

# FAKING IT

## The Story of "Ohh!"

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**Synopsis** -This paper examines the phenomenon of faking orgasm in order to construct a critical analysis of heterosexual relations. Such an analysis, we argue, is central to the task of developing effective HIV/AIDS educational campaigns for heterosexual people. In the paper we examine the different narratives upon which heterosexual men and women rely when they are discussing their sexual and relationship experiences. We analyse these in terms of recent feminist theories of embodiment. We conclude by arguing the importance of this kind of analysis to HIV/AIDS prevention and education.

### INTRODUCTION

I mean they say, well, women fake orgasm, I think it's pretty true. (female interviewee)

In a recent issue of Australian Cosmopolitan magazine, women were advised to fake orgasm on occasions when they were feeling too tired or distracted to enjoy sex. 'Faking it,' they were assured, was the only polite response in that situation -after all, it would not be fair to offend the men who were working so hard to please them (Cosmopolitan, 1992, September). It is faking orgasm which this paper takes as its focus, for as Cosmopolitan's advice indicates, and as we will argue, faking orgasm is a compelling "showcase" site of heterosexual relations. The central aim of our analysis is to examine the ways in which heterosexual relations produce this phenomenon. The broader aim of this paper, which arises out of a larger project based at The National Centre for HIV Social Research, Macquarie University, is to demonstrate the centrality of an understanding of the complexities of heterosexual relations to the development of effective HIV/AIDS education campaigns aimed at heterosexual people.

Although Cosmopolitan tells women exactly when and why they should fake orgasm, explicit instructions are not given as to how. From our research it seemed that the American film "When Harry Met Sally" provides the most readily available representation of how to fake orgasm. Given the extravagant nature of Sally's performance - a full volume theatrical imitation of ecstasy - it is hardly surprising that most of the women we interviewed said that what they did was of a different genre. Statements like "I suppose I do moan and groan a bit more than I'd feel like it" and confessions of "untrue" affirmative answers to the question, "Did you come?" or "Was that good for you too?" were common. In almost every woman's interview these practices were mentioned as something they did, at least some of the time.

In stark contrast, very few of the men we talked to said that they had ever been in bed with a woman who was faking orgasm. Perhaps they too had an exaggerated expectation of theatricality. In general "the whole faking syndrome," as one man put it, was considered by our male interviewees to be a problem that other people encountered. One older man even went so far as to state categorically that "Nobody fakes orgasms any more. . .I think people have forgotten, people fortunately don't do that any more." Clearly, the refined performances which women are giving are extremely convincing.

The phenomenon of faking orgasm in its various forms is important for preventive education and research around HIV/AIDS and heterosexuality because it illustrates the peculiar complexities involved in sexual relations between women and men. It is a knowledge of these complexities which enables educational interventions to be effective -as we have argued previously, it does not make sense to structure an educational campaign around an imagined or ideal set of heterosexual relations which bear little relation to how most people experience their lives (Waldby, Kippax, Crawford, 1991). It is clear, for example, that heterosexual relations are not played out exclusively in conscious and articulated ways: Faking orgasm and men's and women's different responses to it indicate that sexual interactions are multilayered and to some extent unspoken, even unspeakable. Thus, as has been previously pointed out, the model of sexual negotiation and assertion advocated in governmental HIV/AIDS educational materials aimed at heterosexuals -one based on honest and open discussion between partners - is highly problematic (Waldby, Kippax, Crawford, 1991). Such a model assumes that sex is something which, at least after embarrassment has been overcome, can be freely spoken about. The complexities surrounding faking orgasm, as we will show, demonstrate the problematic nature of this model.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper comes from interviews with 73 heterosexual first year university students (mostly aged under 25 years, but some mature age students) and 19 focussed group discussions made up of 3-8 students of the same sex.<sup>1</sup> Both the interviews and groups were conducted by same-sex interviewers and group facilitators. Approximately two-thirds of our data came from women - a percentage which reflects the enrolment statistics in the course from which our subjects were recruited.

The individual interviews were semistructured and lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, while the group discussions were loosely structured and were of 2 hours duration. The interviews were very personal, with the interviewees talking about their own sexual and relationship histories and their feelings about initiating relationships, the differences between committed and casual relationships, talking and directing during sex, penetration, their own bodies, HIV and other STDs, contraception, and homosexuality. The group discussions on the other hand, although they often became personal, focussed more on the participants' social circles and perceptions of sexual and relationship issues within these circles and the wider society. The groups were asked to comment on statements made by the opposite sex which were taken from previous years' groups and interviews, and also to develop endings to half-finished "real life" stories. Both the groups and interviews were confidential so all names have been changed here.

The interviews and group discussions were transcribed and analysed. We looked for themes running through the data, for commonly used metaphors and/or similarities in statements of belief. This analysis was helped by the use of a qualitative data computer programme, Kwalitan (1990), which

allowed us to mark certain passages in the text as being relevant to a particular theme, and to recall all items so marked.

