Chapter II

Theorising Homosexuality

2.1 Queer Studies: Homosexuality

Homosexuality has been strategically suppressed or categorically demonised in all straightgeist cultural representations. It has been read as a crime, sin, a disease and an abnormality in western societies in the later 19th century. It is only because of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in some western countries in the 20th century that it has gained some credibility. ‘Thus, for much of the twentieth century ‘homosexuality’ was more than a ‘name’ that dared not be spoken: within clinical medicine it has been a diagnostic category, a suitable case for treatment, a condition to be cured wherever possible by psychotherapeutic and other less savoury methods like electro-convulsive therapy’ (Glover and Kaplan 2007: 89).

Recently, queer studies (which includes gay and lesbian theories; cultural studies and a portion of gender/feminist debates) have contributed to complex and nuanced studies of homosexuality. The term queer - long used pejoratively to refer to homosexuals, especially male homosexuals - has been reclaimed and embraced by queer theorists. The works of queer theorists such as Eve K. Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Jonathan Dollimore and Michel Foucault have made to look at homosexuality in a new perspective. Queer theorists have suggested enriching ways in which to understand the ongoing debates on gender and desire. When used to refer to sexual relations, queer encompasses any practice or behaviour that a person engages in without any reproductive aims and without regard for social or economic considerations (Murfin and Ray 2003: 386-387). This chapter will elaborately look into
contemporary approaches to Gay/Lesbian and queer theories for a complete and comprehensive understanding of homosexuality.

The word homosexuality has acquired multiple meanings over time. In the original sense, it describes a sexual orientation characterised by lasting aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire exclusively for others of the same sex or gender. Homosexuality is usually contrasted with heterosexuality and bisexuality. The word homosexual is both an adjective and a noun. The adjectival form literally means ‘of the same sex’, being a hybrid formed from the Greek prefix homo, which means ‘same’ and the Latin root sex – which means ‘sex’ or ‘gender’. The first known appearance of the term homosexual in print is found in an 1869 German pamphlet that was written by the Austrian born novelist Karl-Maria Kertbeny and published anonymously. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book Epistemology of the Closet states that an understanding of the homo/heterosexual definition, their outlines and their history would bring about an active importance for a primarily small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority and also spread and establish a modern sexual definition as a continuing determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities.

The word ‘homosexual’ entered Euro-American discourse during the last third of the 19th century – its popularisation preceding, as it happens, even that of the word ‘heterosexual’. It seems clear that the sexual behaviours, and even for some people the conscious identities, denoted by the new term ‘homosexual’ and its contemporary variants already has a long, rich history. So, indeed, did a wide range of other sexual behaviour and behavioural clusters. What was new from the turn of the century was the world – mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable as well to a homo - or a hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence (Sedgwick 2008: 2).
2.2 Queer Theorists

Nearly thirty years after the Stonewall rebellion, which launched the movement for gay liberation, the definition of queer identities is still evolving. Homosexual has changed to gay and gay to gay and lesbian. Bisexuals have become more vocal and more recently transgender liberation has also reshaped queer community prompting many organisations to replace gay and lesbian with lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) or simply queer in their self-definitions. The recognition of varying sexual identities and practices has inspired a re-reading of not straight history or queer but the history of sexuality itself. Based on these developments, a number of queer theorists have come up with vast and extensive writings on queer sexualities, its practices and identities. Queer theorists’ analyses lesbian/gay political, historical and cultural movements in their writings and promotes strong academic analysis in the history of sexual thought and its relation to the very general and universal categories as well as to formal structures by studying the ideas, institutions and social relationships that constituted this web of power in the past and the present, as well as the resistance that power automatically provokes from those subject to it.

2.2.1 Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault, the French philosopher studied philosophy and psychology and later taught the same in the University of Clermont, the University of Tunis and the University of Vincennes. He was also elected to the Chair in the History of Systems of Thought at the College de France, France’s most prestigious Institution of Higher Learning. Foucault formulated bold, innovative and often brilliant hypotheses that have influenced and inspired philosophers, historians, political scientists and sociologists around the world. Foucault’s intellectual influence has been strong in the fields of gay and lesbian studies or queer studies. He published an impressive list of articles, essays and books, most of them translated into English. His most important books are Madness and Civilisations (1961); The Birth of the
Clinic (1963); The Order of Things (1966); Archaeology of Knowledge (1969); Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975); and The History of Sexuality (3 volumes, 1976-1984). In the first volume of The History of Sexuality he, advanced the thesis that homosexuality as we conceive is a recent social construction. Men and women have engaged in same-sex relations, but he claimed until relatively and recently their acts did not confer any specific identity. He also claims in The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Vol 1, that it was not until the end of the late nineteenth century that particular acts came to be seen as the expression of the individual’s psyche. He also shows a shift from sodomy which was considered a crime or a sin against nature until the 1800s to an act that is the expression of an innate identity. He says:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood in addition to being a type of life, a life, and morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him; less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature...Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (Foucault 1998: 43).

In The History of Sexuality, Foucault questions the problems attached to the textual construction of identity. Without the discourse which constructs the identity, there seems to be no agency; but the identity which the discourse supplies are also that which constrains the subject. Foucault proceeds to document how the version of sexual identity which came to dominate Western cultures at the end of the nineteenth century was grounded in a discourse which privileged heterosexual object choice. Undoubtedly, non-heterosexual expressions of
desire – same-sex sexual acts - persisted despite some of the actual prohibitions and punishments of the nineteenth century. Foucault famously describes how, during the nineteenth century, the homosexual and not the heterosexual, ‘became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life form, and morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology’ (Foucault 1976: 43). Unlike the unremarkable heterosexual counterpart, the sex of homosexuals is ‘written immodestly’ on the face and body, a ‘secret that always gave itself away… homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species’ (ibid.: 43). Sexuality was no longer simply one aspect of identity or an aspect conceived in terms of sexual acts, but it was now viewed as a principle truth of the self, something which had to be brought into cultural visibility.

Foucault’s work is important because it proposes that sexuality is not simply the natural expression of some inner drive or desire. The discourses of sexuality concern the operation of power in human relationships as much as they govern the production of a personal identity. By stressing the ways in which sexuality is written in or on the body, and in showing how the homosexual is forced into cultural invisibility or visibility, Foucault begins to dismantle the notion that sexuality is a transparent fact of life. If sexuality is inscribed in or the body, then it is texts and discourses (literary, medical, legal and religious) which make the sexual into something that is also textual. In an important essay written in 1981, Harold Beaver, attentive to work on semiotics and discourse, expands some of Foucault’s work on sexuality. Beaver’s homosexual signs (In Memory of Roland Barthes)’ positions homosexuality as textual (an arrangement of signs), but maintains that the texts which signify sexuality are both multiple and problematic. ‘Homosexuality’ is not a name for a pre-existent ‘thing’, contents Beaver, but is part of a fluid linguistic landscape. The multiplicity and
plurality of signs which have served to structure how sexuality is conceived suggest that no one sign adequately appropriates or contains what sexuality is. Thus, Beaver suggests that it is within and against the grain of texts that sexualities can be rewritten and re-conceived, he further writes that theory and criticism of sexuality should be necessarily and strategically conceived outside the sexual-textual politics of representation.

Despite the fact that sodomy was not necessarily a gender-specific practice historical documents seem to indicate that it was mostly men who were convicted of sodomy. In records of the few rare cases of women being tried for the crime of sodomy, they were mostly convicted for ‘acting like men’ and apparently termed guilty of ‘crime against nature’. In *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Vol 1* Foucault traces the developmental shift from sodomy as a crime, to an act that is the expression of an innate identity that of a homosexual. Sodomy was conceived of as a sin against nature until the late 1800’s. It was used as an umbrella term to cover the range of practices which did not have procreation as their aim meaning ‘unnatural’ forms of sexual relation. Prior to the late 1800’s in Britain, the penalty of sodomy was death. However, it is important to note that during this time laws were directed against acts and not against a certain category of persons – that is homosexuals. He shows how, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, medical analysis of various forms of non-procreative sex as categorisable perversions and deviations came to replace the religious associations of undifferentiated non-procreative sex with sin. ‘So too were all those minor perverts whom the nineteenth century psychiatrists entomologised by giving them strange baptismal names: there were Krafft-Ebing zoophiles and zooerasts, Rohleder’s automonosexualities, and later, mixoscopophiles, gynecomasts, presbyophiles, sexoesthetic inverted, and dyspareunist woman’ (Foucault 1976:43).

