

First published 1997  
by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003.

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

©1997 Ann Brooks

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
Postfeminisms: feminism, cultural theory, and cultural forms  
/Ann Brooks.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Feminist theory. 2. Culture. 3. Feminism-Political aspects.

I. Title.

HQ1190.B764 1997

96-47498

305.42-dc21

CIP

ISBN 0-203-42889-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-73713-X (Adobe eReader Format)  
ISBN 0-415-11474-8 (hbk)  
ISBN 0-415-11475-6 (pbk)

# POSTFEMINISMS AND CULTURAL SPACE: SEXUALITY, SUBJECTIVITY AND IDENTITY

## INTRODUCTION

At an earlier point in this book, it was established that cultural studies, and in particular debates around representation, provided a focal point for the coalescing of a number of debates including feminism, poststructuralism, postmodernism and post-colonialism. Popular cultural forms especially were identified as useful for framing debates around identity, sexuality, ethnicity and image. In this sense popular cultural forms can be seen as ‘sites of opposition’ and ‘sites of resistance’ for a range of groups who wish to open up the possibilities for the creation of new sites of meaning and knowledge. Thus representational issues emerging from popular cultural forms can be seen as actively involved in different subaltern or subcultural groups’ attempts to establish new identities. In this context both postmodernist and postfeminist theoretical debates encourage an approach to identity where both meanings and identities are fluid, not fixed. Two bodies of theory intersect around these debates: one emerging from feminist debates concerned with gender and sexuality which coalesce around gay and lesbian politics, and the other from cultural studies, concerned with debates linking representations and identities within newly defined cultural spaces. This final chapter is concerned to investigate the possibilities and potential for the emergence of new identities and coalitions, and examines debates in the area of sexuality, pornography and representational politics.

## SEXUALITY, SUBALTERN IDENTITY AND ‘PERFORMATIVITY’

The influence of poststructuralism on feminist debates has made earlier debates around identity, sexuality and representation problematic. However, as Patton (1993:82) notes, the poststructuralist debate itself came under attack from gender theorists such as Judith Butler (1990a), Donna Haraway (1991) and Sandra Harding (1986), who ‘sought to take the anti-essentialist arguments all the way down’ (Patton 1993:82). As Patton comments, these theorists have ‘demonstrated that even the supposed biological referents of gender (“sex” in genotype) are themselves

socially constructed' (*ibid.*). These two areas of debate—the feminist poststructuralist critique of identity and the subsequent debates emerging from the 'gender theorists' within feminism—need to be examined.

Second wave feminist theorising focused on the social construction of gender categories and drew a distinction between 'sex', which was taken to be universal and biological, and 'gender' which was understood as culturally variable but, as Bailey (1993:100) notes, still at some level, fundamental: 'Because these gender differences between male and female roles are then seen as social rather than biological, they are changeable by human agency.' This distinction between a conception of a biological 'eternal nature' and a socially constructed model of gender was increasingly challenged by 'feminists, poststructuralists and philosophers and historians of science' (*ibid.*). As Bailey comments, the sociocultural and historical characteristics of both sex as a biological category as well as gender became a central issue in the debate.

The work of Michel Foucault, particularly his 'genealogy of sexuality and sex' as outlined in *The History of Sexuality* (1981a), has contributed to feminist debates in the area. There are a number of dimensions of Foucault's work more generally which have been valuable in advancing feminist debates. These include: his disruption of fixed and stable categories of sexuality and sex; his conceptualisation of new forms of power; his relationship between power and pleasure; and his articulation of the link between resistance and identity.

Bailey (1993:102) claims that, while Foucault does not examine the relationship of gender to bodies and identity directly, his analysis lends itself to these debates. Foucault understands bodies as related 'to the production, transmission, reception and legitimation of knowledge about sexuality and sex'. His rejection of 'transhistorical' categories undermines traditional conceptions of 'the cultural relationship between women, bodies and sexuality' (*ibid.*). This position challenges feminist essentialist positions around a conception of a 'transhistorical female essence', and his genealogical account of bodies renders incoherent a conception of 'bodily vulnerability of women to men across time and culture' (Bailey 1993:106).

Foucault's genealogical critique has implications for conceptions of identity. Bailey (1993:105) contends that 'by documenting the discontinuities of history, he dispels the shadow of a monolithic, transcendent culture from which marginalised groups and individuals must wrest the rights to their "identities"'. We will return to this point shortly.

Bardo (1993a) shows how Foucault's *History of Sexuality* articulates Foucault's theory of new forms of power, including 'discipline', 'normalisation' and 'biopower', which explain how power and identity are related. His conception of power in his later work (see Chapter 3) understood power as productive and plural. Bardo (1993a:192) maintains that this productive conception of power can be seen in 'new forms of culture and subjectivity, new openings for potential resistance to emerge'. As Foucault (1983) claims, where there is power there is also resistance:

Jana Sawicki (1988:186) points out that Foucault's notions of power are eminently compatible with feminist understandings of the personal as political' (Bailey 1993:115).

Before going on to assess Foucault's analysis of power, resistance and the proliferation of identities, his relationship between power and pleasure can also be seen as having also important implications for feminist politics. Bordo (1993a: 192) claims that a Foucauldian framework of power and pleasure do not cancel one another and that such a model facilitates an understanding of compliance as well as contestation and resistance. She argues that women may themselves contribute to 'the perpetuation of female subordination...by participating in industries and cultural practices' (*ibid.*) which contribute to their own lack of power. In this context Bordo draws on the Foucauldian concept of 'docile bodies'; that is, women may experience an illusion of power, while being rendered 'docile'. However, she shows that this 'very "docility" can have consequences that are personally liberating and/or culturally transforming' (*ibid.*). She provides two examples of such instances:

the woman who goes on a rigorous weight-training programme in order to achieve a currently stylish look may discover that her new muscles also enable her to assert herself more forcefully at work. Or... 'feminine' decorativeness may function 'subversively' in professional contexts which are dominated by highly masculinist norms (such as academia).

(*ibid.*)

Bordo thus confirms Foucault's contention that power relations are 'unstable' and that 'resistance is perpetual and hegemony precarious'.

