics of the course. The belief that self-esteem can be enhanced by learning the facts which are listed denies the understandings of the importance of experience within significant relationships.

In *Personal Development and Relationships*, the onus for success or failure in personal relationships and in life appears to be placed entirely with the individual. If the student is told what is required to obtain a positive self-image or to make responsible decisions or to find success and fulfillment in their careers and they find that they do not achieve the expected results, they will feel either that they have failed or that the expectations are unrealistic. Or if they believe the course materials, they will expect that they themselves will be able to surmount all difficulties – to make all relationships go more smoothly.²³ In fact, however, many junior high school students do not take *Personal Development and Relationships* seriously because they feel that the course is unrealistic. Although this is a generalization, for the way that different students respond to the course varies tremendously and the way the course is presented depends upon who the teacher is

²² The teaching guide suggests that the poem 'Our Rights – Our Responsibilities' (Department of Education, 1991, p.103) be given to the class. It begins "I have a right to be happy and treated with understanding. This means that no one will laugh at me or put me down." This is not a reality for many students and the reading of these lines or even the memorization of these lines will not make it so.

²³ In the film *No Way! Not Me*, (1987) Rosemary Brown, points out that young women do not realize that they face the real possibility of living in poverty alone or as a single parent sometime in their lives. She emphasizes the role the media plays in constructing a 'dream' future, with reference to which young women make their decisions, but the discourse which is contained in the romantic discourse of the *Personal Development and Relationships* also contributes to the unrealistic expectations which prevent young people from understanding the situations they will face.

and what the teacher's interest in the course and in the students is, but this response reveals the way the course is perceived by some junior high school students

Expectations of positive self-image, of effective communication and caring relationships, of responsible decision making, of satisfying careers, and of living happily ever after are expectations of the romantic discourse, but they are not easily actualized. If we see that we are not always as happy as we expect to be, we may believe that we would be able to achieve this if we ourselves were more determined or smarter or luckier or we may believe that we would achieve the happiness we have a right to if only others weren't so difficult or if the conditions weren't so difficult. All of these factors have an influence upon the circumstances of our lives, but happiness, like pleasure and like desire, needs to be questioned.

How is it that we expect our lives to proceed happily ever after, in spite of the fact that every human life will end in death, that each person will suffer from physical and psychological distress and that human relationships are difficult?²⁴ As human beings, we may experience satisfaction, pleasure, wonder, joy and love, but we will also experience sorrow, pain, fear, and loneliness. We may be able to take steps to improve our circumstances, or to deal more effectively with our situation, or to be related to others more compassionately. We may be able to live more happily, but we will not be able to live 'happily ever after'. We need to find ways to promote the growth of self-esteem, to educate the emotions, to support the development of more caring relationships, to develop the talents and the potential of every human being, to question the assumptions which constrain our lives; we need to provide information and to teach skills in the educational settings which would decrease the spread of disease and which would check the negative consequences of our actions as far as possible; and, we need to expose and condemn exploitation and violence. We need to educate ourselves and young people so that we

²⁴ When Siddhartha Gautama saw an old man, a diseased person and a corpse and he realized that these eventualities were part of the human condition, he began the search for an understanding of the meaning of human life. With his Enlightenment, Gautama became the Buddha. In awakening from his dreams, he saw the truth of the human situation with deep compassion.

could live more happily than we now live, not only as individuals but within our social relationships.

But we also need to recognize the ambiguities of our human situation and the tension between conflicting voices – to understand that sexuality involves both pleasure and danger; that in sexual relationships we are most vulnerable and yet we may feel most alive; that we are separate from and different from others, yet we are connected to and responsible for and shaped by others. An identification of the many discourses which shape our curricula, our beliefs, our desires and our sexual relationships may allow that recognition.

Although discussions about sex education programmes often focus upon what the empirical content of the course should be, the primary content of a programme in sex education is social. Facts can only be known and technical skills can only be learned and applied if the meanings of the terms and the instructions can be understood. A common language is needed so that we can speak together or so that we can communicate with one another, but the sharing of language is a sharing of the understandings of meaning which allow us to interact with one another, which allow us to plan for the future and to reflect upon our choices. The meanings which we share are carried in discourse.

I have used the term 'discourse' to indicate a particular set of understandings which are taken for granted in certain ways of speaking and ways of acting for within any language there are different ways of seeing, different ways of understanding, different ways of operating, different ways of beginning which depend upon different stances in the world or which depend upon different assumptions. The identification of a discourse as discourse, is an identification of some of the assumptions which are carried in the language in particular geographical and historical settings or which are shared by a certain group of people and which influence behavior in particular ways. The assumptions which shape our lives are generally invisible, although some of them may be made visible through a critical inquiry. The discourses about sex in both informal and formal sex education programmes reveal and convey assumptions and attitudes about sexuality. Our assumptions and attitudes about sex are reflected in our understandings about ourselves, as male or female, and about our relationships with others, as male or female, and they

influence our behaviors. Or, one might say that they are reflected in our behaviors and influence our understandings.²⁵

Whether they are visible or not, assumptions and attitudes about sex in the family will be conveyed to others in the family. Whether they are visible or not, assumptions and attitudes about sex in the culture will be conveyed to others through the process of informal sex education in the media, in the literature, in the institutions, and in the customs which are evident in the society. Whether they are visible or not, assumptions and attitudes about sex will be conveyed through both formal and informal education programmes. Although there may be a great deal of difficulty in reaching agreement about the formal sex education curriculum because of the many different interest groups, the content and the structure of the formal curriculum will only be one of the factors which shapes the social knowledge which is learned in any formal sex education programme. In the classroom, the assumptions and the attitudes of the teacher, of those who influence the formal curriculum of the institution, of the students, and of individuals in the larger community will all have an influence upon the social knowledge which can be learned in the exchange which takes place. Controversy may arise in the planning of or in the implementation of the curriculum when the assumptions and attitudes of different participants do not coincide and when each group feels that their view is the 'correct' perspective. However, there are many different possibilities when diverse views are identifiable.

All, or some, of the participants may conclude that it is expedient to remain silent and to avoid the issue, perhaps saying that sex education ought to be the responsibility of the parents; each may argue for their own position and try to convince others of the error of their ways; each may maintain their own position and pay no heed to others; the more powerful may speak; or each might begin to realize that there are other ways of seeing, other perspectives. With this latter realization, a conversation in which the identification of the differences between the perspectives, an examination of the consequences of the different positions, a recognition that we might make choices and an evaluation of our

²⁵ The first person plural pronoun is used here to refer to each of us as an individual and to us as a social group.

choices may ensue. Within this exchange, the recognition that there are different ways of seeing the situation may lead to a critical inquiry of the social knowledge which we have relied upon in the past. Hearing of other viewpoints, the perspective of each of the participants may be enlarged. Understanding that there are different ways of seeing, different ways of acting, different ways of responding, each one may become freer of the limitations of their own past.

* * *

Although discourse characterizes our social knowledge, the identification of discourse and the inquiry about the sources and the implications of the particular discourses which rule is accomplished by a critical perspective. Critical knowledge, which may free us from the constraints of the discourse which we have taken for granted, is acquired through a reflective inquiry into the processes by which we gain knowledge and make use of it. In the next chapter, I discuss critical knowledge and its relation to sexuality and to sex education.

Chapter Five

Critical Knowledge

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance attributed to Thomas Jefferson

Understanding critical knowledge

Critical knowledge is a knowledge of the social processes by which the understandings and assumptions which identify our social reality and through which we know the world have been accepted.¹ Critical inquiry is possible only with the recognition that the present social conditions, the ways we speak and the ways we act, are neither necessary nor natural but that they could be otherwise. It is related to questions about what a better situation might be and how that could be realized. Habermas has called the interest in the possibility of change 'the emancipatory interest' and suggests that it is related to the human interest in responsibility and autonomy (Habermas, 1978, p. 311).

The recognition that we might make choices which are neither arbitrary nor compulsory is a recognition of the possibility of human autonomy and responsibility. To the extent that choices are compelled, by others, by material conditions or by ideological forces, freedom is denied. Yet if choices are made arbitrarily, that is, without reason and for no purpose and without an understanding that our actions have consequences, that is, without a connection with the future – they are not made responsibly and they do not represent an exercise of human freedom. The idea of free choice as choice which might be made with no requirement to take anyone else into account and with no standards which would influence the decisions is a popular, but illogical notion. The recognition that our actions will have effects is a recognition of a responsibility for the intended and the unintended consequences of our choices which demands a continuing evaluative reflection. This insight relates us to the future and is a defining feature of human freedom and potency.

¹ Critical theory has been influenced by Kant's reflection upon the limits of human reason and by the understanding of Marx that the social conditions in which we live influence our consciousness. Later critical theorists have investigated the conditions of knowledge by examining the assumptions which shape our knowledge.

Critical thought, in the most general sense, is the manifestation of the human possibility and responsibility to relate to the world in an evaluative and reflective manner. This relationship with the world is praxis.

But [human] activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it [Human] activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. (Freire, 1974, p. 119)²

The social reality in which we live is a result of the choices we have made, individually and collectively. As Freire puts it "Through their continuing praxis, [human beings] simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings" (Freire, 1974, p. 91). With the recognition that we live in the world as we have chosen to live, questions about why these choices have been made and what alternatives there might be become relevant. Questions which guide a critical evaluation of the social order include:

- i) What is the situation?
- ii) How has it developed?
- iii) What would be a better situation?
- iv) What could be accomplished and how?
- v) How shall we decide?
- vi) What will the consequences of our actions be?

Critique which intends to examine the social order to transform it depends first of all upon a description and a social understanding of the situation, that is, it requires a response to the question 'What is the situation?'. However since every description is made from some position, and is expressed and understood through the discourses which are accepted, every description is partial. This acknowledgment does not invalidate the process, although it demands a flexibility and an agility on the part of those who make statements

² I have used gender-neutral language here, as indicated in the square brackets, although the translation from the Portuguese does not. I take this freedom here because a work in translation does not represent the original expression of the author.

and those who hear them. It requires a willingness to change as we add to our understandings and as we include others' perspectives.

Critique also examines the past and how it has influenced the present. (See ii) above). Critique is ideally characterized by a persistent inquiry into and questioning of the assumptions, values and goals which shape our lives, individually and collectively, or as Marx put it, a "relentless criticism of all existing conditions" (quoted in Bernstein, 1985, p. 181). "By criticism, we mean that intellectual and eventually practical effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions, and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit" (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 270). Critique is related to the common understanding of 'critical' as 'fault-finding', which has a negative sense in its ordinary usage, but, while we object to those who constantly find fault and who do not also notice what is worthwhile and what ought to be celebrated and preserved, the critical ability to see what is unacceptable or inadequate in relation to the values which we have or to standards we wish to maintain is an important one and may alert us to the need for the 'critical' care which is required in a crisis or to the 'critical' need for an intelligent and responsible maintenance of community health. As Dewey puts it:

What is needed is intelligent examination of the consequences that are actually effected by inherited institutions and customs, in order that there may be intelligent consideration of the ways, in which they are to be intentionally modified in behalf of generation of different consequences. (1929, p. 273)

Although critique has always been guided by an interest in improving human existence and in finding a new world through a criticism of the old, the emphasis within more recent critical theory has been on an analysis of the societal conditions and of the relations of power which have produced situations of oppression, exploitation, subordination, marginalization and injustice. It is informed by the conviction that the situation, as it is, is unacceptable. The exploitation of the working classes, the subordination of women, the marginalization of oppressed and minority groups, and the injustice of racism have therefore been the main subjects of critique and the Marxist critique and the feminist critique have been important contributors to the critical movement.

But while the critical analysis of the contradictions within the society may act as a force which may stimulate change, a programme for the construction of the future is not contained in a critique of the past. Critical theory aspires to bring individuals to an awareness of the injustices in the culture with the expectation that these individuals would then become agents of a social transformation. Critical theory implies an understanding of the social responsibility to make alternative choices for the future, that is, it demands a response to the ethical questions about alternative choices as in iii) 'What would be a better situation?' and about standards as in v) 'How shall we decide?'. Without a positive direction and an understanding of what a better situation would be, a new social order cannot be envisioned and a critique can become a discourse of negativity and despair. And, without the ability and the will to implement another form of social life, critical thought may remain theoretical and without potency. Therefore practical questions such as iv) 'What could be accomplished and how?' which depend upon empirical knowledge must be included. And since we are responsible for the foreseen and the unforeseen, the intended and the unintended consequences of our choices and our actions, we need to inquire about the consequences of our actions as in vi) and to maintain a critical vigilance. Because all these questions are part of a critical perspective on our actions in the world, critique as transformative praxis always depends upon and involves critical, ethical and social and empirical knowledge.

Many critical theorists have noted the need for a positive direction within the critical movement, for in analysing the results of the historical processes which have taken place in the past, critical knowledge sees the need for change. The view which looks toward the future and which proposes alternative choices requires another emphasis, another kind of knowledge. It requires a knowledge which I shall call ethical knowledge. I propose to differentiate the knowledge which looks toward the past and the knowledge which looks toward the future as a heuristic device in order to understand their specificities, although it must be remembered that both are required either in a responsible evaluation of the social reality or in the formulation of a vision for praxis.

Critical theorists have sometimes recognized the need for these two different movements within critical theory. Sometimes this need is recognized in an awareness of the lack of one or the other. Henry Giroux, for example, remarks about critical pedagogy:

Despite its insightful theoretical and political analyses of schooling, radical educational theory suffers from some serious flaws, the most serious being its failure to move beyond the language of critique and domination. ... Radical educators have focused on the language of domination to such a degree that it undercuts any viable hope for developing a progressive, educational strategy. (1988, p. xxxi)

He points to the role that teachers and administrators might play as "transformative intellectuals" combining the analysis of power which acts as a negative force of domination with the understanding of power which might be a positive force for change within the educational system and within the larger society.³

Scheffler (1985) writes of human potential; Roger Simon (1992) speaks of "a pedagogy of possibility" and Maxine Greene speaks of and with a "passion for possibility".⁴ Ira Shor, in conversation with Paulo Freire, calls for a "liberating pedagogy" which demands imaginative reconstructive thinking to propose alternative ways of living – and then a willingness to begin (Shor, 1987, p. 185). Without a language of possibility, the language of critique becomes a language of hopelessness produced by the techniques of complaint. The language of possibility depends upon a moral and political perspective which requires a vision of and a commitment to a better world. The language of critique, which speaks of the way things are, is related to the language of possibility and of transformation, but they are different discourses. They are both concerned with freedom; one with the need to be aware of and to be free from ideological and societal practices which are oppressive and the other with the need to understand what we might do with our freedom. Bernstein speaks of the problem of the relation between theory and praxis and points out that "It is not sufficient to develop a critique of ideology and contemporary society" but that "Rather, in the final analysis we must honestly confront the gap that has

³ See the Introduction in Giroux (1988). In *The Struggle for Pedagogies* (1993), Jennifer Gore suggests that Giroux's work fails to provide specific guidelines for instruction in pedagogical practice. This is a remark about the need for the practical implementation of critique, although not everyone can or should be expected to do everything!

⁴ Presentation at Conference of Atlantic Educators, November 1993, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

always existed – and still exists – between the idea of such a critical theory of society and its concrete practical realization" (1985, p. 225). However, critical theory, which consists of an analysis of the power relationships and the processes which have produced the social reality as it is, needs to be supplemented by an ethical vision which might be implemented. In order to fill the gap between the way things are as seen by critique and the way things might be, a social vision is required and then a practical knowledge is needed so that the vision might be actualized.

On the other hand, a proposal for action which envisages how a future society should be organized may seem unrelated to the current situation or it may produce unrealistic expectations unless it is accompanied by a recognition of the features and the problems of the setting in which this is to take place. The present features and problems must be understood so that a new order could be made real. The present disillusionment with the educational system, for example, is related to a perception that educators are not reaching the goals that have been set. But if the contradictions which exist among the various expectations and the problems which educators face are not acknowledged and if the actual difficulties which are part of the situation are not recognized, it will be impossible to realize the goals of a utopian imagination. The process of education never takes place in an ideal situation; it takes place in a concrete social and historical context.⁵

So although there are difficulties associated with the attempt to distinguish the critical from the ethical, including the fact that the critical, at depth, implies the ethical, and the ethical, at depth, requires the critical, I intend to examine these two forms of knowing separately; the first in the remainder of this chapter and the second in the following chapter.

⁵ Examining the situation in the schools, Michael Valpy writes in *The Globe and Mail*, October 2, 1993: "Canadians may be drawing very wrong conclusions from what they read and hear about their schools. They may be linking their dissatisfaction to problems with pedagogy rather than to the state of their children...It is not just that more social problems are being recognized; it is that there is an absolute, and dramatic increase in social problems. And they say a child who is hungry, angry, in emotional turmoil, frightened and hurting inside cannot learn; neither can his classmates if that child is being disruptive....The issues are extraordinarily complex."

Critical knowing

Critical knowledge depends upon an inquiry into the social conditions in which we live. The social conditions in which we live include the external social circumstances, the social relationships and forms of organization, the institutional practices and traditional customs. But the social conditions are also related to our understandings and to the knowledge we have and through which we are related to the world; they are related to the assumptions, values and norms which constitute our point of view or our interest. But although these assumptions influence all our relationships they are generally accepted without question. Critical inquiry acknowledges the connections between knowledge and interest and between knowledge and our social conditions and demands a recovery of what Habermas has called "the forgotten experience of reflection" (1978, p. vii) so that these connections can be made visible. Critical inquiry is an exploration of the social meanings and practices which we have learned and of the social relationships which have maintained these.

Dorothy Smith has proposed a strategy of inquiry which regards "the everyday world as problematic" and which begins "where women⁶ *actually* are and addresses the problem of how our everyday worlds are put together in relations which are not wholly discoverable within the everyday world" (1987, p. 47). She has extended Marx's method of examining our social conditions to an investigation of the conditions of knowledge itself in order to uncover the assumptions which shape our social realities.

Inquiry and investigation explore and make explicit and visible what we know only as insiders in and through our practices of knowing. Inquiry here addresses our own practices as knowers. We know them tacitly and in practice; by making them objects of investigation, they are brought into view reflexively as a knowledge not just of the world but of ourselves, of our own doings in it. (Smith, 1990, p. 57)

⁶ Because she proposes a feminist sociology, she begins with the actual experiences of women. However, this methodology may be applied in relation to any group (see Chapter One, p. 14-15, for a discussion of the identification of a group) by beginning with the actual experiences of that group of individuals.

The method of inquiry requires the discovery of a standpoint outside the ruling discourse or practice from which the discourse or practice which is taken for granted can be interrogated, which is to say, another point of view or a self-consciousness is required.⁷ Habermas (1978, p. 229) has likened the process of critical social analysis to the process of psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis the therapist helps to bring to consciousness the factors in the patient's subconsciousness which cause the patient's present responses, by examining the history of the formation of the self, whereas in critique, through a study of the structure of the social reality and of the historical influences which have produced it, unquestioned assumptions can be made visible. The goal of analysis or of a social critique is the practical transformation of the individual and of the society.

In the articulation of his method of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire contends that education must teach individuals how to participate in the transformation of their world by the method of identifying and questioning the problems and the contradictions in their own situation.

In problem-posing education, [individuals] develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with others* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (1974, p. 70)

Critical theory has examined the link between practice and knowledge and between power and knowledge. In examining the way that official knowledge is produced and maintained, Smith, for example, has shown the way that the relations of power in the

⁷ An individual may be able to question their own assumptions as a result of having different experiences, such as in travel or perhaps illness, for example, or another person or group of people may question an individual's assumptions. The individual may participate in an exchange with another and bring an inquiry to their previous assumptions by learning of another perspective. This process may take place at the societal level, although there is more resistance to reflexive questioning within established relations of ruling on the larger scale. A historical perspective can bring the possibility of seeing the assumptions of one period from the point of view of another. Or, at any time, the assumptions from the perspective of one group can be questioned by another or even by a sub-group which has different interests than the larger group. For example, the patriarchal perspective has been questioned from a female perspective.

society are maintained. The domination of one group over another or the exploitation of one group by another are negative expressions of the relations of power, but the domination of accepted ideas or of ways of thinking and acting may also be oppressive by their very invisibility.

A society without power relations can only be an abstraction, which, as it is said in passing, makes all the more politically necessary the analysis of power relations in a given society, their historical formulation, the source of their strength or fragility, the conditions which are necessary to transform some or to abolish others. For to say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say either that those which are established are necessary, or, in any case, that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined. Instead I would say that the analysis, elaboration and bringing into question of power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence (Foucault, 1983a, p. 223).

The heart of a critical inquiry is an inquiry into the current reality which asks again and again, "What is our situation?" and "How has this situation been produced and how is it maintained?" But it is not a questioning that is neutral or that seeks a final truth. As Maxine Greene points out:

It is a matter of questioning and sense-making from a grounded vantage point, an interpretive vantage point, in a way that eventually sheds some light on the commonsense world, in a way that is always perspectival and therefore forever incomplete. There is always more. There is always possibility (Greene, 1988, p. 128).

Critical knowledge and sex

The understanding that reality as it is lived and sexuality as it is experienced have been socially constructed provides a basis for the critique of sexual relationships. Questions about gender – about how maleness and femaleness and about how the relationship between males and females have been understood and regulated and what the implications of these understandings and of the social and institutional practices which are related to these are – can be raised when the relationship between the social expectations of gender role and the identification of anatomical sex characteristics is no longer assumed.

to be necessary. Naming the discourses which represent the cultural perspective is a task and a result of critical inquiry. Critical knowledge of the social relations which have constructed and which maintain the discourses of gender and about sexual orientation has been gained through the feminist critique of the patriarchal assumption and through a critique of normative heterosexuality. Since our sexuality is constituted by the ways we live in relationship with ourselves and with others as gendered human beings, the analysis of the discourse which constructs our understandings and our practices in relation to the different experiences and possibilities of males and females and the analysis of the discourse which concerns the relationship between the sexes have been important topics in the critique of sexuality. Not only is the methodology of the feminist critique a useful model for a more global critical examination of our social reality, but a critical study of our sexual reality cannot ignore the understandings which have been reached by the feminist critique of gender and which have influenced the critical study of normative heterosexuality.

Critical knowledge of patriarchal discourse: The realization of the absence of women in many areas of public life and of their contribution in the production of official knowledge and social policy and of their dependence on males led to a recognition of the patriarchal assumption, which is a fundamental characteristic of our social reality. Patriarchy assumes and supports male dominance in the hierarchical social power structure in which "sex is a status category with political implications" (Millet, 1969, p. 32).

The insight that women were, as a class, regarded as *the Other* in a totality of two components necessary to each other was clearly articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 in *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being....She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (de Beauvoir, 1974, p. xiv, xv)

The recognition and the clear statement of the fact that the organization of society has been accomplished almost exclusively from a masculine perspective has been an important contribution of the feminist critique. It has shown that what has been regarded

as true, accepted as knowledge, considered rational, moral or important, and what has been decided as social policy has been determined largely by males and in their interest. The recognition of this fact has raised many questions about how women's situations reflect this, what the consequences of this assumption have been for the relationship between men and women, why women have accepted this status and how women's state of dependency can be overcome.

The strength of the patriarchal ideology which has been a pervasive feature of our discourse and of our social reality has depended in part upon its invisibility. This has been related to the understanding of knowledge as objective and universal. As long as it was assumed that there could be a single, objective and impersonal truth which could be discovered by rational minds and tested empirically,⁸ it could not have been considered that it would make any difference in the knowledge which was known and discovered, if someone had pointed out that all the authoritative figures were males.⁹ In identifying fundamental features of our social reality and in raising questions about how it has been constructed, the feminist critique has made the absence of women's voices in the production of knowledge and social policy problematic and it has also challenged the epistemological assumptions of traditional views. In seeking ways to include the perspective of women in the construction of knowledge and in the formation of social policy, many feminists have challenged the value of simply claiming that women are like men. Rather, they advocate the development of a new social order which would be based upon a new form of relationship between men and women – they advocate a radical change in the social knowledge which we rely upon.

⁸ – or which could be known through revelation.

⁹ It might be and it was argued, assumed and sometimes 'proved' that men were, 'by nature', more capable in these roles and/or that they have been chosen by God for these roles. These arguments – that because the earliest apostles, chosen by Christ were male, then men are the ones who are capable for this role – were used in May 1994 in an Apostolic Letter from the Pope which claims that women ought not to have the right to become priests in the Roman Catholic church.

In its study of the processes which reveal the dominant patriarchal discourse, of the consequences of this assumption and of the power relations which maintain and are maintained by this perspective, the feminist critique is an example *par excellence* of critique and of the development of critical knowledge. In questioning some of the taken-for-granted features of our social and sexual relationships, it has identified many of the contradictions in our social reality. And, in spite of the fact that patriarchal assumptions are deeply embedded in the language and are related to the fundamental notions of objectivity and rationality, the feminist critique has shown that it is possible to gradually free ourselves from the ways we have thought. The feminist critique has brought about social change at the most fundamental levels as a result of the refusal to accept the understandings of meaning which had previously been taken for granted. But progress is slow. Not only are the assumptions of patriarchy intimately related to all aspects of the culture, but as John Stuart Mill wrote in 1869, when he so eloquently argued that "the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (1985, p. 219). He pointed out that the accomplishment of a change in this regard would be very arduous because "there is a mass of feeling to be contended against" (1985, p. 232) and that the whole force of education has been used to teach men and women from the very earliest years that this unjust and unsatisfactory state of affairs is the way it should be and the way it must be. Both thought and feeling need to be educated so that we might know differently.

The fact that society has been organized from a male point of view has influenced all social and personal relations. It has affected male sexuality, female sexuality and all our sexual relationships. In the sexual reality produced from the male perspective, women and women's bodies, in their erotic and their reproductive capacities, have been regarded as sexual objects for men, because within the culture men have been the ones whose views have been relevant, have been heard, and have been influential and not because individual men have so decided. In pointing to the need to include the perspective of women, the feminist critique has pointed to the need for change from a male-centred perspective.