Foucault states in his book that the transformation of sex into discourse and the forms of sexuality that was not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction was considered as
perverse implantation. In short, a quantitative phenomenon, to constitute sexuality as economically useful and politically conservative governed the discourses on sexuality. He states that upto the end of the eighteenth century, three major explicit codes-governed sexual practices: canonical law, the Christian pastoral and civil law which determined in its own way to divide between the licit and the illicit. They were all centered on matrimonial relations and marital obligations of a male and a female.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit…But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law…A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanour avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one’s speech. And sterile behaviour carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible; it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty (Foucault 1976: 3-4).

Thus, the famous sixteenth century surgeon Ambroise Pare’ could write that ‘Sexe is no other thing than the distinction of Male and Female’ (cited in Glover and Kaplan 2007: xiii). But with the coming of the nineteenth century different codes began to manifest the understanding of sexuality. The nineteenth century was an age of multiplication: a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantations of perversions. It was an epoch that initiated sexual heterogeneities. ‘It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult
confession of what they were. No doubt, they were condemned all the same; but they were listened to, and if regular sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities’ (Foucault 1976: 39). It is ‘culture’ as opposed to some inner drive or disposition, which is crucial in the work of Michel Foucault. Culture, is understood in terms of the interoperation of knowledge, power and discourse. *The History of Sexuality* thus, marks an important point in the critique of the 19th century sexological and medical formulations of sexuality. One of the principle objectives in Foucault’s work is the analysis of ‘a certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power’. Power is not a ‘group of institutions or mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state’. Power is exercised ‘from innumerable points’; power relations are concerned with prohibition, but ‘have a directly productive role’; and there is no ‘binary and all – encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations’. Rather power come[s] into play in the machinery of production in families, limited groups, and institutions (Foucault 1976: 92-94).

In *The History of Sexuality*, psychoanalysis is viewed as a ‘normalising discourse’; and if sex is repressed, silenced and prohibited, then the simple fact that one is speaking about sex has ‘the appearance of a deliberate transgression’. Foucault contends that sexuality is an especially dense transfer point for relations of power. He further points out that sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations but one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality. But power is also described by Foucault as ‘polyvalent’. One of the central points in *The History of Sexuality* is that the complexity and instability of discourses mean that a discourse can be an ‘instrument’ and ‘effect’ of power. Discourses, he continues, can be a ‘hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an overlapping strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it
also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (ibid.:100-101). The ‘tactical’ polyvalence of discourses can be understood by examining how Foucault charts the ‘identity’ of the homosexual subject in nineteenth century sexology. Discourses manage and label subjects on the basis of definitions which simultaneously produce the identity in question. But the polyvalent nature of discourse means, according to Foucault, that discourses also produce the terms for their own resistance and deconstruction.

Nineteenth century sexology names, labels and pathologises the homosexual at the same time as it creates a space for a counter discourse. In subjugating some identities, discourses simultaneously enable these same identities to ‘speak’ or become ‘visible’. ‘These fine names for heresies referred to a nature that was overlooked by law, but not so neglected of itself that it did not go on producing more species, even where there was no order to fit them into. The machinery of power that focussed on this whole alien strain did not aim to suppress it, but rather to give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality...’ (Foucault 1976: 44). In *Madness and Civilisations* (1961), he had argued that the homosexual first appeared as an ‘abnormal’ in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and he returned to this view in the interview given in the 1980s. he much admired the study of ‘gay people’ in the Middle Ages published by John Boswell in 1980 and agreed that ‘the feeling among homosexuals of belonging to a particular social group...goes back to very early times’ (Aldrich and Wotherspoon 2001: 143). Further Foucault through his works tries to explore not only the discourses but the will which sustains the resentment and negation towards sex. The basic notion as to why sex should be hidden and silenced. How and what has anchored repression. Foucault works to establish – a science of sexuality to understand sexuality and its movements in a schematic way from certain historical facts that serve as guidelines in his writings.
2.2.2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the belief that homosexuals were identifiably different coexisted with the belief that these same people were invisible. Throughout the nineteenth century, literary, visual, and dramatic texts, alongside legal and political disputes, reveal varying degrees of trepidation and anxiety about the hidden world of homosexuals. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick probably the most influential and ground breaking of the queer theorists whose work re-charted gay and lesbian studies in the 1990s earned her PhD at Yale, with a thesis which formed the basis of her first book, *The Coherence of Gothic Convention* (1980) reconsidering some of the conventional aspects of gothic fiction in the manner which forecasts some of her later more well-known work, along with its pre-occupational issues of sexuality. With the publication of *Between Men* (1985), Sedgwick’s ambitious re-charting of the relationship between literary studies and questions of sex and gender become explicit. Sedgwick explored the nature of ‘Homosexual’ relations specifically, what constituted a basis for social relationship between men and how social networks of male associations both eschew and yet always signal an interest in the idea or figure of the homosexual. Sedgwick’s work, which depended upon a series of exacting and creative interpretations of largely canonical literary texts, profoundly affected the way in which literary studies sought to define questions of narrative and the thematic elaboration of sexual issues. Her work similarly cast familiar texts in new light, in particular, her exploration of the inter-dependency of homosociality (masculine social bonding), homophobia and homosexuality as three relations which structure masculine contact re-casting the ways in which those topics were to be debated within literary studies for the coming decades.

*Between Men*, as an innovative social as well as literary analysis, extended the reach of Sedgwick’s work beyond the confines of literary scholarship, paving the way for the 1990
publication of *Epistemology of the Closet*, her most famous work. Following the lead given by Foucault’s analysis in *The History of Sexuality* of the ways in which sexuality may be spoken of, Sedgwick makes the audacious claim that the idea of knowledge itself must be understood in terms of the question of sexual knowledge. According to Sedgwick culture might best be understood through an epistemology of the closet, that is, through the cluster of secrets that revolve around the question of gay identity and self-identification. Sedgwick’s claims are based on a series of axioms which both defined and re-structure the ways in which sexual identity might be understood. She questions the very nature of sexual definition as it revolves around object-choice, rather than a host of other possible definitional parameters. For Sedgwick, the variety of sexual subjectivities that may be available for the task of self-definition is matched only by the various different ways in which we might understand those sexualities. The closet, in Sedgwick’s analysis stands not merely for the concept of secrecy, but more interestingly for the secret of having a secret or telling a secret. In other words, secrets are interesting as much for what they reveal as for what they fail to disclose. Similarly, Sedgwick is interested in broadening an understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge by including an appreciation of the various kinds of epistemological and political powers vested in ignorance. The cultural and sexual practices of lesbians and gay men are associated with secret knowledges and codes, discussed in Eve Sedgwick’s *The Epistemology of the Closet*.

The gradually reifying effect of this refusal meant that by the end of the nineteenth century, when it had become fully current – as obvious to Queen Victoria as to Freud – that knowledge meant sexual knowledge, and secrets sexual secrets, there had in fact developed one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted as secrecy: the perfect object for the by now insatiably exacerbated epistemological/sexual anxiety of the turn-of-the-century subject (Sedgwick 1990: 73).
Inside yet outside, public but also private, homosexuals have been visualised in the paradoxical terms of secrecy, concealments and visible isolation. Central to many of the debates in lesbian, gay and queer criticism are the issues of visibility, representation, transgression and dissidence. Homosexual identities are thought to cohere extra-textually or as textual constructions which take shape in discourse and without the discourse which constructs the identity, there seems to be no agency. In some works, all sexual identities are also textual constructions which take shape in discourse.