Foucault's theorisation of the relationship between bodies and power highlights the problematic nature of feminism's earlier analysis of 'pleasure'. As Bordo (1993a:193) observes, second wave feminist discourses which put a premium on the oppressiveness of femininity 'could not be expected to give much due to the pleasures of shaping and decorating the body or their subversive potential'. Linked to this, she says, has been the implications of Foucault's work for conceptualisations of representation: 'Foucault has been attractive to feminists for his later insistence that cultural representation is ubiquitous and perpetual' (*ibid.*). Bordo claims that Foucault has been of interest to two 'waves' of Foucauldian-inspired feminism: the first wave emphasised concepts such as ' "discipline", "docility", "normalisation" and "bio-power"', while a second emphasised elements of deconstruction including "'intervention", "contestation", "subversion"' (*ibid.*).

The relationship between power and resistance in Foucault's work has implications for conceptualisations of identity. Bailey (1993:116), drawing on Foucault, claims that his contention that 'all discourses give rise to resistance offers a more fluid, more partial "identity"...'<sup>1</sup> Bailey drawing on Sawicki (1988:186–190) notes that Foucault's conception of 'identity as historically constructed' is compatible with an analysis of identity by lesbian feminists. However, the

reconstruction of identities which has emerged from lesbian feminism has been formulated as an 'identity politics', based on a 'hierarchical distinction from other identities', such as gay men. Sawicki claims that this model limits the potential for alliances between lesbians and gay men, which could reinforce and 'strengthen local struggles'. Bailey (1993:116) highlights the way that Foucault's conceptualisation of "homosexuality" as an identity constructed through the hegemonic discourses on sexuality and sex has exploded the confines of this limited identity, constituted by, and enabling, a gay community which encompasses many other political identities and differences'.

### IDENTITY AND 'PERFORMATIVITY': THE WORK OF JUDITH BUTLER

My recommendation is not to solve this crisis of identity, but to proliferate and intensify this crisis.

(Butler 1990a:121)

Perhaps the most significant challenge to the concept of gendered identities is contained in the work of the postmodern feminist theorist Judith Butler, particularly her conception of gender as 'performativity'.

Martin (1992:101) draws on Judith Butler's work on the 'deconstruction of feminist identity politics and its foundationalist premises' and her call for 'the disaggregation of sex, gender, sexual identity and desire' (*ibid.*). Butler argues that division along gender lines is simply the articulation of repeated performances of culturally sanctioned acts of gender. She states that

The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. This kind of critique brings into question the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated. The internal paradox of this foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes, and constrains the very 'subjects' that it hopes to represent and liberate.

(Butler 1990a:148)

Drawing on aspects of poststructuralist analysis, Butler shows that the plurality of discursive domains within which women are located establishes diversity around issues of 'subjectivity', 'identity' and 'difference'. As Martin (1992:103) maintains, "the subject of feminism" cannot be thought of as a stable, unified, or internally coherent woman, or lesbian', without in the process ignoring the range of discourses within which 'subjects are constituted'. Butler maintains, however, that resistance to and subversion of dominant hegemonies can only emerge "within the practices of repetitive signifying", not from claims to independent and discrete identities' (Martin 1992:103). Martin, in a comprehensive summary of Butler's work, shows

how Butler's argument stresses the importance of 'surfacing' and making 'visible the complexities that already exist', but which are rendered invisible by dominant discourses 'with deep investments in defining viable subjects' (1992:105).

Butler's (1990a:137) radical conception of identity advances a model which creates spaces for a range of sexual identities—including gay, queer, lesbian identities—which act to destabilise the unity of identity categories, exposing 'the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence'. As such, Butler claims that she is not interested in 'difference *qua* difference', nor in 'celebrating each and every new possibility *qua* possibility', but in 're-describing those possibilities that already exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible' (Butler 1990a:148–149, cited in Martin 1992:103).

It is in this context that aspects of performativity within homosexual practices 'such as drag and butch-femme roles, become privileged sites for the re-description of "possibilities that already exist"' (*ibid.*). It is the identification of gay men and lesbians with butch/femme roles that act to subvert essentialist notions of identity. As Martin (1992:104) claims, Butler's conceptions of drag<sup>2</sup> and butch-femme roles show that 'a model of signification might displace the debates over whether gay and lesbian sexual practices constitute imitations or the real thing...'. Both drag and butch-femme are seen as performative in that neither can be seen as imitative since, as Martin shows, all performances are 'imitations of fantasized ideals, hence masquerades' (*ibid.*).

For Butler, heterosexuality is itself a masquerade. She claims that 'drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced, and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality' (1993a:125). However, both 'drag' and 'butch-femme' are problematic conceptually and in their application, which reflects difficulties with the concept of performativity. Modleski (1991:158) claims that Butler 'speaks of a situation in which "the anatomy of the performer is...distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of these are distinct from the gender of the performance"', which suggests a "dissonance...between sex and gender, and gender and performance" (Butler 1990a:137, cited in Modleski 1991:158).

In her application of the concept of drag in her now famous analysis of the film *Paris is Burning*, a film on the subcultural practices of black and Hispanic gays, Butler (1993a) recognises that these representations are ambivalent and she acknowledges that they could be 'read' as being of homophobic, misogynistic and racist origins.<sup>3</sup> The butch-femme as an example of 'the performative' is also problematic. Teresa de Lauretis claims that "The butch-femme role playing is exciting not because it represents heterosexual desire but because it doesn't; that is to say in mimicking it, it shows the uncanny distance like the effect of ghosting, between desire (heterosexually represented as it is) and the representation" (cited in Modleski 1991:158).<sup>4</sup>

Modleski notes that the contrast between the approach of Butler and de Lauretis, both lesbian feminists, both theorising the issue of gender identity, is an interesting one. In contrast to Butler's emphasis on gender as 'performativity', de Lauretis, far from deconstructing the concept of gender, is concerned to understand the

means by which women become 'gendered' and in the process serve as 'sources of empowerment' for other women.

Martin is an advocate of Butler's performative account of gender, and of the separation of the analytically and politically distinct categories of sexuality and gender. As Martin contends the normalisation of sex and gender works to obliterate pluralities and, while not wanting to dismiss lesbian feminist positions such as Adrienne Rich's, she recognises the limitations of this position in terms of sexual desire and sexual essentialism. However, Martin does not subscribe fully to Butler's deconstruction of gender as 'a significant social marker' (1992:117). There are also other criticisms of Butler's position from those like Benhabib (1992), who argue from a somewhat 'modernist' perspective that it involves a concept of identity without a subject. However, for Butler, the identification of a subject in any real sense limits the possibilities of diversity. For Butler (1990a: 121) the answer to the issue of both identity and representation is to 'proliferate and intensify the crisis and she calls for a chaotic multiplicity of representations'.