Patriarchal assumptions influence all our social relations, including our understandings of gender, our understandings of the self, of knowledge, and of human

purpose, but other cultural assumptions also structure our thought and frame our social reality at fundamental levels and they shape our lives in very basic ways. Concepts of gender influence our notions of self, of knowledge and of human purpose, but understandings of self, knowledge and human purpose also affect the ways we see and experience gender. The more deeply any of our assumptions are embedded in language, in social practices and in institutional forms, the more difficult it is to see them or to question them. Along with the effects of patriarchal understandings, the assumptions of individualism, of humanism, of the separation of mind and body, of the supremacy of the human cognitive mind, of the central role of human beings in the cosmos, of the right of human beings to control nature, of truth as that which can only be determined by empirical and rational evidence, of historical change as progress and of democracy as the necessary and sufficient condition for justice, which are also reflected in discourse, define our modern western social and economic reality. These understandings have developed within the historical context of the Greek, Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions.

All of these discourses influence our understandings of gender and shape our sexual reality. In other words, our understandings of gender and of sexuality are shaped by patriarchal assumptions, but not only by patriarchal assumptions. Critique provides a way of identifying and reflecting upon the ways our lives have been influenced by the assumptions which shape our attitudes, yet which we can hardly see because they are so close to us. It can open up the possibility of alternatives and of choice, the possibility of transcending these constraints, the possibility of freedom – of the freedom which is "an opening of spaces as well as perspectives, with everything depending on the actions we undertake in the course of our quest, the praxis we learn to devise" (Greene, 1988, p. 5).

Critical knowledge, patriarchy and sexual violence: The realization of the tremendous impact which the ideas and practices of patriarchal discourse have had on the social relations has resulted in a re-examination of many troublesome aspects of the society. For example, violence in our society is often expressed sexually, in rape and sexual assault and in the physical and sexual abuse of women and children. A critical feminist perspective has shown the connection which these social phenomena have to the assumptions we have about gender relationships. They provide evidence of systemic problems in a social order in which men are dominant and women are subordinate which are not only due to the inability of individuals to control themselves in the face of slight or

extreme temptation or aggravation. The latter explanation for the problems of sexual violence is a more traditional response to what is commonly agreed to be an unacceptable situation. The traditional response proposes to solve such problems by punishment through the legal system and by means of education about what is appropriate, while the critical response calls for a re-ordering of the power structures in society, even though how that should be done is not so obvious.¹⁰

The analysis of sexual violence in the society has been greatly influenced by the understandings of the feminist critique. In the asymmetric power relationship between men and women, between adults and children, between the powerful and the less powerful, the possibility of violence is always present. Pornography, rape, sexual assault and prostitution, which are the most obvious negative expressions of the sexual reality in our society, are all forms of sexual violence perpetrated most often by men upon women.¹¹ They reveal and maintain assumptions of patriarchy and they reflect and support our understandings of the body, of sex and of others as objects which can be used for our purposes or as commodities which can be bought, sold and traded.

¹⁰ These positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Critical inquiry has revealed cultural assumptions which have produced many inequities and injustices and many contradictions between what we expect and what is, in fact, the case. Yet it is also important to acknowledge the fact that individuals act in many different ways within a social framework. For example, not all men in a patriarchal society see women as subordinate or treat women violently. Problems in the society are a result of both societal assumptions and the systemic structures which support them and the actions of individuals who are situated differently in the society. To address only one or the other aspect is to address the problem partially. To argue that one or the other position is wrong is to argue in favor of addressing only one or the other. If problems in society have both individual and societal roots, it is clear that education has a double pronged challenge – to educate individuals to be able to participate in a positive way in a social setting and to educate individuals to be able to examine the societal structures and to envisage ways to resolve difficulties through social reform.

¹¹ Catharine MacKinnon claims that these expressions of sexual violence institutionalize male sexual supremacy (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 148). This is true to the extent that these are the forms in which male sexual power is sometimes expressed, but it is not the case that these forms of male sexual power are legitimated by the fact of their existence.

But these same assumptions affect all of our social and sexual relationships. Edwin Schur writes that:

One suspects, indeed, that many Americans continue to view acts of sexual coercion as pathological violations of our society's norms. Some probably believe that the frequency of these behaviors has been exaggerated. Others may become concerned about one type of sexual offense, without ever placing it as part of a more general pattern. From the standpoint of systematically reducing sexual coercion in American life, these views are not very helpful. The offenses are not, in fact unrelated to each other. And we cannot simply attribute them to individual wrongdoers. In fact, we cannot appreciate them apart from the normal workings of our sexual system or our social system. To a considerable extent they are integral to those systems, rather than departures from them. (Schur, 1988, p. 144)

The assumptions of patriarchy and of the understandings of the body and of others as objects are also reflected and maintained more generally in the ways men look at women and in the requirement which women feel to look beautiful and to appear seductive and sexually attractive.¹² In the asymmetric sexual relationship between men and women, women's bodies are often considered to be objects for male pleasure. In the look, women are admired or scorned for their sex appeal and women see themselves and judge their femininity in relation to this look.

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed, female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger, 1983, p. 47)

The way that men, women and sexual relationships are portrayed in advertisements and in the media reflects the patriarchal assumption that women are for men. And within

¹² See the discussion in Chapter Four of the disciplines of body which women undergo to be feminine and to be sexually attractive – for the look. Although teen-age boys are also concerned about their appearance and the need to look attractive, male sexuality is not equated with appearance in the same way as female sexuality is. Male sexuality is more often equated with power, strength, and ability to perform.

the context of a capitalistic economy, the commodification of sex, of women, and of women's bodies is both a cause and a result of the objectification of sex, of women and of their bodies.¹³ Competition for consumer attention results in the use of more and more blatantly sensational images in order to attract notice. The sexual images of men and of women and of their relationships which are presented everywhere are made more explicit as the distinctions between advertising or mainstream entertainment and pornography, and in another dimension, between pornography and erotica are increasingly blurred.¹⁴

Sex is commercialized in the sex industries of pornography and prostitution and in the promotion of sales for all kinds of goods and services. Schur points out that "Capitalistic exploitation of sexuality and the content and level of sexual expectations feed each other. Every prospective liberation provides new commercial possibilities" (Schur, 1988, p. 12). Since advocates of libertarianism support the freedom of expression in sexual matters, they may argue that the availability of sexually explicit materials and a wide range of sexual services can release us from repressive and restricting anti-sex moral prescriptions; however, the issue is not only one of freedom from censorship, or of being for or against sex. The issue is more often one of power and coercion. Susan Cole claims that the making of pornography is "a practice of sexual subordination" (1989, p.24) and in this she refers to the effect of pornography upon those who take part in its production and in its consumption. This is not as much a remark about the product as about the persons involved. The object of the exercise is sex and not money, but the practice is supported by the exchange of money, which is a powerful force in our society. In the sex trade, in most cases, the buyers of sex are men and the sellers of their bodies or of sexual services are women or young men, or the producers or pimps are men who present and sell the bodies

¹³ See Berger (1983) and Kilbourne (1987) for discussions of and representations of the way that advertising objectifies women.

¹⁴ This is not to suggest that the meanings of 'pornography', 'erotica' or 'entertainment' can be easily specified. They can only be understood within a social context, but the meanings vary depending on the perspective and the position of the subject in the society. A continuing examination of the difference in meanings for different individuals is needed so that one perspective is not assumed to be the defining perspective.

or the sexual services of women or of women and men.¹⁵ The ones who are used sexually are most often victims, controlled by money or by psychological coercion, physical force or drugs so that someone else may benefit financially. The commercialization of sex to sell products in advertising is not as invasive a practice as pornography and prostitution, but here too, women and their bodies are used in order to make profits. In either case – when money is used to get sex or when sex is used to get money – the people involved are not taken into account. As a result the proliferation of the buying and selling of sex may produce an increasing dehumanization of sex and an alienation of persons.

Sex, violence and violent sexuality sell because sex is associated with the most intimate experiences of our lives and violence is related to our deepest fears. Images of and references to these arouse an emotional response and capture our attention. As more and more violent and suggestive images are presented in pornography, but also in advertising and in the media, images of sex and violence¹⁶ and of pleasure and danger, are conflated. As violence and impersonal sex are eroticised, it becomes more and more difficult to separate them from desire and sexual excitement and the images which are presented shape our notions of sexuality, our desires and ourselves.

Pornography, rape, sexual assault and prostitution produce and are the result of the most negative experiences of alienation in sexual relationships, although the alienation and loneliness experienced in many sexual relationships have many of the same causes. The societal belief in individualism which emphasizes the importance of the gratification of the desires of the individual may lead to experiences of depersonalized, performance and result oriented sexual relationships if the understanding of the importance of an empathetic

¹⁵ This is related to the patriarchal relationships in the larger social context. It is therefore a gender issue. However, if the roles were reversed or if both men and women were involved in every aspect of the trade, there would still be victims.

¹⁶ For discussions of the eroticization of violence in pornography, see Cole (1989) and MacKinnon (1988). The liberal claim that a distinction can be made between pornography which is violent and pornography which is erotic is not borne out in practice, for it is difficult to separate the erotic from the violent in many pornographic materials, and pornographic images which eroticize the subordination of women are always implicitly and often explicitly violent.

connection with others and an ability and a willingness to connect with the other in a sexual relationship is not understood. Wilson claims that the widespread use of pornography is a logical outcome of the view that sex is an activity which can be removed from the context of a relationship (Wilson, 1989, p. 134). It contributes to and is a result of the 'loss of the partner', to use Schur's phrase. An excessive occupation with pornographic or even idealized romantic images "may disable the person from ever participating in a relationship characterized by real intimacy and mutuality" (Schur, 1988, p. 126). It may prevent the individual from being able to appreciate another in his or her uniqueness, from being able to understand the necessity of acknowledging and accommodating the needs and desires of another, from being able to accept responsibility with respect to the relationship, but it may also be the result of the inability to form intimate relationships with others.

Rape is legally defined as an act of sexual penetration without consent and therefore the determination in law as to whether a particular sexual act is rape or not hinges on the very difficult issue of consent. From a woman's point of view rape is a violation of her person and any act of sexual intercourse in which she feels treated as a sexual object – even if she has given her consent – may feel like rape and the effects may be similar. Any act of sexual intercourse in which the partner is treated as a sexual object, is a kind of rape, although it may not be identified as such. Both the patriarchal perspective, which assumes the domination of women by men, and the belief in individualism, which emphasizes the importance of the needs of the separate individual and which leads us to view others as objects who might satisfy those needs, contribute to a growing tendency of alienation in sexual relationships.

However, not all sexual relationships are relationships of domination and subordination and in spite of the rhetoric of individualism, many people find pleasure with others and fulfillment in the context of relationships. Sexual relationships which provide a connection or are a form of exchange between individuals or which are expressions of love affirm the participants rather than demean them. So although the possibility for sexual violence and isolation exists in the society and in each of us, the possibility for positive and

delightful sexual relationships also exists and a critical inquiry can begin to identify the conditions which produce the difference.¹⁷

Critical knowledge of normative heterosexism: The understanding that sexuality is socially constructed has also led to a critical examination of the societal assumptions about sexual orientation and of heterosexism, the ideology that proclaims lesbians and gays to be 'deviant' and heterosexuals to be 'normal'. The starting point for the analysis is the recognition of the contradictions in the homosexual experience. An inquiry about the processes which have constructed homosexuality and the ways it has been defined and regulated and the way that homosexuals have been oppressed and marginalized within the larger social context may then be undertaken. This analysis has been accomplished primarily by members of the gay and lesbian community, who begin with an identification of their situation in the larger network of social relations in which we live. Gary Kinsman writes of the contradiction he has found between his experiences of being a person and of being labeled a deviant:

My experience as a gay man...is that there exists a constant tension between, on the one hand, how we live our daily lives and give and receive erotic pleasure, and on the other, the sexual categories imposed by a society of presumed universal heterosexuality. (Kinsman, 1987, p. 14)

Historical and anthropological studies show that varieties of same sex behaviors have been regarded differently in different cultural settings. Western culture defines appropriate sexual behavior in terms of a limited range of acceptable activities. There has been a long tradition of hostility towards homosexuality in the West, because within the Judeo-Christian context reproduction has provided the only justification for sexual intercourse and the norms of sexual behavior have been defined in relation to the discourse of sex as sin. With the change from a religious to a secular and scientific authority,

¹⁷ Adrienne Rich raises the question "Are we then to condemn all heterosexual relationships, including those which are least oppressive?" (Rich, 1980, p. 659). Perhaps this is the wrong question. There are different qualities of experience within heterosexual relationships and we need to begin to see what may produce the possibility of mutually affirming relationships whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. Rich herself asserts that the question is the wrong one and claims that it arises because there has been an absence of choice about the kind of relationships in which women can live.

homosexual acts which had been regarded as sinful were then pathologized and medicalized -- however, the discourse of normative heterosexuality remained.

The definition of difference and of deviance of homosexuality has resulted in the oppression of homosexuals. Although legal persecution of homosexual activities has diminished since it was decriminalized in Canada in 1969 and homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's list of diagnostic categories in 1974, homosexuals still experience official and social discrimination and harassment and they are still considered deviant with respect to normative heterosexuality. The homophobia which exists gives evidence of the strength of the socially constructed negative understandings of homosexuality: homosexuals who have identified themselves as such, individuals who are suspected of being homosexual, or those who match the stereotypical image of homosexuals in any way are in physical danger and they are also at risk emotionally because of the possibility of hatred, ridicule, and ostracism from family, friends, employers, colleagues and other members of the society. The justifiable fear of being labeled homosexual helps to maintain rigid gender stereotypes, which limits the range of expression for all human beings. The association of stereotypically feminine characteristics with male homosexuality and of stereotypically masculine characteristics with female homosexuality has supported the dichotomization of traits which are identified as masculine and as feminine and it has limited the ability of men to express their feelings and vulnerability and to participate in certain activities.¹⁸

Jeffrey Weeks points out that the term 'homosexual' began to be used to define individuals rather than to identify certain acts during the eighteenth century along with the development of a political interest in the regulation of society (Weeks, 1981, p.96 ff).

¹⁸ "I believe that homophobia, which I define as more than a fear or hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality but a fear of being perceived as gay, is perhaps the *greatest* pressure boys face while growing up. It sparks male hatred of women and fear of closeness to other people" (Friedman, 1989, p. 8). Although this statement may refer to the experience of those individuals who believe that they will be perceived as gay, Friedman points out that this fear can put pressure on all boys and young men to act in certain ways and to speak of women in particular ways.

Individuals have engaged in same sex behaviors in many different cultures and the response towards homosexual behavior has varied enormously. In some situations this has been approved or tolerated while in others it has been condemned. However the identification of some individuals as 'homosexual', when that identification is made as a way of distinguishing a group of individuals who are regarded as abnormal from those who are regarded as normal, has profound implications for those who are named deviant. This identification is a political and social act which grants privilege to those who are regarded as normal and penalizes and marginalizes those who are regarded as abnormal. Those identified as homosexual could be punished by the legal system, studied and cured by the psychological and medical community, condemned or forgiven by the religious establishment, and regulated by social policy and by normative standards. All of these responses are legitimated in relation to the definition of homosexuals as individuals who are abnormal. As homosexual identity became a social identity, a community, within which same-sex relationships could be accepted and celebrated, developed as a sub-culture. This community provides a setting where the hostility and oppression of the society can be avoided and resisted; but the establishment of this community also serves to further construct and maintain homosexuality as an identity and as a social category which is different from a heterosexual identity. The current official policy of tolerance and an extension of human rights to individuals identified as gay or lesbian reflects and maintains the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, although the changes to institutional discriminatory practices will help to decrease the homophobia in the society and it will gradually affect the conceptualization of homosexuality.

In reporting his statistical findings of sexual behavior, Kinsey had drawn attention to the difficulty of identifying a person as 'homosexual' or as 'heterosexual', to distinguish among those who have had homosexual experience and yet who are identified and identify themselves as heterosexual, those who have not had homosexual experience but feel themselves sexually attracted to others of the same sex, and those who live in heterosexual relationships and yet who identify themselves as homosexual. He claimed that "one must learn to recognize every combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality in the histories of various individuals" (1963, p. 617). He proposed a scale to indicate that there is a continuum of sexual expression between those who engage in only heterosexual acts and those who engage in only homosexual acts and he had pointed out that "Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be

divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects"(1963, p. 639). His proposal to identify individuals as homosexual-heterosexual on a scale of 0 to 6 repeats the same identification of persons only with more categories. The problems are similar, although an individual may not be condemned by a single homosexual encounter. Kinsey claims, for example, that "Army and Navy officials and administrators in schools, prisons, and other institutions should be more concerned with the degree of heterosexuality or homosexuality in an individual than they are with the question of whether he has ever had an experience of either sort" (1963, p. 647). However, as long as heterosexuality is normative and all other acts are considered deviant, when people are identified as homosexuals, more or less, they will be considered deviant.

In a different approach, Adrienne Rich (1980) suggests that we need to begin to see that all human beings are sexual and that every individual is related to all others sexually. She questions "the bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible" (1980, p. 632) and argues that "heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*" (1980, p. 637) for the identification of heterosexuality as normative and the naming of some individuals as heterosexual and some as homosexual establishes a social categorization which privileges some individuals over others. This difference in status is reflected in and maintained by institutional practices. She suggests that the term *lesbian continuum* be used "to include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (1980, p. 648) and that an expansion of the meaning of lesbian experience would free our thinking and permit a wider range of choice for all women. This way of conceptualizing same sex behavior would free us from the perceived need to identify individuals as either homosexual or heterosexual and from the habit of seeing homosexual behavior or heterosexual behavior as an identifying feature which privileges certain individuals socially and politically.

The quality of our lives is related to the quality of our sexual relationships, as individuals and as members of the society in which we live. A critical inquiry is interested in the ethical question "Do we have a good sex life?" and raises questions which need to be asked in relation to this question. Our sexual reality is constructed in the interaction of all the taken-for-granted meanings, institutional practices and sexual relationships which establish and reflect our norms and values and which shape our lives. A critical inquiry raises questions about the problems which have resulted from specific understandings of sex and gender that have developed in our culture. Through the identification of the institutional practices and of the discourses of gender and of sexual orientation which shape the meanings we have assumed, we can begin to see that we might be otherwise and that we might be free from what we have been.

Critical knowledge and sex education

Critical knowledge is needed in three areas in the formal sex education programme – for teachers, for curriculum planning and for students. The education which takes place in a formal programme is a result of the interaction which takes place among the teacher and the students about the subject matter. An examination of the past and an assessment of the present situation is a necessary condition for making a responsible and a realistic proposal for the future. A critical inquiry into the sex education programme must begin with a recognition and an acknowledgment of the situation as it is so that responsible decisions can be made.

Educators need a critical perspective on the issues of sexuality that can take into account the complexity of contemporary social life and which will allow a continuing reflective evaluation of the meanings which are conveyed in both the formal and the informal curriculum. A critical perspective can identify the kinds of discourse which are dominant in a specific context and which shape the understandings of sexuality in that setting. An identification of discourse can reveal the ways that the meanings which sexuality has have been constructed and conveyed in the social processes. An understanding of the sources of and the consequences of a particular set of beliefs allows a freedom from the assumptions which are contained in the discourse. Critique may be motivated by the recognition of a need for changes in our social relationships or it may indicate the need for change in a specific direction. But a critical perspective is not always

reconstructive; it may also allow an appreciation of some aspects which had been taken for granted but which need to be valued and emphasized. Unless we are able to identify the ways thought and behavior has been structured, we do not have the possibility of being free of and in the ways we think and the ways we act.

The fundamental societal discourses which reflect a belief in science, in individualism, in patriarchy and in heterosexism structure our understandings of gender, self, knowledge, sexual orientation and relationships. These beliefs, which establish the relations of power in the society, may be identified and their implications may be explored through critique. Some of these assumptions and attitudes have been discussed in this chapter and in the previous chapters. Belief in these ideologies influences the discourse in both informal and formal sex education. The technical-rational discourse in formal sex education programmes, which emphasizes the teaching of physiology and promotes the process of rational decision-making to prevent undesired outcomes of sexual relationships conveys the information which has been gained through scientific research. While this kind of programme is necessary, it is inadequate, for it does not address the emotional, the social, the political and the ethical aspects of sexuality and it fails to explore the meanings individuals attach to sexual activity. The belief that the teaching of information and the technical and rational skills which are required to make use of the relevant empirical knowledge constitutes an adequate sex education programme is related to the belief in scientific knowledge as the paradigm of knowledge. However, while programmes which teach the information and the skills necessary to prevent negative consequences of sexual activity are assumed to be value-free and exclusively empirical, they are based upon and convey the dominant assumptions of patriarchy, heterosexism and individualism, that is, they carry the understandings which are part of the social knowledge we learn as we learn the language and the customs in the society. Teachers in a sex education programme need to be aware of the assumptions and the attitudes which they themselves bring, which students bring and which are carried in the discourses which predominate in the formal and informal curriculum. Unless educators can reflect upon the beliefs and judgments which are carried in the discourse and which produce meanings which are then taken for granted, they will unintentionally participate in the reproduction of these beliefs.

Within sex education programmes there are a variety of discourses which reveal particular attitudes and understandings about sexuality. With an understanding of the

negative implications of the discourses of sexuality as violence, as victimization and as individual morality, which Fine (1988) identified, it becomes possible to ask 'Is this the way it should be?' She points to the silence which surrounds the topic of desire and the need for the inclusion of a discourse of desire, so that the programmes could be related to the students' experiences and to an exploration of the positive aspects of sexual relationships. In characterizing the traditional, progressive, and the libertarian sexual discourses, Dennis Carlson (1992) shows how these attitudes have influenced sex education programmes. Furthermore, the romantic discourse, which speaks exclusively about heterosexual romantic relationships and is shaped by the assumptions of our patriarchal and individualistic society, is a major factor in the informal sex education especially of young women. Without seeing these influences, we cannot be free of their force.

The construction of our sexual reality is an on-going process in which we all participate. In order to be able to take responsibility for the formal programmes, educators need to identify the dominant discourses which are present (and which are absent). In order to be able to relate to the students' lived experiences and to provide what might be relevant, educators need to be aware of the discourses which shape the informal sex education. The identification of educational discourse requires a critical perspective and an ongoing inquiry. A critique of our sexual reality will soon reveal the complexity of the issues involved. Understandings of gender, of the self, of knowledge and value are connected in very complex ways. A teacher needs to realize that each student's experience of these will be different, yet that the experience of each will have been influenced by the understandings and practices which have been accepted in the culture. A teacher needs to begin with a reflective examination of his or her own situation and of his or her attitudes and assumptions and of the social relations which have supported these, while realizing that every individual will see the reality which is shared from a different place. The question 'What is the situation?' (p. 102 above) may seem simple, but if it is a question of critique it requires a recognition of the political situation and an understanding of the empirical, the social and the ethical knowledge of individuals involved, a knowledge of the beliefs and practices which are accepted in the larger social context, a recognition of the way these elements affect one another, and a realization that the situation is not static, but that it is constantly changing. Unless teachers bring a critical inquiry to their role, they will teach what they have understood as if it were universally

applicable. In the process, they will convey their empirical, their social and their ethical understandings. This form of education has been called education as reproduction. It may include the best of what the culture has understood and it may include the worst.

However, students are not merely empty containers. They bring their own perspective about education and about the subject matter. They resist, they select and they learn this and/or that from what is presented. Education as reproduction is never an actual possibility. There are always some results of the process, yet unless teachers are able to bring a conscious and a critical inquiry to bear, they will be unable to intervene effectively in the process.

The formal curriculum of any educational programme acts as a guide for the teachers and for the students. It identifies the subject matter about which the teachers and the students exchange and reveals the material which has been considered important and what has been considered unimportant by its omission. It acts as the raw material which then takes final shape in the actual process of education. In a formal programme of sex education the understandings about sexuality which have been learned by earlier research may provide useful resource material for the class. However, the understandings which have been gained by a critical inquiry about sexuality need to be included as well as the understandings which have been gained through empirical research.

An increasing awareness of the inequitable treatment of males and females in the society and in the school system which discriminates against and disadvantages women has been one of the results of the critical pedagogy and of the feminist social analysis of patriarchy. The recognition of sexism within the educational system has produced some changes. Policies which provide a more equitable education are gradually being introduced. As well, some affirmative action programmes designed to counteract the effects of traditional stereotypical expectations have been established, although the implementation of programmes which depend upon a change of perspective can only be very slowly accomplished. However, sex education curricula which are concerned only with the empirical information and skills needed for a protective discourse are not concerned with an analysis of social relations and of the meanings which are a result of cultural assumptions about gender and which shape our understandings of gender or of sexual relationships. A critical analysis has shown that sex education courses, which are based upon a biomedical model and which convey a protective discourse often reflect and

support the assumptions about gender and about sexual relationships which are prevalent in the society (Fine, 1988; Jordan, 1987; Stromquist, 1987; Whatley, 1987). This analysis has led to proposals for changes in sex education curricula. A similar recognition of the way that individuals who have been identified as homosexuals have been treated and of the ways that homophobia has been supported in the society and within sex education programmes has led to suggestions for sex education curricula which would avoid practices which have been understood as discriminatory and which would redress the inequities which result from negative stereotypical understandings of homosexuality (Friedman, 1989; Sears, 1992). As the feminist critique and the critique of the assumptions of normative heterosexism reveal the negative consequences of inequitable treatment of males and females and of homophobia, there is an increasing recognition of the necessity to include the understandings which have been gained through these critiques in the curriculum.

That is, there is a growing awareness of the need to introduce anti-sexist and sex equitable education in all areas of education and an exploration of what that might mean in sex education programmes. Klein points to "goals for reducing undesirable sex differences (discrimination) and stereotyping during the education process and in the desired educational and societal outcomes" (Klein, 1987, p. 5). However, although the aim of establishing sex-equitable education may be all but universally acceptable, it is not so clear how that might be actualized. Teachers and educators need to become aware of the ways that the taken for granted meanings and customs reflect and establish systemic discrimination. Whatley has proposed goals for a sex-equitable sex education which include the elimination of biological determinism and a redefinition of sexuality. She proposes that sexuality be understood to include a wider variety of sexual expression and she calls for the elimination of a double standard for sexual behavior and responsibility. She places sexuality education in a wider cultural and social context and points out the need to educate against violence (Whatley, 1987, p. 68-69). Similar kinds of goals can be identified which will counteract the discrimination in sex education programmes based upon sexual orientation. However, before these goals can be effectively introduced into sex education curricula, teachers need to become aware of the way that accepted practices and beliefs reflect sexist and homophobic attitudes and how their own attitudes and assumptions have been influenced by the dominant discourses, that is, teachers need to become critical knowers.