The process, narrowly bordered at first in European culture, by which ‘knowledge’ and ‘sex’ become conceptually inseparable from one another - so that knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance; and epistemological pressure of any sort seems a force increasingly saturated with sexual impulsion...In a sense, this was a process, protracted almost to retardation, of exfoliating the biblical genesis by which what we now know as sexuality is fruit- apparently the only fruit- to be plucked from the tree of knowledge. Cognition itself, sexuality itself, and transgression itself have always been ready in Western culture to be magnetized into an unyielding though not an unfissured alignment with one another, and the period initiated by Romanticism accomplished this disposition through a remarkably broad confluence of different languages and institutions (Sedgwick 1990: 73).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* stands out for understanding the potent fusion of homophobic stigma, the punishing stress of loss and social fracture related to the potency and vigorated magnetism of gay self-disclosure. The book had argued that the foundational methodology of Western sexological formulations was grounded in an organised understanding of radical incoherence. In Sedgwick’s argument, this incoherence is stated in terms of ‘minoritising’ and ‘universalising’ notions of sexuality and identity. In her own words, Sedgwick states that:
The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence (Sedgwick 1990: 68).

Sedgwick argues that a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation around the issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, has been impelled by the distinctively indicative relation of homosexuality, to wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, of the private and the public which were and are problematic and critical for the gender, sexual, and economic structures. Sedgwick considers that the closet is the defining structure for gay operation and the mappings have become dangerous incoherences in certain figures of homosexuality.

Most moderately to well-educated western people in this century seem to share a similar understanding of homosexual definition, independent of whether they themselves are gay or straight, homophobic or antihomophobic. That understanding is close to what Proust’s probably was, what for that matter mine is and probably yours. That is to say, it is organised around a radical and irreducible incoherence. It holds the minoritising view that there is a distinct population of persons who ‘really are’ gay; at the same time, it holds the universalising views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities; that apparently heterosexual persons and object choices are strongly marked by same-sex influences and desires, and vice-versa for apparently homosexual ones; and that at least male heterosexual identity and modern masculinist culture may require for their maintenance the scapegoating crystallization of a same sex male desire that is widespread and in the first place internal (Sedgwick 1990: 85).

Sedgwick’s development of Foucault’s work enables her to underscore the degree to which discourses about sexuality are as much concerned with the operations of knowledge and power as they are about an assumed or definitionally coherent sexual identity. The
languages of sex and sexuality not only intersect with, but also transform the other languages
which we use to construct social realities, contends Sedgwick. Her extensive list of binary
categories observes how sexuality and desire cannot be addressed in isolation from a whole
network of other cultural discourses.

I think that a whole cluster of the most crucial sites for the contestation of meaning in
twentieth century Western culture are consequentially and quite indelibly marked with the
historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition, notably but not exclusively male,
from around the turn of the century. Among those sites are, as I have indicated, the parings
secrecy/disclosure and private/public along with and sometimes through these
epistemologically charged parings, condensed in the figures of the ‘closet’ and ‘coming out’,
this very specific crisis of definition has then ineffaceably marked other pairings as basic to
modern cultural organisation as masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation,
natural/artificial...So permeative has the suffusing stain of homo/heterosexual crisis been that
to discuss any of these entices in any context, in the absence of an antihomophobic analysis,
must perhaps be to perpetuate unknowingly compulsions implicit in each (ibid.: 72-73).

Sedgwick’s expansion of perspectives in anti-homophobic theory constitutes an attempt to
contest the centering and settled definitions of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In addition,
one of the principle arguments in Epistemology of the Closet is that notions such as
sameness/difference, public/private and secrecy/disclosure structure identity formulations
seem to underscore heterosexual relations as normative and hegemonic. Sedgwick’s analytic
strategies combined with Foucault’s theories of discourse, knowledge and power shows that
many of the major discourses in the twentieth century are structured and splintered by a crisis
of homo/heterosexual definition. Sedgwick’s work highlights the confusing context which
established rigid sexual boundaries and exclusions. She further notes how the oppressive,
homo/heterosexual system was generated on the basis of repeated decenterings and exposures.
Sexual identity rapidly accrued the status of an epistemology and was placed in a privileged
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relation to identity, truth and knowledge, transforming almost every issue of power and
gender. Despite endemic incoherence of definitions, sexuality in general, and heterosexuality
in particular, powerfully regulated a matrix of other binarised markings, groundings in the
belief that heterosexual provided the normative and veridical model of human individuation.
Sedgwick notes that even after the formation of sexual species, other, ‘less stable’
understandings of sexual choice persisted, often among the same groups and often interlaced
in the same systems of thought.

Recent gay male historiography, influenced by Foucault, has been especially good at
unpacking and interpreting those parts of the nineteenth century systems of classification that
clustered most closely around what current taxonomies construe as ‘the homosexual’. The
‘sodomite’, the ‘invert’, the ‘homosexual’, the ‘heterosexual’ himself, all are objects of
historically and institutionally explicable construction. In the discussion of male homosexual
panic, however – the treacherous middle stretch of the modern homosocial continuum and
the terrain from whose wasting rigors only the homosexual-identified man is at all exempt –
a different and less distinctly sexualised range of categories needs to be opened up. Again,
however, it bears repeating that the object of doing that is not to arrive at a more accurate or
up-to-date assignment of ‘diagnostic’ categories, but to understand better the broad field of
forces within which masculinity – and thus, at least for men, humanity itself – could (can) at
a particular moment construct itself (Sedgwick 1990: 187-188).

Sedgwick’s work in Epistemology of the Closet was deepened and expanded in the
essays collected as Tendencies (1993); whereas the Epistemology of the Closet mostly
consisted of extended readings of literary texts. Tendencies ranged more widely to consider
the questions of autobiographical and ficto-critical writing. Tendencies furthered some of the
earlier books’ investigation of the matter of sexual identification and definition. Tendencies
animated Sedgwick’s familiar themes with extended meditations on queer as both activist and
contemplative. Sedgwick profoundly affected the burgeoning field of queer theory both in her practice and in her support of the work of other theorists.

2.2.3 Judith Butler

Judith Butler, an American philosopher and a gender theorist, has significant influence in the fields of feminist, queer and literary theory, philosophy and political ethics. She is best known for her works *Gender Trouble*, *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, where she challenges the sex/gender distinction and develops her theory of gender performativity. Butler questions the belief that certain gendered behaviours are natural illustrating the ways in which gendered behaviour is an act of sorts or a performance or in other words the assumption that a given individual can be said to constitute himself or herself. She wonders to what extent our acts are determined for us by our place within language and convention. She underlines the linguistic nature of our position within what Jacques Lacan terms the symbolic order, the system of signs and conventions that determines our perception of what we see as reality. Identity itself, for Butler, is an illusion retroactively created by our performances. She takes her formulations even further by questioning the very distinction between gender and sex. Feminists in the past made a distinction between bodily sex and gender. They accepted the fact that certain anatomical differences do exists between men and women. Accordingly for traditional feminists, sex was a biological category and gender a historical category. Butler questions that distinction and states that sex ‘not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs’ (Butler 1993:1). For Butler sex is an ideal construct which is materialised through time. Butler is influenced by the postmodern tendency to see our very conception of reality as determined by language.

Homo/heterosexual definition thus, can be placed not in the context of ‘analytic impartiality’, but against the backdrop of a homophobia which served to devalue one term at
the same time as it valorised the other. Though Sedgwick content’s that the conceptual
instability of heterosexual and homosexual binarisms does not render these opposition as
‘inefficacious or innocuous’. She further asserts that the critical exposition and explanation of
the ambiguous nature of the discourses of sexuality remain important tasks in attempts to
contest and challenge heterosexual hegemony. It is the troubled management of sexuality and
gender in the late 20th century which prompts Judith Butler’s investigations in Gender
Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990). She argues most powerfully that
identities figured as feminine or masculine do not axiomatically require the anatomical
grounding which has traditionally differentiated sex and gender identities.

Can we refer to a ‘given’ sex or a ‘given’ gender without first enquiring into how sex
and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is ‘sex’ anyway? Is it natural,
anatomical, chromosom al, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to assess the scientific
discourses which purport to establish such ‘facts’ for us? Does sex have a history? Does
each sex have a different history, or histories? Is there a history of how the duality of sex
was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable
construction? Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various
scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the immutable
character of sex is contested? Perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally
constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the
consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at
all (Butler 1990: 9-10).

Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex
(1993) probe and question models of sexuality and identity which cohere around the assumed
stability of heterosexuality. Butler’s investigation also displays a similar indebtedness to the
work of Foucault, Discipline and Punishment as well to post-structuralist theorisations of the
subject and language which reveal the influence of Derrida and Lacan. Butler in Gender
Trouble interrogates the seemingly inevitable contradictions between sameness and difference which mark identity formulations based around gender and sexuality. It is in Gender Trouble that her refinement of the Nietzschean and Foucaultian concept of genealogy is established as a critical tool in the analysis of gender and sex. Butler explicitly challenges biological accounts of binary sex, reconceiving the sexed body as itself culturally constructed by regulative discourse. Butler’s appropriation of genealogy allows her to show how the assumed causes and origins of sexuality are the effects of discourses and institutions whose points of origin are multiple. Despite such multiple points of origin, Butler’s stresses that a genealogical approach nevertheless works within and against the broad framework of a heterosexual and hetero-normative matrix.

The ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as ‘identity’ is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appeared to be persons but who fail to conform to the gender norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (Butler 1990: 23).

The crux of Butler’s argument in Gender Trouble is that the coherence of the categories of sex, gender and sexuality are culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized acts in time. These bodily acts, in their repetition, establish the appearance of an essential, ontological core gender. This is the sense in which Butler famously theorises gender, along with sex and sexuality as performative. The performance of gender, sex and sexuality, however, is not a voluntary choice for Butler, who locates the construction of the gendered, sexed, desiring subject also called the gender intelligibility under regulative discourses. Regulative discourse includes within it disciplinary techniques,
coercing subjects to perform specific stylized actions, maintaining the appearance in those subjects of the core gender, which the discourse on sex and sexuality itself produces.

‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the ‘expression’ or ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice (Butler 1990: 23).

Butler redefines the notion of knowledge and power in *Bodies that Matter*, she notes how one effect of such hegemonic heterosexuality is the attempt to naturalise and stabilise sex, gender, and identity. Extending her analysis of naturalised genders, Butler suggests that performances associated with drag illustrate how gender is open to imitation. Rather than being a constantive or substantial expression of who or what one is, drag helps to highlight the ways in which gender can also be figured in terms of stylized repetitions of acts for which there is no origin or copy. Butler emphasises the role of repetition in performativity making use of Derrida’s theory of iterability, a form of citationality, to work out a theory of performativity in terms of iterability. Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject but this repetition is what enables the subject and constitutes the temporal condition of the subject. This iterability implies that performance is not a singular act or event, but a ritualised production, a ritual under the force of prohibition or taboo. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that drag plays upon the difference between the anatomical body
of the performer and the gender that is being performed. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler strengthens her case, suggesting that drag is not confined to lesbian or gay rituals or queer cultures. Drag is not understood as a secondary imitation or enactment of a prior, original gender. Rather, heterosexuality is itself part of repeated effort to imitate its own socially constructed idealisations. Although gender trouble argues for the proliferation of drag performances, Butler underscores that there is necessary relation between drag and subversion. At best, drag can be understood as a site of certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes. Butler offers parody, the practice of drag as a way to destabilise and make apparent the invisible assumptions about gender identity. By redeploying those practices of identity and exposing the attempts to become one’s gender, Butler believes that a positive, transformation politics can emerge.

Butler’s main contention is that gender does not axiomatically proceed from sex. Although the sexes might seem binary in their morphology and constitution for Butler there are no grounds to assume that genders ought to remain as two. Consolidating and expanding a key argument in *Gender Trouble*, that the relation of gender to sex is not mimetic, the other books of Butler abandon the notion of an innate or intrinsic gender identity. She further claims that sexual differences are in-dissociable form discursive demarcations and that it is not the same claim that discourse causes sexual difference. She categorises sex from the start as normative and agrees with Foucault that it is a ‘regulatory ideal’. In this sense, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, a regulatory force producing a productive power. Thus, according to Butler, sex is a regulatory ideal whose materialisation is compelled, and this materialisation takes place through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, sex is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time. Butler states that it is not a simple fact or static condition
of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialise sex and achieve this materialisation through forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialisation is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is inbuilt. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for re-materialisation, opened up by this process that mark one’s domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn re-articulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law.

Butler then relates the notion of gender performativity and its relation to the conception of materialisation. In this sense Butler states that, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate act, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. She constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements and its relation to the effect of power and comes to a point that

‘Sex’ is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility (Butler 1993: 2).

Butler concerns herself with those gender acts that similarly lead to material changes in one’s existence and even in one’s bodily self and contends that our sense of independent, self-willed subjectivity is a retroactive construction that comes about only through the enactment of social conventions. Butler proposes the practice of drag as a way to destabilise the exteriority/interiority binary, finally to poke fun at the notion that there is an original gender and to demonstrate that all gender is in fact scripted, rehearsed and performed.

Looking at ‘sex’ from the long term, historical perspective recommended by Foucault, the identity of one’s sexual behaviour and for those who felt themselves to be ‘different’ narrows down to one question ‘Do we truly need a true sex?’ After all, isn’t what truly
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matters ‘the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures’ (Foucault 1980: vii). The modern system of sexuality that is organised around the heterosexual or the homosexual self is approached as a system of knowledge, one that structures the institutional and cultural life of societies. As such, queer theorists view heterosexuality and homosexuality not simply as identities or social statutes but as categories of knowledge, a language that frames bodies, desires, sexualities and identities, which erects moral boundaries and political hierarchies. ‘Modern Western homophobic and gay affirmative theory has assumed a homosexual subject. Dispute materialised over its origin (natural or social), its changing social forms and roles, its moral meaning, and its politics. There has been hardly any serious disagreement regarding the assumption that homosexual theory and politics have as their object “the homosexual” as a stable, unified and identifiable agent. Drawing from the critic of unitary identity politics by people of colour and sex rebels, and from the post-structural critique of “representational” models of language, queer theorists argued that identities are always multiple or at best composites, with an infinite number of ways in which “identity-components” can intersect or combine’ (Seidman 1994: 173). Approaching identities as multiple, unstable and regulatory, queer theorists presents new and productive possibilities of rendering gay theory and politics as permanently open and contestable as to its meaning and political role. In other words, decisions about identity categories are pragmatic, related to concerns from the public surfacing of differences or a culture where multiple voices and interests are heard that helps shape gay life and politics.

2.3 Gay Community: World Cultures

The development of lesbian and gay studies arose in response to political activism of the 1960’s although its incorporation within formal education was much slower. After World War II, a time during which homosexual identity politics began to emerge with Harry Hay’s Mattachine Society. The aims of the Mattachine Society was to bring homosexuals and
heterosexuals together, to educate both homosexuals and heterosexuals, to lead a movement for legal reform, and to assist those who found themselves victimised on a daily basis in the context of entrenched homophobia. Similarly CAMP (Campaign against Moral Persecution) Inc., an Australian group founded in 1970, described their political agenda thus:

As far as the wider society is concerned, we should concentrate on providing information, removing prejudice, ignorance and fear, stressing the ordinariness of homosexuality and generally reassuring and disarming those with hostile attitudes. Concerning homosexuals, we think a policy of development of confidence and lessening of feelings of isolation and guilt, where they exist is vital (cited in Sullivan 2003: 23).

Gays and lesbians were forced to remain ‘closeted’ if they wished to lead ‘normal’ lives. It was not until the late 1960’s – most memorably in 1969 with the famous Stonewall riots at a New York gay bar that ‘Gay Liberation’ became an open public issue. The slogan of the Stonewall riot fired the imagination of many persecuted gays and lesbians – ‘We are queer. We are here. Accept it!’ The gay community in a retaliatory expression of self-liberation then appropriated the derogatory epithet ‘queer’ to its own use. The term ‘queer’ has since then come to be accepted in many circles as an all-encompassing idea that identifies a wide range of sexual minorities. ‘Queer’ includes homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people of all varieties. When appended by the word ‘theory’ the term is recognised as an academic discipline, which is still struggling against the straitjacketing effects of institutionalisation. However like all theoretical concepts ‘queer’ theories are constantly redefining themselves, primarily by expanding the boundaries of what it means to be queer and straight, and the multiple grids of negotiations that fall within.