### THE PROLIFERATION OF IDENTITIES AND REPRESENTATIONS

Biddy Martin, in her article 'Sexual Practice and Changing Lesbian Identities' (1992), considers the politics of 'authentic' and feminist lesbian identities, emphasising the complexity of same-gender eroticism. She argues that we need to denaturalise heterosexuality as part of destabilising the powerful homo-heterosexuality opposition. Martin seeks to contextualise lesbian and gay identity and politics within the right-wing backlash in the early 1990s in the US. As she notes,

The effort to open up the public realm to a discussion and appreciation of sexual diversity and variation challenges the epistemological and political terms in which homosexuality and other 'perversions' have been closeted for the benefit of 'the ambient heterosexual population', or what Cindy Patton, in *Inventing Aids*, calls 'a repressive administrative state'.

(Martin 1992:95)

Drawing on a lecture by Susie Bright, editor of the lesbian porn magazine *On Our Backs*, Martin ponders how this provided an interesting opportunity 'to further consider changing lesbian identities'. Martin expresses the problematics of sexual identity framed by the rigid sexual categorisation of 'the right', but also from within the lesbian community itself, through its demand for stability and internal coherence and the 'uniqueness of lesbian identity'. She argues that not only has this obscured sexual differences, but it has also 'generated an active resistance to knowing what we fantasise, desire, do and think' (1992:97).

A range of different positions including lesbian feminist, sex radicals and 'queer identities' represented debates around identity and sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s. The lesbian feminist position represents a model of identity where the

categories of sex, gender and sexual identity are inextricably linked, with clearly defined 'sexualities'. Women's 'essential feminine identity' is cast in terms which clearly distinguish it from the masculine identity. The collective and unitary identity of the lesbian feminists led them to identify not with their sexuality but with their gender. This led them to reject any sense of identification with gay men or 'sex radicals'. Thus women's sexual, and specifically lesbian, identity is framed in opposition to masculine sexuality. The authenticity of women's and lesbian identity was seen as distorted and denigrated by pornography. The work of Adrienne Rich and Catherine MacKinnon convey slightly different views within this anti-pornography position.

Adrienne Rich (1980:650) held that lesbianism is a 'profoundly female experience' which has a parallel in motherhood and is linked to clearly identified characteristics of 'womanhood'; This emphasis on the 'essential' characteristics of femininity—for example, 'emotional', 'gentle', 'nurturing'—can be seen as repressive of both sexuality and 'desire'. Biddy Martin (1992:10) maintains that the 'collapse of sexuality and gender' appears to remove the importance of desire and replaces it with the desexualised concept of 'identification'. The collapsing of sexuality and gender in Rich (1980:648) is significant for her objective, which is to erode any potential differences between lesbian women and feminist women by establishing a 'lesbian continuum' which includes 'women identified women' and heterosexual women. Modleski (1991:151), drawing on what Bersani calls 'the pastoralizing' and 'domesticating' of sexuality, claims that Rich's analysis presents a desexualised model of lesbian identity. (Kemp 1994:3)

MacKinnon (1989), while dealing with the issue of power and pleasure, defines these categories as the prerogative of men and used by men to sexualise hierarchy. MacKinnon (like Rich) collapses the categories of sex and gender, making little distinction between the 'sexuality of men' and 'male sexuality'. As Kemp (*ibid.*) notes for MacKinnon, sexuality is about the dominance of men over women as she indicates, 'dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity, submission eroticized defines its femininity' (1989:318). She thus elides sex, gender and sexuality and this is clearly extended to her analysis of pornography.

The essentialist model of identity as theorised by Rich and MacKinnon's position was clearly a problematic one for both lesbian sexuality and identity. However, the work of Rich, MacKinnon and others should not be totally dismissed. Martin (1992:101) shows how Adrienne Rich's writing in the 1970s challenged traditional conceptions and definitions of lesbianism. Martin argues that the revisiting of a number of discourses around sexuality, and sexual identity, such as the 'renewed emphasis on sex, on alignments with gay men, and on sexual practices such as "butch-femme" roles does not represent a simple return from women identification to minoritizing models of gender inversion'. She indicates that the now much criticised work of lesbian and feminist writers of the 1970s has made it possible for lesbian writers and theorists to engage with a



wide range of 'sexual, textual and theoretical explorations' as part of the increasingly contested nature of lesbian identity and politics.

It would be mistaken to convey a model of broad-based agreement within feminism or lesbian feminism in the 1970s. The model of 'sexual essentialism' was challenged by writers such as Gayle Rubin (1984). Rubin is representative of the lesbian sadomasochistic position and stressed the separation of sexuality from gender. She calls for the re-evaluation of radical lesbian identities and the construction of new queer identities, advocating the 'appreciation of erotic diversity and more open discussion of sexuality', and as Kemp (1994:5) shows, Rubin claims that 'variation is a fundamental property of all life, from the simplest biological organisms to the most complex human formations' and she challenges the concept of 'sexual essentialism' with 'benign sexual variation' (1984:303).

In stark contrast to lesbian feminists such as Rich and MacKinnon, who stress the repressive nature of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and female submission, Modleski (1991:152) claims that 'the sex radicals tend to emphasize the individual "free choice" in matters of sexual behaviour, including such activities as lesbian sadomasochism, which many women denounce as acting out oppressive patriarchal relations of dominance and subordination'.

The position of sex radicals such as Rubin leads to a defence of most sexual practices (including paedophilia). As Modleski comments, this leads them to identify more with 'stigmatized erotic populations' than with radical feminists. Rubin (1984:305) advocates s/m (sadomasochism) as legitimate practice and argues that s/m practice is based on consensual agreement. Modleski (1991:157) claims that 'lesbian sadomasochism enacts a complex dynamic in which existing gender arrangements are simultaneously contested and preserved -preserved partly in order to *be* contested'. She claims that there is thus a one-sidedness in the debates around sadomasochism, whether these are from the position that understands 'lesbian sadomasochism as replicating existing gender inequalities' or from the position held by those, such as Parveen Adams who, Modleski maintains, hold that 'the lesbian sadomasochist has entirely succeeded in separating sexuality from gender' (*ibid.*). One of the difficulties for lesbian sadomasochists is that, while they criticise the strict binary conception of male power and oppression typical of the lesbian feminist position, they appear to ignore the issues of power and control intrinsic to their own position. The implications of s/m debates for postfeminism will be considered more fully below.