In spite of the growing awareness of the negative impact of homophobia on individuals' lives and in the society, James Sears points out that there is deeply rooted resistance to the introduction of the topic of homosexuality into the school curriculum. He points out that there is a need to include the discussion of homosexuality in the school, but the position that this is a deviant lifestyle which should be tolerated, fails to challenge the categorical thinking about sexual orientation (1992). The categorical thinking which needs to be challenged is the categorical thinking of both teachers and students who have learned the taken for granted meanings which are carried in the social knowledge of the culture and in the educational discourse. In order to be free of the social knowledge which we have learned in the past so that we might be free to take responsibility for the future, both teachers and students need to become engaged in a critical inquiry. Teachers in a sex education programme need to reflect upon the understandings of gender and of sexual relationships which are predominant in the society and which are carried in the formal and the informal curriculum so that the curriculum of the sex education programme may become a critical inquiry.

Since gender and issues of sexual orientation have been the subjects of a critical inquiry, there may be an assumption that we now know how to speak about these areas and how we should act. The demand for a particular way of speaking or of certain kinds of behavior is not a demand for a critical perspective. A critical perspective requires an ongoing inquiry about the choices we have made, including the choices we have made to institute 'sex-equitable education' and how they have been put into practice for, no matter who we are, we cannot have taken everything into account and we do not yet know what the consequences will be.

The question of how students can be encouraged or taught to raise critical questions about sexuality is a different question than the question about whether critical thought *has been* brought to the selection and to the teaching of the material. It is more closely related to the question about whether a continuing critical attitude can be brought to our understandings. Students need to learn to participate in a critical inquiry which can raise questions about the taken for granted meanings and which can examine the processes by which our social and sexual reality is shaped so that they can engage in the question of how we might live. "The empowerment of students means encouraging them to explore

and analyze the forces acting upon their lives. It means respecting and legitimating students' own voices in the classroom" (Weiler, 1988, p.152). However, although students need to learn how to participate in an exchange, students also need to learn to recognize the way their voices have been shaped within their social and historical context, to learn how to reflect upon the understandings which they have, and to hear other points of view.

Lynn Phillips and Michelle Fine (1992) point out that the dangers of teaching to a particular outcome or of imposing views have been recognized by critical educators, yet simply to state all options and to provide students with a sense of autonomy makes little sense for students will choose from the perspective which they have gained from the particular circumstances in which they have lived. Their perspective will have been shaped by their own experiences in the family, the community and the larger society. They do not bring an unencumbered, disembodied and impartial thought to alternatives. Adolescents, like the rest of society, may support homophobic, male-centred biological notions of sexuality, materialistic ideals and individualistic, competitive and performance-oriented understandings of sexuality. They may not recognize or they may excuse date rape (Mercer, 1988) and they may participate in sexual harassment of their classmates of the same sex or of the opposite sex.

We are concerned, further, that the liberal strategy of "giving students information and a sense of entitlement, and then leaving them alone to decide" essentially reifies an androcentric notion that development, decisions, and moral dilemmas are worked out within the minds of isolated, autonomous individuals, rather than in the context of relationships, responsibilities, conversations, and consequences. (Phillips & Fine, 1992, p. 247)

The definitions of date rape and of sexual harassment cannot be specified clearly (Cohen, 1991) and a judgment about whether a particular event constitutes one or the other will depend very much on the perspective of the individual who is asked. If date rape or sexual harassment are defined specifically, the definition is either too narrow and fails to prevent harm or too wide and prevents the negotiation of relationship. An analysis of the ambiguities involved is necessary before students can respond to questions about these topics. An examination of the complexities of the issues, of the context of patriarchy, of

the stereotypical expectations of male and female behavior and of the ways that different individuals interpret the same events can enlarge the students' understandings of these situations and may free them from their 'opinions'.¹⁹

The study of a variety of cultural perspectives may allow students to realize that there are many ways of living in the world and many ways of understanding gender and sexuality. At best, such a recognition can free students from the belief that there is a single or a 'natural' way of being male or of being female or of being sexual. At worst, we judge the understandings or practices of other cultures by comparing them to our own without questioning our own assumptions, and, by imposing our own perspective we repeat a variety of cultural imperialism. Every culture expresses both the best and the worst of a complex world view, which contains understandings of the nature and purpose of human beings as well as of gender and of sexuality and every culture reveals contradictions between its highest ideals and the lived reality of individuals' lives. If it is possible to see that other people have made different choices and students can begin to see the reasons and the consequences of these choices, these same methods can be brought to a study of our own societal understandings and practices. No social organization is without discourse, yet a reflection upon the contradictions which are present in our lives and which shape our social relationships can bring a new relationship to that situation through critical knowledge.

The recognition that our understandings of gender and of sexuality and the practices associated with these are learned within the social context and that they might be other than they are raises questions about how our particular ways of seeing and ways of doing have become accepted, about who benefits and who suffers, about whether and how we could effect changes intentionally and how we can acknowledge responsibility for the expected and the unexpected consequences of our choices. As I pointed out above, "critical thought, in the most general sense, is the manifestation of the human possibility and responsibility to relate to the world in an evaluative and reflective manner" (p. 102).

¹⁹ We may believe that the factual information we have could be proved wrong, that the arguments or the reasoning we have relied on could be improved, that we do not have all the relevant data, but we will be unlikely to allow that our 'opinion' needs to be revised or that our perspective might be enlarged, perhaps because we imagine it to be 'a thing' we have and own – or as Mill noted, because there are feelings involved.

Although it cannot not be shaped by our assumptions, values and goals, it is ideally characterized by a persistent inquiry into and questioning of the assumptions, values and goals which shape our lives, individually and collectively. The recognition that we might make choices which are neither arbitrary nor compulsory is a recognition of the possibility of human autonomy and responsibility. The recognition that our actions will have effects for ourselves and for others is a recognition of our situation in lived time in a social setting. The recognition of the responsibility we have for the intended and the unintended consequences of our choices, which demand a continuing evaluative reflection, characterizes our human freedom.

The educational challenge "to press students to challenge and reframe their own, as well as others', constructed meanings" (Phillips & Fine, 1992, p. 248), to accept the responsibility of their own human autonomy and to understand the complexity of social interactions is the challenge to encourage students to become critical knowers. Although our freedom is limited by our situation and by our social context, it can be expressed only from that situation and within a social context. The situation and the context need to be examined and questioned.

If we, as feminist theorists and educators, have anything to impart, it is the capacity and courage to look critically at social arrangements, to chart out spaces for rigorous analyses of power, and to seek out intellectual and political surprises. Perhaps this is the greatest gift we can give our students – the invitation to interrupt the structured silences that deprive them of the critical sexuality education they so desperately need and deserve. (Phillips & Fine, 1992, p.249)

Teachers are gendered individuals raised in a specific historical environment, they understand the world from a particular perspective which carries with it the social meanings learned in the societal context. They do not and cannot bring a disinterested and neutral standpoint to the exchange. The educational challenge to engage students in an inquiry about their social and sexual context requires a willingness on the part of educators to engage in that inquiry as well. Education which includes education for critical thought can become a "practice of freedom". Freire's problem posing method explains the need for an on-going dialogue between students and teachers. The students need to become critical co-investigators with the teacher in an education which "strives for the emergence

of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (Freire, 1974, p. 68). He points out that a continuing reflection is the result of this dialogue in which "the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and on the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action" (p. 71). Freire's method of dialogue and the emphasis on the need to interrogate the reality of the situation is reminiscent of the Socratic method. Socrates, an earlier revolutionary, had established the method of inquiry as the method of education for free human beings, but the practice of freedom needs to be initiated again and again.

* * *

Judgment and choice depend upon ethical considerations. In the next chapter I discuss ethical knowledge, which is concerned with judgments about the decisions which are made by individuals and by the political relationships which rule. The question of the development or the education of ethical knowledge requires an understanding of the levels of ethical response. What constitutes a better quality of ethical response? How do we determine whether an individual or a political decision is ethical or not? I discuss the two modes of moral reasoning which have approached this question through the ethic of rights and a concern for principles of justice and the ethic of responsibility and an emphasis on the need for caring relationships to show that these ways of determining moral value are not contradictory and that both of these need to be developed so that we can act rightly as individuals and collectively in the larger social context.

Chapter Six

Ethical Knowledge

Love, wisdom and courage are the most important way of a superior person – the virtues that are universally binding

Confucius *The Analects* 9.28

Understanding ethical knowledge

Ethical knowledge is concerned with human well-being. Our aims and our aspirations and the ways we undertake to achieve them reveal our understandings of value. If the knowledge of our wish or of what is worthwhile guides our choices and informs our actions, then we may act with reason and therefore responsibly. Otherwise, our actions are a result of our reactions to the situations we meet. Our actions can be moral acts only because we have the possibility of choice. And, only when we have the possibility of choice can we be responsible for our actions. Actions which are compelled by external forces or which are merely the effect of prior causes are not free and in that sense they are amoral. Our choices, our plans for the future and our judgments about the past or about future plans reflect our ethical beliefs and understandings. Decisions made within the social context are political decisions and these too reflect our value judgments.

Classically, politics has been considered to be continuous with ethics. Political decisions have been expected to reflect the best understandings of the good and just life in the society. And we still expect this. We expect the law to be just rather than either merely expedient for some or popular with the majority; we are concerned about the character of politicians; we demand that public figures be held accountable for their political decisions;¹ and, education is considered essential for the citizens in a democracy

¹ See Plato's *The Republic*. Plato's conception of the philosopher-king, as one who could rule wisely and without self-interest, in the utopian society described in *The Republic*, corresponds to the ideal of those who take responsibility in the modern myth of the future presented in "Star Trek".

so that they might be better able to participate in the decision making process which will be in the best interests of the larger social unit.

It was pointed out in Chapter Five that critical knowledge is related to ethical knowledge. A critical inquiry about the current social reality is motivated by ethical concerns, but it also raises questions about the future and requires a proposal for action which will bring about a new social order. However, the decisions which are made need to be subjected to critique and to an ongoing evaluation, for if we have the possibility of making choices and the power to implement them, we need to be prepared to take responsibility for their consequences.

Education is concerned with the question of how we might live. Carr and Kemmis point out that educational decisions are moral acts because they can be seen in their social and historical context as facilitating or debilitating progress towards "a more rational and just society" (1986, p.39).² They point out that educational practice as *praxis* (action informed by evaluative thought), must be guided by *phronesis* – the disposition to act truly and rightly (p.38), although we often are occupied with technical questions of how to produce a certain outcome or with interpretive questions about the meanings of terms, actions and processes. The ethical question "How ought we to live?" is oriented towards the future, but it is a question which can only be raised in the context of the present which has been formed as a result of past events. It is a question which must be raised both individually and collectively. We need to ask 'How should I live?' and 'How might our society be organized?'. These questions are always about ourselves in relation to others, for although each of us exists separately, we also live in a social context.

Educators have to address questions of ethics in two different ways – in making educational decisions, about policy and curriculum, for example, and in developing the students' ability to make ethical choices wisely. Administrators and teachers need to make the best choices they can in the specific context in which they act, and educators also need

² The meanings of the terms *rational* and *just* are not unambiguous. When the meanings of these terms are specified and the practical implications of the specific understandings are evident, we may not agree that this represents the kind of society we wish, yet Carr and Kemmis clearly mean to speak of an ideal society.

to educate the students so that they can become morally responsible for their actions. Every educational programme conveys the values of the culture – especially the values which are held by those in positions of power within the culture and within the education system. The values of the society and of the teachers are expressed in the curriculum decisions and in the ways the practical details of the process are realized – in the stated goals and in the hidden curriculum. This is not surprising, for educators themselves have learned the values and the understandings of the society as they have grown up to become participating members of the society. Critical educational theorists have pointed out that the dominant understandings of race, class and gender are reproduced in schools as the cognitive content of the courses is conveyed. As well, the values of individualism, of capitalism, and of a belief in science shape the knowledge which is learned. But these values which are held in the language and in the programmes are generally conveyed unreflectively – without a conscious decision and without a recognition of the way the understandings which are assumed, construct the social reality and affect the lives of the students. A critical inquiry may identify some of the assumptions which have influenced the discourse in the society and in the schools. Once the hidden curriculum is made visible, questions can be raised about what we wish in relation to these issues. For example, since the feminist critique has pointed out the way that patriarchal assumptions have shaped students' school experiences, questions can be asked about how we can re-think and re-present gender.

As students become responsible for their own decisions they will make choices which will reflect their position with respect to the values they have been given through their experiences in the family, in the school and in the larger society. Understandings are reproduced and produced.³ Each of us is involved in making ethical decisions which will have consequences for our own lives and for others and all of our decisions will reflect the level of our wisdom, courage and compassion. Without a reflective and critical inquiry about the understandings which guide our decisions, we will not be able to be free of the

³ There need not be a contradiction between the approaches which emphasize the way that existing understandings and relationships are reproduced and those which emphasize the way that meanings are produced through a resistance to the imposition of those understandings. Both processes take place. For a discussion of the theoretical approaches to these see, K. Weiler (1988).

force of the assumptions which influence our choices, and without a recognition that we are responsible for the consequences of our decisions, we will not understand the importance of being aware of the beliefs which affect our choices. The claim that we ought to engage in a critical evaluation of our social relations and of our individual responses is an ethical claim, based on the belief that a critical reflection upon our situation is a human responsibility.

It was pointed out above (p. 126) that the question of how students can be invited or taught to raise critical questions about sexuality is a different question than the question about whether critical thought *has been* brought to the selection and to the teaching of the material, although both kinds of questions are needed. Similarly, questions about how students can be made aware of the fact that they are ethical decision makers and that it makes a difference – that is, that they are responsible – and how they can be helped to become wiser, more compassionate and more courageous members of the society, are different questions than the questions about what kind of values are carried in the educational programmes which reflect and shape our social reality. These aspects are not unrelated. Educational policy is affected by and contributes to the cultural emphasis on individualism and on instrumental decision-making and education participates in the perpetuation of the differential treatment of individuals identified by gender, race and class. These issues need to be addressed, but education must also be concerned with the development of the students' level of ethical thought and care for others. The individual's disposition to act truly and rightly is shaped in a social context, that is, it will depend upon the disposition of the others who have a significant influence in that context as well as upon the content of the curriculum and upon the form of the social arrangements in that setting. As the individual's ethical concern develops he or she will become more interested in issues of social justice. The individual's understanding of ethical responsibility and the concern for social justice in the community are intimately connected.

Ethical knowing

But what is it to act truly and rightly? If we are free to decide, how do we decide? Our decisions will be affected by our understandings of a rational and a just society, but also by what and who we are willing to take into account. In her studies of the development of ethical knowledge, Carol Gilligan has outlined "two ways of speaking

about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self" (1982, p. 1). One of these she describes, following Kohlberg (1980), as being a morality of rights which refers to principles of justice and which celebrates individual autonomy. The other, she calls 'an ethic of care and responsibility' which emphasizes connections between people and which understands that moral decisions always involve and affect relationships. Kohlberg assumed that an application of principles of justice constitutes the highest level of ethical understanding and he described the stages in the development of moral reasoning in relation to this. He identified six stages in the development of moral reasoning from the lowest level where an individual's decisions are motivated by the desire for reward or by the fear of punishment to the sixth, the universal ethical principle orientation, where right "is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen *ethical principles* appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency" (Kohlberg, 1980, p. 93). He confirmed these stages in studies of males and then used this model as a measure of moral development in males and females. Although Gilligan was very much influenced by this work, she pointed out the gender bias which she claimed resulted in a partial understanding of the development of moral reasoning. Gilligan's work showed the value of the moral perspective which is concerned with the connections between individuals and which is more frequently a feminine response to moral questions. Speaking to women about their moral perspective she found evidence of levels of development of an ethic of care from "an initial concern with survival to a focus on goodness and finally to a reflective understanding of care as the most adequate guide to the resolution of conflicts in human relationships" (p 105). The recognition of these different kinds of moral reasoning reveals the need for a moral understanding which includes both of these, for although each of them appears to have a different emphasis, the highest level of ethical knowledge requires both. Gilligan points out that the development of the first kind of ethical reasoning is more frequently associated with males while the ethical development of females is more often related to the second. A recognition of these two distinct ways does not require a choice between them, but can point to the value of each.

To understand how the tension between responsibilities and rights sustains the dialectic of human development is to see the integrity of two disparate modes of experience that are in the end connected. While an ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality – that everyone should be treated the same – an ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence –

that no one should be hurt. In the representation of maturity, both perspectives converge in the realization that just as inequality adversely affects both parties in an unequal perspective, so too violence is destructive for everyone involved. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 174)

A discussion of one or the other represents a partial understanding of morality. Although each of these emphasizes a different aspect of moral concern, a full human life requires both. An association of one of these modes of ethical knowing with males and the other with females in spite of the fact that males also exist in relationship and females are also concerned with understanding and applying principles of justice impartially maintains stereotypes which characterize both males and females partially.⁴ Every individual is separate from and connected to others and both aspects need to be acknowledged. As Muriel Dimen points out "To attempt only individualizing is to become emotionally isolated; to attempt only relatedness is to lose the self by merging with someone else" (1989, p. 40). Each of the modes of ethical decision making emphasizes an essential aspect of morality. Clarity of thought and emotional generosity are both required at the highest level of ethical knowledge. Wisdom and compassion, which identify this level of understanding, are not separate traits but contain one another. When a sharp distinction is made between thought and feeling, the concepts in these pairs may seem to be opposed to one another, however, practically speaking, the development of knowledge (see Chapter Two) and of ethical understanding requires the participation of both thought and feeling.

⁴ Just as different individuals may rely more on one or other of these two kinds of moral response, different cultures may also be associated with one or the other. The kind of ethical reasoning relied upon by individuals or within cultures is a matter of emphasis maintained by custom, belief and discourse. Modern western culture is characterized by a widespread emphasis on the individual and upon separate and personal autonomy, by the effort to guarantee the rights of individuals, by an assertion of the equality of individuals, and by a dependence on the human intellectual ability which can ascertain principles of rationality and which can demand and evaluate evidence. In more traditional cultures, such as in India, the different responsibilities which individuals have to maintain relationships and order in the family and in the society are emphasized. Here, spiritual insight, rather than the cognitive ability is regarded to be the highest human faculty. However, an emphasis on either the separateness of individuals or the interrelatedness of individuals which does not acknowledge the importance of the other aspect, cannot encompass the human situation adequately.

If our actions and the decisions we make, individually or as a society, are motivated by a low level of ethical concern and judgment, by self-interest and by the wish to gain immediate sensuous pleasure or to escape personal discomfort at all costs, or by the wish to maximize our own profit and to minimize our losses, then our relationships will be relationships of control, maintained by personal reward and punishment, whether we are, or our group is, in the position of power or not – that is, whether we control or are controlled.

We are both separate and connected. "We know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and ...we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 63). Similarly, we are both free and responsible. We are free only when we have the possibility of choice but we are responsible because we have the possibility of choice. The development of ethical knowledge is a result of and a cause of both the deepening of a sense of justice and an increasing realization of our relationship with others. Education of the ethical sense is for the sake of this development.

Ethical knowledge and sex

Because issues of sexuality are issues of relationship, there are always political and ethical aspects and implications of the choices which are made. The personal ethical questions "What should I do?" and "How can I act rightly?" arise within an ongoing political and cultural context in relation to the immediate social circumstances and personal experiences. The decisions we make affect not only our own situation, but also that of others and collectively our decisions shape the social and political reality. Our social and sexual reality reflects our collective understandings of principles of justice and the level of care which exists amongst individuals which has been formalized institutionally. Individuals may then ask, "Do our social policies and institutional practices promote justice and well-being?" and "How can they be changed so that they will better serve the needs of all the citizens?"

The cultural belief in individualism has undermined the force of sexual moral guidelines established by conventional morality and by religious traditions. But how then

do we choose? As the unquestioned authority of traditionally accepted moral judgments about sexual behaviors decreases, a critical examination of their implications is possible, but does not necessarily follow. We want to find or to give our own answers to personal ethical questions and yet since, to the extent we have the possibility of choosing, we are responsible for the decisions we make and for their consequences for ourselves and for others, we cannot choose simply on the basis of self-interested sensuous pleasure. Personal freedom and individual autonomy are not equivalent to license, rather they imply responsibility.

The emphasis on the need for freedom from external constraints and controls is related to the belief that a just society ensures this negative freedom for all its citizens. But a just society is not ensured if the citizens are free from external controls and constraints; a just society also depends upon and attempts to ensure right relationships, based upon principles of justice and upon caring, amongst the members of the society. An ethical perspective on sexual and social relationships emphasizes the need to protect rights and to prevent harms, to avoid undesirable consequences and to reduce the dangers to individuals, but an ethical perspective which is concerned with human well-being in the largest sense also needs to acknowledge and support the real pleasure and delight which can be found in relationships. Within relationships and more particularly in those relationships which have a physical and an emotional intimacy, individuals can find a connection with one another which affirms them and gladdens them. The physical, emotional, spiritual and social well-being of individuals and of the society is reflected in and affected by the quality of the relationships which exist between individuals as private individuals and among individuals as members of the society. Family relationships, social customs, institutional practices, public policies, and community values reveal our choices and shape our choices.

The recognition that sexuality is socially constructed can free us from the belief that there is one true or correct understanding of sexuality, and the recognition that people are different can free us from the belief that there is one true or correct way of expressing sexuality. Different genders, different sexual orientations, different experiences and different interests result in an infinite variety of sexualities. The recognition of the fact of the variety of human response and of sexual diversity may free us from expectation and free us for exploration. The recognition of sexual diversity reveals the inadequacy of the

rigid prescriptions of traditional morality and of the narrow expectations of what has been legitimated as normal behavior, but the recognition of the fact of a wide variety of sexual desires and experiences makes the questions about sexual choice more difficult.

Jeffrey Weeks (1986) has presented an outline for an ethics of sexuality which incorporates some of these aspects. In contrast to the position which focuses on the morality or the normality of sexual acts and identifies some behaviors, occasions, partners, and positions as right or 'normal', Weeks proposes a sexual morality which acknowledges a plurality of perspectives about sexuality and which emphasizes the importance of relations rather than acts, and of meaning and context rather than rules. He argues that although sex has become an arena for thinking about and expressing personal identity, "sex only attains meaning in social relations, which implies that we can only make appropriate choices around sexuality by understanding its social and political context" (Weeks, 1986, p. 81). He states that this perspective involves "attempting to understand the power relations at play, the subtle coercions which limit the possibilities of choice, the likely impact of a particular sexual activity on the self and others, as well as the possibilities of pleasure and personal autonomy that may be encouraged" (Weeks, 1986, p. 82). In this discussion, Weeks points out that sexual morality requires an ongoing critical inquiry.

Yet he also acknowledges that there are difficulties involved with the radical moral pluralism he proposes related to the problems of how to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors which he claims are inescapably political questions and to the ethical questions about what the place of sex should be in our lives. So although he ends with the statement that "A genuine acceptance of moral pluralism seems the only appropriate starting point" (Weeks, 1986, p. 120), he admits it leaves the important questions wide open – to debate, to negotiation, and political choice. It requires an ongoing vigilance, an ongoing awareness and willingness to take responsibility for our choices and their consequences, it requires an openness and a willingness to listen to others – it requires an ongoing critical and ethical engagement.

Gary Kinsman reiterates Weeks' position of moral pluralism and claims that:

An emphasis on choice, relationship, context, pleasure, social equality, and consent – taken together – could provide the basis for alternative sexual policies in a broader socialist and feminist transformation of society, as opposed to the public-private, adult-youth, normal-deviant, heterosexual-homosexual, male-female, act-specific categories that now dominate. Sexuality in the context of other social changes could become a terrain for communication, play, desire and pleasure. (Kinsman, 1987, p. 229)

An ethical position may be realized by combining Weeks' understanding of the necessity of accepting the fact of a diversity of perspectives about sexuality and the importance of choice at the same time as insisting upon the need to accept responsibility for the consequences of our choices and to maintain an ongoing critical inquiry about the way meanings of sexual relationships have been constructed. This position recognizes that sexual choice is not only a matter of individual decision, but that it is affected by and affects others and that it is formed within and also influences our social reality. It recognizes that sexual freedom can only be ethical if it is enacted responsibly and this requires the development of an ethical understanding, that is, a growth of understanding and of care – of wisdom and compassion. This perspective does not name particular acts as moral or immoral, rather it requires an ongoing open-minded reflective evaluation of actions in the context of social relations which requires care for individuals and a concern for principles of justice.

It is perhaps the case that sexual activity, whether it be homosexual or heterosexual, is immoral when it expresses the trivialization of human beings, or their domination and betrayal, rather than supporting presence, fidelity, and liberation. (D. Roy, 1988, p. 317; quoted in King, 1989, p. 72)

This proposal represents a move away from an identification of acts as right or wrong. It values choice which is made in the context of relationships, which depends upon mutual consent and takes account of concerns for social equality. This position acknowledges pleasure and yet it recognizes the fact that our choices are shaped within a social context. Our choices affect our lives, the lives of others and shape the social reality, therefore we also need to be aware of the responsibility we have for making ethical choices.

Ethical concerns and discourse in sex education

The attitudes and assumptions which express and shape our social knowledge, our understandings of meaning and of value are revealed and conveyed through the linguistic, institutional and customary practices, that is, through the prevailing discourses. Through a reflective inquiry, critique has identified many different kinds of discourse which characterize our social relationships. Feminist and socialist critiques have emphasized the importance of examining the link between power and knowledge and of questioning the ruling practices which operate from and which maintain asymmetrical power relationships. Since these practices result in the domination of one group over another and the marginalization and devaluation of some people, the identification and the analysis of the ways they operate is related to the ethical concern for justice and fairness. Therefore, issues of race, gender, class, and the treatment of minority groups have been important topics of critique and they have highlighted important ethical issues in the society.