The issues concerning queer theory revolve around basically two schools of thought. One, the ‘essentialists’ who believe that homosexuality is a biologically determined fact of existence i.e. one is about ‘coming out’ or ‘she or he was always different’, followed by a
discovery of the ‘truth’ about oneself. Usually the discovery is described as traumatic or anxiety – ridden since the individual has imbibed the lesson from parental, peer and other societal apparatuses that homosexual behaviour/love is ‘bad’ and ‘unnatural’. This form of discovery is, in queer theory jargon, called ‘homosexual panic’ where the individual recognises that his/her sexuality is aberrant from what society perceives to be the acceptable form of sexuality and sexual identity, but finds him/herself helpless to do anything about it.

The other school that could be called the ‘antiessentialists’ believe that forces of social conditioning, and not some amorphous unverifiable ‘essence’, determine one’s sexual identity. Sexual identities, these theorists believe, are a matter not of some ‘inborn’ biological instinct but a result of an assortment of socio-cultural factors, contingent to specific times and culture. In other words, these groups took an assimilationist approach to politics and to social change. The aim of assimilationist groups was and is still to be accepted into, and to become one with, mainstream culture. Consequently, one of the primary tenets of this group is to come together as a common humanity to which both homosexuals and heterosexuals belong. And this commonality – the fact that we are all human beings despite differences in secondary characteristics such as the gender of our sexual object choices – is the basis, it is claimed on which we should all be accorded the same human rights, and on which we should treat each other with tolerance and respect. As Daniel Harris, citing Ward Summer puts it:

Gay propaganda from the 1950s…is characterised by what might be called the Shylock’s argument, the assertion that a homosexual is not a…dissolute libertine well beyond the pale of respectable society, but ‘a creative who bleeds when he is cut, and who must breathe oxygen in order to live’ (Harris 1997: 240-241).

In short, these groups tried to make differences invisible or at least secondary between homosexuality and heterosexuality in and through an essentialising, normalising emphasis on sameness. Often assimilationist groups drew on the writings of theorists like Ulrichs, arguing
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that homosexuality is biologically determined and therefore should not be punishable by law. However unlike Ulrichs, such groups allegedly tended to accept the medical model of homosexuality articulated by sexologists such as Westphal and Krafft-Ebing and, as a consequence, sometimes represented themselves as victims of an unfortunate congenital accident who should be pitied rather than persecuted (Sullivan 2003).

One debate which is central to any discussion of gay/lesbian literature is what exactly is gay/lesbian literature? Is it writing by lesbians/gays? Can heterosexual/bisexual people write stories that may profitably be included in gay/lesbian literature? What about writers who ‘came out’ after a long time – does one go back to their writing and pick ‘clues’ about their sexual repression and make that writing also part of gay/lesbian literature? Finally, is sexuality a valid barometer for a critique of literature – or does one marginalise it in favour of historicist/ Marxist/cultural readings that appear to be more socially useful than the investigation into a writer’s sexual identity? The questions are several, and finding answers is never easy, primarily because we live in cultures where the imagination is more or less ‘homophobic’. The homophobic imagination deems any known-procreative form in sex in general as aberrant, deviant and unnatural. Defined as a fear of homosexuality, homophobia is the condition in which a person or a group of persons predating themselves on heterocentric assumptions marginalise gays and lesbians as freaks and deviants and practice active/passive discrimination. Homosexuality in a majority of countries across the world is till synonymous in legal parlance with sodomy. Widespread and vociferous religious condemnation of homosexuality is also a strong factor that has reinforced it in the popular mind as abnormal and aberrant. For decades, homosexuality was pathologised and psychoanalysed as a disease, treatable/curable by medication, therapy, even voodoo. Finally the influence of the AIDS crisis across the world landscape has made it an integral part of any discussion of gay and lesbian issues. Issues about AIDS hold powerful influence in lesbian
and gay life, in political activism and in the literature. Clearly then no discussion of gay or
lesbian studies or queer theory is complete without a fundamental questioning and
reconsideration of what it means to be a gay/lesbian in our varied cultures. As a result, queer
theory is a deeply introspective discourse that draws strength from the questioning
deconstructive temper of contemporary post-modern and literary and aesthetic practices as
well as from the embattled and beleaguered conditions that have constituted, and in a large
measure still constitute, the material reality of many gay and lesbian people’s everyday
existence.

Societal attitudes towards same-sex relationships reflected in the attitude of the
general population, the state and the church have varied over the centuries and from place to
place, from expecting and requiring all males to engage in relationships, to casual integration,
through acceptance, to seeing the practice as a minor sin, repressing it through law
enforcement and judicial mechanisms, to prescribing it under penalty of death. Most nations
do not impede consensual sex between unrelated individuals above the local age of consent.
Some jurisdictions further recognise identical rights, protections and privileges for the family
structures of same-sex couples, including marriage. Sexual customs have varied greatly over
time and from one region to another. Modern Western gay culture, largely a product of the
nineteenth century psychology as well as the years of post-Stonewall Gay Liberation, is a
relatively recent manifestation of same-sex desire. Looking back at the history of
homosexuality and homosexuals in different cultures across the world shows its existence as
an ‘understudied relationship’ understanding sexuality as a part of human identity and not
merely as a sexual act.

Homosexual expression in native Africa took a variety of forms. Anthropologists
Murray and Roscoe report that women in Lesotho have engaged in socially sanctioned ‘long
term, erotic relationships’ named motsalle. E.E. Evans Pritchard reported that male
Azande Warriors in the Northern Congo routinely married male youths who functioned as temporary wives. In North American native society, the most common form of same-sex sexuality seems to centre on the figure of the two-spirit individual. Such persons seem to have been recognised by the majority of tribes, each of which had its particular term for the role. Typically the two-spirit individual is recognised early in life and is given a choice by the parents to follow the path and if the child accepts the role then the child is raised in the appropriate manner, learning the customs of the gender it had chosen. Male two-spirit people were prized as wives because of their greater strength and ability to work.

In Asia, same-sex love has been known since the dawn of history. Homosexuality in China, known as the pleasures of the bitten peach, the cut sleeve, or the southern custom, has been recorded since 600 BC. These euphemistic terms were used to describe behaviours, but not identities. The relationships were marked by differences in age and social position. Homosexuality in Japan, variously known as shudo or nanshoku, has been documented for over 1000 years and was an integral part of Buddhist monastic life and the samurai tradition. This same-sex love culture gave rise to strong traditions of painting and literature documenting and celebrating such relationships. Similarly, in Thailand, Kathoey or ‘ladyboys’, have been a feature of Thai society for many centuries, and Thai kings had male as well as female lovers. Kathoey are men who dress as women and are generally accepted by society. Thailand has never had legal prohibitions against homosexuality or homosexual behaviour. The teachings of Buddhism, dominant in Thai society, accept a third gender designation.

Coming to Europe, the earliest western documents in the form of literary works, art objects concerning same-sex relationships are derived from ancient Greece. They depict a world in which relationships with women and relationships with youths were the essential foundation of a normal man’s life love. Same-sex relationships were a social institution
variously constructed over time and from one city to another. The practice, a system of relationships between an adult male and an adolescent coming of age, was often valued for its pedagogic benefits and as a means of population control. Plato praised its benefits in his early writings, but in his late works proposed its prohibition, laying out a strategy which uncannily predicts the path by which same-sex love was eventually driven underground.

The Roman emperor Theodosius I decreed a law, on August 6th, 390, condemning passive homosexuals to be burned at the stake. Justinian, towards the end of his reign, expanded the proscription to the active partner as well warning that such conduct can lead to the destruction of cities through the ‘wrath of God’. Notwithstanding, these regulations, taxes on homosexual boy brothels continued to be collected until the end of the reign of Anastasius I in 518. During the Renaissance, cities in northern Italy, Florence and Venice in particular, were renowned for their widespread practice of same-sex love, engaged in by a majority of the male population and constructed along the classical pattern of Greece and Rome. The eclipse of this period of relative artistic and erotic freedom was precipitated by the rise to power of the moralising monk Girolamo Savonarola.