The deconstruction of the reified and prescriptive nature of lesbian sexuality as developed in these debates opened up feminism to a recognition and articulation of difference represented in a range of critiques emanating from within and outside feminism. For writers and theorists such as Susie Bright and Judith Butler, and for others working in the same area, lesbianism cannot be understood as an 'absolutely separate identity with separate foundations and internal homogeneity' (Martin 1992:105). The implications of such a position

would mean, as Martin notes, complicity ‘with the repressive, even deathly operations of normalization and exclusion, even of lesbians’ own fantasies, pleasures and practices’ (*ibid.*).

What becomes clear is that Martin is challenging the same totalising tendencies, based on a seemingly fragile coherence, that she implies characterise lesbian identities, as women of colour and lesbian feminists did of second wave feminism. The crude binary opposition, a characteristic feature of the uncritical use of terms such as ‘patriarchy’ and ‘oppression’, is replaced in Martin’s work by the critique of homo-heterosexual opposition. Drawing on Bright’s lecture, Martin highlights how ‘investments in sexual identity categories become stumbling blocks in current discussions of sexual practices and pleasures’ (Martin 1992:97). In this context, Martin argues, the construction of homosexuality and lesbianism as marginal, leaves the naturalising tendencies of heterosexuality unchallenged and contains ‘difference in a third static category’.

Martin (1992:98) goes on to note that the need for uniformity of identity and claims to authenticity based on ‘separate foundations in a world outside of heterosexuality, operates as a defence against the continued marginalisation, denial and prohibition of women’s love and desire for other women’. Martin asks whether this strategy is the best one ‘to challenge heterosexism and misogyny, or an effective strategy to defend against annihilation’ (*ibid.*). She claims that the constant effort needed to maintain the category intact clearly highlights both its instability as a ‘unitary category, and its lack of fixed foundations’ (*ibid.*:98–99), and this emphasis on unity makes for difficulties in terms of understanding ‘the complexity of social realities, fantasies, desires, pleasures and practices’ (*ibid.*). Debates within lesbian feminism around pornography, sadomasochism, etc. have been late in ‘surfacing’, due to the attempt to maintain internal coherence. Martin cites Greta Christina’s work on bisexuality, *Drawing the Line*, which

[points] to important ways in which the politicization of bisexuality and appropriation of the term ‘queer’ opens up new alignments, or realignments across categories of gender and sexual identity. These new alignments co-exist and contend with other constructions of lesbian identity, including those that emphasise the gender specificity of lesbians’ experiences and oppression and the differences between lesbians and gay men.

(Martin 1992:110)

As Martin shows, questions of the contested nature of lesbian identity have become more visible, as part of the more contested nature of identity within feminist theory and politics. Martin notes that heterosexist and anti-homophobic readings of homosexuality have, on one level, been characterised by contradictions, but ‘contradictions that remain available for manipulation in the service of power/knowledge’ (*ibid.*).

Debates around the proliferation and diversification of identities and representations can be seen to have coalesced around the area of gay/lesbian

politics. In this context there has been an opening up of a series of new debates around the area of political theory and practice. Moynihan (1994:17) contends that the 'gay movement and the more recently declared "queer nation" share political objectives around resistance to the marginalisation of homosexuality as excluded and demonic Other'. She claims that after that their political projects diverge, and the gay movement is primarily associated with 'the assertion of difference on the basis of rights assumptions: that people have the right to be accepted regardless of sexual preference' (*ibid.*). Moynihan distinguishes between this position and that of the 'queer nation', who she maintains 'reads that implicit desire to become part of the mainstream as a form of cooptation. In contrast, they identify as "queer" ie., with the transgressive, and as "nation" as separate and autonomous' (*ibid.*).

The issue of identity is a crucial part of the politics of both gays and the queer nation. Moynihan, drawing on the work of Cindy Patton (1993), shows how the emphasis on a 'rights based politics' implies a concept of identity and acts to constrain difference. The queer nation rejects these constraints and understands itself in terms of performativity. As Moynihan (1994:17) notes, this 'location of identity in performance is an important move, both politically and theoretically for it entails a refusal to be individuals or subjects of liberal, Western homosexuality'. For the queer nation, as Moynihan shows, 'identity belongs to "nation" as a collective, formulated through collective alliance. It also moves the political away from acting subjects to the performative...to what people do rather than who they are' (*ibid.*).

This becomes important in the issue of gay and lesbian sexual practices such as 'drag' 'butch-femme roles' and sadomasochistic practices. Joan Nestle's work *A Restricted Country* (1987) highlights some of these issues. She considers butch-femme roles in the 1950s and sees them not as "phony heterosexual replicas", but "complex erotic statements" that signalled erotic choices' (Nestle 1987:100, cited in Martin 1992:107). Martin notes that in her account of butch-femme roles Nestle does not understand them 'as expressions of some underlying gender core or identification, or as imitations of heterosexual gender complementarities, but as the thoroughly performative construction of a public erotic culture in defiance of the injunction to be normal heterosexual women' (Martin 1992:111). Nestle contextualises this view within a model which aims to 'restore queerness to lesbianism'. As Martin states,

Nestle writes about choices and modes of survival, about erotic and social competencies, about concrete struggles and pleasures, and about political alignments among lesbians, gay men, sex workers (including prostitutes and porn writers) and other sexual minorities that have been effaced by the emphasis on lesbianism as gender identification.

(Martin 1992:109)

The rearticulation of the erotic into sexual politics around lesbianism can also

be seen in the increasing focus on s/m practices among lesbians. Martin (1992:99) notes that in her lecture at Cornell, Susie Bright claimed that 'lesbians' anxieties about penetration and its potentially heterosexual or male implications are now old news'. Lewis and Adler maintain that the shift in acceptance of s/m practices within lesbian relations has partly led to, and partly been the result of, changes in lesbian culture and identity (1994:433-4). Kemp (1994:7) shows that they maintain that s/m practices have reinscribed power into lesbian relationships and they provide a feminist critique of these relations and practices. Modleski (1991:149) claims 'that powerlessness and masochism have different ideological valences for women than for gay men'. Drawing on the work of Kaja Silverman, Modleski, while recognising that Silverman 'overstates the case for the subversive potential of even male masochism, observes that since masochism is so close to the norm for women, it is unlikely to have the radical force it has for men' (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup> She goes on to comment that there is a qualitative difference in lesbian s/m relations and heterosexual relationships, commenting that the former do not carry the 'weight of male physical and economic power behind them' (1991:154).