The discourses of patriarchy and of normative heterosexism and the impact these discourses have had upon our understandings of sexuality and upon our sexual relationships were discussed in Chapter Five. Analyses of these discourses and the critique of the assumptions which have been taken for granted are motivated by a general ethical concern and not only because these pervasive ideologies affect our sexual relationships. Critique has recognized that these beliefs deny the possibility of full participation in the society to some individuals based upon the possession of some trait, such as gender or race, which is irrelevant to what their contribution in the social order might be. These exclusionary practices, which effectively name certain individuals as *other*, as abnormal, as deviant or as less able, marginalize, devalue and disempower the members of the groups so identified and lead to the possibility that they will be exploited, including being sexually exploited, by those in the dominant and powerful groups. It is clear that this ghettoization has deleterious effects upon the lives of the members of the subordinate groups, but it is also sometimes recognized that the lives of members of the dominant groups are affected adversely.

I have not included a discussion of the analyses of the historical and cultural assumptions of race and class and of their effects upon the understandings of sexual relationships, for the situation becomes extraordinarily complex when the way these

discourses and the discourses of gender and sexual orientation affect one another are taken into account. A further exploration of the consequences of these interactions is beyond the scope or the intention of this thesis. However, within any sex education programme, the fact of this complexity needs to be recognized and acknowledged and aspects of it need to be explored more thoroughly. hooks (1992) discusses the ways that the history of Afro-American slavery and the current racism affect the understandings and the experiences of black males. She points out that contemporary black men have been shaped by the narrow representations of black masculinity and the myths and the stereotypes which have been perpetuated (p. 89). Similarly, black female sexuality has been constructed within a racist culture and hooks asks 'How and when will black females assert sexual agency in ways that liberate us from colonized desire, of racist/sexist imagery and practice?' (1992, p. 75). She points to the need of an interrogation, which begins from the experience of black women, of the representations of black female sexuality in the popular culture (1992, p. 76).

McLaren (1989) writes about a group of disadvantaged females he taught in an inner city school, many of whom were West Indian and therefore had different cultural and historical backgrounds than their Canadian middle-class teachers and peers. Violence, poverty, cultural displacement, and racism were often part of their experience. "Much of their abrasive behavior was a direct rejection of middle-class propriety...These girls fatalistically accepted their position in society as members of a subordinate class and gender grouping...One way in which girls combat class-bound and oppressive features of school is to assert their 'femaleness' to replace the officially sanctioned code of neatness, diligence, application, femininity, passivity, and so on, with one that is more womanly, even sexual, in nature" (1989, p. 217). Through their actions, these young women resist the contradictory myth that schools function as agents of equality, yet somehow they continue to see themselves as 'stupid or something' if they do not succeed in a world dominated by middle class values. Gaskell (1982) has documented the way that young women make life choices, which will always be related to sexual choices, based upon a realistic assessment of the possibilities available to them. However, the possibilities which are available to individuals in the society depend upon what their situation in the social context is. The situation of every individual will be influenced by the assumptions about gender, race and class and the way that these are interpreted in the cultural discourses.

Sexual violence and sexual exploitation of vulnerable individuals, negative and restrictive stereotypes, and feelings of frustration and low self-esteem of those who do not match the normative expectations are related to the effects of patriarchal assumptions and normative heterosexism. When the negative consequences of these discourses are identified, the need for change at very fundamental levels of social interaction becomes evident. The proposals for change and the methods which are used to implement these changes, in individuals or in the society, will reflect the ethical perspective of those who are able and willing to make the changes. However, many of the consequences of our decisions will be unforeseen. The choices which are being made and which will be made will also need to be critically evaluated for the questions 'What have we done?', 'How can our lives be improved?' and 'What have we missed?' must be asked again and again.

The recognition of the negative consequences of the dominant discourses of patriarchy and of normative heterosexism has motivated a critical analysis of the curricula of some existent sex education programmes. This inquiry has revealed that cultural assumptions are also carried and conveyed in these programmes in the discourses of patriarchy and of normative heterosexism; in the discourses of liberalism, of individualism and of a belief in science; in the protective discourse, the romantic discourse, the discourses of violence, of victimization, of individual morality, or of traditional morality. Each of these discourses has different implications for males and for females and each of them affects those who occupy different positions in the society differently, for the discourses of gender, race, class and of sexual orientation, which grant status, intersect with all the other discourses. The critical inquiry which identifies the characteristics of these discourses and their consequences is motivated by the ethical interest in the quality of our lives and asks how the choices, which have resulted in these ways of speaking and ways of acting, have been made and how they affect us and our ability to choose.

The protective discourse (see Chapter Three) relies upon scientific knowledge and expects that a knowledge of the laws of process will allow the desired results to be produced, if the necessary skills have been learned. The optimism in the possibility of control over physical processes is often paralleled by a belief in the possibility of control over emotional processes which is represented in the romantic discourse, conveyed in the world of advertising and in some courses such as *Personal Development and Relationships* (see Chapter Four). The idea that every person is a separate and

autonomous individual who has complete freedom of choice and who will be able to make rational decisions based upon the available empirical evidence – and that we will all be able to achieve what we wish to achieve – is related to the discourses of individualism and libertarianism (see Chapter Four).

Concern for social justice: The discourses of individualism and of libertarianism are of ethical concern, primarily because they do not address the ethical issues of the social reality as it is and as it has been, but instead emphasize the hope for future progress. The social relations are accepted as unproblematic in these discourses. It is expected that physical and emotional problems will be able to be solved through biomedical and psychological intervention and with personal initiative. The expectation that knowledge will allow us to get what we desire assumes that our desires are unproblematic. Questions of value are regarded as separate from questions about facts and about processes. Knowledge about facts and about processes is regarded as knowledge of the world or as objective knowledge which can be questioned, proved true and advanced, whereas value judgments are considered to be personal and subjective. Although this dichotomy cannot be sustained,⁵ for our understandings of value influence our empirical knowledge and our values are learned in a context, the belief that this separation is real leaves our values unquestioned and largely uneducated.

As pointed out above (p. 84-87), the language of radical individualism may lead to experiences of separation and loneliness for it cannot adequately speak to concerns of relationship. Techno-rational and romantic discourses do not comprehend and address the very real problems of systemic injustice, of domination and exploitation, of violence, of alienation, which are not just problems that some people, who should be able to do something about them, have. The discourses which are based upon the expectation that all problems may be solved, may seem naive, irrelevant, and unrealistic to those people who have lived with these problems, who have had experiences of violence or who know that these dangers exist. These discourses speak about the possibilities of choice for individuals who have personal power in the society in which they live and these discourses are spoken by those who have privilege in the society. The language of such discourses

⁵ See Chapter Two.

speaks to those who are able to make decisions and to act upon them and does not make sense to the others. Everything is left as it is. The discourse which assumes the possibility of individual initiative and the ability of individuals to effect change may make those who do not have power in the society feel that they are not as they should be and that they have failed, or, it may make those who do have power feel that the others are not as they should be and that they have failed. In either case, the social relations and the assumptions which shape them are not questioned.

Critical pedagogy has discussed the myth that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed,⁶ yet the belief in the egalitarian ideal keeps us from seeing what the actual situation is for many individuals in the society. The failure to raise the questions which need to be asked about the implications of our linguistic, institutional and customary practices and the social relations which they support and about the violence and the despair which exist, is at the least, morally naive or blind, or, as viewed more sternly, morally reprehensible, for the discourses which rule perpetuate the assumptions and the attitudes which lead to the situations of injustice and of exploitation and alienation.

On the other hand, the discourses of violence and of victimization and the discourse of morality which views sex as sin emphasize the possibility of dangerous consequences of sexual relationships. There is an important difference between those discourses which emphasise the negative forms of sexual relationships as they have been shaped by patriarchal and heterosexist assumptions and the discourses which regard sexuality and the desires of the body as fundamentally dangerous. The former may speak with anger about the situation and about the assumptions and the practices which have led to these unacceptable forms of sexual relationships and sees the need for change while the latter may speak with anger or disgust about sexual relationships which are not within a monogamous marital relationships and sees the need for limiting sexual expression. An identification of situations which are unacceptable and an understanding of the causes of these situations are important features of social change. However, the identification of

⁶ The understanding of 'success' varies with respect to the context. It may refer to economic success, personal happiness, romance, health or whatever members of the audience wish it to mean. For discussions of the myth of universal opportunity in education see McLaren (1989), Bastion et al (1993) and Hodgkinson (1993).

another way of living and the understanding of the steps which might be taken to implement the alternatives are also important features of social change. As it was pointed out in Chapter Five, a critique of the past must be accompanied by a hope for the future and both must be grounded in an understanding of the processes involved.

The discourses which identify the negative consequences of sexual relationships are often spoken by those who have experienced violence, who have been victimized or exploited, or who have been threatened with punishment or those who have been hurt or angered or made to feel fearful or ashamed and by those who recognize the features of the social relations which lead to these kind of injustices. The ones who have been most victimized will have been silenced (Belenky et al, 1986) for voice reveals a power to express and to act. The ones who have been made fearful or who have been silenced need first of all to be helped to find voice so that they can identify their situation. This voice may then express anger which marks the gaining of agency. The energy which is available in this anger may then be transformed to become productive of change. The identification of unacceptable situations, which may produce attitudes of fear or of anger is not enough. A further analysis of the situation, a recognition and a naming of alternatives and a practical understanding of process are also required. If the discourses only identify the negative consequences of sexual relationships they may foster fear and produce negative attitudes about sex, about men, about women, about heterosexuals, or about relationships, they may produce feelings of victimization or of powerlessness and despair, or they may promote attitudes of blame or defensiveness. However, if they are related to an analysis of the social relationships which have led to these results and to an understanding of the possibility of different forms of relationships, they may lead to a desire for individual and social change.

As I have argued in this thesis, what is learned about sexuality is not only a matter of information. Assumptions about sexuality are carried in the meanings which are learned as we learn empirical and practical knowledge. This social knowledge, which influences our attitudes towards sex and sexual relationships, carries prescriptive weight. Attitudes of fear, shame, anger and blame do not characterize a rich and abundant life. Attitudes of hope, which are based on a realistic assessment of the present situation, a realization of the possibility to effect change and an acceptance of the responsibility to evaluate and to improve the social situation characterize a good life.

The discourses of violence and of victimization and of individual morality often carry a stern moral tone, either in condemning injustices arising from certain relationships or in condemning certain sexual behaviors, but those who make use of these discourses are morally culpable if as a result of these discourses individuals do not use safer sex practices or if they become negative and fearful about their own sexuality. As discussed earlier, in Chapter Three, erotophobic adolescents are less likely to use contraceptives or prophylaxes and they are more likely to rely on alcohol to reduce their inhibitions about sexual encounters than erotophilic adolescents are, but they do not abstain from sexual intercourse. Fine (1988) has pointed out that a discussion of desire is often omitted from these discourses (See Chapter Five). This may leave students with the impression that their experiences of desire are something to be ashamed of and/or that they cannot be spoken about. Desire, however, may be identified, queried, celebrated, and educated.

The privileged members of the society, especially the white upper and middle-class individuals who have not been victims frequently rely upon the protective discourse, the romantic discourse and the discourse of individualism. On the other hand, the discourses of violence and of victimization are often the discourses of individuals who have experienced, know of or fear sexual assault or abuse. If these discourses are spoken by two different groups, they may seem to be discourses of those who belong to two different solitudes who do not acknowledge or hear one another. In that case everything remains as it is.

Each of these perspectives is partial. However, if a critical perspective can be brought to bear on the discourses that different individuals rely upon, the limitations of each perspective may be made evident. The discourses which identify the negative consequences of sexual relationships and of the social relations as they stand and the discourses which speak of the positive results of sexual relationships and of our ability to control the results are both needed. The presentation of facts which are related to the two clusters of discourse will not, by itself, promote a larger perspective. Unless there is an accompanying analysis which examines the apparent contradictions, students may hear only those aspects which they can personally relate to their own experience. In this case, everything remains as it is. Or the apparent contradictions may seem to invalidate both

discourses.⁷ However, the apparent contradictions may provide the impetus for an inquiry about the way these two discourses might inform one another. Adolescents need to learn the information which they need to protect themselves from disease and unwanted pregnancies, they need to learn the requisite social and practical skills to make use of this knowledge, they need to know that relationships may be loving, supportive and affirming, and that individuals can take responsibility for their actions and make a difference in the world. However, the positive belief in the future needs to be grounded in a clear recognition of the present situation as it is for all the members of the society and an understanding of the way this has developed. This vision can be brought by a critical and ethical perspective which examines the current social and sexual reality and which identifies and traces the roots of those aspects which are unjust, which produce relationships of exploitation and which need to be changed.

As pointed out above (p. 138), a just society attempts to protect the rights of its citizens and to prevent them from being harmed. This requires an acknowledgment of the negative aspects of our society and an analysis of the social relations which have produced them so that they can be changed. But a just society is also interested in promoting the physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being of its citizens, which is reflected in and affected by the quality of the relationships between individuals including the sexual relationships. The discourses of violence and of victimization identify the negative outcomes of the asymmetric power relations in sexual relationships. They identify the kind of relations which need to be transformed so that a movement towards our collective goals, as a society, might be possible.

⁷ The contradictions between the romantic discourse presented in some school programs and the actual experiences of the students may cause the students to regard the programs as irrelevant. Or, the contradictions between the discourse of victimization in a sex education program and the students' experiences of desire and their hope for the future, may cause the students to dismiss the programs as unhelpful (Fine, 1988).

Discourse of desire

The perspective which emphasizes the possibility for positive outcomes of sexual relationships may represent an illusory hope, whereas the perspective which emphasizes the possibility of negative outcomes of sexual relationships may seem to counsel despair. Either perspective alone fails to acknowledge the complexity of our sexuality, as individuals or in the society. Both pleasure and danger characterize our sexual experiences; we have felt both desire and fear; there is the possibility of both affirmation and degradation; of love and of feeling more lonely than when we are alone; of joy and of sorrow. We may hope for freedom from pregnancy or we may hope for conception – and many have hoped for both at different times. We may wish to love and be loved freely, but we may not be able to be free of fear and self-occupation. I may wish and you may not.

Although it may be unspoken, the discourses in sex education programmes which emphasize the positive outcomes of sexual relationships and speak of the possibility of preventing negative consequences and the discourses which emphasize the fact that there are dangers associated with sexual relationships in our society depend upon the wish for an improved quality of life, that is, they are related to our desires. Fine (1988) points to the need to include a discourse of desire in the sex education programmes so that female students might find a connection with their own subjectivity from which they could act, for the acknowledgment and the owning of desire provides a sense of entitlement and of self-esteem for young women who have understood themselves to be victims, who have experiences of being victimized and who do not see themselves as able to take positive action. The identification and the recognition of our desires and of their force may also enable us to take responsibility for our actions.

However, desire itself is not unproblematic. Nor is it simple. Desires are sexual but they are not only sexual. Our desires and our goals are shaped within our social context, influenced by what we have experienced and what we have learned. Sexual desire includes desires for sensuous pleasure and the delight which can be found in body, yours and mine; the emotional and intellectual wish for relationship with another and to live well, the desire to support and to be supported, to know and be known, to be attracted and to be attractive, to love and to be loved; and, for the possibility this delight

and this relationship have for gathering and bringing vitality and energy. Our concerns about sexuality are related to the possibility of pregnancy and the creation of new life, with its attendant dangers, responsibilities and possibilities, both for the parents and the society. We may hope for a child or we may hope that our sexual exchange does not result in a pregnancy. All of these are related to our understandings of gender, of body, and of human purpose and subject to social, political, economic and personal regulations. Our desires may be selfish or they may be base, but on the other hand, they may take others into account and they may be related to the highest ideals of the culture. The way which we choose between conflicting desires will depend upon their relative strength as well as upon our goals. Desires are not the same as goals but they are not unrelated. Since desire motivates our individual actions, our choice of goals and our political decisions, it needs to be subjected to a critical inquiry.

Judith Jordan (1987) has examined the way that desire is socialized differently in males and in females during adolescence. She points out that desire, defined as an individual's feeling of wanting to have some experience or object which will satisfy personal needs or physical appetites, is related to the understanding of the self as a separate and independent entity which is related to the discourse of individualism (p. 1). This corresponds to male desire as it is portrayed in the media where the successful male has exciting and pleasurable experiences as well as power and status. Since desire and sexuality are intimately connected "Sexuality then becomes subsumed into a system of achievement, competition, mastery and performance" (Jordan, 1987, p. 13). "The experience of desire typically [becomes] intertwined with the need to control and exert 'mastery' over or 'to own'" (Jordan, 1987, p. 8). The language of privilege, of rights, of power and control, of separation, of competition, of domination and subordination contains the seeds of violence. A male typically learns this language in a patriarchal system and this language becomes the language of male sexual desire. The stereotypical understanding of masculine desire and of male sexuality which emphasizes conquest and individual performance and which does not acknowledge the need for emotional intimacy is supported by male banter and by images in the media and in pornographic materials.

The understanding of male entitlement is corroborated in the biological discussion of the role of sex hormones in shaping desire. The view that the male sex drive is uncontrollable because of the action of male hormones and that women, who are

understood to have less libido,⁸ should take the responsibility for controlling the level of sexual exchange, provides a biological explanation for interactions which are a result of complex biological-psychological-cultural influences. The assumption that human behavior is biologically determined prevents the status quo from being challenged and a real exploration of the whole range of sexual pleasure. However, as Whatley points out (1988, p.103) the identification of androgen and estrogen as 'male' and as 'female' hormones respectively, is inappropriate for both of these hormones appear and play a central role in the normal functioning of males and of females.

The outlook, that male desire is hormonally driven and largely uncontrollable, has negative consequences for both men and women. Rape and sexual assault or coercion are the most violent outcomes of a belief in masculine sexual entitlement which does not recognize a responsibility for relationship;⁹ but loneliness, alienation and a lack of understanding between men and women may also result from this view of male desire as independent of relationship. The view of desire as biologically determined which justifies male entitlement shapes male and female sexuality. 'The young man who imagines that he needs to prove himself by sexual conquest and by a show of bravado and independence will fear exposing his vulnerability and "the wish to be known and loved becomes a secret, often hidden from the boy himself" (Jordan, 1987, p.12). The male who has believed that he need not be concerned with the development of a capacity to be sensitive to another's needs will be unable to sustain relationships which are important to him

Too often, women get used as pawns in men's quests for acceptance among peers and status within the men's pecking order. I believe for many of us jocks, these lessons somehow got translated into a "man-as-hunter/woman-as-prey" approach to sexual relationships. (Sabo, 1992, p. 323)

⁸ Freud remarked, "The juxtaposition of 'feminine libido' is without justification" (1933a, p.16). In his view, only a passive and sexually masochistic female could be considered a normal female. Freud's perspective has profoundly influenced the biological and the medical understanding of sexuality since then.

⁹ And in extreme cases, the sense of anger when this desire is thwarted may lead to violent assault and to murder. It is not only a sexual desire that is thwarted but a desire to control and these two become conflated.

Women often experience desire in the context of a relationship with another.¹⁰ They are interested in closeness, in tenderness, in emotional intimacy and in being loved by and connected with another. "This evidence does not discount the real physical pleasure of sexual intercourse, of opening deeply to another, and the wonderful abandon of orgasm but does say that the relational context in which these acts and responses occur provides the meaning and joy" (Jordan, 1987, p. 14). Because the common female experience of desire for connection is different from the understanding of male sexual desire, and because his desire, understood this way, is more easily defined and more readily satisfied, a woman's resistance to an impersonal sexual exchange is sometimes attributed to a lack of desire. And since a woman wishes to support the relationship which she desires, she may accommodate a man's desire at the expense of her own and she may end up feeling used and unloved. "The message is reinforced heavily in adolescence: to be female is to learn to accommodate to another's wishes. In a mutually empathic relationship this might take the form of increasing delight for both. But when accommodation meets entitlement, the accommodating person may feel invalidated; as one patient put it, 'I'm the one who doesn't count'" (Jordan, 1987, p. 16). In this kind of exchange where the woman is unable to be clear about the nature of her own desire or she is not heard, she loses her self-esteem and feels isolated and without relationship – the very thing which she desired.

Yet freedom from the assumption of the feminine stereotypical role in sexual behavior does not necessarily mean that women ought to appropriate masculine stereotypical behaviors. A stereotypical masculine understanding of egocentric desire and of sexual relationships is also fundamentally deficient as a model for human relationships. A freedom for sexual license without a concern for relationship is a freedom that many women find unsatisfying. Any ongoing and mutually satisfying relationship depends upon

¹⁰ It is as if he knows what he desires and then tries to find a relationship which will provide it or asks or demands those to whom he is related to provide it, and as if she seeks a relationship and then knows what she desires. The distinction which is made here between the way that female desires and male desires are more commonly socialized parallels the distinction which has been made between a more typical female mode of moral reasoning and a more typical male mode of moral reasoning made by Gilligan (1982).

the individuals involved being willing and being able to attend to and to enjoy both the self and the other in the context of the relationship. It is useful to point out that just as females are not lacking in desire for personal sexual fulfillment, males are not lacking in concern for relationship, but the stereotypical understanding of masculine desire and the construction of male sexuality, which is learned informally through the ongoing cultural discourse separates the sexual relationship from a romantic relationship, while sex and romance are conflated in the construction of feminine sexuality. Neither the separation of sex and emotional connection nor demand for a conflation of sex and a particular quality of emotion allows a useful exploration of the connection between these two forces in sexual relationships. The association of each of these two different approaches with a specific gender leads to a great deal of misunderstanding. But by openly exploring the true nature of their desire in relationship and sharing interest in the presence of the other, there is some possibility for both men and women to come to know their own wholeness. Without this, men become crippled by their disavowal of need and vulnerability and women are disempowered by their lack of clarity of desire and by the difficulty of affirming the importance of relationship to them (Jordan, 1987, p. 18).

Ethical knowledge and sex education

An emphasis upon the romantic and the protective discourse prevents an examination of the current reality, while an emphasis upon the possibility of the negative consequences of sexual relationships does not by itself produce needed changes which reflect our aspirations. Each of these two perspectives is limited. By including a discourse of desire in the sex education programme, the desires which shape our goals and which motivate our choices can be examined. An identification of desires is not only a way to recognize what needs to be done in order to accomplish our aims, but it may be the first step in owning the forces of desires. This can bring about a sense of empowerment for those who have felt powerless (Fine, 1988), but it can also be an important step in acknowledging the responsibility for our actions which are motivated by our desires.

A discourse of desire also provides the possibility of a critical reflection about the way in which choices have been made in the society and the way in which desires have been shaped and a critical reflection about our own desires and about our own responsibilities in relation to these desires. Since desire is socialized differently in males

and females, a critical discourse of desire may permit males and females to reflect upon the way their desires have been shaped and it may free them from some of the assumptions which have shaped those desires. A critically based discourse of desire may allow students to understand the social and ethical implications of the assumptions which rule and it may raise questions about how we make our choices and how we might make our choices. Since our desires reflect the level of our ethical concern, a critical examination of our desires raises questions about our values and about ourselves as ethical knowers.

Just as critical knowledge is needed in three areas of the formal sex education programme (see p. 121 above), so too is ethical knowledge. Teachers and students need ethical knowledge and the curriculum needs to reflect understandings of ethical knowledge. Educators need to bring care for their students and for all members of the society, as well as an understanding of principles of justice to the exchange which takes place in the classroom. Otherwise, they may bring harm and unintentionally convey beliefs which produce injustice. Ethical knowledge is also needed so that a curriculum which can identify the conditions and social relations which lead to harm and which can teach information and skills which promote well-being may be formulated. But students also need to learn to make ethical choices, that is, they need to learn how to care for others and how to understand and apply principles of justice, that is, they need to learn wisdom, compassion and courage, rather than a particular set of rules of behavior. The particular way that these aims may be accomplished will vary from time to time and from place to place. Some suggestions about how such a programme may be implemented are made in the final chapter of this thesis, but no curriculum can ensure the development of ethical knowledge. However, although no curriculum can ensure the growth of care and of the understandings of principles of social and individual justice, this is the fundamental requirement of any sex education programme. An examination of the kind of care and understanding which teachers themselves bring to the subject and to their educational practice, of the attitudes and assumptions which are conveyed in the sex education programmes, and of the way in which students are encouraged to take responsibility for their choices is constantly required, for these ideals can never be assumed to have been accomplished. We are responsible for maintaining a vigilance about the situation, about the aims we have chosen and about the process of education as it takes place.

The four kinds of knowledge, the empirical, the social, the critical and the ethical need to be addressed in the development or the evaluation of any programme of formal sex education. However, in practice, as in every educational situation, the teachers will meet with a group of particular students to learn something of the subject. Who the teachers are and who the students are will affect what can take place in the exchange. The teachers and the students come to the class with very different backgrounds, experiences and knowledge. What they have learned about sexuality and about sexual relationships will have been learned both formally and informally.

Part Three: Formal and Informal Sex Education

Chapter Seven

Informal Sex Education

Early education

An individual is not born a member of society. Born into a social setting, children become members of a particular society through the complex learning process which is called socialization. Every child is a member of a family; every family belongs to a variety of communities identified by definite characteristics, every community exists within a society made up of many diverse communities united politically or ideologically; every society operates within a larger cultural grouping which belongs to an ongoing historical tradition. A tradition can be identified because it differs from other traditions within the human experience. Every person expresses one particular way of being, but it is not only their own. It is also their family's, their communities', their society's, their cultural tradition's, their humanity. Each of us exists in relationship with others from whom we learn and with whom we construct ways of living.

Every child is presented with the world in a distinctive way. Aspects of this are learned and internalized as the child becomes a participating member of the society. A child does not have a choice with respect to the primary socialization which provides the basic structures through which reality is known and understood. "In primary socialization, then, the individual's first world is constructed. Its peculiar quality of firmness is to be accounted for, at least in part, by the inevitability of the individual's relationship to his very first significant others... Only later can the individual afford the luxury of at least a modicum of doubt" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 155-6). Primary socialization occurs within the highly charged emotional relationships of the family. Children model the behavior of others they see around them and they learn as a result of their own experiences. Their understandings of the world and of their place in it will be influenced by the ways that they are treated.