Among many Middle Eastern Muslim cultures, homosexual practices were widespread and public. Persian poets, such as Attar (1220), Rumi (1273), Sa’di (1291), Hafez (1389) and Jami (1492), wrote poems replete with homoerotic allusions. Recent work in queer studies suggests that while the visibility of such relationships has been much reduced, the frequency has not. The two most commonly documented forms were commercial sex with transgender males or males enacting transgender roles exemplified by the baccha (dancing boy). In Persia homosexuality and homoerotic expressions were tolerated in numerous public places, from monasteries and seminaries to taverns, military camps, bath houses and coffee houses. In the early 1501 – 1723 era, male houses of prostitution (amradkhane) were legally recognised and paid taxes. A rich tradition of art and literature sprang up, constructing
Middle Eastern homosexuality in ways analogous to the ancient tradition of male love in which Ganymede, cupbearer to the gods, symbolised the ideal boyfriend. Muslim – often Sufi-poets in medieval Arab lands and in Persia wrote odes to the beautiful Christian wine boys who, they claimed, served them in the taverns and shared their beds at night. In many areas the practice survived into modern times as documented by Richard Francis Burton, Andre Gide and others.

In South Asia, a gender variant category, hijra, remains intact despite the efforts of British colonials to eradicate what they called ‘a breach of public decency’ (Nanda cited in Penrose 2001: 4). This third gender consists of hermaphrodites, women who do not menstruate, as well as passively homosexual and castrated men all who proclaim they are neither men nor women. Generally though not always, hijras wear female attire and have female mannerisms and patterns of speech. Hijras group together as devotees of a Hindu mother goddess, Bahuchara Mata. They sing and dance at birth and wedding ceremonies. As an Indian proverb states ‘Truth is a many sided diamond’ Nanda calls the role of the hijra as ambiguous, like the many other facets of Indian society (cited in Penrose 2001: 6-7). Hijras are simultaneously mocked, feared and shown respect. Sudhir Kakar helps contextualise the position of Hijras by saying that the Hindus are more accepting of deviance or eccentricity than are the Westerners, who treat sexual variance as anti-social or psychopathological, requiring correction or cure (cited in Penrose 2001: 7). In the Hindu view, the status of Hijra is the working out of a particular spiritual life task of the individual who is travelling on the path to moksha, final release from the cycles of human existence. This aspect of religion, on which the caste system is built, allows institutionalised gender variance to exist within Hindu society, despite its highly patriarchal nature. In southern India transvestite males and females serve as devotees of Yellamma, a goddess of skin disease who is believed to have the power to change the sex of individuals. Jogappa are her male attendants who wear female clothing.
and Jogamma, her female attendants who dress as men. Jogappa, though apparently not castrated, fulfil some of the traditional functions as the Hijras as in dancing and singing at birth and wedding ceremonies. While Jogamma just carry the images of the goddess and other sacred items. Since the goddess is thought to have the power to change the sex of both men and women, the gender-deviant states of both Jogappa and Jogamma are considered to be a direct result of the possession by the goddess. Bradford notes that they are regarded as divine rather than queer (Bradford cited in Penrose 2001: 9).

The ancient Sumerians believed in people of a third type. In the Sumerian myth of ‘The creation of Man, the god Ninmah fashioned seven variant persons, including one who has no male organ, no female organ and a woman who cannot give birth’ (Murry and Roscoe cited in Penrose 2001: 11). Roscoe uses the expression ‘state third genders’ when describing gender roles in ancient Mediterranean and Asian societies. He cites the evidence from places like Rome and Persia to show that third gendered individuals worked as domestics in palaces, temples and other large estates. A system of multiple genders, according to Roscoe, can only exist outside dichotomous gender systems, which polarise sex, gender and sexuality into categories of male and female. In a binary gender system, androgyny becomes the only available alternative. ‘Third and fourth genders, on the other hand, help us to perceive all that is left over when the world is divided into male and female – the feelings, perceptions and talents that may be neither’ (cited in Penrose 2001: 30-31).

2.3.1 Civil Rights

Shortly after World War II the gay community began to make advancements in civil rights in much of the western world. A turning point was reached in 1973 when, in a vote decided by a plurality of the membership, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, thus negating homosexuality as a clinical mental disorder. Since the 1960s in part due to their history of
shared oppression, many gays in the west have developed a shared culture. To many gay men and women, the gay culture represents heterophobia and is scorned as widening the gulf between gay and straight people. Legislation designed to create provisions for gay marriage in a number of countries has polarised international opinion and led to many well-publicised political debates and court battles. At the start of 2006, six countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada and South Africa) had legalised same-sex marriage. In the United States, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and New York have legalised gay marriage while the States of Vermont and Connecticut allow civil unions. Majority of European Nations have enacted laws allowing civil unions, designed to give gay couples similar rights as married couples concerning legal issues such as inheritance and immigration. Numerous Scandinavian countries have had domestic partnership laws on the books since the late 1980s. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in its section 15(1) has provided protection against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation since 1995. The supreme court of Canada unanimously agreed that sexual orientation was a protected category under the charter. In education, this decision has resulted in Canadian teachers’ federation and associations of teachers’ rights and responsibilities to include sexual orientation as a character of person to be protected against discrimination in keeping with the law of the land. The modern lesbian and gay rights movement can be traced to the massive, social and political upheavals in the United States in the late 1960’s generating vibrant cultural and political work. Among the agendas, one main agenda is that of parenthood and adoption by same-sex couples which is still a contentious issue in many countries that has become a part of the platform of many gay rights organisations and movements. Lesbian and gay liberation, even in its earliest days, had a significant rights component based on equality under the law. The first lesbian and gay liberation protest at the Federal Parliament Buildings in Ottawa during 1971 was organised around a series of political demands explicitly calling for equal treatment
in terms of age of consent, immigration and participation in the armed forces. In addition, the Canadian Charter has helped move lesbian and gay activism towards a more specific strategy of rights talk and has legitimised their presence within Canadian civic culture.

In 1977, Quebec became the first state-level jurisdiction in the world to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. During the 1980’s and the 1990’s most developed countries enacted laws decriminalising homosexual behaviour and prohibiting discrimination against lesbian and gay people in employment, housing and services. In the United States President Bill Clinton’s Executive Order 13087 prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation in the competitive service of the Federal Civilian Workforce. In the United States, there is no federal law discriminating potential or current tenants on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Hate crimes also known as bias crimes are crimes motivated by bias against an identifiable social group defined either by race, religion, disability, ethnicity or sexual orientation. In United States, 45 states and the District of Columbia have statutes criminalising various types of bias- motivated violence or intimidation. Thirty two of them cover sexual orientation, twenty eight cover gender and eleven covers transgender and gender identity. Robinson says conservative Christian organisations typically use the term ‘special rights’ rather than ‘equal rights’ because they believe that rights based on sexual behaviour are quite different from more traditional rights. The latter are based on sexual behaviour are based on unchangeable factors, like race, colour, ability, status, nationality and gender. Publicly gay politicians have attained numerous government posts, even in countries that had sodomy laws in the past. Gay British politicians who were Cabinet Ministers were Chris Smith and Nick Brown. Guido Westerwelle, Germany’s Vice Chancellor, Peter Mandelson, a British Labour party Cabinet minister and Per-kristian Foss formerly a Norwegian minister of Finance.
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The first strategic re-deployment of the word ‘queer’ came in 1990 with the founding of the activist group ‘Queer Nation’ in New York, a movement that directly grew out of political work on behalf of people suffering from AIDS. The popular slogan ‘We’re here! We’re queer! Get used to it!’ became the combined slogan to point a critical finger at existing institutions articulating a far-reaching demand for change in the unexamined lines of symbolic demarcation between gays and straights. With the outbreak of AIDS in the early 1980’s, many LGBT groups and individuals organised campaigns to promote efforts in AIDS education, prevention, research, patient support and community outreach and to demand government support for these programmes. Gay Men’s Health Crises, Project Inform and ACT UP are some notable American examples of LGBT community’s response to the AIDS crises. The bewildering death toll by the AIDS epidemic seemed at first to slow the progress of the gay rights movement but in time it motivated and galvanised some parts of the LGBT community into community service and political action, and challenged the heterosexual community to respond compassionately. Queer Nation as an activist group combined the sardonic and the provocative, the theoretical and the confrontational to create vivid, highly charged moments of recognition. George Chauncey in his path breaking book *Gay New York* (1994) combines personal recollections and private desires to chart the changing fortunes of the city’s gay male communities and also examines the conflict and the mutuality – between the nations ‘gay capital’ and ‘normal’ or ‘straight’ world. Although different terms were used by different categories of people to define gay men like ‘inverts’, ‘perverts’, ‘degenerates’ or sometimes ‘homosexuals’ or ‘homosexualists’, ‘faggots’ or ‘queens’ by the 1910 and 1920s according to Chauncey the word most often employed to indicate ‘a distinct category of men’ who were sexually interested in other men was queer (1994: 15-16). Since the 1960’s, many LGBT people in the West, particularly those in major metropolitan areas, have developed a
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2.3.2 Religious Institutions