While recognising the importance of the new 'militant' politics of sexuality, Martin maintains that some of the patterns of exclusion, which were apparent in feminism's 'exclusive focus on gender', are emerging in the new politics of sexuality. One of the casualties is 'gender' itself. Martin maintains that the new radical politics of sexuality is often 'formulated against feminism', rather than in relation to it. She argues that 'to define a politics of sexuality as if gender were no longer a social marker or as if feminist analysis and politics had not been critical to current developments seems willfully blind' (Martin 1992:117). As Martin comments in referencing the work of Nestle, Lorde, Goldsby and Bright, to 'put desire back into history', as Nestle advocates, 'means refusing to abstract it out of the complex relations through which sexuality is constructed and enacted' (*ibid.*).<sup>6</sup>

Martin considers a range of erotic literature and maintains that both literature and pornography are potentially positive in their implications: first, in terms of proliferating the range of representations and practices available; second, in terms of understanding these representations and practices as challenging binary models of sex and sexuality; third, as a means of subverting dominant cultural forms and establishing new discourses, representations and identities.

### **POPULARISING REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS: MADONNA AND THE TEXTUAL POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE**

It is against this theoretical background and the demand for a proliferation of representations of sexualities that the emergence of Madonna as a 'gay icon' can be read. As Hann (1995:5) comments, 'Madonna embodies one accessible point in popular culture where representations of homoeroticity, bisexuality, s/m, sexual freedom etc reach the wider public'. The central element in Madonna's 'positioning' is her 'ambivalence'. On one level Madonna can be 'read' as the 'traditional erotic

spectacle for male fantasies'; at another level 'her ambivalence is thought to create spaces for a lesbian/gay oppositional reading' (*ibid.*). In this context Madonna's representations can be seen as a 'site of contestation' for a range of identities and practices. As Hann contends, this is seen 'as positive by many gays and lesbians fighting for their identity and rights in the midst of a conservative backlash in the West', and reifies essentialist 'ideals of identity' (*ibid.*). It is the sense of ambiguity that belongs to the politics of the 'queer nation'.

Lisa Henderson's article 'Justify Our Love: Madonna and the Politics of Queer Sex' (1993) raises many of the issues around Madonna's status as a 'queer icon', including: the idea of cultural representations as 'sites of contestation'; Madonna as a signifier of sexual resistance; Madonna as the embodiment of 'strategies of proliferation and diversity'; and Madonna as encouraging the expression of lesbian lust and fantasies.

Schwichtenberg (1993:6) claims that much of Madonna's later work (*Express Yourself*, *Vogue*, *Justify My Love*, the *Blond Ambition Tour* and *Truth or Dare*) deals explicitly with representations of sexuality that have particular resonance for gay and lesbian audiences. She argues that they 'recontextualise those elements, within gay history, fantasy and political struggle' (*ibid.*). Schwichtenberg claims that the Madonna paradigm provides the impetus to shift 'the margins to the centre' and thus 'it highlights the complexities of gay and lesbian politics and pleasures as they are lived, constructed and contested' (*ibid.*).

Henderson draws on the censorship controversy around *Justify My Love* as a centrepiece within which to examine a number of discourses that situate Madonna within the context of the sex and pornography debates. Henderson, arguing from an anti-antipornography position, 'affirms the pleasures of Madonna's gay-directed rearticulations and visibility; however she concedes that, unlike Madonna, gay and lesbian people represent an oppressed minority of whom sex-identification entails tremendous risk' (Schwichtenberg 1993:6).

Henderson contextualises Madonna in relation to the gay community. She notes that Madonna, unlike Robert Mapplethorpe, has never identified herself as a gay artist. Madonna, also unlike Mapplethorpe, has 'circulated bits and pieces of lesbian and gay subculture in popular genres to popular audiences. Especially for many young gay people in the United States Madonna came closer than any other contemporary celebrity to being an above ground queer icon' (Henderson 1993:108). Henderson considers Madonna's 'positioning' in relation to gay politics and the gay community and in relation to the essential ambiguity in much of Madonna's work. She notes that for many lesbians and gays the lyrics of *Justify My Love* (among others) articulate the gay community's 'refusal to await sanction, from [Jessie] Helms, or the church, to have sex and to forge their identities through the medium of sexual politics' (Henderson 1993:122). However, as Henderson goes on to point out, the messages in Madonna's lyrics are double-edged, both liberating and conforming, and Madonna remains 'the essential female spectacle' appealing to heterosexual male fantasy. Henderson claims that 'Many of *Justify My Love's* sexual gestures depend on dominance and

subordination for their effect, overturning the standard of mutuality in much feminist and humanist rethinking of sexual relationships' (*ibid.*).

The issue of pornography is raised by Henderson (1993:115) in the context of a broader discussion of sexual freedom, questions of legitimacy, and the political significance of pornography and sexual practices '(penetration, sadomasochism, lesbian butch/femme roles)'. She outlines the anti-pornography and the anti-anti-pornography<sup>7</sup> positions as follows: 'In characterising the anti-pornography stance, I have noted elsewhere that female subordination in patriarchy is assumed to be both the cause and effect of the female degradation in pornography (Henderson, 1991:3)' (*ibid.*). Henderson indicates that for the anti-anti-pornography lobby the suppression of pornography is part of a broader definition of sexual expression, including lesbian sex. She claims that as with 'earlier songs and videos (e.g. *Open Your Heart, Express Yourself and Hanky Panky*), *Justify My Love* can thus be read from the anti-anti-pornography position, which separates power and coercion rather than power and sex' (Henderson 1993:115–116).

Henderson also shows how *Justify My Love* is available for lesbian reading, now codified as 'oppositional reading'.<sup>8</sup> As she states, 'however gratifying even a glimpse of eroticism may be, lesbian viewers hardly need to await pop culture's nervous forays into homosexuality in order to produce their own erotic identifications' (*ibid.*). Henderson, in drawing on this range of cultural contexts, shows the lesbian and gay appeals of *Justify My Love*; however, as she indicates, 'the context is created through, not despite its contradictions and volatilities' (*ibid.*).