As a young person grows up, the way members of the household behave and the nature of their relationships, the domestic arrangements, the attitudes about men, women

and children which are evident, the ease or difficulty of showing affection in its many forms, the way ideas and feelings are expressed, the purposes which communication serves, and the respect each person is given, will all influence the way sexuality is understood, whether the parents or guardians and significant persons are aware of it or not. These early experiences will convey knowledge about what is expected, what is permitted, and what is valued. Understandings of body, of gender, feelings of self-esteem, of concern for others and of the possibility of trusting and loving others will be learned independently of any statements made about these aspects. We do not gain this kind of knowledge by evaluating evidence in order to decide whether we will accept it or not.

There is an emotional atmosphere in the family, which is not chosen but which affects every member of the family. The general emotional tone can be felt rather than identified although many things can be said about it. Whatever is said, for example, that it is a positive or a negative experience, can only be understood to be partially and temporarily true, for the actual situation, which depends upon the interaction of all the members of the household and upon the circumstances in which they find themselves, is incredibly complex and it is continually changing. Each individual within the family has a different place in it, is of a different age and has a different nature and each one is regarded differently; and each member of the family is more or less powerful, has more or less responsibility, and is more or less appreciated, thus each person will experience family life differently. But whatever is learned within the family is learned within the emotional atmosphere which exists and it is colored by this. The first learning influences the way that reality is perceived, intellectually and emotionally. The ways of being in relationship, ways of seeing, ways of knowing produced by primary socialization, which are related to both individual and collective experience, have a "subjective inevitability" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967. p.163) about them which is very difficult to examine or to question. It is not surprising that the deep and terrible psychic wounds which are inflicted on those children who are physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused affect the whole of their lives and all of their relationships and require a process of healing which reaches the

deepest layers of the psyche, for every child is affected deeply by the early experiences which constitute the first informal education.¹

Sex education begins very early in life with primary socialization. Social and ethical knowledge are needed before empirical and critical knowledge can be relevant. Practical and technical information about how to accomplish what is to be done or what ought to be done and a critical examination about the implications of customary practices depend upon an understanding of what is, what is expected to be done and what ought to be done and upon an understanding of what is of value. The first lessons about sexuality consist of the social knowledge of meanings gained informally in the family context through the learning of sexual scripts. The idea of sexual scripts was introduced by Gagnon and Simon (1973) who used the theatrical metaphor to describe how our sexual and social reality is shaped. They argued that we learn certain roles in our lives and that the scripts learned in these roles prepare us for the way we will respond to new situations in our lives. The sexual scripting which we learn governs both sexual behavior and sexual identity. We learn what to say and what to do as we learn how to relate to the world around us and to the others with whom we live. We learn the roles which we are expected to play in the social organization of the family which itself plays a role in the larger societal order. The metaphor which Gagnon and Simon (1973) introduced has proved to be a useful one and others follow this way of speaking about our social knowledge.

We expect our lives to follow certain scripts, and we make an effort to follow them, too. We also try to make our experiences accord with these scripts, sometimes even reinterpreting reality so as to make it fit them better. (Laws & Schwartz, 1977, p. viii)

Speaking of acts of sexual intercourse, Gagnon points out that we learn who one does sex with, what one does sexually, and when and where sex is appropriate in the culture (Gagnon, 1977, p. 6-8) as we find our own particular place in relation to these ideas in experience. We learn, for example, the range of behaviors which is considered to

¹ Many early influences may also be beneficial. The blessing "May you live in the company of the good" is an acknowledgment of the importance of the lessons learned through social interactions with those around us.

be feminine, what females of a particular class are expected to do, what females of that class will be permitted or how they will be thought of if they act in certain ways, and then when we get on stage, we 'ad-lib' in the particular situation. We identify ourselves and others as good, as normal, or as successful – or the reverse – with respect to these scripts. The scripts we accumulate and our ability to apply and manipulate them are rarely the outcome of a systematic and conscious learning process, but rather they are the result of an accumulation of responses to the cues and hints provided by the social world around us. We learn the meaning of sex as we learn to function as sexual persons in the social context, yet, in general, we are unable to articulate or to reflect upon the social knowledge which guides our behaviors, that is, we are unable to examine our actions critically, for we do not see that there are any alternatives among which we could choose. Our first sexual scripts are learned and accepted without question very much like a first language. In a situation when we are out of context, in a different social setting, for example, we may begin to realize the way in which the meanings and the scripts which are usually invisible and which we take for granted shape our lives. In seeing some of the consequences these scripts have had, we may come to realize some of the advantages and some of the difficulties certain scripts have. Examining and questioning the scripts which we have learned and which constrain our lives may lead to the development of new understandings and new scripts² and it may also initiate a critical inquiry. "Why should we have these scripts and not those?" The observation that different individuals have different roles to play may also produce a critical question, such as "Why are boys permitted to go out after dark and not girls?" The natural critical interest of children may be developed or it may be stopped. For example, the response to the question here may indicate that this is a useful and a serious question and it might point out that boys are treated differently than girls but that it might be different in another setting, or the response may indicate that these are the rules, or that it is because boys are stronger, or because it is dangerous for girls after dark. We respond and we teach empirical, social, ethical, critical knowledge.

² Some sex education programs, for example, in *Skills for Healthy Relationships* (see Chapter Three), the understanding of the importance of 'scripts' in guiding actions is used to help students learn and develop scripts for assertive behavior which they will then be able to use in situations they might encounter.

The scripts we learn are not fixed. We may feel that we do not suit the part we have, in major or in minor ways; we may encounter situations which are totally unscripted; and we may meet with others who have learned to play parts which do not correspond with our expectations or who have expectations of us which are not in our scripts. So although our scripts and the understandings which are implicit in these guide our lives, they are constantly changing. This dynamic quality gives an opportunity for new roles and new understandings. But because the rightness and the efficacy of the patterns for routine actions and the scripts which support these is assumed, a dominant perspective or ideology is supported. New scripts will generally remain within the range of practices which reflect the ideology of the community in which we live. A radical departure from the accepted scripts often requires the support of another community, which will allow and validate other roles and scripts.³

In any given society, at any given moment in its history, people become sexual in the same way they become everything else. Without much reflection, they pick up directions from their social environment. They acquire and assemble meanings, skills, and values from the people around them. Their critical choices are often made by going along and drifting. People learn when they are quite young a few of the things they are expected to be, and continue slowly to accumulate a belief in who they are and ought to be throughout the rest of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Sexual conduct is learned in the same ways and through the same processes; it is acquired and assembled in human interaction, judged and performed in specific cultural and historical worlds. (Gagnon, 1977, p. 2)

Our sexuality is not only manifest in acts of sexual intercourse, but it is expressed in all of our relationships with others and with ourselves. These relationships may be affected by our ideas and by an intellectual reflection about them, but emotional factors are the more significant determinants of our relationships. Understandings of gender, a sense of self, the ability to relate to and to allow for others, perceptions of the role and the place of the body, and questions of value and purpose which are first learned within the family influence our relationships. To that extent all of our relationships are sexual. Our

³ For example, a connection with the gay community has been an important factor in the experience of many homosexuals who have been able to make sense of their own sexual feelings within a social context (Weeks, 1986).

intimate physical relationships which involve ourselves naked are a particular subset; but they are not separate from the rest of our relationships.

Understanding gender: Our understanding of gender, that is, how we see ourselves as male or as female, and how we see and relate to others, as they are male and female, is an important component of our sexuality. Gender is always a significant factor in our relationships, but it is especially important in our sexual relationships, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. This person attracts me and excites me in his maleness or that person attracts me and excites me in her femaleness. But my understandings and my feelings about my female self and about others as male or female are not only based upon a recognition of sex; they also depend upon the social constructions of gender which I have made my own and upon the reactions which I have to others and to myself because of my own past experiences.

Children learn the social rules of gender with respect to themselves, to others and to the relations between themselves and others very early and therefore the most significant agents of gender socialization are within the family, however the family is constituted as the child grows up. Although each person's and each family's way of understanding gender is unique, it cannot be wholly independent of the societal perspective, as was pointed out in Chapter One, above. Within a patriarchal society, for example, the male perspective is the central one and the female perspective is considered to be less important and it is often ignored or devalued. The patriarchal assumption frequently results in the domination of female persons by male persons, but it is not a necessary outcome in any particular situation.⁴ The understandings of gender conveyed within any family will be particular, although they will be related to the larger societal

⁴ It may result in an oppression of women or a violence against women in some circumstances, but within the society individuals will have a wide range of different experiences. Take for example the different experiences of three women, one of whom is raped on her way home from work, another who is afraid to walk alone after dark in her neighbourhood but who has not been sexually assaulted and a third, who lives without fear of danger in her community. In spite of the fact that each of these women lives within a patriarchal context and that as a result they share a common position in the society and share the understanding that any woman might be sexually assaulted, their different experiences will have an important effect on their lives and on their sexual relationships.

context which, in modern western culture, is shaped by patriarchal assumptions, but there are many different forces operating in any situation. In some families, females are generally treated with contempt; in others, relationships can be harmonious as long as females fulfill certain functions; while in some family situations, the female presence is celebrated and a wide range of options are available. But these different kinds of family situations which may also all happen within a single family, do not only affect the lives of women, they will affect the males in them in a corresponding way. In the first example, the males will also be treated with contempt or they will learn contempt; in the second, males will also be expected to fulfill certain functions, which limit their possibilities and in the third, both males and females will more likely be able to realize their potential within the established roles. So even when the male view is the important one around which the family and the society revolve, there is a wide variety of and quality of experiences possible.

The learning of gender identity and language are closely related and the basic elements of both of these are established between the ages of 18 months and three years (Gagnon, 1977, p. 63; Mackie, 1991, p. 93). Each of us is either male or female and we understand gender from one or other of these perspectives. Males and females not only differ biologically but they are treated differently because of the societal assumptions about gender-specific role and identity (Mackie, 1991). We come to understand ourselves as either male or female at the same time as we recognize that we are not-female or not-male, that is, when we realize that there is an important difference between males and females and that we ourselves are members of one group and not the other. Males and females do not experience or interpret the world, relationships and intimate sexual relationships in the same ways. They inhabit different bodies and different worlds. The most important lessons about gender and the first practical experiences which shape our ideas and our scripts about gender are learned informally within the family. How males and females are treated, how males and females are valued, how males and females are expected to act within the family all affect my perception and understanding of gender gained in the family setting and my perception and my understanding of myself as male or female. The early knowledge of gender which is learned informally in the family is primarily a social knowledge, a knowledge of meaning which provides the framework in relation to which all later experiences and knowledge are understood. It shapes what we assume is ethical knowledge because having been exposed to what is expected, each one

of us assumes that we now know what ought to be done. It is not ethical knowledge based upon judgment. Empirical knowledge is also gained through observation and through experience, but impressions, beliefs, conjecture, empirical data, mistakes, explanation and misunderstandings are all part of our indiscriminate stock of empirical knowledge.

A sense of self: The individual's sense of self also develops within the family context. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, the authors point out that the way women relate to the world is influenced by their family background.

Given that we have been describing frameworks for meaning-making that evolve and change rather than personality types that are relatively permanent, it is curious that people who share an epistemological position would have so much family history in common. (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 155-6)

Although they do not characterize their classification as such, the epistemological positions which the authors have identified, as silence, received knowledge, subjective, objective and constructed knowledge are related to the sense of agency, and therefore to the sense of self, which individuals have. The women they have called silent, but who might more accurately be named 'silenced', do not imagine that they can understand others and they do not see themselves as being able to participate in an exchange through which knowledge can be discovered. Bonnie, a woman who is silenced, remarks: "If you just knew my parents...They were parents that said, 'You shut up to everyone'" (Belenky, 1986, p. 158). The experiences children are exposed to have an impact on their lives, yet because we do not look at what we do, we do not see and we do not realize the responsibility we have. A volatile, unpredictable, or violent family situation often leaves children speechless and numbed. Young women who have been treated in this way may feel powerless in their lives. These are the women who most need to find a connection with their subjectivities through a discourse of desire.

In speaking about her family background and the way she has dealt with it, a young woman from Nova Scotia reveals who she has become:

The information I'd like is family[sic]because with my father, I do not get along with him. In fact, I don't care for him, but you just sort of live with him. I have an older brother and sister; and I've watched them argue with him, like, every day, and I said to myself I just wasn't going to do it....I don't know how to deal with it; I just sort of shut it out and shove it to the back of my mind because there's nothing I can do about it. (Day, 1990, p. 53)

The ways we have been treated and the ways we have acted affect our lives. The sense of self which results from such experience influences all relationships and will have a profound effect upon intimate sexual relationships. Unless such a history can be transcended, a family pattern of violence, with abusive fathers/males and abused mothers/females, both of whom might lash out at the children, may be repeated in future generations (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 163; Bentovim, 1988, p. 45). A sex education programme may provide a way to be freed of the patterns of the past, by providing a way to identify and to examine the events which took place and by understanding that there are alternatives to these ways of interacting.

Some family situations allow individuals to develop a sense of self from which they can actively and responsibly engage in relationships with others and with the world, without fear and without the self-importance which needs to control others. The variety of experiences within families results in a wide range of feelings of self and self-efficacy.

The descriptions of volcanic activity, alcoholism, violence, and abandonment were markedly diminished in the stories of family life told by procedural and constructivist knowers – in terms of both prevalence and virulence – when compared with the stories told by women who held the earlier perspective....When all family members were encouraged to draw on their whole range of capacities to deal with both the personal and the impersonal, they no longer needed to rely on the use of either power or abandonment for the resolution of conflicts. (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 180)

A life in body: The sense each of us has of our body is closely related to our sense of ourselves. Each human being is born incarnate and each human life ends with the death of the physical body. As we grow up, we learn about our bodies: we learn facts about our bodies and we learn attitudes about our bodies. We live embodied – whatever we do is done bodily and what we learn is expressed through the body. Social and political life is expressed through the body constituted, regulated and practiced in cultural habits. Our

understandings of the body and of its purpose are influenced by the cultural understandings of the body, as gendered and as human. These understandings are not merely theoretical beliefs but they are lived practices which have been learned, conveyed through the expectations and disciplines of institutional policy, economic practice and social custom,⁵ which are experienced first of all in the particular family setting in which we grow up.

The understandings of body are gender specific. Males and females are different physiologically and they have different experiences related to these physical differences, but males and females are treated and valued differently in every society. As a result of both biological and social factors, they have different understandings of and different attitudes about their own bodies and about the bodies of others. Males cannot know the experiences of menstruation, of pregnancy, of childbirth, of breast-feeding, or of being woman-bodied although they can know about them, be affected by them and respond to them.⁶ By the same token, women cannot know the experiences of male erection, ejaculation, or of being male-bodied. But these experiences are not only lived, they are interpreted and understood within the whole network of social relations in the larger social context and in the smaller communities in which we live and these interpretations and understandings are integral to our experiences. For example, being female means having a female body, but it also means living in relation to the range of social expectations about being a woman, about being an attractive woman, about being a successful woman, about being feminine, about having a female body, about being a daughter, a sister, a mother, a young girl, a middle-aged woman, an older woman. All the events in the life of a woman, or of a man, are gendered events, interpreted in the light of the societal understandings of gender, which change through time. Giving birth is a biological event, but the role of mother is understood in the complex network of social relationships developed in the cultural tradition to which the society, the family and the individual belong. Being woman and being mother are examples of biological facts which are understood differently from

⁵ See Chapter Four.

⁶ Not every woman will have all of the experiences here identified, but all of them will experience being female bodied and being treated as female.

time to time and from place to place, but they will always be understood in some way or other which brings demand and expectation to the role.⁷

Although each individual has a unique physiological structure and personal history and that particularity influences their understanding of and attitude about their own body, the way that an individual is treated by family members is one of the most significant factors in the development of the sense of body. Each of us learns and experiences a whole range of attitudes about our physical self which includes shame, anxiety, pride, acceptance, fear, ignorance, wonder, alienation, delight and frustration, although some of these will be predominant. This range of attitudes is related to ideas about the body which we have learned through exchange with others and in being treated in certain ways, firstly and most importantly within the family. Although these ideas may not be articulated they are expressed and revealed in our actions and in the ways we treat ourselves and others. They are a part of our social knowledge which carries the assumptions we have and give shape to our values and to our understandings of what is important.

The attitudes and scripts which we learn about our bodies are first learned informally within the family. The way that the genitals, the reproductive organs and other parts of the body are spoken of, the ease with which physical affection is expressed, the acceptance or the disapproval of nudity, the acceptance or the disapproval of sexuality, the gladness or the resentment of being male or female, of living a bodily existence, and of being in relationships with others all have an effect upon us. Although there are also many other sources of influence, the family attitudes will provide the first language, which is primarily non-verbal.

⁷ As an example, menstruation may be regarded as a normal function of the body, a pathological concern, an indication of impurity, as a 'curse', or as a blessing. Menarche may be regarded as a mark of a passage into womanhood or of the beginning of feminine problems. What we are told about menstruation, how we are told about it and how we are treated affect our feelings about being female. A young woman recalls: "When I first got my period, my mother dragged me into the bathroom and told me to take off my clothes. I stood naked in front of her while she grumbled, 'You can have kids now, so you better be careful'" (Boston Women's Health Collective, 1971, p. 27).

Knowledge gained: The knowledge which is the first and the most important learning about sexuality and which takes place within the family is the learning of meaning and of relationship which is carried in the exchange that takes place as we learn sexual scripts. This knowledge is primarily social knowledge. The meanings about gender, about body, and about the self which are communicated verbally and non-verbally are understood in the context of the family situation and the understanding of meaning is coloured by the attitudes which are conveyed. These reveal and influence the way that individuals in the family relate to the world, to others and to themselves. The social knowledge gained through these early experiences and relationships shapes the fundamental assumptions and understandings which affect all later experiences and relationships. Early experiences and relationships provide our model for 'normal' living. We act in response to the expectations of those around us and these expectations shape our understanding of what is to be done or of what is normal. These expectations become our own as they become internalized.

Ethical knowledge is closely related to social knowledge because understandings of what *is expected* to be done convey judgments of value about what *should* be done and about what is important. We understand what *should* be done by learning what *is* done. We are judged and we judge ourselves to have succeeded or failed with respect to the standards we have acquired in the social exchange with others; and we question, accede to, or refuse these ideas in living our lives. These beliefs are not so much conveyed through verbal communication as by precept and practice. One becomes what one is because of the experiences one has had. These experiences include one's own response to what one sees and hears, to the treatment one receives or to the circumstances one finds oneself in. Thus the early experiences in the family which establish the social knowledge of meaning provide individuals with an ethical knowledge by which choices are made, but which is not itself based on a conscious deliberation. How notions of what ought to be done have been conveyed will have an important effect upon the possibility of a development of ethical knowledge, understood as the development of understandings of principles of justice and of the willingness and the ability to care for others. If demands are made randomly – if, for example, one day a sexual display is laughed at and the next day it is punished – children will not know what to expect and will not value one way or another; they may see that the only reason to act in one way or another may be personal whim. If there is a contradiction between the behavior demanded of children and the

parents' behavior, children may become cynical and manipulative or they may stop listening to their parents or to anyone else. They may wish to gain a position of power so that they would have the authority to impose demands and to avoid responsibilities.

The most significant aspect of ethical knowledge which is conveyed in the family setting is the way that individuals are related to ideals of justice and practices of care⁸ rather than the content of any value-judgment statements. An exposure to practical and impartial applications of principles of justice, to the implications of a belief in the rights of individuals, or of a respect for law and social convention will affect the ethical outlook of a child who grows up in that environment. A child who grows up in a family in which the primary concern centres around receiving rewards and avoiding punishment and where control is maintained by withholding rewards and meting out punishment will learn of the efficacy of reward and punishment. Similarly, the way that individuals in the family take others into account will provide a model for the possible development of the ethic of care. If individuals in the family are largely self-occupied and self-interested, then the children will learn from this, whereas if the individuals in the family are able to show real concern for others in the family or outside of it and are willing to act less from self-interest and more from a realization of what is needed, it will also affect the children. Reasons for a prescriptive claim might be given from any level of moral understanding. For example, the statement might be made that asserts that there should be no pre-marital sex. Such a statement might be justified by speaking about the parental wrath which would ensue from a discovery of the child's sexual liaison, by pointing out the need to avoid unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, about the need to bargain for a marriage proposal, about the need to obey the demands of a social convention or a religious tradition, about the emotional need for a context of commitment for sexual relationships, or about the need not to lose oneself in desires of the flesh.⁹

Apart from a direct influence on the choices which are made and the reasons for these choices in response to questions such as, "Shall I have sexual intercourse with this

⁸ See the discussion in Chapter Six.

⁹ The different reasons may express and support different levels of moral understanding.

person or not?". the ethical or moral sensibility is shaped as an individual grows up in the family and in the larger social setting. Whatever the family situation there is a range of understandings carried in the language and a range of experiences with others which will invite comparison. A comparative evaluation of experience and the recognition of the range of quality of experiences and relationships provides an internal measure of value and a sense of direction which relates each of us to an ethical dimension, to ideas of the good or of justice. These ideas, the result of having a variety of experiences of different qualities, are connected to hope, to wish and to conscience, but they are not necessarily tied to any particular societal expression of morality. The recognition of something better and the understanding that the way we live is not the way we might live can also provide an impetus for change if we see a possibility of affecting the course of events and a need to do so, in other words, if we have a sense of potency and of responsibility for ourselves and for others.

The way that members of a family convey and respond to social and moral claims and conventions will provide the first informal education of a critical response for the children in the family. Whether they are held or rejected with dogmatic vehemence, whether they are disregarded and ignored as irrelevant, or whether they are respected and considered with a critical and evaluative inquiry reveals and models an attitude which is conveyed to those who are learning social, ethical and critical skills. Attitudes always carry assumptions which are not named but which have a force. The recognition and the naming of the assumptions is a first step in a critical inquiry. But just as an atheistic position describes a religious position, an acritical stance, which does not reflect upon the ways we make our choices, describes a critical position.¹⁰ When young people question conventional morality, they are ready to engage in a critical inquiry about the causes, reasons and purposes of ethical claims and about societal and individual choices. Neither an outright rejection nor a blind acceptance of the claims of conventional morality

¹⁰ There can be no choice, no possibility for evaluation, no reflection, no identification when there is no separation from the action – when we react. Identification requires a separation from the action. Such a separation is a condition for reflection. The related recognition that there are alternatives allows evaluation. Real choice is possible when the power to accomplish alternatives is available. Thus the naming of our social conditions is a necessary first step in changing them.

supports such an inquiry. Questioning traditions and codes of behavior is a way of engaging with them. In Charles Scott's view, "questioning... is not a matter of indifference or ignorance, but a way of relating to something that holds its fascination or importance while it loses a measure of its authority" (1990, p. 8).

Along with the ethical perspective and the social understandings of sexuality which are learned as we grow and learn how to function in the world, some basic empirical information about sexuality is learned, which assumes and depends upon these understandings. We learn by observation and by being told, by overhearing others or by asking questions of those around us, although some of what we learn and some of what we surmise may be incorrect or misunderstood. We learn about the difference between male and female anatomy, we learn how to look after our personal hygiene, we learn what is and what is not pleasurable for others and for ourselves, we learn how babies are born, and we learn of the widespread interest in sexual matters. We gather information, we infer, we deduce, and we imagine facts about sexuality from very early in life, long before we ask for or are taught specific information about the development of secondary sexual characteristics, about the physical and emotional intricacies of various forms of sexual relationships with others, about the anatomical facts of reproduction, about the prevention of sexually transmitted disease and unwanted pregnancy, about how we could find out more about sexual functioning and about how to do what we want to do. What is gathered will include true and false, trivial and important, useful and useless information. Although teenagers will have learned a great deal of information from many sources, when they are asked "What is your source of information about sex?" (King, 1990, p. 51) the question generally refers to specifiable kinds of formal, factual information of the kind which can be identified by questionnaire. However, our empirical knowledge, whatever its source, is always limited by context, by the questions which we have asked and by our ability to understand them. What we can know empirically depends upon the understanding of meaning established in the context of our social exchange with others.

Learning through adolescence

Sometime between the ages of nine and sixteen individuals begin to mature sexually. Through the teen-age years, there are many bodily changes related to the development of secondary sexual characteristics and sexual feelings. The biological

processes of growth take place in the natural course of events, but how these changes are understood and interpreted depends upon the social context and upon the family, the community, the society and the cultural traditions. We learn these understandings and interpretations by participating in these settings. During puberty, as young people grow to adulthood and become capable of sexual reproductive activity, their interest in becoming independent members of the society develops and their interest in sexual matters increases. The period during which this takes place, when individuals are no longer children and not yet adults, is called adolescence. Although the period of adolescence is related to the time when puberty takes place, this designation is primarily social. Adolescence is understood to be "the period during which young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood and become increasingly independent from the family" (Parry, 1982, p. 16; quoted in King, 1990, p. 10). Bibby and Posterski identify adolescence as that period of limbo when young people are neither children nor adults (1985, p. 10). The term also connotes the idea of "a strong peer culture, active social life, and little responsibility" (Laws & Schwartz, 1977, p. 41). Young people are expected to gain the required experience and skills and to try them out in preparation for and in rehearsal of adult occupational and sex roles.

The formal curriculum in junior and senior high school is expected to prepare students for employment and participation in the community, while sex is a topic of such intense interest for adolescents, that it often appears to be the major subject in the informal junior and senior high school curriculum. It may seem to young people and to others that they are only now beginning to raise questions about sexuality and that the area is 'virgin' territory, but as I have pointed out above, their sex education begins much earlier. A great deal of knowledge about sexuality has already been gained by the time an individual is able to frame a question about sex.

During adolescence individuals often turn to their peers for support. Adolescents belong not only to the social group which is the family, they also belong to the social group which consists of their peers. Friendships within the peer group are the most important sources of enjoyment for the majority of teenagers (Bibby & Posterski, 1985, p. 32, 98) and peer groups have an important influence upon the social learning which takes place as individuals gain their independence. They provide emotional security, support, information and feedback as adolescents build their own identities. Peers frequently

reinforce the socialization gained in the family, since the peer group often consists of those with similar backgrounds, but they also provide another and more impartial assessment of how adolescents fit into society than the family does. Teenagers take the judgment of their peers very seriously, and often adjust their own ideas and behaviors to fit the expectations of their friends. After all, the ones who know best what it is to be a teenager and what is popular with teen-agers are teen-agers.