Though the relationship between homosexuality and religion can vary across time and place and between different religions and sects, nonetheless one can look into the different attitudes that the church and doctrines of the world have towards homosexuality and bisexuality. Current authoritative bodies and the world’s largest religious communities generally view homosexuality negatively. This can range from quietly discouraging homosexual activity, to explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual practices and actively opposing social acceptance of homosexuality. Some religion teach that homosexual orientation itself is sinful, while others assert that only the sexual act is a sin. Some claim that homosexuality can be overcome through religious faith and practice. On the other hand, voices exist within many of these religions that view homosexuality more positively. Some view same-sex love and sexuality as sacred and a mythology of same-sex love can be found around the world. Yet the authority of various traditions and religious denominations and the correctness of their translations and interpretations are still being disputed. Other ancient civilizations, like that of the ancient Israelites, were motivated to exterminate homosexuals because they tended to have fewer children. One writer states ‘Religious objections to homosexuality spring from two sources. One is the ancient patriarchal warrior-clan religion on which several modern religions are based. In their clans it was every male’s duty to breed, to produce more soldiers and any who didn’t were violating cult taboo: it was taken as a sign of non-male weakness, of “sin” against their warrior Father’ (Athenadorus cited in Robinson 2004:1). The same writer continues ‘The other source of these condemnations has been the need of religious and political leaders, who, in trying to force their religion and it observance on the people of their communities, have created mythic polemics that attempt to denigrate and destroy the...
religious beliefs and practices of others. This is the origin of the myth of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the opprobrious dicta of Saul/Paul’ (ibid. 2004: 1-2).

The overall trend of greater acceptance of gay men and women in the latter part of the twentieth century was not limited to secular institutions alone but it was also seen in many religious institutions. Reform Judaism, the largest branch of Judaism outside Israel had begun to facilitate religious weddings for gay adherents in their synagogues. The Anglican Communion encountered discord that caused a rift between the African and Asian Anglican churches on the one hand and North American churches on the other when American and Canadian churches ordained gay clergy and began blessing same-sex unions. Other churches such as the Methodist church had experienced trials of gay clergy which were claimed as a violation of religious principles.

2.3.3 Literature

In 2005 Haworth Press withdrew from publication a volume on homosexuality in classical antiquity titled *Same Sex Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity and in the Classical Tradition of the West*. This was in response to criticism from American conservative groups which objected to the discussion of positive aspects of classical pederasty. One of the main ways in which the record of same-sex love has been preserved is through literature and art. Homer’s *Iliad* is considered to have the love between two men as its central feature. Plato’s symposium also gives readers commentary on the subject, at one point putting forth the claim that homosexual love is superior to heterosexual love. The European tradition was continued throughout the ages in the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. In Islamic societies it was present in the works of Omar Khayyam and Abu Nuwas. *The Tale of Genji*, called the world’s first real novel fostered this tradition in Japan and in the Chinese literary tradition works such as BianErZhai and Jin Ping Mei advocated the same tradition.
Perhaps the most troubled and troubling representation of homosexuality is James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* (1957). Despite the success of his first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni’s Room* was turned down by Baldwin’s American publishers because they were afraid that the book would make him known as a black homosexual writer. Baldwin’s own views about homosexuality provide an instructive counterpoint in *Giovanni’s Room*. Baldwin sought both to transcend the reduction of homosexuality to mere sexual behaviour, whether natural or not and at the same time to insist that the division of the world into ‘two sexes’ was an unavoidable fact with which everyone must in some way come to terms, ‘no matter what demons drive them’. For Baldwin humankind’s greatest need was ‘to arrive at something higher than a natural state’, to strive towards the ‘genuine human involvement of love and friendship that must necessarily include communion between the sexes’ (Baldwin 1985: 101-105). The word queer has been historically used in a number of different ways to signify something strange such as madness or worthlessness. Queer is also a term that has been virtually reinvented by gay critics and gay activists in recent years. Roughly speaking the term queer seems to have passed through three main phases. When it first came into use in the United States it was not a mark of obloquy or disdain as told to George Chauncey by one of the respondent who had been part of New York’s gay world in the 1920s. According to him: ‘it wasn’t like kike or nigger…it just meant you were different Chauncey 1994: 101). To identify oneself as queer tended to indicate a quietly controlled, ‘manly’ demeanour and a desire for other queer or perhaps straightmen. One of Chauncey’s central claims in his book was that same-sex desire was necessarily a solitary, secretive longing that could not be given public expression which he felt was a myth. In recent years, ‘Queer Theory’ as an academic discipline has been developing new modes to make literary or cultural criticism. Most queer critics have been developing different interpretations of literary texts or are asking new questions of them. The results have been varied: ‘queer readings’ of
major writers as James Joyce and Henry James have given new modes and insights into understanding their works.

Revealing ‘queer’ also had another meaning in the 1950s. When David in Giovanni’s Rome tells one of his male companions in a gay bar that ‘I’m sort of queer for girls myself’, he is turning the word against a would-be lover and also using the word in a somewhat different sense to indicate both the sources and the intensity of this desire. Mad for men, yet preferring women: this figure of a passion that is aberrant precisely carries over into queer’s latest incarnation, a phase in which queer becomes a signifier of attitude, of a refusal to accept conventional sexual and gendered categories, of a defiant desire beyond the regular confines of ‘heteronormativity’. John Rechy (1963) in his classic novel of pre-stonewall gay life, City of Night describes a bar off Hollywood Boulevard:

Among its patrons are the Young, the good-looking, the masculine – the sought after – and, too, the effeminate flutterers posing like languid young ladies, usually imitating the current flatchested heroines of the Screen but not resorting to the hints of drag employed by the much more courageous downtown Los Angeles queens (1963: 186).

One of the first major articles on ‘Homosexuality in America’ depicted a San Francisco bar where men ‘wear leather jackets, make a show of masculinity and scorn effeminate members of their worlds’, in contrast with the ‘bottom-of-the-barrel bars’ where one finds ‘the stereotypes of effeminate males – the ‘queens’, with orange coiffures, plucked eyebrows, silver nail polish and lipstick’ (Welch 1964: 66-68). A part owner of one leather bar hangs a sign that says, ‘Down with sneakers!’ – described as the ‘favourite footwear of many homosexuals with feminine traits’ – and is quoted proudly as saying, ‘this is the antifeminine side of homosexuality…. We throw out anybody who is too swishy. If one is going to be homosexual, why have anything to do with women of either sex?’ (ibid. 68). The most recent examples in attempting to justify one’s sexual identity can be related to Dean Hamer’s Gay
Gene and Simons LeVay’s *Gay Brain* studies. The ‘gay brain’ became a frequently used term in 1991 after Simon LeVay, a neurologist, published a study which showed physical differences between a heterosexual and a homosexual brain (cited in Rixecker 2000: 267). He cited a difference in the nucleus of the hypothalamus which appeared larger in straight heterosexual men than in gay men, resulting in the idea that gay brains are fundamentally different from the straight men’s brain, and this difference means that homosexuality, or at least gay male homosexuality could no longer be discriminated against because it was innate or generic rather than by choice or lifestyle. Pat Cadigan’s novel *Synners* challenges some of the most powerful and dangerous norms and normativity of American thought and culture. The novel’s narrative form enables an approach to techno science and transnational capitalism focussing on a more productive representation of postmodernity. Cadigan in the novel deconstructs Judeo-Christian religious tropes to argue for a responsible and knowledgeable approach to technology by going back to times when there were no differences. The figure of the tree of knowledge in the Bible uses species difference to introduce prohibition. The connection between difference and prohibition is the basis of the story of a fall from an idealised time and place where and when no difference existed. Cadigan’s deconstruction in *Synners* enables us to move away from the original stories, and to escape the logical trap created by these circular, recuperative notions of prohibition and transgression. The title of the novel comes as a pun, they are not sinners but synners, synthesizers who work with new technology and are changed by it.