Henderson considers how Madonna, and in particular *Justify My Love*, is articulated by the gay press in terms of lesbian and gay politics and identity. Many writers in the gay press, she notes, go to the heart of Madonna's appeal to lesbian and gay audiences:

These include her willingness to act as a political figure as well as a popular one and to recognise that such fraught domains as sex, religion, and family, are indeed political constructions, especially for lesbian and gay audiences. Like politics, the sex in Madonna's repertoire is conspicuously *there*.

(Henderson 1993:117)

Within the gay press Henderson (1993:119) shows that Madonna becomes 'a queer icon whose very sensibilities are "gay" and whose ironies resonate with particular power in lesbian and gay imaginations'. Don Shewey (1991:44), who interviewed Madonna for *The Advocate*, a national lesbian and gay magazine, claims that 'Hollywood doesn't really get Madonna. She doesn't fit any past models of Hollywood stardom' (cited in Henderson 1993:119).

Another group of writers in mainstream publications, feminist writers, have also focused on where Madonna and *Justify My Love* fit into contemporary feminist politics. Their critiques reflect the more ambivalent relationships between Madonna and

feminism around 'sexual pleasure and representation'. Henderson, however notes that gay writers give Madonna a more generous appraisal. Michael Musto<sup>9</sup> acclaims Madonna's 'artifice and multiplicity as a bridge between lesbian and gay fans':

Her pride, flamboyance and glamour reach out to gay guys as much as her butch/femme dichotomy and her refusal to be victimised strike a cord in lesbians. As a result, Madonna—the great leveller, a breath mint and candymint—is the first superstar to appeal equally to both camps.

(cited in Henderson 1994:121)

Henderson notes in conclusion that, despite Madonna's appeal to the gay community, gay and lesbian writers remain sceptical about the double edge of Madonna's appeal. Henderson (1993:123) argues that 'Madonna's penchant for metamorphosis beckons to us to recognise and toy with our own self-construction', but, as she points out, the 'universe' available to most people is a much more limited one. In addition Madonna's 'plasticity' carries with it many of 'the oppressive meanings of consumer society', as well as retaining the greater audience and greatest profit. As Henderson notes, 'It is difficult finally to acknowledge the divided self and engage the pleasure of masquerade while at the same time fighting a strikingly antagonistic, legal and social system' (*ibid.*). She maintains that

Madonna cannot be seen to be the answer to significant social and political problems but in terms of articulating and problematising the issue of representation for the lesbian and gay community, she has captured the politically powerful ground of the popular.

(Henderson 1993:124)

Patton, like Henderson, contextualises the debate around lesbian and gay identity and politics and its representations within a political and theoretical context. Patton identifies the same critiques of the internal operations and theoretical framework developed within lesbian and gay politics as developed within feminism. She claims that by 'the end of the 1980s, much of the theoretical work in lesbian and gay studies de-essentialized the once apparently stable "homosexuality"' (Patton 1993:82). The process of self-reflection was further developed by poststructuralist and postmodernist debates. As Patton notes

poststructuralist work appeared to undercut the claims of the most visible gay and lesbian rights organisations that had, for more than two decades, hitched their wagons to the rhetoric and practices of postwar US Minority politics...lesbian and gay critics were caught between the desire for theoretical clarity and the hope for political and cultural freedom.

(Patton 1993:82)

Schwichtenberg (1993:6) claims that, for Patton, Madonna's *Vogue* serves as a

touchstone from which she develops a poststructuralist theory that explains the formation of subaltern memory in relation to gay politics, identity and representation. Schwichtenberg shows how 'Patton explores the tensions between Madonna's liberation body politic in *Vogue* and the live experience of voguing as a kind of "folk" dance that originated among black and Hispanic queens (a particular gay, subaltern formation)' (*ibid.*).

Patton's theory explores the possibilities of cultural representations around Madonna's video *Vogue*. As such it offers a number of openings for debates in the area of popular culture and gay cultural identity and representation. Patton's analysis positions debates around Madonna's appropriation and commodification of elements of gay, popular and cultural identity against debates which understand her position as establishing 'sites of resistance' in popular culture. In addition, Patton's (1993:86) analysis of voguing establishes new ways of conceptualising gay identity because of its link to non-white gay culture. Finally Patton draws on the work of Michel Foucault<sup>10</sup> to develop the concept of 'lieux de memoire'.<sup>11</sup> As Schwichtenberg (1993:6) comments, Patton gives a 'provocative and nuanced account of the political stakes invested in popular embodiments of subaltern memory'.

Patton outlines the theoretical debates that frame the analysis of black and gay culture in the 1980s and 1990s, and positions Madonna and Madonna's work in relation to these wider debates. She observes that

where some critics have viewed *Vogue* and Madonna's work in general as parasitic on, variously, black and gay culture and even on feminism, I will suggest that she re-routes through mass culture quotidian critiques of dominant culture (in this case voguing's critique of whiteness and of gender) making them more available as places of resistance...

(Patton 1993:83)

Patton at one and the same time undertakes an ideological critique of 'Voguing' as an art form, and a textual analysis of Madonna's music video *Vogue*. She goes on to say that

what seemed vital about the diffusion of voguing through release of the video was the battle it sparked over control of the popular memory of homosexuality, for a new generation of queens. Young gay men and women were coming out through their imitation of voguing and Madonna. They were learning to remember their bodies in a critique of gender that is autonomous of gay liberation and feminism.

(Patton 1993:86)

Patton charts the 'popular history of homosexuality' in terms of homosexual subcultures which she maintains 'developed elaborate signifiers of membership' (1993:87).<sup>12</sup> *Vogue* and voguing, she notes, is positioned at a site of intersection of race and gender in terms of its representation and history:



In both its intertextual components and in the hype about the video's subject-voguing—*Vogue* constitutes a site of memory reconstituting Afro-Latin and gay history due to: (1) its prominence and popularity, (2) its self-referential claims to being a kind of history and (3) its intertextual linkages.

(Patton 1993:92)

Patton develops the theme of history in terms of the text itself, maintaining that *Vogue* can be 'read' in historical terms because of its use of black-and-white photography and 'retro' costuming. In addition, Patton claims that the listing of the names of iconic figures from gay male culture are both a traditional form of history and a traditional mode of establishing one's lineage and thus one's authority to speak. However,

textual analysis provides us with only a glimpse of the ways in which popular cultural artifacts connect with a wide range of memories and folk knowledges; textual analysis is mute at the moment that we try to understand how dancers operate in the lieux de memoire.