A mutual learning of a variety of information and misinformation, attitudes and behaviors results from the companionship with others of equal status and of approximately the same age and who have common interests. Topics such as sex, looks, and loves are easier to discuss with peers than with family members or with other adults. The first sexual language of individuals consists of the ideas and attitudes learned from the family, but this is augmented or contradicted by the ideas, definitions, expectations, and beliefs current in society at the time and which are approved by the peer group. The sexual language is the social knowledge which we gain in the social exchange with others. Each of us thinks about sexuality, acts sexually, and judges others in relation to this sexual discourse. Although new ideas will be added as we have more experiences in life, we learn the basic concepts of the discourse very early.

Social Research: As young people enter adolescence they join a new community which has a culture of its own. They need to discover the language and the customs of this community as they find their place in it. The social research which the young people undertake takes the form of participant observation, which involves participating in the social world from a particular perspective, reflecting on the events and the social relationships which are observed and drawing conclusions which can guide future action. As young people learn about the world they are about to enter, the methods they use are like the methods used more self-consciously in the social sciences. However, although these methods are often used intentionally, they are seldom used reflectively.

Young people are not merely passive recipients of knowledge about sex and sexual relationships. They also engage in a more active inquiry into questions which arise from their own interest. The knowledge which they gain from this more intentional learning consists of empirical knowledge, of facts – which may include mistaken beliefs, superstitions, personal trivia – and practical skills and of social knowledge about sexual

relationships. Young people feel an ownership of the empirical knowledge about sex and sexual relationships which they have discovered and which they can identify, experiment with, question and augment. They may feel that they have no other knowledge about sex except this empirical knowledge which can be put in the form of statements or which has practical efficacy.¹¹ However, how this knowledge is understood depends upon the social knowledge which has been learned more passively. The attitudes and the assumptions we have shape our questions, guide the selection of data we are interested in and lead us to accept or reject explanations, but they are not easily identified, experimented with, questioned and changed.¹²

A sharp separation between the passive learning of social knowledge which also brings empirical knowledge during early childhood from within the family and the active inquiry which brings empirical knowledge and carries social knowledge from an engagement in the social world during adolescence cannot be maintained. Children may ask specific and pointed questions about sex which results in some factual knowledge and they learn facts about the body and about themselves and others in the ordinary course of events. However the most significant learning which takes place in early childhood is the learning of the assumptions and attitudes carried in the social knowledge they receive. The more self-directed learning about sexuality which takes place later depends upon this earlier unarticulated knowledge, although the new knowledge will also affect the individual's understanding of meaning. The social interactions which take place during adolescence and throughout adult life will have an effect upon the attitudes and the assumptions which shape the emotional and intellectual framework through which every individual views the world, although the first relationships are the most significant.¹³ The facts and skills about sex and sexuality which young people gain as a result of self-directed

¹¹ This is the knowledge which is referred to when adolescents are asked "What is your source of information about sex?" (King, 1990, p. 51).

¹² The individual belief in the exclusive validity of empirical knowledge parallels science's belief in itself. The remarks made here about the dependence of the empirical knowledge upon prior understandings of meaning echo the remarks made earlier about science.

¹³ The distinction made between primary and secondary socialization points to this difference.

learning in adolescence are learned in the context of a general interest in sexual relationships. Since they are gathered intentionally, young people consider them to be more interesting and relevant than the incidental facts learned earlier in a general curiosity about the world.

In order to illustrate the process of inquiry which takes place in the informal learning of knowledge of sexuality, I outline the stages which young people go through in early adolescence to learn about sexuality and about being sexual in their social setting, using the terms familiar in social research to discuss participant observation. To illustrate this, I speak of Sonia, my daughter, and her participation in a process which might be likened to the process which takes place in social research and which has been called 'participant observation'. The fact that she is white, middle class, urban, and female, will influence the content of her informal learning, as will her particular family situation, her situation in the family, her personality and her physical attributes. The content of what she can and will learn is different from what a similar teenager might have learned in the past, or will in the future. The culture, ethnicity, class, and gender of 'the researcher' affect the informal education about sexuality which can take place in any social and historical context. As in all areas of ethnographic research, the background knowledge, the assumptions and the attitudes as well as the specific characteristics and personal attributes of the researchers have an important influence on what can be learned for ". Although it would be wrong to think of the effects of these as absolutely determinate or fixed, such characteristics as gender, age, and ethnic identification may shape relationships with gatekeepers, sponsors, and people under study in important ways" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 84).

The content of what Sonia learned, therefore, is not the same as what other adolescents have learned or will learn, although the processes by which all adolescents learn about sexuality are similar. When teachers meet a class of adolescents, they meet a group of young people who have a great deal of knowledge about themselves and about their sexuality, who have come to understand sex in their social setting and who have a sense about what is expected of them and what is possible for them. Not only have they received this education unintentionally as they have grown up in a particular social situation and as they have learned the language and the customs of the society, but they have also been actively engaged in an inquiry about sex. Within any group, the experience

and knowledge of each of the individuals is unique, although some discourses, assumptions, and experiences will be shared and some information will be relevant for all of them. They will have social and empirical knowledge both of which have ethical implications, but in general, they will not have been able to bring a critical reflection to their knowledge, to their experiences and to their judgments. A sex education programme which begins from the understandings and the information students have in common and which aims to teach what all of them will need is a sex education programme which teaches to and from the lowest common elements and it will seem irrelevant and uninteresting to most of the students. A more interesting and useful programme might begin with the fact that the knowledge which each of the students has is different from every other student's knowledge and that each student will have different questions and different needs. At the same time, since all students are members of the society, there are some questions about the social reality in which all students will have a common interest.

Research proposal: When Sonia was twelve, she began to be interested in learning how thirteen and fourteen year old females who are successful look, dress, speak, think, and behave and she set out to discover this. All this seems a reasonable undertaking – if one is going to set out on an expedition, it is advantageous to learn the latest techniques, to find out what one should wear, how one might begin and what one needs to do in order to succeed.

Preliminary field work: Together with her friends she looked at the ways older teen-agers acted, dressed, and spoke. They set out to gather empirical data in order to develop hypotheses and theories which could then be tested, with the expectation that the knowledge gained would allow them to accomplish whatever they wished to do. What their goals were or how they might be chosen was not at issue – yet.¹⁴ However, all adolescents are interested in the fact that they are growing up and that their situation, whatever it is now, will change, and they are interested in learning how to grow up or to be older successfully which includes learning about being sexual.

¹⁴ There is an assumption that the knowledge gained would provide the information which would allow the desired results to be produced. The aims are expected to be selected by personal choice. Yet how these choices are made or should be made is not examined.

The understanding of what constitutes success will vary from one individual to another and may change over time for each individual. At a very general level, adolescents may have the desire to become more independent or they may wish to satisfy parental or societal expectations or they may have both of these wishes. More specifically, they may want to leave a difficult home situation or they may wish to follow a certain career. Each of these goals may have consequences for sexual relationships or will require some negotiation about sexual relationships. For example, independence from a parental situation will require another domestic arrangement or another domestic arrangement will provide a possibility of leaving home.¹⁵

For Sonia and her friends these larger decisions seemed far away. They were sure that being a teen-ager would open a whole new world of possibilities in social relationships, but that it would also require a new set of social and technical skills to be successful in those unknown situations. The working hypothesis at this stage posited that successful teenagers are popular and popular teenagers are successful.¹⁶ They observed that some teen-agers were popular and that some were not and they were interested in what attributes the more popular ones possessed and how they behaved. They did not presume that they knew about being teen-agers, but they looked forward with excitement and some trepidation to participating in this great adventure. Their preliminary field work was carried on by observation of a group to which they did not belong. Therefore they did not question their subjects directly, but took note of their activities as often as they could. Observation of older siblings and their friends provided more data about teenagers who were not so different from themselves. But they could observe only a sample of teen-age life: they met only a small number of teenagers and they were not party to

¹⁵ Traditional expectations shape goals but young people are also prepared to demand or negotiate change. Young people reproduce the past and produce the future through learning, accepting, resisting, and resolving their situation. See Gaskell (1982) for a useful analysis of the way family life is reproduced *and* produced.

¹⁶ Each of us needs and wishes to be liked and supported by others at many levels. The most superficial level is the level of popularity within our group. This may not provide a very deep satisfaction, but it is the most obvious level and it is where we can often effect change most easily. With whom we can be popular, often determines our peer group.

everything which went on.¹⁷ Many of their conclusions were drawn from inference and fueled by imagination, and, as with all observation, a continuous selection took place for not everything could be observed and not everything seemed relevant. What was observed was evaluated and interpreted, often in exchange with a small group of peers who together made preliminary judgments about what their tactics would be, believing that they had complete freedom of choice.

Although they regarded their research as empirical, the information which they obtained depended upon the meanings learned in a particular context. For example, the identification of popularity is an assessment of social status within a group and therefore some of the attributes associated with popularity will be specific to that group.

Theoretical research: At the same time as these young girls were carrying on field studies, they were also engaged in theoretical research in order to discover what 'the experts' in this area were saying and to fill in some of the gaps in their knowledge. They believed that the questions they were asking had definite answers which could be found through observation, explained theoretically and tested by repeatable experiment, that is, that the research that they were engaged in is empirical research. They begin with very general questions such as: "What does a popular and successful teenager look like?" "What does a popular and successful teenager do?" and "What are the skills I need to learn?" which later can become more specific "How can I lose inches off my thighs?" "How can I attract his attention?"

To learn from 'experts' and to gain a wider data base they turned to popular culture. Sonia and her friends read magazines; they read pamphlets which gave them some technical information about safe sex, about how to avoid pregnancy and how to prevent the transmission of AIDS and STDs; and they watched television programmes, videos and films, listened to music and read novels. They put together their 'own' understanding of sexuality, using what they had gleaned from a variety of sources, from

¹⁷ "Not all parts of the setting will be equally open to observation, not everyone may be willing to talk, and even the most willing informant will not be prepared, or perhaps even able, to divulge all the information available to him or her. " (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 76).

non-fiction, often considered to be 'expert' opinion, and from fictional and from dramatic recreations of 'real' life situations. Talk shows, dramas about adolescents, about young adults, soap operas and popular situation comedies provided much of the material from which this knowledge about being a woman in a heterosexual relationship was collected. Many of the commercial and popular prime-time television programmes depend upon the use of sexual innuendo to maintain viewer appeal, but more explicit sex and violence, which are often linked, are shown on programmes later in the evening, or in adult films and videos. Both kinds of programming, which young teen-agers watch not merely for entertainment but for educational purposes, emphasize the central place of sex in every 'normal' adolescent's life and the importance of knowing sex.

Young men have many of the same influences and many of the same sources of information as young women do, but their role models are the males who play a significant role in their lives and the older teen-boys and men whom they believe to be successful. Popular images of young males are found in the sports and entertainment world where success is related to ability in sports, to physical power, to financial resources, and to heterosexual sexual conquests. Young men are likely to read magazines, such as *Sports Illustrated* and special interest magazines, which feature skiing, hockey or surfing. These magazines portray images of powerful and active males who succeed in a man's world in which women are often noticeably absent.¹⁸ Adolescent males' research about sexuality is often carried out by speaking to other males about their knowledge and their experiences, but knowledge about sexuality is also gained by reading print material and viewing visual media.

Young men, interested in gaining information about females and sexual relationships, are likely to turn to adult magazines such as *Playboy*; *Entertainment for*

¹⁸ In the November 15, 1993 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, there are six major articles about football and others about skiing, basketball, boxing, and horse racing, columns, and many advertisements, but there are only two small references to women in the 'Sports notes' column, photographs of two women who are mothers or wives of the male sport heroes, and one woman who is the dominant figure in one of the advertisements. The major items advertised – cars, trucks and the products associated with them, cigarettes, whiskey, and technological gadgetry – emphasize power and the rewards of individual achievement.

Men, Penthouse and other more sexually explicit pornographic magazines, films or videos, which are now easily accessible. The images of females and of sexual relationships in these as well as in advertisements and in mainstream films reflect and shape male fantasy and imagination. Boys between 12 and 17 constitute a large segment of the users of pornography, and for many of these adolescents, pornographic materials are a significant form of 'sex education' (Cole, 1989, p.47).

The informal sex education received by female adolescents through the media differs from the informal sex education received by male adolescents. An examination of the content of the media which is popular with young people, reveals the forces which shape desire differently in males and in females (Jordan, 1987; Whatley, 1988). The ideals of body image for females represent the look which will attract male desire and inform young women about the disciplines of body which will achieve the look which they believe will bring them self-esteem and happiness. As young women learn how to attract the sexual interest of young men, they are also told that they need to take responsibility for controlling the amount of sexual intimacy in the relationship. The look which is cultivated to get male attention and to gain commitment is also dangerous. *YM* gives advice about "when he wants sex and you don't – how to handle four difficult situations" "How to cool him down without turning him off" (*YM*, March 1992, p. 101). Young women are encouraged to find ways to gain commitment without sexual intimacy, but sexual intimacy with commitment is condoned.

One of the magazines which Sonia and her friends read avidly was *YM* – Young and Modern – which is filled with advice for teen-age girls. The front pages of a selection of recent editions of this magazine indicate the kind of material which is found inside. "What Scares Guys Off", "Whew! 8 things guys really don't want from a girl", "Virgins! 5 reasons to wait", "Prom night: 250 guys tell you what they expect plus how to ask him to go", "Makeup Secrets from the Pros", "Sexy Hair: 12 pages on how to get it", "Star Wears: The best and worst dressed of 1993", "I was stalked: One girl's tale of terror", "I Sold my Body for Drugs: One girl's horror story." Articles, regular columns and special features give practical advice about male-female romantic relationships, telling girls what boys think, what they want, emphasizing how to get a boy interested and how to keep a boy interested by detailing what to wear, what to say, what to do, what make-up to apply and what hair products to use. The suggestions are accompanied by pictures of smiling

teen-agers or young adults who reflect and define the popular look. How to be attractive, how to be sexy, how to be appealing, how to be happy, and how to be a successful teenager are equated, with the implication that all this is within reach with the right action, the right attitude and the right purchase.¹⁹ One article in each issue presents the disastrous consequences of the loss of self-control in relation to food, alcohol, drugs, sex, or relationships.

Questions about relationships, which deal with minor concerns – "I like this guy who I think likes me too. But when he's with his friends, he ignores me. What's going on?" – and with serious problems – "I'm pregnant and I don't know who the father is" – are answered by feature writers, popular actors, by models or by handsome teen-age boys. Reflecting a kind of feel-good, decide-for-yourself pop psychology, responses to these questions vary widely, but they all imply that the romantic relationship between males and females, whether consummated or not, is the most important aspect of young girls' lives and that success can be achieved by careful attention to script and to appearance. Many of the articles discuss beauty secrets, tricks and tips. Articles about make-up, hair and skin care, and fashion are accompanied by advertisements for the related products, but it is difficult to distinguish between the articles and the advertisements, both of which purport to give information about 'sexiness' and about being a successful teenager. At least that's what they say they are doing – and this is precisely what these young girls wanted to learn about. In a very obvious sense, young women learn what they are told about sex.

Hudson draws attention to

the emphasis on leisure and fun as opposed to work and study, the preoccupation with romance; the conspicuous consumption and the prominence of gossip, the lack of comment on the hard work necessary for

¹⁹ It is hardly possible to argue that we should not wish to be able to find the right attitude and to perform the right action, but what the right attitude and the right action might mean is often trivialized in these contexts. Questions of what right attitudes and right actions might be have been raised by all human beings interested in living rightly. When these questions are raised seriously, they are not concerned with the superficial aspects of human life, but with our deepest aspirations.

success, in the sections on pop stars; the discouragement of enlarged social, geographical or occupational horizons; the stereotypical, white, bland prettiness of the models; the telegraphed, slangy language (1988, p. 49)

in the magazines which specifically target teenage girls and which construct teenage femininity. However, the construction of female sexuality is class-specific as well as race-specific. McLaren, for example, points out that the aggressively sexual dress and behavior of girls from a subordinate group, allows them to have their own form of control over their situation by forming their own cultural identity in a resistance to and a violation of the norms of appearance represented in the teenage magazines like *YM* or *Seventeen* (1988, p. 217).

On the other hand, using *Sports Illustrated* as an example, males learn about different sports, they learn biographical details of men who have been successful, and they learn of the material rewards of success. They learn what males like and that the successful males get what they want – they learn entitlement. The bravado exchanged between young men in the locker-room (Sabo, 1992, p. 322-3) and the promise of sex without consequence as it is depicted in pornography and in some mainstream media supports the idea of sex without commitment as a goal. For the adolescent boy, male status and gender identity are often related to physical and economic power and to heterosexual conquest and performance, regarded as the normal expression of a powerful and hormonally driven male sex drive. The ideal male body image, which is promoted and which many young men try to achieve through physical disciplines and with steroids, represents physical power. Virginity and homosexuality are viewed as abnormal or as unmanly (Whatley, 1988, p. 118). Young men, wishing to be 'normal' judge themselves and others in relation to this powerful cultural stereotype. The equation of men's sexuality with power and the homophobic construction of 'normal' male sexuality in the popular culture (Whatley, 1988, p. 118) are significant and disturbing messages which are learned by both males and females as they learn the sexual scripts conveyed in the media.

But whether by conforming to or by resisting the cultural discourses, whether by being considered normal, successful, deviant or rebellious, young women and young men are influenced and educated informally by the images and the understandings which are presented in the media, by the expectations of the culture and by the regulations of the

institutions. A critical examination of the knowledge which is conveyed through the media and of the messages which are received by individuals who are situated differently within the society will allow teachers to understand some of the understandings about sexuality which young people have gained informally. Furthermore, young people themselves may be helped to critically analyze the messages conveyed in the media so that they can reflect upon the influences of this informal sex education.

The knowledge about sexuality gained informally through the media is primarily social although it has ethical implications because it shapes our notions of what we ought to do. The social, empirical and ethical knowledge which is learned from the media is carried in the dominant discourses of patriarchy, of heterosexism and of romance which convey and carry the normative assumptions and attitudes of the culture. Within this context, the media has recently included information about how to prevent the transmission of STDs and of HIV. However, the protective discourse which has been added in an effort to educate members of the public so that they would have the necessary information to protect themselves from the possibility of contracting AIDS is carried in the context of the dominant discourses.

Reports of violence and victimization are predominant in the news reports and on the tabloid talk shows, where sexual assault, spousal abuse, murder, stalking and incest provide sensational and salacious material. However, the underlying cultural assumption of individualism maintains the belief that every individual could choose to change their situation. This belief allows the ones who have power and privilege to feel that they have deserved their good fortune, that it will therefore continue and that the others could be in a different situation. By the same token, those who are powerless and disadvantaged will feel they should be able to control their situation and they will feel responsible for their own misfortune. However, without an inquiry which can bring a question about the past and a hope for the future, we are not able to see what forces operate and to be free of the discourses which rule.

Participatory experimental research: After preliminary field research and with some theoretical background, young men and young women apply the knowledge they have learned as they conduct further participatory experimental research about their own sexuality. They test their tentative conclusions and gain more knowledge through

practical experience. As young people enter adolescence, they have a great deal of knowledge about sexuality which they have learned in their exchange with others in the cultural context. Although the early learning has a very significant impact upon their understandings and will affect the choices which they will have and make, informal learning continues throughout their adolescence and throughout the rest of their lives

As young people become adolescents, they are expected to begin to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for looking after their own needs rather than relying upon others.²⁰ They are expected to identify their goals in every area of their lives and they are asked again and again "What do you want to be?", "What do you want to do?", "What do you like?" and "Who do you like?" and they are convinced that they should be able to do what they want even though they do not know what that is. It is assumed that once goals are identified and needs are recognized, an empirical knowledge of the processes will ensure that the desired results may be achieved.

And these questions demand answers. Religious tradition and parental judgment are no longer regarded as authoritative as they once were in determining adolescents' choices about occupational, social or sexual matters although they may be taken into account and they may be a factor in the decision-making process which young people are involved with. In the North American cultural context, independence, self-determination, and self-sufficiency are considered to be among the most desirable characteristics an individual might have and the primary task of adolescence is defined with respect to these. Although these characteristics have, in the past, been assumed to be masculine, the political nature of this assumption has been identified and the association of these traits

²⁰ The understanding of the task of adolescence varies from culture to culture. In some cultures, becoming an adult will be signaled by the taking on of new roles within the society and fulfilling the responsibilities of that role as they are understood by the society rather than as a result of any independent decision or choice. For example, a young woman may become a wife and a young man a husband through a marriage which has been arranged by the families involved. Their status is now changed in the view of the community and in their own eyes. When a child is born, they then are expected and expect themselves to take on parental responsibilities. Or, if for example, the father or mother in a family dies, the eldest son or daughter may have to fill the role and become an adult because of the responsibilities of that role.

with males is no longer regarded as natural or necessary.²¹ Successful adolescents, both males and females, are required to learn to make independent choices and to take responsibility for them. Adolescents fail if they allow someone else to make their decisions, if they do not achieve their aims or if they do not take responsibility for the consequences of their choices. The emphasis on the importance of an identification of and the realization of personal goals is associated with the belief in the separate autonomy of individuals and the belief that freedom of choice is one of the fundamental rights which needs to be supported and protected. In a survey of teen-agers' attitudes conducted by Bibby and Posterski in 1992, freedom was selected as an important goal by 86% of the respondents; it was regarded as an important goal by more young people than any other goal.

The belief that the self can be separated from the social context in which it lives and acts and the idea that a person can become aware of his or her desires which are the result of independent thought and wish or are due to the recognition of the physical needs of the individual and the idea that happiness will be achieved when these goals are reached are fundamental assumptions of individualism which characterize Western liberal thought. These assumptions are revealed and supported in the language and in institutional and social practices and mask the extent to which individuals are influenced by their personal and cultural background. The increasing emphasis on the individual over the group is reflected in the data collected by Bibby and Posterski (1992) who conclude that "the importance of the individual, as opposed to relationships and the group, has been on the ascent" (p. 19).

Young people have never had more choices.

In virtually every sphere of their lives, Canadian teenagers are surrounded by options. As they reflect on what they want to buy and how they want to look, where they want to go and how they want to spend their time, the name of the game is choice. (Bibby & Posterski, 1992, p. 95)

²¹ Barbara Hudson (1984) writes of the contradictory demands adolescent girls face in the expectations of being independent and 'feminine', understood as compliant and nurturing. There is also an increasing demand for males to be 'masculine', understood as invulnerable and powerful, as well as sensitive and caring.

But goals cannot be established outside experience and choices cannot be made without criteria. Young people discover and identify their goals from the range of choices which are available to them. Choices are limited both by individual capabilities and by the current social realities, by what can be done and by the empirical, social, and ethical knowledge which has been learned. The desires which individuals have and the choices and goals which are available are shaped within the social context. The way that desire is socialized differentially with respect to gender was discussed in Chapter Six, but desire and choice are also socialized differentially with respect to social position. Young people, like everyone else, find themselves doing what they do and wanting to do certain things, without having made many conscious decisions, without having much knowledge of what the consequences of their actions will be, and without realizing their desires and their choices and their situations are very much a product of their past and their social environment. Although adolescents wish to be healthy, successful and happy, their more specific goals can only emerge as they find their place in the culture. Questions about what their personal goals are cannot be answered outside and apart from their experiences in a social context. The answers must be discovered. Young people begin identifying their own aspirations and needs based upon their understandings of what is regarded as desirable, important and possible within their own range of experience in their social setting. They begin from the base of social knowledge which they have. Those who have positions of privilege and power in the society will understand the language of choice differently than those who are disadvantaged and powerless. The rhetoric of the dominant discourse speaks to both, but it will be heard differently.

The understandings about which choices are available, the meanings of the choice, the desirability of the choices, the possibility of realizing the choices, the costs and the implications of the choices will be influenced by the discourse, the practices and the social relations. Each individual is situated differently in this social context and will experience it differently. Gaskell points out, for example, that boys are less concerned about the conflict between self interest and fairness (1982, p. 164), whereas girls see that these are sometimes contradictory and that a resolution is demanded. Blacks, native youth, and homosexual young people will see their possibilities differently than others and this will affect their choices. Young people make their choices based upon "an assessment of the

way the world works, what opportunities are open, what paths are possible" (Gaskell, 1982, p. 166).

Desire itself is problematic. A discourse of desire makes the identification of choice more available for conscious reflection. A discourse of desire, which does not merely condone desire, but which examines it, will reveal the way in which the social relations have shaped desire and constrained choice. Our desires are shaped through our social relationships and the actions which are a result of our desires affect others. An examination of our desires requires an examination of our social reality.

Our desires also express our subjectivity, our intention to act from where we are. As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, the owning of desire will empower the ones who feel powerless and it will allow the ones who have abused their power to see the implications of their desires more clearly. For example, a young woman who acknowledges that she wishes to become a veterinarian or run an animal shelter may, by naming her goal, be helped to examine the possibilities and the implications of such a choice and to discover ways of reaching it. A young man who wishes to control his girlfriend's activities may be able to examine the negative consequences of this desire if he is able to acknowledge it. A discourse of desire may distinguish among desires which are personal wants or personal needs or which are based upon the wishes or needs of others or which represent a wish for what is possible for us together.

Becoming expert: As young people grow up, they become part of the adolescent culture. It is not a matter of choice. By the time they have reached the end of the high school years, most young people will have found their place within a particular peer group in the teenage culture. This is more a matter of discovering a place, rather than choosing a place, although there are elements of both of these. In the process they will have learned the language and the accepted behaviors of adolescents in general and of their particular peer group. They will have come to share understandings of meaning with others in that group. Those outside the group do not know the same things. In that sense, all adults are outsiders to the teenage cultural group and do not know what teenagers know. However, adults were once teenagers and they live in a society with teenagers, and, teenagers will be adults and they now live in a society with adults. An acknowledgment of this may allow a real exchange to take place.

When she was in Grade Eleven, in response to the question "What would you and others in your school like to know about sex and sexual relationships?", Amanda replied that she and the others knew all they needed to know about sex. On further reflection, she thought there were some who did not have the information that *she* realized would be useful for them, but that *they* did not know what kind of information they needed and that therefore *they* would not say that they wanted to know this. It did not occur to her that she might be in a similar situation with respect to information that she did not have!