### 2.4 Homosexuality Theorised

By the late 1980’s and early 1990’s the call to develop theories of sexuality was being answered by an expanding body of literature that addressed the political and cultural positions of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, sex workers, sadomasochists and others – a diverse conglomeration of sexual minorities who were increasingly identified as ‘queer’
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(De Lauretis 1991: 5). Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Warner’s *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993), and two special issues of *Differences* (Vol 5, No 2 and Vol 6, No 2 & 3) all signalled the consolidation of an approach to theorising sexuality that crossed gender lines integrating sexual theories related to masculinity and femininity and to heterosexuality and homosexuality. Most importantly the emergence of queer theory within academia marked a radical shift towards positioning abject and stigmatised sexual identities as important entry points to the production of knowledge (Butler 1993). As part of the larger post-modern concern with the debunking of ‘metanarratives’ queer theory’s greatest contribution has been the destabilization of *heteronormativism*. The idea/belief that heterosexuality is the norm from which any/all sexual behaviour deviant is condemned as un-natural, immoral, and ‘queer’. Heteronormative ideology asserts that any form of same-sex intimacy, especially sexual, is unacceptable stages of feminist and minority-centered studies, gay studies centered on the undermining of hegemony-this time the hegemony of heterosexuality- and how homosexuality worked within and around heterosexuality. Such landmark works as Foucault’s three volume study *The History of Sexuality* and Adrienne Rich’s essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980) both drew a priori stability of heterosexuality into interminable flux, and centered homosexual existence and the prominence and importance of considerations of homosexuality. However, not until Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* had the ‘closet’ been interrogated or academically centered as a discourse. In this important study, by using the figure of the ‘closet’ as a central metaphorical space for all considerations of homosexuality Sedgwick placed ‘homosociality’ and homophobia as central to not only homosexual existence, but also to the existence of Western society as a whole. With ‘Lesbian Panic as Narrative Strategy in British Women’s Fictions’ Patricia Julian Smith extended Sedgwick’s thesis of
‘homosexual panic’ and erotic triangulation (involving two men and a woman) to explore ‘lesbian panic’ and a new triad (this time involving two women and a man). The theories of Adrienne Rich have in particular deeply influenced lesbian/gender studies. A move to destabilize sexual and gender categories was and still is an integral part of this process. Thus, queer theory and queer politics represents a critical moment in the history of western sexuality in which sexual minorities and deviants who were previously defined by legal statutes and medical/psychological diagnosis were instead creating an always contested and re-negotiated group identity based on differences from the norm— in other words, a post-modern version of identity politics (Butler 1993). Queer Theory, as such dealt with aspects that allowed great inter-disciplinary mobility, as they permitted theoretical concepts initially applied to issues of sexual identity and the oppression of sexual minorities to be deployed in studies of other social sub-groups as well as in studies of the written and spoken word, the build environment, material objects and other products of culture. Although many people believe that queer theory is only about homosexual representations in literature, it also explores categories of gender and sexual orientation. One of the main projects of queer theory is to explore the contestations of the categorisation of gender and sexuality. When analysing texts queer theorists expose underlying meanings within the texts challenging notions of ‘straight’ ideology and has leanings to the tenets of post-structuralists theory and deconstruction in particular. Queer theory looks at, and studies, and has a political critique of, anything that falls into normative and deviant categories, particularly sexual activities and identities. But queer theory and queer activism are two different issues. The later developed as a response mainly to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. Thus, queer theory expands the scope of its analysis to all kinds of behaviours, including those which are gender-bending as well as those which involve ‘queer’ non-normative forms of sexuality. Queer theory insists that all sexual behaviour, all concepts linking sexual behaviours to sexual identities and all categories
of normative and deviant sexualities, are social constructs sets of signifiers which create certain types of social meaning. Queer theory follows feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies in rejecting the idea that sexuality is an essentialist category, something determined by biology or judged eternal standards of morality and truth. For queer theorists, sexuality is a complex array of social codes and forces, forms of individual activity and institutional power, which interact to shape the ideas of what is normative and what is deviant at any particular moment, and which then operate under the rubric of what is ‘natural’, ‘essential’, ‘biological’, or ‘god-given’.

Much of queer theory developed out of a response to the AIDS crisis, which promoted a renewal of radical activism, and the growing homophobia brought about by public responses to AIDS. Queer theory became occupied in part with what effects put into circulation around the AIDS epidemic-necessitated and nurtured new forms of political organisation, education and theorising in ‘queer’. Sadism and masochism, prostitution, inversion, transgender, bisexuality, asexuality, intersexuality and many other things are seen by queer theorists as opportunities for more involved investigations into class, racial, ethnic and regional differences using non-normative analysis as a tool.

‘Queer’ is one term that has emerged to engender multiplicity in sexuality rather to accept the artificial crevasse between ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’. In 1990, Judith Butler offered the foundational proposition of queer analysis, arguing that there is ‘no gender identity behind the expressions of gender’ because “that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. In other words, there is no ‘real’ woman or ‘normal’ man, there is no ‘woman’ there is no ‘man’. There is merely the repeated construction of types and the constrained performance of identity (1990). In this sense, therefore, sex is thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is, it will be one of the norms by which the one becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life
within the domain of cultural intelligibility (Butler 1993). Judith Butler does not try to anticipate exactly how queer will continue to challenge normative structures and discourses. On the contrary, she argues that what makes queer so efficacious is the way in which she understands the effects of its interventions which are not singular and therefore, cannot be anticipated in advance. In stressing the partial, flexible and responsive nature of queer, Butler offers a corrective to those naturalised and seemingly self-evident categories of identification that constitute traditional formations of identity politics. She specifies the ways in which the logic of identity politics- which is to gather together similar subjects so that they can achieve shared aims by mobilising a minority-rights discourse.

Queer, then, is an identity category that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilising itself. It maintains its critique of identity, focused movements by understanding that even the formation of its own coalitional and negotiated constituencies may well result in exclusionary and reifying effects far in excess of those intended. Queer theory in this sense seeks to stand for an identity of political and social interests for gay men and in the words of Judith Butler ‘to wield a discourse of truth to delegitimate minority gendered and sexual practices. This doesn’t mean that all minority practices are to be condoned or celebrated, but it does mean that we ought to be able to think them before we come to any kinds of conclusions about them’ (Butler 2007: viii).

Queer theory articulates a related objection to a homosexual theory and politics organised on the ground of the homosexual subject: this project reproduces the heterosexual-homosexual binary, a code that perpetuates the heterosexualization of society. Modern Western affirmative homosexual theory may naturalise or normalise the gay subject or even may register it as an agent of social liberation, but it has the effect of consolidating heterosexuality and homosexuality as master categories of sexual and social identity; it reinforces the modern regime of sexuality. Queer theory wishes to challenge the regime of
sexuality itself – that is, the knowledges that construct the self as sexual and that assume heterosexuality and homosexuality as categories marking the truth of sexual selves. Queer theorists shift their focus from an exclusive preoccupation with the oppression and liberation of the homosexual subject to an analysis of the institutional practices and discourses producing sexual knowledges and how they organise social life, with particular attention to the way in which these knowledges and social practices repress differences. In this regard, queer theory is suggesting that the study of homosexuality should not be a study of a minority – ‘the making of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/subject – but a study of those knowledges and social practices which organise ‘society’ as a whole by sexualising – heterosexualising or homosexualising – bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture and social institutions. Queer theory aspires to transform homosexual theory into a general social theory or one standpoint from which to analyse whole societies’ (Seidman 1994: 174). It is in this sense thus, that the assertion of the term queer is to affirm the contingency of the term and to expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that can be understood and anticipated by younger generations and whose political vocabulary will continue to democratize queer politics, and also to expose, affirm and rework the historicity of the term.