(Patton 1993:97)

In conclusion, Patton (1993:98) notes that, while the 'moves of voguing deconstruct gender and race', *Vogue* itself makes it problematic to understand why such a process of deconstruction is necessary. As she indicates, 'in constructing its historicity, *Vogue* alludes to a popular memory of repression that it then anxiously undercuts by atomizing and dequeening the performance of the dance' (*ibid.*).

The weight of both Henderson and Patton is on the capabilities of cultural readers. Kemp (1994:11) comments that, while putting emphasis on the importance of diverse cultural readers, this in itself cannot provide a complete analysis of how meaning is created. A fuller explanation would also take account of the processes that create these readers, as they cannot be understood as completely free agents. As he claims, 'To suggest this would be to ignore the possibility that cultural products can exert any normalising influence, and that the intended meanings of culture might have effects upon audiences' (*ibid.*).

### THE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF AMBIVALENCE IN THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

The emphasis on cultural readings and the implication for the 'polyvocal quality' of texts is central for debates around both sexual and cultural representations and identities. Mercer (1992:23) claims that the struggle for identity and agency always 'entails the negotiation of ambivalence'. Debates around the political importance of ambivalence have been particularly important in theories of sexual and cultural representation around race and ethnicity (Bhabha 1984, 1994; Mercer 1994) and post-colonialism. This last section of the chapter considers some of these debates, particularly as they have coalesced around the work of Robert Mapplethorpe. It

also considers the framing of debates within feminism around the issue of pornography and the implications of debates around sexuality and identity for feminist theorising.

## **PORNOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL SPACE: FRAMING THE DEBATES**

If there ever was a quintessential postfeminist issue, pornography is it.  
(Modleski 1991:135)

Modleski's comment is an interesting one in reflecting on the debates around pornography that preoccupied feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is insightful, if by it she means that the issue of pornography encapsulated debates around sexuality, identity and representation, which have (at least, in part) defined the postfeminist agenda.

Second wave feminist debates on pornography can broadly be divided into two 'camps': the 'anti-pornography' camp, a position held by writers such as Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin and Adrienne Rich; and the 'anti-antipornography' camp which tended, at least in the 1970s and 1980s, to be associated with 'sex radical' Gayle Rubin. Perhaps more interesting than the assumptions behind these positions were the implications of these debates for issues of sexuality and identity.

The anti-pornography position which occupied a prominent space in second wave feminist debates around the issue of representation, became part of a feminist orthodoxy in the 1970s and early 1980s and is still represented in feminist debates in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> The anti-pornography position is based on a model which sees pornography as an expression of male power and oppression within patriarchy. It is a model which understands pornography as a representation of oppressive fantasies, that objectifies women and leads to violence. Catherine MacKinnon (1987:172) claims that pornography 'institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, fusing the eroticization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female'. In fact both Andrea Dworkin (1981–1987) and Catherine MacKinnon (1987, 1989) understand pornography as itself a form of violence against women.

Elsewhere MacKinnon, in an article entitled 'Sexuality, Pornography and Method: Pleasure under Patriarchy' (1989), outlines a model of pornography which implies a direct link between pornography as a representational form and violence against women, particularly rape. Thus for MacKinnon pornography is directly linked to male sexuality and is 'inextricably linked to victimizing, hurting, exploiting' (MacKinnon 1989:328, citing Dworkin). Other advocates of the anti-pornography position, such as Suzanne Kappeler (1986), claim that all representations of women within a framework of patriarchal commodity capitalism are degrading and violent and by definition pornographic.

The anti-pornography model can be characterised as follows: it assumes a unitary, undifferentiated concept of pornography, making no distinction between different forms; it is based on a simple binary model which understands all pornography as a reflection of male sexuality; it assumes a single transparent, undifferentiated meaning regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality or class; it assumes a simple cause/effect model which implies that pornography as representation will lead to violence; finally it makes assumptions about women's sexuality, seeing women as passive victims, while at the same time denying opportunities for resistance.

The anti-pornography movement is a pro-censorship movement, with groups like Women Against Pornography (WAP) demanding censorship legislation. One of the unintended consequences of such demands is the casting of women as 'victims' and the 'authorizing' of the State to intervene further in issues of sexuality and identity. In both the UK and the US such debates have been appropriated by 'the Moral Majority' to restrict and control a range of services and art forms seen as 'morally corrupting'. Examples include the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, lesbian feminist art, abortion information, etc.

The anti-antipornography position or the anti-censorship position is represented in the work of Vance (1984) and Burstyn, among others.<sup>14</sup> This position can be characterised in the following way: it makes a distinction between pornography and erotica; it attempts to counter the representations of women in pornography by working 'within'; it challenges the uniformity of sexual representations of women by advocating a proliferation of sexual representations; it establishes cultural spaces within the context of representational forms and identity. The proliferation of sexual representations of women has produced what Gayle Rubin (1984:303) calls an 'appreciation of erotic diversity and more open discussion of sexuality'.

## CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AND MARGINALISED IDENTITIES

Debates in the 1970s and 1980s surrounding the issue of pornography highlighted conflicts of interest between lesbian feminists and gay men. What was sometimes overlooked in the radical feminist (psychoanalytically driven) relationship between pornography and the 'male gaze' was the privileging of a particular racial group in these debates, namely white men. This model of the dominant gaze of the white gay man has been drawn on by a number of writers and theorists in their analysis of the representation of black sexual identity. Hooks, in her analysis of Isaac Julien's film *Looking for Langston*, contends that the 'gaze of the white [gay] male as it appears in the film is colonizing, it does not liberate' (1993:69). She goes on to question whose or what 'desire is expressed when the only frontal nudity seen in the film appears as secondhand image—the pictures of naked black men taken by wealthy white photographer Robert Mapplethorpe?' (*ibid.*). Hooks' position retains a strong commitment to a

modernist representational model which privileges reality over fantasy and assumes a univocal reading of the text. As she argues, 'Though acknowledged, Mapplethorpe's vision is simply not compelling when it is displayed within a framework where the prevailing image is that of the black male body defining itself as subject, not as object' (*ibid.*).

The anti-pornography movement, typical of feminist initiatives of the 1970s, while problematic in its links with the 'New Right's' demands for censorship, was important in its politicisation of the issue of sexual representation. While the movement remained an essentially white middle-class movement, the issues of race and racism emerged in critiques from women of colour and Third World women. Mercer (1994:131) notes that these same critiques did not emerge in the gay movement, and he comments that 'white gay men retain a deafening silence on race'. Mercer maintains, 'this is not surprising, given the relatively depoliticized culture of the mainstream gay "scene"' (*ibid.*).