But she was speaking only about the empirical knowledge of facts and processes. By the time young people reach Grade 11, they are sexually mature and many of them are sexually active. King (1988) found that 56% of Grade 11 students have had sexual intercourse and Bibby and Posterski (1992) report that 62% of the 15-19 year olds in the Atlantic region are sexually active. Adolescents have a great deal of experiential knowledge about relationships, about themselves, about their bodies and about sexual relationships. Advice about relationships from friends and in the print media, information about contraception and safe sex in print and from medical personnel, and sexually explicit material are all readily available. Young people generally feel able to access the information they might wish to find and in many cases this feeling is justifiable. Sometimes they do not realize that the information they have is incorrect or inadequate. This may only become clear after the consequences of this mistaken judgment become evident, as a result, for example, of the discovery of an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease. "I thought I would not become pregnant if he pulled out in time", or "I didn't think she would be the kind who would have a disease" are the kind of claims made when such a judgment is proved wrong.

If young people contract a sexually transmitted disease, become pregnant or if they discover that they cannot resolve a problem in a relationship, they will wish to know what they do not know. They will wish for help from someone who knows what to do and how to resolve the problem. They will wish for empirical solutions to the problem as they perceive and define it. When they do not have a problem that they can see might be resolved, they do not believe that there is any knowledge which they need.

The social knowledge which they have is a knowledge of the meanings and of the social relations within the teenage culture which they have learned from their particular

perspective as they have found their place. This knowledge, which has not been gained consciously, is now taken for granted. Because it is different from the knowledge which others, particularly adults have, adolescents do not feel that others can understand them. They may claim, "You can't understand the problems of being a fourteen (fifteen, sixteen) year old now".

And although teenagers need to make many difficult choices, the widespread belief that individuals must make their own choices, often means that individuals do not understand how to explore the implications their decisions will have for others and consequently upon themselves as they exist in a network of social relationships with others. If the highest value is the freedom and autonomy of the individual, then the right of each person to make their own choices will be defended and everyone will be expected to choose for themselves. With the recognition of a variety of cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, there has been an increasing recognition of the value of an acceptance of a diversity of perspectives. However one of the negative consequences of this has been an increasing acceptance of the idea that whatever anyone chooses is acceptable. Bibby and Posterski point out that 65 percent of teenagers agreed that "what is right and wrong is a matter of personal opinion" (1992, p. 100). Many teachers and other adults share this opinion. Although it may seem relevant to discover more data about the conditions and about the consequences of alternate choices, if decisions are regarded to be only a matter of personal choice, the need for an exchange about the criteria for choice and for the education of our ethical understandings will not be recognized.

Informal learning which initiates new members into the discourses of the community, never raises questions about the validity of the assumptions of the community and leaves everything as it is. Sometimes questions are raised by others outside the community, but there may be many different motivations for this. But as adolescents become part of the teenage community, they become insiders – experts – the ones who know what they need to know to be where they are. They have gained the requisite empirical, social and ethical knowledge. However, informal learning does not result in a critical and reflective evaluation of the knowledge which has been gained and of the choices which have been made, individually and collectively in the society. A critical inquiry raises questions about the social relations and the assumptions which have led to

these ways of living and because a critical inquiry may allow us to examine the assumptions and attitudes which shape the discourses, it may free us from the practices and the consequences of the dominant discourses so that we may raise the question "How should we live?"

As young people grow up to take their places in society, they are surrounded by the influences of their family, their peers and the community. When they reach physical sexual maturity, their attitudes will have been largely formed. They will have learned a great deal about sexuality whether or not they have had a formal sex education programme in school. They will have some correct information, some misinformed ideas, some degree of interest as well as some notions about how to learn what they feel they need to know about sex. By the time they leave high school, many young people will have been sexually involved with one or more partners (King, 1989; Bibby & Posterski, 1992).

Being sexual and knowing sex

The individuals within any group of adolescents will have had a wide variety of sexual experiences and sexual relationships. Some of them will have engaged in sexual intercourse with a number of partners, some will have remained physically chaste by choice or because of fear or through lack of opportunity; some will find same-sex relationships satisfy their physical and emotional needs; others will discover heterosexual relationships fulfilling; some will have been or will be exploited or abused by others, some will have found delight in another and an affirmation of themselves in intimate relationships. Sexual experiences are among the most personal and the most intimate of experiences and yet they are shaped by and interpreted in relation to the shared understandings of gender, of body, of family, and of relationships learned in a social context. What is it which might be said that young people need to know about their sexuality so that they can live well – as individuals, in intimate and social relationships and as members of a society? This question, which raises the issue of formal sex education, might be asked by young people themselves, by their parents, and by those who are concerned for the well-being of the larger community as well as by educators within the schools.

Formal sex education is the communication of material which is intended to convey information about sex, to develop an understanding of sexual ideas and practices and of sexual relationships, to foster certain attitudes about sex or to question our established ideas and practices and to allow discussion of issues related to sex. It raises and tries to answer the question "What do we need to know about sex?". The formulation of the question this way which uses the pronoun 'we' instead of asking "What do young people need to know about sex?" indicates that the question is relevant for everyone. In determining a curriculum and in implementing it, we may ask "What do young people need to know about sex?" but the choice will depend upon our understanding of what sexuality is and what can usefully be understood about it through an intentionally planned process, involving an exchange with one another about the issues. The question as it is posed includes a query about what the educators need to know in order to choose a curriculum and to take responsibility for its execution. Just as the questions about the role of empirical knowledge, social knowledge, critical knowledge and ethical knowledge of sexuality were important for teachers, for the curriculum and for the students, the more general question "What do we need to know about sex?", which includes all these forms of knowledge, is a question which is relevant for educators, in relation to the curriculum, and for students.

However, this question can only be answered with reference to the knowledge about sex which we already have. In the context of our cultural situation it requires an examination of the socially constructed understandings of sexuality and the ways these have been shaped and are conveyed; it requires an understanding of the social knowledge which is shared but which individuals are related to in different ways, although it is often regarded as referring only to the store of information which individuals have about sex. The setting of a course implies a goal toward which or a direction in which we wish to proceed, although the goals which influence our choices are often unexamined. Yet since formal sex education involves an intention to educate, the questions "What is the aim?", "How is it best accomplished?" and "Who has decided?" are always relevant. In choosing goals and methods and in implementing programmes we become responsible for their consequences and this requires an ongoing inquiry. Issues about a formal sex education programme are discussed in the next chapter and a proposal for a critically-based sexuality education programme is made.

Chapter Eight

Formal Sex Education

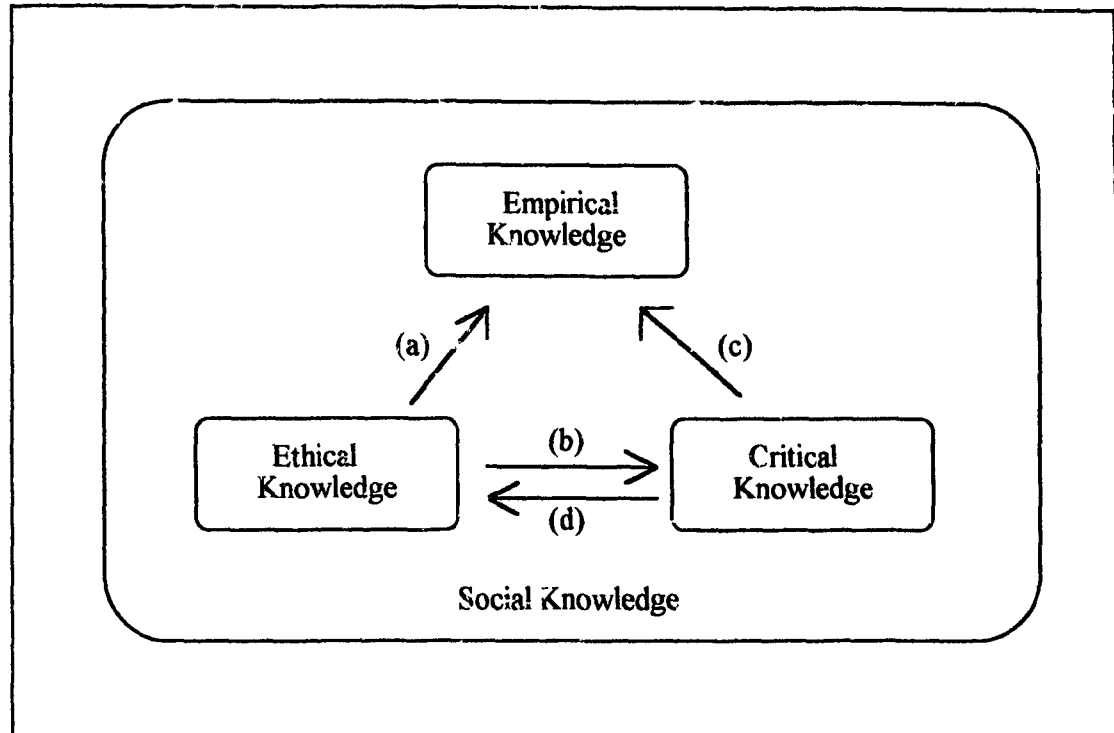
Knowledge for responsible action

Information is knowledge that is merely stored up; wisdom is knowledge operating in the direction of powers to the better living of life John Dewey

Because human beings can identify process, understand consequence and see relationships, they can recognize alternatives. Because we have knowledge which allows us to understand process, we can often produce the results which we wish. To the extent that we have the power to choose one course of action rather than another, and to the extent that we have the ability to implement our decisions, we can act intentionally. Much of the time, however, we live without being aware of any real alternatives. Many of the actions which we perform are done without a conscious decision for we have learned how to respond in a variety of situations. Many things happen which are not in our control and we experience both joy and sorrow in our lives as a result of the events which take place. However since we can choose between alternatives and we can often actualize our choices, we can be responsible for our actions. The human possibility to reflect upon experience and to evaluate alternatives leads to the human possibility to choose; when we have the power to realize our intentions, we have the responsibility to choose as wisely as we can.

The implementation of our plans for the future requires empirical knowledge of the processes about how those plans can be realized. But what those plans are will depend upon our purposes; upon our assessment of the situation as it is; upon our understanding of the situation and the meanings of the interactions which take place; and upon our level of interest in and concern for the well-being of others and ourselves – that is, the identification of our aims depends upon our social and ethical knowledge. Critique examines the social and political consequences of our actions and accepts or recognizes responsibility for the choices which have been made. The four categories of knowledge, which I have discussed in the central chapters of this thesis are closely related to one another. It is useful to identify the different role each of these kinds of knowledge can play in our relationship with the world and in a reflective evaluation of that relationship,

for when a separation is made between them, the way they can act as a check or as a guide for one another can be appreciated. However, in functioning together, they balance one another. The relationship between these forms of knowledge is shown in the diagram below.



A technical knowledge of processes is needed in order to effect change, that is an empirical knowledge is needed to implement the choices we have made. Our choices, which are made with an understanding of value, require and lead to the development of empirical knowledge (a). Critical knowledge, which is given direction by ethical knowledge (b), examines our situation. It may raise questions about the effects of our actions (c) and it may also reflect upon and challenge our ethical claims and decisions (d). All of these forms of knowledge, the empirical, the critical and the ethical depend upon our social knowledge – the understanding of meaning and the sharing of assumptions and attitudes – although at the same time, the knowledge in each of these areas affects and shapes our social knowledge.

The critique of 'scientism' has shown that the belief in the exclusive validity of empirical knowledge cannot be justified. Although it is increasingly clear that choices cannot be made without ethical and social knowledge, that is, without some freedom of choice for which we are responsible and without an understanding of meaning and value, the role these forms of knowledge play may not be acknowledged. When the importance of ethical and social knowledge is not appreciated, and only technical and instrumental knowledge is considered valid, we become unable to understand how choices might be made wisely. In the absence of any criteria, decisions are often made by those who are in positions of power in the social order. Life can be lived without a reflective inquiry and it can be lived without an application of critical knowledge. We frequently live and function, responding in the ways we have learned to act in our situation without questioning the assumptions and the practices which shape our lives. Yet without an application of critical knowledge which examines the social processes by which our collective decisions are made and which questions the assumptions which rule, the notions of gender, class, and race, of rationality, of right, and of truth, which we have taken for granted, shape our lives, willy-nilly. Without a conscious reflection upon our lives, individually and collectively, we will accept what we have been told or what we have come to know. But whatever we have learned is partial; it is known at a particular time, from a particular viewpoint and it is understood in relation to a particular purpose. Perhaps some of it is true and useful for us, but we will need to look and see. If we wish to take responsibility for our actions, we will need to recognize that there are alternatives which will have different consequences. For that we need to see more and to see more deeply. And for that, a critical and reflective analysis of our knowledge and of our situation is needed.

Sex education programmes

A formal sex education programme is formulated to satisfy needs which are not being met through the process of informal education. An identification of the goals which are considered valuable and a realization that these are not being met can lead to a proposal for a programme which will produce the desired results. This way of speaking makes it appear that we¹ could design a programme which would solve the problems as

¹ How the pronoun 'we' is used here needs to be examined. Who might design the program which would satisfy the needs of everyone? A more impersonal grammatical

they have been identified, no matter who the students are – sex education as a means to produce a desired result – and this is often our expectation. If we are in a position of responsibility and we recognize a need, we attempt to select and to implement the best programme. However, there are many goals which may be identified and many positions from which the current situation might be viewed. The acknowledgment that each of us sees the situation from a particular context and position and that each of us sees only partially invites an ongoing inquiry about how we might see more clearly and more inclusively. This inquiry can lead to an effort to see more clearly and to an exchange with one another which will enlarge our understandings and enrich our lives. We would then be able to select and to implement a better programme – but this too would need to be held lightly. The recognition that no particular programme could be determined to be the 'best' programme, even for a specific group of people and that every group and every individual have different requirements suggests that the content and the methodology of any programme need to be continuously evaluated. The question "How could the programme be improved to better meet the needs of these students at this time?" rather than "What do adolescents need to know about sex?" requires an examination of the curriculum as it is, an analysis of the needs of the individuals involved and an identification of what is worth while, that is, it requires both critical and ethical reflection. An evaluation of the programme also requires an exchange amongst those who are concerned about the outcome. Thus, the effort to evaluate a programme and its suitability for a particular group and to propose a better one, is both a means to discover a better programme but it is also the way to reach the goal of fostering critical and ethical reflection and promoting an exchange amongst those who are involved. The response to this question will have implications for the curriculum, and an engagement with the question will develop empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge of sexuality in both students and educators who are engaged with this inquiry.

form, such as, "A program might be designed which would solve all the problems" makes the fact that some people design any program, even less visible. The position of 'experts' as the ones who have the power to implement social policy, which has been assumed to be objective, has been questioned by critical theory. See Erhenreich & English (1989) for an excellent discussion of the way that the advice of male 'experts' has been imposed upon women.

Formal sex education may include sex-related school based policies² as well as specifically designed courses of instruction of whatever length which are introduced for a specific goal (Klein, 1987, p 6). A decision not to introduce a programme of formal sex education into the curriculum may be made because a need has not been perceived or because it is felt that education about sexuality ought to take place in other settings such as in the family or within the religious community. A strong lobby for this conservative claim has often successfully opposed the introduction of sex education programmes in the schools, in spite of the fact that the need for some type of formal sex education programme in the schools has increasingly been acknowledged by federal health agencies, by the public and by parents as concerns about the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and about the high incidence of adolescent pregnancy have grown.³

Not all parents are well enough informed or willing to teach their children even minimum biological facts about reproduction. Other than avoiding controversy, the results of leaving the subject of sexuality to parents have not been good; many young people are woefully ignorant of the facts which they need in order to make responsible decisions. As well, some adults have negative, restrictive and prejudicial attitudes about sex which they transmit to their children. If the subject of sexuality is left entirely to parents, for those young people who have parents who have been unwilling or unable to speak to their children, this area remains shrouded in silence. Young people may then remain ignorant about many aspects of sexuality, although they will learn about sexuality informally and part of what they learn may be that sexuality is unspoken. Although silence about sexuality in the family may convey an easy acceptance of sexuality, it may also convey a negativity, a fear and a denial of sexuality and it always supports the status quo. And, even if sexuality is spoken about in the family, unless there is some forum which will allow young people to consider, a little dispassionately, their own family background with

² Examples of the policies which would provide some formally sanctioned sex education include policies about sexual harassment or policies prohibiting physical contact between students.

³ Health Canada reports that 97% of Canadian adults support AIDS education in schools. It is not clear whether this means that 97% of Canadian adults support sex education in schools.

respect to sexuality they will be less able to see alternatives to their experience and to be free of their own past.

The recognition of the need for formal sex education has led to a variety of responses, some of which have been discussed earlier. One of the responses has been to make information and services more available to those young people who wish to make use of them. As the concerns about the incidence of adolescent pregnancies and of the apparent lack of knowledge about sexually transmitted disease have increased and as the awareness of the prevalence of abusive relationships has grown, some community or school based health clinics have been established to provide information and advice about contraceptives and prophylactics (see Chapter Three). The type of sex education which is provided in clinics is related to the provision of health services which are 'client-driven'. Clinics provide a valuable service and they have been well received by those who make use of them. However, although clinics allows a greater accessibility to some adolescents for counselling and services, they do not provide services to and education for all adolescents.

Because public education is universally available, when formal sex education is included in the school curriculum, the programme will reach a greater proportion of young people, although school drop-outs may be among those who are most at risk of acquiring STDs (Radford et al, 1989, p.1-2). Formal programmes have been developed to teach information and skills considered useful to meet the needs identified through an assessment of young people's knowledge and attitudes. However programmes vary depending upon the perspective of those who have identified the needs. Programmes, such as *Sex Respect* and *Teen Aid*, which promote abstinence as the solution to the problems of adolescent pregnancy and the dangers of sexually transmitted disease, have been introduced in some school systems, although these programmes have been criticized for presenting a simplistic and misleading notion of sexuality and inaccurate or partial information. They rely on fear to shape adolescent behavior and do not address the needs of sexually active young people (McKay, 1993). Programmes which advocate abstinence as the only choice have not been shown to delay the initiation of intercourse or to reduce the frequency of intercourse (Kirby, 1992), although they may increase the sense of fear

and guilt about sexual activity which will have negative affects upon contraceptive use.⁴ Both adults and adolescents ought to learn how to prevent unwanted pregnancies and to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and to realize that neither of these obviously desirable results can be guaranteed. Abstinence from sexual activity with a partner may be chosen by individuals at different stages in their lives for many reasons or it may be a fact which is the result of circumstance. By itself, abstinence from sexual activity is neither a mark of virtue nor of a lack of desire or of desirability. The variety of reasons for choosing not to engage in sexual intercourse can be usefully discussed as well as the implications of the fact that everyone is a sexual person and can be sexually healthy and happy whether or not they are or have ever been sexually active with a partner. Sexuality cannot be comprehended by a simplistic either-or determination and a good sex life cannot be decided by whether I do or whether I don't do this or that.

The *Canada Youth and AIDS Study* (King, 1989) highlights the need which young people have for accurate and relevant information about responsible sexual behavior and the necessary social skills to make use of the information in order to reduce the spread of HIV. Evaluations of programmes which emphasize only an acquisition of knowledge about reproduction and birth control or which explore values clarification and decision-making procedures in a general way have shown that these programmes have not had a major impact on behavior and are not effective in reducing the incidence of unprotected sexual encounters (Kirby, 1992). However, it has been demonstrated that well-planned, theory-based, group specific programmes which convey relevant information, provide motivation and train behavioral skills can have a positive impact on adolescent health by significantly reducing high-risk behaviors if adolescents have access to the necessary resources. (Fisher, 1990a; McKay, 1993) The programme, *Skills for Healthy Relationships*, which has been developed in response to the needs identified in the study, *Canada Youth and AIDS*, and which incorporates these features has been introduced in some schools where it has been shown to have a positive impact on knowledge and attitudes and on behavioral intentions, by providing skills and by removing many of the

⁴ As pointed out in Chapter Three, erotophobia is correlated with a lower rate of contraceptive use. The proponents of abstinence as the only choice for adolescents are sometimes erotophobic themselves and convey these attitudes to students.

barriers which prevent young people from making use of their knowledge of birth control and of disease prevention.

Programmes which are introduced specifically to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted disease and the incidence of adolescent pregnancies provide biological and medical information and they may teach the technical and social skills which are required to make use of the information. These programmes concentrate upon teaching the empirical knowledge which is required to produce the desired outcomes and their success or failure will be judged by determining whether or not there is a reduction in the numbers of adolescent pregnancies and in the incidence of sexually transmitted disease. Such a result would indeed be a cause for celebration. However, the need to prevent disease and to avoid unwanted pregnancies is only a very small part of our interest in and concern about sexuality. The prevention of disease and unwanted pregnancy may constitute a necessary condition for a good sex life and for a good life but it does not satisfy our aspirations. The goal of reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies and the incidence of sexually transmitted disease determines which facts will be taught and what will be emphasized. In any programme there are many facts which will not be discussed. The selection of a particular group of facts or of an approach to the teaching of sexuality has implications which cannot be evaluated adequately by determining if the facts are true or false, if the students have learned the facts and if the students are able to use their knowledge of these facts. A critical examination of the selection of facts, of the implications of that selection and of the understandings which are conveyed through the programme may make the perspective which is imposed more evident.⁵ The questions "Is this perspective desirable?" and "How can our perspective be enlarged and deepened?" which follow, require ethical knowledge. An evaluation of the effects of any sex education programme requires an evaluation of the empirical knowledge which is learned, but also a reflective and critical analysis of the social knowledge which is conveyed and an

⁵ A critical examination may examine the implications of a program by pointing out what facts have been omitted. For example, in a program which emphasizes the prevention of pregnancy, the facts about sexual desire may be omitted (Fine, 1988).

ethical decision about whether this programme is adequate. Evaluation, which is an ongoing requirement, depends upon empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge.⁶

Teaching sex education

In any programme of sex education, social knowledge of sexuality will be conveyed through the content of the curriculum and the pedagogical methods used.⁷ Although the attitudes and understandings of meaning which are part of the hidden curriculum are held largely unconsciously, they will significantly affect what is learned. The attitudes and the understandings of the teacher will be the most important factor in determining this part of the curriculum although the attitudes and the understandings of the students which are related to their own varied experiences will also affect what can take place in the classroom and what will be learned. Trudell (1992) points to the influence of the school organization and conditions in determining the teaching strategies in health and sex education classes. She describes the situation in a grade nine classroom in which Mrs. Warren, the teacher, minimized resistance to the required course by "selecting non-controversial topics, simplifying content, presenting mostly fragments of technical detail geared toward passing the exam, and limiting discussion. Such strategies had the effect of reducing rich and diverse knowledge about sexuality to a narrow range of technical school knowledge with little relevance to students" (Trudell, 1992, p. 211).

Forrest and Silverman (1989) point out that teachers find student reactions and their lack of interest to be problems in teaching health and sex education programmes. On the other hand, students often find the material in the courses outdated and naive and do not take the programmes seriously, although sex is an important topic for them and sex education is an integral part of school life outside the official curriculum. But sexuality is a topic which cannot be comprehended by information about the physical processes involved and by learning the codes of behavior which have traditionally been sanctioned or

⁶ Critical and ethical knowledge are evaluative knowledge which depend upon empirical and social knowledge.

⁷ See Chapter Four, for a discussion of the social knowledge which is conveyed and identified as discourse.

which are socially acceptable. To understand our sexuality is to understand ourselves as gendered, embodied individuals who live in relationships with others. Born as male or female, in the natural course of events, we grow up and become sexually mature and able to reproduce. With the passage of time, we grow older and die. But what is it to be male or female, to grow older, to give birth, to parent a child, to experience physical and emotional intimacy with others, to love others? What is it to be a human being, who can reflect on experience and act intentionally? Our responses reveal our understandings and our aspirations; they reveal what we believe has significance and what we consider to have value. Our understandings, which arise out of and shape our relationships, involve both thought and feeling. They are framed and influenced by the linguistic understandings shared with others and by the social and institutional practices in our communities, but they are more specifically related to our own experience. Our hopes, fears, expectations, and desires connect our individual and collective past to the future. And as Muriel Dimen points out, "Sex stands at the crossroads of nature, psyche and culture" (Dimen, 1990, p.35).

Our understanding of sex is related to the deepest sense of ourselves, in thought, in feeling, and in body. A clinical discussion of the physical processes involved does not convey anything about the rich and mysterious quality of sexual energy and desire, which may be expressed through love or in lust. Presenting only biological and medical facts about sexuality and relationships leaves the informal sex education which has taken place, whatever it has been, unquestioned. It reproduces and naturalizes the dominant understandings of sexuality and it obscures the complexity of the issues which are involved. Emphasizing only the physical dangers of sexual relationships and the importance of preventing the transmission of disease and unwanted pregnancies maintains a silence about the concerns and the problems which adolescents face in sexual relationships; about their excitement and hesitation, their hopes and their fears; and about the ambiguity and the confusion they find in their sexuality. A programme of sex education which addresses only the technical and instrumental aspects of sexual interactions separates the study of facts about sexuality from the understandings of the meanings and the students' experiences of sexuality. As a result, students may feel that there is no way to, thoughtfully and carefully, examine the meanings which they have understood or guessed and the experiences they have had. Without a reflective and evaluative consideration of their own situation, they cannot be free of the informal

education which they have had individually and more generally, through the linguistic and institutional practices. A curriculum which provides only empirical information and which teaches nothing more than technical and social skills to enable students to use this knowledge omits a discussion of many of the aspects of sexuality. The silences which surround the issues of body, of feelings, of physical desire, of power, of gender, of relationships, of morality may be understood to imply that these are not issues which can be discussed, known and understood. The silences may be taken to mean that these issues are determined by nature or that they are matters of individual choice.⁸ In either case, without a critical reflection, the understandings gained informally are left as they are.

The official curriculum severs notions and discussions of sexuality from construction of gender politics, violence, heterosexism and the economics of reproduction... Teaching "only the facts" means teaching male pleasure and heterosexual privilege, (as if that in and of itself were sexuality), absent from critique, distinguished as if separable from violence, and devoid of female desire. (Fine & Phillips, 1992, p. 243-4)

Whatley claims that the mandate to introduce sex education programmes often means that only the most conservative curricula will be introduced and any discussion of values, choices or decision making, beyond the decision to say no, will be considered

⁸ These two conclusions which may be drawn from the fact of silence or which may lead to a silence about these issues are completely contradictory. On the one hand, if understandings of the body, of gender, feelings of desire, fear, our ability to form and maintain relationships are understood to be 'natural', that is, we are born this way or that, then we might imagine that there is nothing to be discussed, that we cannot change 'the way it is' and so we remain silent, or explain the silence. On the other hand, if individuals can choose the way to think, feel, and act in relationships with others and how they see their body and make moral decisions, and if free choice is our highest ideal, how can an intervention in someone else's decision be justified? However, with even a little observation of one's own situation, it is clear that neither of these conclusions can be maintained. Our choices are constrained. They are made within a certain context and from a certain perspective and they affect ourselves and others. Alternatives to our situation can be envisaged. Changes cannot be made easily, but they can be made. Just as there are levels of choice and levels of desires, there are levels of freedom. "The only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observations and of judgment exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile (Dewey, 1963, p. 61).

suspect (1992, p. 79). The values clarification discussion may become a way to persuade students of the most conservative adult perspective, for although teachers express a commitment to programmes that enable students to examine their own values, many of them also believe that students should be explicitly taught not to have sex (Forrest and Silverman, 1989, p. 67). On the other hand, the values clarification programme may lead to a belief in moral relativism and a justification of self-interested value judgments. The fact that different cultures, different traditions and different individuals have had different values, may be regarded as support for the claim that no value judgment can be shown to be universally acceptable or the claim that all choices are equally valuable and that morality is a matter of 'personal choice'.⁹ Programmes which claim that they do not discuss issues of morality, but concentrate upon teaching the empirical information and social skills necessary to prevent disease and pregnancy and which emphasize the importance of a rational decision-making process are often based upon a discourse of liberalism which assumes the values of individualism and of patriarchy and heterosexism. Sexuality cannot be dissociated from our understandings of value. Programmes which claim to be value-free will carry values which are assumed but not recognized, whereas programmes which teach values, rather than exploring the values which are assumed in the culture, by the students and by the teacher, may impart ideas and positions about morality, which students can 'learn' to pass the course, but these programmes will do little to promote an appreciation of the complexity of the issues involved and to develop a greater level of moral understanding and ethical knowledge.

However, sexuality education can be more than a discussion of anatomy and prevention and of moralistic rules of behavior. Besides teaching the information which students need to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, sex education programmes can help students to reflect upon their experience and to identify and to evaluate alternatives, so that they might be freed from their past in order to be able to take responsibility for the future. That is, sex education may support a critical reflection about

⁹ The conclusion that all choices are equally valuable does not follow from the fact that different cultures and different traditions have understood morality differently. The belief that it does is a result of the failure to understand that there are different qualities of moral judgment or different levels of ethical concern; see Chapter Six. See also a discussion about these issues by W. Hare (1985).

sexuality and the development of an ethical concern. James Sears (1992) proposes a critically based sexuality education which can explore and challenge dominant categorical thinking about gender and sexual identity by examining the origins of sex roles as they are understood and by identifying the ideas and the institutional practices which enforce them. Our notions of gender and of sexual morality are closely related to our understandings of the individual, of the body, of knowledge and of human purpose. A critically based sexuality education which is, in fact, engaged in an inquiry about our ideas and practices, will result in an identification and evaluation of many of the assumptions which shape our discourse and affect our lives and not only our assumptions about gender and sexual orientation. This inquiry requires and depends upon an attitude of inquiry which is able to reflect upon experience and the choices which have been made, individually and collectively, within the cultural context; the meanings which have been understood; and the way those choices and meanings have been constructed. It requires a practical modeling and practice – that is, it requires a teacher who understands and is engaged by such an inquiry and who is able to develop the students' interest and ability in the process of inquiry.

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, [human beings] cannot truly be human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [human beings] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1974, p.58)

Education which emphasizes learning through a process of inquiry is very different from education which is viewed as the teaching of information and skills. Freire has called education which concentrates upon transmitting information and knowledge 'education as banking' (Freire, 1974, p. 57 ff). In the banking method, the teacher and the texts teach and the students store the deposits which are made. In this model, knowledge is understood to be made up of empirical and rational or prescriptive statements and the practical skills required to accomplish something or to produce desired results. The teachers are the custodians of what they have learned or of what is carried in the texts and the official curriculum. In spite of the rhetoric of child-centred learning, this idea of knowledge as rational, instrumental and technical remains central within the educational field and it is through this model that most teachers have become experts in their subject area when they themselves were students. Education as inquiry, or as problem-posing,

begins with an examination of the ways we exist in the world, that is, it begins from a recognition and an identification of our situation,¹⁰ and examines the way this has come to be and what the consequences might be. An understanding of the dynamic nature of our social reality brings hope for change and awakens a feeling of responsibility to bring about transformation. Education, which emphasizes inquiry does not deny the value of empirical information and technical skills, but expects them to be relevant for the purposes of the students and expects that the selection of what information and skills are to be included will itself be the subject of inquiry and evaluation. Teachers who have been educated with definitive answers will teach others in this way unless they can learn to give up the expectation of answers and an exclusive reliance upon empirical and analytic knowledge. "Teachers, like their students, have to learn to love the questions, as they come to realize that there can be no final agreements or answers, no final commensurability" (Greene, 1988, p. 134).

In discussions with student teachers about sexuality education, Mariamne Whatley has found that these prospective teachers have often seemed to be more interested in finding ways to avoid potential problems rather than to address the issues.

Instead of focusing on strategies to teach sexuality in the best ways to facilitate communication with students on this complex and sensitive topic, the class effort ends up directed toward developing strategies to avoid conflict and controversy. ... Comprehensive curriculum development, lesson plans, and learning activities seem driven not by theories of education but by the fear of attack. (Whatley, 1992, p. 78)

Many teachers of health and sex education have not been trained in the subject area and they do not feel prepared to teach about sexuality, nor do they receive any support except for the material which is contained and suggested in the texts and in curriculum guides. Teachers in junior high schools in Nova Scotia, for example, may be asked to teach the course, *Personal Development and Relationships*, only because they have room on their

¹⁰ The 'we' here may be any group which includes the one who inquires. 'We' as members of this class, or as members of the group of adolescent girls, or as human beings, or as members of this generation, or as human beings interested in sex...will discover different features of reality.

time-table. A lack of training, a lack of confidence or interest, a lack of preparation about the rich and diverse topic of sexuality may all contribute to a reliance upon the most conservative approaches with respect to the content and the method of teaching. A teacher does not become qualified to teach about sexuality and questions of relationships merely by virtue of having achieved physical maturity or of having had sexual experiences. The questions "What do we know about sex?" and "What do we need to know about sex?" become relevant for us as sex educators, when we begin to realize the importance of the empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge of the teacher in this area. Whatever the curriculum is, it is conveyed by some teachers and it is taught to some students. It has no significance until it is used and its significance is determined by the way it is conveyed and by the way it is learned.

In any course, whatever the content of the curriculum, what actually happens in the classroom will depend upon the interaction between the teachers and the students. Teachers have a great deal of influence upon the way the curriculum is taught (Fine, 1988) although as Trudell suggests, the students can open up or close down possibilities for meaningful discussion. There are many factors operating in the classroom and the teacher has to work within a particular context. Trudell cautions against holding individual teachers personally responsible for the content and teaching strategies which we may regard as unsatisfactory and points to the need to become "cognizant of the constraints and possibilities that even the most progressive, personally comfortable, and academically well-prepared teachers will encounter on a daily basis and prepare teachers for this reality by critically examining both constraints and possibilities in preservice and in-service education" (Trudell, 1992, p. 205). The constraints and the possibilities are both internal and external. Sex education may be opposed by school administrators, by parents or by the public who believe that sex education is not what the schools ought to be teaching because it is not related to the cognitive development or employment prospects of the students, or that it promotes sexual activity or undermines parental authority. As sex education is increasingly regarded as necessary to prevent the spread of AIDS, for example, the resistance of school administrators, parents, and the public is expressed through the claim that certain topics should not be discussed. Students may feel uncomfortable discussing issues of sexuality with their peers or with the teacher or they

may believe that they know all they need to know about sex¹¹ and that the material which is provided is irrelevant. An expectation of external resistance and a realization that the students will have had a great variety of experiences and will have a wide range of knowledge may add to a teacher's internal hesitation about addressing issues of sexuality.

Even when the conventional sex education curriculum concentrates upon a study of anatomy and strategies of prevention of disease and pregnancy, the teacher's own attitudes are conveyed and the dominant ideologies about gender, sexual orientation, knowledge and relationships are reproduced through the hidden curriculum. At the same time, the curriculum and the attitudes will be resisted and shaped by the students. There are many forms of resistance from students who find the curriculum irrelevant or naive or who are given contradictory messages through the formal and informal curriculum. They may pay no attention, they may disrupt the class by making remarks which are sexually explicit, they may use slang to show their own special knowledge, they may flaunt their sexuality, or they may learn the information in the text well enough to respond to examination questions and make no use of it. In general the formal sex education programme has little or nothing to do with the informal sex education students receive inside and outside the school, but informal sex education is far more influential in the students' learning about sexuality than the formal sexuality curriculum. One of the most important roles which formal sex education can have is in the provision of a way to reflect upon the informal learning of sexuality which has taken place and which continues to take place. In any social context, some adolescents have good experiences in relation to sexuality and others have bad experiences. Without a critical reflection upon the ideas and the practices which we have been exposed to, we remain under the influence of our past experiences and our informal education and we cannot be free of the way they shape our understandings¹² and the societal assumptions of gender, race, class, of individual responsibility and possibility and of values remained unquestioned.

¹¹ See Chapter Seven (p. 185). However, students do not know all they need to know about sexuality merely by virtue of achieving physical maturity and of having had some sexual experience.

¹² One of the most obvious examples of the repetition of experience is in the area of family violence. Physical, emotional and sexual abuse is most often perpetrated by those who have experienced abuse themselves. Although those who have been abused do not

A critically based sexuality curriculum must begin from where we are as teachers and as students. What we know and what we understand is the material which needs to be examined and reflected upon and to be changed or augmented. Our informal education needs to be evaluated in the light of our hopes, wishes, and expectations, that is, in the light of our understanding of what is of value and of what is worthwhile. The values themselves can also be examined in the light of others' questions which reveal their aspirations.

By paying attention to what adolescents are listening to and watching, educators not only acquire information about interests and concerns, but also have a means of entering discussion. ... Some of the most important issues in terms of how we live as sexual beings in the world can be approached and analyzed through fairly accessible popular culture examples. (Whatley, 1992, p. 82-83)

A formal sex education programme may add to the store of empirical facts which young people have; it may widen their understanding of meaning and, if the teacher is attentive to the classroom atmosphere, it may extend their experience of relationship; and, it may inculcate conventional or traditional morality. However, the most important role which a formal sex education programme can play is to develop the students' critical and ethical ability so that they would be able to reflect upon and to inquire into their own situation in the context of their social reality. The identification and reflection of the situation can free students from the assumptions which have ruled so that they will be able make decisions for the future, as individuals in a social and political context, for which they could recognize their responsibility.

always abuse, since they have been victims of abuse, they will react out of that unless they can find another way of responding, another way of seeing, another way of knowing. Although the example of abuse presents the case strongly, we are affected in a similar way by all the influences which constitute our informal social knowledge. Unless we can see what it is and that there are alternatives, we act from our past experience.

Sex education as inquiry in exchange

Formal sex education can provide a forum and can help students develop the ability to examine the way that we live in relation to sex and to ponder about the way that we might live. Through this analysis they can be helped to become more able to take responsibility in their individual relationships and as citizens in the society.

By virtue of the genuine interest of adolescents in sexuality, sexuality education can pose questions and provide knowledge that challenge students' everyday concepts of gender and sexuality. More important, sexuality education can help bridge the gap between the personal and political by exploring the ideological basis for gender and sexual identities. Finally, sexuality education can convey the multiple forms of sexual expression, and the plasticity of sexual identity to adolescents and, in the process, explore questions about power and ideology in society. (Sears, 1992, p. 145)

By beginning with an acknowledgment of the contradictions which we meet in our experience, we can initiate an exploration of the assumptions which shape our lives and we can raise questions about what might be possible. In a real exchange with others, our assumptions can be challenged, our understandings of meaning can be enlarged and our perspectives can be changed. With new understandings and new perspectives, we can act differently in the world.

A study of the problems of loneliness and violence, for example, within the society and in relation to our own experiences, can lead to an examination of the forces which operate and the ideas which rule in our social context. When such problems are recognized, questions about their causes and what would constitute a better life for individuals and in the larger social unit, arise. A discussion of these questions requires a consideration of desire and of ethical values and it raises questions of meaning. The exploration of complex and sometimes controversial issues, such as abortion, reproductive technology, social responsibilities, family responsibilities, the needs of children and our responsibility to provide child care, influences of pornography and violence in the media, questions arising out of the changing views about sexual orientation in the society, or assumptions of gender and race provides students with a chance to develop their

understandings of the personal, social, political and cultural roots of our beliefs and practices, and of the implications of our choices for ourselves and for others. An examination of these issues, which do not have easy solutions, but which require our thoughtful and careful response, promotes the development of critical knowledge and of ethical considerations.

A discussion which is an intentional and focused conversation about these issues may encourage a thoughtful and careful consideration of our own position and a reconsideration of the issues in light of enlarged understanding gained through hearing others' points of view if there is a real exchange among the members of the group in the class, which will include the teacher and the students. The exchange which is required is one in which the participants reflect upon and present their own views *and* listen to the views which others bring so that they can reflect again upon the issues in light of the shared understandings. It is a dialogue in Freire's sense (1974, p. 75 ff). The fact that members of the group will have had different experiences with respect to the issues raised is an advantage, for different perspectives can then be articulated. Some will have given careful thought to some topics and not to others; and some will find that certain areas are of special interest. Each person may not contribute equally to or benefit equally from any particular discussion.

However, as Jane Roland Martin suggests:

A good conversation is neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in manner, and constructive in intent, it is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another. (1985, p. 10)

The point of a conversation is not always to reach a consensus, nor is it to determine which point of view is better but rather it is found in the exchange and in the opportunity to enlarge our understanding of the complexity of the issues and to become more deeply aware of our own and of each others' lives. This kind of conversation about issues which are related to our sexuality is a method of achieving the goal of increasing our empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge of sexuality and of pondering together how we might make choices in this regard as individuals and as a society, but it is also the mark of an achievement of our goal, for in this conversation we reflect upon the issues and

we take others into account – we express our understanding of the way to make use of critical and ethical knowing.

Not everyone in a class will be immediately able to participate in a focused and constructive conversation and the teacher will need to develop the students' ability in this regard. The art of this form of conversation will require an attitude of open-mindedness, but it will also develop an attitude of open-mindedness. William Hare has described the open-minded person as "one who is able and willing to form an opinion, or revise it, in light of evidence and argument" (1985, p. 16). The use of the term 'opinion' here may be understood as the expression of the point of view which we see motivates our actions, including our thought, words and deeds. Such a point of view may not have been reached through a cognitive process, for it may have been inculcated through the processes of socialization. However, before it can be examined it must be acknowledged. This may be accomplished through the attempt to express it. This requires a willingness and an ability, or as Hare puts it, being "able and willing to form an opinion" and this can best be accomplished when someone wishes to hear our point of view, when someone asks and then listens – that is, it can be realized in the context of a real exchange with another or with others. However, in order then to hear "evidence and argument" which would cause us to change our outlook, we need to be able and willing to hear another's view. This is not a remark about the adequacy of the sense of hearing, but rather it is a remark which points to the need for an openness of the heart and mind and for a willingness and an ability to hear another, to see another, to take another seriously – which is loving another.¹³ Or, as Freire puts it, the dialogue which is an act of creation, "cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for [human beings]" (1974, p. 77).

The teacher needs to promote the possibility of this exchange and to develop the willingness and the ability to participate in this in the students. Belenky *et al* speak of the role of the teacher in a connected class as being a mid-wife "one who would help them articulate and expand their latent knowledge" (1986, p. 217) so that they can build understanding through sharing their perspectives on the issues which are important to them. The teacher does not need to and ought not to remain neutral but should participate

¹³ *Belief in the existence of other human beings as such is love* Simone Weil

fully in the exchange. In many cases the teacher will need to raise the level of the exchange by contributing and bringing a point of view which has not been brought by the students or to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of meaning and of status, which the students bring to the discussion. The teacher's role is a demanding one for it requires being part of the process and watching over and guiding the process at the same time. In the process of the exchange, the students come to know themselves, to know others, to know about the subject area more broadly and to know how to inquire about and to reflect upon claims which are made and their consequences and to take others into account. They become knowers – empirical, social, critical and ethical knowers.

The process will involve an exchange of information from those who have some information based upon their own experience, from texts and from experts, that is, the exchange will depend upon and promote an increase of empirical knowledge. It will also involve social knowledge, for it will depend upon and develop shared expectations and understandings of concepts. And because such an exchange will require a reflective consideration of the implications of the discourse, of the selection of the topics, of the partiality of the information which we have, of the limitations of our shared perspective, that is, it will challenge our assumptions of patriarchy, of individualism, of an exclusive belief in science, for example, it will include critical knowledge. It will also depend upon and lead to an understanding of our values and our aspirations, and a hope for the well-being of individuals and of the society, that is, it will depend upon and lead to ethical knowledge. With the development of an empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge of sexuality, we may then be able to act more wisely and to take responsibility for our actions more seriously. The education of empirical, social, critical and ethical knowing empowers the students who so that they would be able to engage in responsible decision making as individuals and as citizens.¹⁴

¹⁴ Democratic decision making is not something that we are able to participate in by virtue of being able to voice an 'opinion'. Democratic decisions ought not to be made merely because of a majority opinion or because the more powerful have persuaded the less powerful that their view is the right one. Democratic decisions might be arrived at through an exchange which might allow the development of a larger understanding of right action.

Michelle Fine writes that:

In order to understand the sexual subjectivities of young women more completely, educators need to reconstruct schooling as an empowering context in which we listen to and work with the meanings and experiences of gender and sexuality revealed by the adolescents themselves. (Fine, 1988, p. 36)

While it is true that this process of exchange which includes a discourse of desire provides an empowering context for students, the point of constructing schooling as an empowering process is not so that we can understand the sexual subjectivities of young women or of the students, or so that they can understand their own sexual subjectivities, but it is so that, empowered, students will be able to act responsibly as reflective individuals and as members of the society, who can reflect upon and examine the assumptions which rule. The process of empowerment will not take place unless the students can be helped to bring their own subjectivities to light and then to reflect upon their experiences and their understandings in the light of others' perspectives.

An inquiry about our sexuality and about the way we have culturally and individually responded to questions about our sexuality constitutes the method of a critically based sexuality curriculum. Each group of individuals or each class, under the guidance of a particular teacher, will explore these ideas differently. Case studies which reveal the complexity of some of the issues involved may provide an opening into a discussion, so that the class may begin to learn how to engage in an inquiry in the form of a conversation, as described above. Media studies may be related to the students' own understandings of the popular culture and may provide a way to begin the exchange. A comparative study of the understandings of gender and sexuality and the different responses to these in different cultures can provide the way to enlarge the perspective beyond the views held by individuals in the class. These are a few examples of the way the form of inquiry may be filled. In every case, it will be important for the teacher to guard against his or her tendency and the tendency of the students to defend or to reject certain views without a careful examination and it will be important for the teacher to encourage the development of a concern for principles of justice and of the ability to understand and to care for others. A critically based sexuality curriculum depends upon and leads to

ethical knowledge and it depends and leads to an analysis of our social knowledge, and it will influence the way we will make use of our empirical knowledge.

The film "No Way! Not Me", which discusses the level of poverty among Canadian women, models a way of questioning some of the taken-for-granted meanings related to issues of gender and the economic situation. Rosemary Brown speaks about the social, political and economic realities of women's situations and provides a historical context which shows the roots of the feminization of poverty in the society. She points to the contradiction between the myth that: 'Everything will turn out well for me. If I do not choose poverty and loneliness, then I will not be poor and lonely' and the circumstances of many women, not unlike myself. That is, she points to the contradiction between the romantic discourse and the discourse of individualism and the actual situation for many women. The identification of this contradiction leads to a critical examination of the understandings of gender and the impact of these assumptions on the economic circumstances of many women. She advocates positive steps to the goal of a happy and fulfilled life in relation to an awareness of the problem of the social relations as they are. The refusal to accept the consequences of an unexamined set of assumptions, such as the feminization of poverty, leads to an identification of the assumptions which have produced the situation, a recognition of their consequences and an active intervention. In this case, Rosemary Brown proposes that young women get as much education towards employment and economic independence as they can, so that they would be less likely to be victims of the social system or of others. Although more education, by itself, cannot guarantee employment, the critical and ethical education which is provided through the film, about the social reality and about the need for a critical awareness of the assumptions which rule, and about the need to take positive action toward a goal will have a large impact upon the attitudes and the lives of the young women who learn these lessons. Making the assumptions which rule and the contradictions which exist visible will also have a large impact upon others in the society, who by this can begin to see the situation more clearly and to recognize the negative consequences of our taken for granted beliefs. The education which allows us to see more clearly the effects of our individual and collective decisions will have the greatest effect on the feminization of poverty.

A similar study and analysis which can lead to proposals for action towards our goal of a good life, individually and collectively, can be envisioned with respect to some of

the problems which we face in relation to our sexual relationships, within our families and within the society – problems of violence, of loneliness, of disease, of abuse, of neglected children, of feelings of meaninglessness, or of the disciplines which have been undertaken to produce particular bodies. A recognition of the problems, an analysis of the roots and a recognition of our wish may lead to proposals for real solutions. A practical education about how to recognize the problems, how to examine the social roots of the problems, how to understand and to evaluate our goals and how to institute change is required.

Issues of sexuality do not only arise in health and sex education classes. As James Whitson (1992) points out, since our social reality is inextricably connected with sexuality, sexuality cannot be eliminated from our curriculum of cultural studies and liberal arts. Sex education teachers can and should make use of the material from other areas in the curriculum as well as the material in the informal curriculum. However, a corollary of the fact that our social reality is related to our sexual reality is that every teacher is a teacher of sex education. Sexuality is a topic of the formal and of the hidden curriculum in every subject. Understandings of gender and of sexuality are conveyed and learned in every area of the curriculum, in literature, in history, in biology, in family studies, in economics, in political science, and in religious studies, as examples, through the content of the material which is studied and through the attitudes of the teacher and students who interpret that material. This realization has pedagogical implications for pre-service and in-service programmes for educators, for the question "What do we know and what do we need to know about sex?" is relevant for all teachers.

It has been pointed out in this thesis that the emphasis on prevention of unwanted pregnancy and of sexually transmitted disease in adolescence may result in a sex-negative discourse. As well the emphasis in critique on the identification of the assumptions which have resulted in injustice and inequities in our social relationships may result in an emphasis upon the possibility of negative consequences of sexual relationships. Dwelling on the problems related to our sexuality and on the potential for danger and negative sexual experiences, even when this is done in order to help young people avoid these, is a partial and limited perspective about human sexual experience. The emphasis on the prevention of negative outcomes is parallel to the emphasis on the removal of constraints of freedom; the question about what we are free for remains.

The whole range of human feeling can be touched and expressed in sexual relationships; when we are most exposed we are most vulnerable; and yet when we are most exposed we can be most deeply seen. Although the possibility of violence and abuse of sex, which may express and result in feelings of despair and degradation, exists, so too does the possibility of finding and expressing delight in physical and emotional intimacy, of finding and expressing love through sexual relationships, and of creating new life. Sexual desire and 'the love which moves the sun and the other stars'¹⁵ are not equivalent, but neither are they unrelated. The love which is expressed through tenderness or through eros and passion reveals the connection between the body and the psyche at the same time as it shows the wish of one person to connect with another. Plato claimed that love is a *daimon*, a force which serves as an intermediary between the flesh and the spirit or between one and another or between the human and the divine.¹⁶ Because of its ecstatic possibility and the connections it makes real, the experience of erotic passion and sexual love can reveal by analogy, something of the possible relationship of the human being to the divine through mystical love.¹⁷ The whole range of human possibility can be included in a critical discourse of desire.

The experiences each one of us has represent only a small portion of human experience. However, through hearing of others' experiences and by understanding our common human situation, our perspective may be enlarged. We can learn of the range of experience which is possible for us through an examination of our own experience, through speaking to and listening to others, and through the study of history, literature and myth.

¹⁵ From the last canto in *The Divine Comedy* by Dante.

¹⁶ Socrates reports hearing from the wise woman, Diotima that "Love is a great spirit (*daimon*) and like all spirits, he is intermediate between the divine and mortal...he is the mediator which spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore by him the universe is bound" (Plato, *The Symposium*, p.216).

¹⁷ The relationship of love between the human and the divine is expressed by reference to the physical relationship in, for example, *The Song of Songs*, *The Gita Govinda*, the poems of John of the Cross.

An understanding of the field of possibilities brings hope and yet it requires us to choose amongst alternatives. Our choices will depend upon the criteria we use to evaluate the alternatives. The recognition that we can choose brings an awareness of our responsibility for the consequences of our choices and a wish to know more about the processes which are involved. However, unless we can identify the present situation and understand the way that we might effect the desired changes, we will be unable to realize our choices. Responsible human action depends upon the complex interplay of empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge. Each of us lives as an individual, but we also always live within a social reality and we are related to others; our choices affect others and others' actions will have an impact upon our lives. Questions about our choices are questions about individual and social morality and justice.

A formal sex education programme which seriously raises and keeps alive the question "What is a good sex life?" depends upon and develops the empirical, social, critical and ethical knowledge about sexuality of the teachers and the students. The point of such an inquiry is not to establish definitive answers for everyone, but it is to deepen the questions so that we may come to understand the world and ourselves more fully in order that we can address again the question "What is a good life?"

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