Mercer considers many of the issues that have characterised debates within feminism, particularly in the work of writers such as bell hooks. He notes that the issue of 'freedom of choice' within sexual libertarianism reflects racial privilege and is embodied in the white-dominated 'consumer-oriented character of the metropolitan gay subculture' (Mercer 1994:133). He contends that this subculture in many ways is no different to mainstream culture in terms of the way it 'positions' and represents black men. Mercer claims that 'As black men we are implicated in the same landscape of stereotypes which is dominated and organized around the needs, demands and desires of white males' (*ibid.*). He shows that the same 'narrow repertoire of "types", is available to the black man including the supersexual stud and the sexual "savage" on the one hand, or the delicate, fragile and exotic "oriental" on the other' (*ibid.*).

The confinement of gay black men to these stereotypes is reflected in different representational forms, particularly gay pornography. Mercer raises the dilemma faced by gay black men in this context: 'what interests us are the contradictory experiences that the porno-photo-text implicates us in, as pornography is one of the few spaces in which erotic images of other black men are made available' (*ibid.*). He maintains that the repetition of the stereotypes of black men in gay pornographic forms 'betrays the circulation of "colonial fantasy" (Bhabha, 1984)' (*ibid.*).

### MAPPLETHORPE AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF AMBIVALENCE

It is within this context that Mercer develops a critique of the work Robert Mapplethorpe. His images of *Black Males* (1983) 'as the stereotypical conventions of racial representation in pornography are appropriated and abstracted into the discourse of art photography' (Mercer 1994:134). Mercer claims that Mapplethorpe's work can be seen as reinforcing and reiterating the terms of 'colonial

fantasy' and thus constructing the black man as serving the racist fantasies of the 'white male gaze'. (Hann 1995:8).

While recognising the importance of the concept of 'the colonial fantasy' as articulated by Bhabha and developed by Mercer in its implications for black identity, Mercer does move beyond a position which 'fixes' a conception of black identity within this model. He maintains that 'black readers may appropriate pleasures by reading against the grain, overturning signs of otherness into signifiers of identity. In seeing images of other black men coded as gay, there is an affirmation of our sexual identity' (Mercer 1994:135–136).

Mercer's reconceptualisation of Mapplethorpe's work is in part a reassessment of Mapplethorpe's own position, as a member of the gay community and his subsequent death from AIDS, and partly Mercer's redefinition of the nature of the text. As Hann (1995:9) comments, drawing on Mercer's (1992) earlier work, 'it does make a difference who is speaking because if Mapplethorpe can be recognised as a queer advocate then his representations can be empowering'. Hann goes on to note that one of the main reasons behind Mercer's rereading of Mapplethorpe's work is that his previous critique could be appropriated by the 'New Right'.

In addition, Mercer recognises the importance of 'ambivalence' in reading texts. As Hann (1995:9) claims, Mercer 'privileges this as an important political position reminding us that the struggle for identity and agency always "entails the negotiation of ambivalence" (Mercer, 1992:23)'. She notes that 'Mercer argues for the importance of any representations that expose what Spivak calls the "epistemic violence" of the denial of difference, the false stability of the centre' (*ibid.*). In this context Mercer suggests a textual model that advocates 'aesthetics of ambivalence' (Gaines 1992:29).

## FANTASY, PORNOGRAPHY AND REPRESENTATION

In an article entitled 'The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess', Judith Butler (1990b) considers the issue of pornography, and in particular the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, against the backdrop of feminist debates around pornography, representation and fantasy. She contends that within the anti-pornography position there is an 'implicit theory' which 'relies upon a representational realism that conflates the signified of fantasy with its (impossible) referent' (Butler 1990b: 105). She claims that it is this theory of fantasy which informs those branches of feminism which call for censorship against pornography and which 'appears to inform New Right efforts to prohibit federal funding of artists like Robert Mapplethorpe' (*ibid.*).

Butler contends that the effort to limit 'representations of homoeroticism' in the federally funded art world, 'in an effort to censor the phantasmatic', inevitably leads to its production. Drawing on the work of Jacqueline Rose, Butler (1990b:108) shows how 'the phantasmatic is also precisely that which haunts and contests the borders which circumscribe the construction of stable identities'. Fantasy offers

the possibility of the fragmentation or proliferation of identifications which challenges the very 'locatability of identity'.

It is within this context that Butler challenges the implications for both representations and identity of the anti-pornography position. As she contends,

the effort to impute a causal or temporal relation between the phantasmatic and the real raises a set of problems...[The] view that fantasy motivates action rules out the possibility that fantasy is the very scene which *suspends* action and which, in its suspension, provides for a critical investigation of what it is that constitutes action.

(Butler 1990b:113)

The anti-pornography position, in its assumptions about cause and effect, offers no possibilities for alternative interpretations because it is based on the claim that the text permits a single interpretation and understands the 'construction of the pornographic text as a site of univocal meaning' (*ibid.*). Butler notes that it is this 'postulation of a single identificatory access' to representation that carries with it a stabilisation of gender identity. She claims that 'the political task is to promote a proliferation of representations, sites of discursive production, which might then contest the authoritative production produced by the prohibitive law' (1990b:119).

## CONCLUSION

Postfeminist and postmodernist debates, while not necessarily advocating 'the death of the subject', recognise that the epistemological framing of the subject as an object of knowledge increases as differentiation proliferates division. These unitary categories which characterised 'identity politics' have been increasingly challenged as identity becomes more fluid and fragmented, undermined by contrasts such as that between gay and straight, female and male, and black and white. This increasing fluidity has impacted on both the range and meaning given to representations. The proliferation of representations emerging from cultural forms are partly the result of popular cultural forms emerging as 'sites of resistance'. As Dyer (1993:2) notes, cultural forms can no longer be seen to have a single determinate meaning and are understood in different ways by different cultural and subcultural groups. However, he recognises that 'the complexity of viewing/reading practices in relation to representation' does not imply that there is 'equality and freedom in the regime of representation'. As Butler (1990b:121) contends, it is the very proliferation and deregulation of representations as part of a process towards the production of a chaotic multiplicity of representations which will undermine the restriction of the terms of political identity.