The underlying premise of our method is that the way people talk about and experience sexuality, as is explained in detail below, is culturally constructed. Thus in examining the ways in which a number of people talk about sex, we believe, we can identify commonalities which are important and meaningful and in so doing come to understand the experiences of individuals in a more comprehensive and useful way.

This paper uses contemporary feminist writing to provide the theoretical underpinnings of the arguments presented and builds also on previous work from the Heterosexuality and HIV/AIDS project (Kippax, Crawford, Waldby, & Benton, 1990; Waldby, Kippax, & Crawford, 1990, 1993a, 1993b; Waldby et al., 1991).

## THE STORIES OF "OHH!"

The aim of this paper is not to provide the "truth" about faking orgasm but rather to discuss the ambivalences and slippages of meanings which circulate through and around it. What we wish to argue is that an understanding of the complexities and instabilities of hetero- sexual relations, which are demonstrated in the phenomenon of faking orgasm, is useful in attempting effective educational interventions. Our argument then is based on an examination of the narratives or stories which are woven into and constitute people's sexual experiences. In our data two important stories arise: a story of relationships and love, and another of technique and work.

### *The love bit*

One of the most striking similarities across the women's interviews and group discussions was an almost exclusive focus on love and the importance of being in a monogamous relation- ship. Sex, although a "natural" progression once the women were in such relationships, seemed always to take second place. These statements from three women's groups indicate commonly held views:

Karen: Sex is the wrong word I think. Like, you have sex with people that you don't really care about. You know and like, it's sort of like, if you're gonna have sex with the person that you love (mm) it's like making love instead of having sex (right). It sounds so um like. . .so detached, like you're having sex with somebody (yeah) (mm) (yeah) I mean, it's obviously a way of showing, probably the ultimate way of showing someone that you care about them.

Interviewer: So can you imagine the situation where you do love someone but you still feel like having sex with other people? Or do you consider that love has to be. . .

Michelle: But if you really loved someone then you wouldn't want to have sex with anyone else.

Diana: I think that. . . [sex is] sort of, not natural but it comes with love, what you're doing. ...It comes with love, it's just, sort of an extension of your love for the person.

This focus by women on emotionality and relationships is not surprising. As our interviewees of both sexes confirmed, it is a well known "truth" in our culture that women are more "into" relationships than are men. That these women placed the stability of their relationships above their own sexual pleasure was not seen to be at all problematic by the vast majority of our interviewees.

### *Technique: Working in the dark*

In contrast to this story of love and relation- ships, the men we interviewed seemed to use a less emotional narrative: a story of technique and work. Wendy Hollway has argued that men usually

construct their sexuality as being based on a strong "biological" drive (Hollway, 1984). As has been previously shown, this construction positions women as the passive recipient of men's desire - sex becomes something which men do to (or on) women, whose silence is interpreted as consent (Kippax et al., 1990). Although this "male sex drive" story was evident to some extent in our research, the men we interviewed were also very keen to discuss sexuality as an abstracted practice of knowledge and skill (Waldby et al., 1993a, pp. 250-251). This practice requires a thinking mind and a controlled body. The techniques it produces are also very static - once a man has learnt certain skills he does not need to change or develop them according to his situation. Thus again what is also required is a passive woman's body to receive the technique and work - as is evident in the following quotes, women in this unemotional or "reasoned" approach to sexuality quickly lose their status as persons and their difference from one another.

Interviewer: How capable are you, you know, of pleasing your partner?

Phil: Ah. On a scale of one to ten?

Interviewer: Why not!

Phil: Oh, I think I'm doing a pretty good job, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you ever feel anxious about your ability to please your partner?

Tom: Ah, sometimes I worry about it but nothing, I mean it's not a worry in my mind at all times. Especially if I'm with someone I knew, you know. If I slept with someone new for the first time you might be a bit worried about it then. And if they, if you see them again well you know that [giggles] it worked.

It became clear in our research that one particularly important aspect of the technique/work narrative is an emphasis on being able to give women an orgasm, a phenomenon which, at least in its present form, dates specifically from feminist-influenced sexology (Ehrenreich, Hess, Jacobs, 1986).<sup>2</sup> Whilst their own pleasure is "natural" and driven, men use their technique to bring women to orgasm.

Steven: I don't feel like I have to be, I don't place myself at the centre of the actual event so I feel like my partner is more central to the experience than me so I have to, I'm in a way there for her, to please her, so I have no problem with having an orgasm, so, I feel like it's my duty to make sure she has one as well. ...

Interviewer: Well, how important is orgasm? Female orgasm?

Steven: To me it's fairly central, yeah I think.

Interviewer: Do you have any anxieties over your ability to er -

Steven: Yes, sometimes.

Interviewer: Provide orgasm?

Steven: Yeah, sometimes, yeah. I think it's a constant thought when the act's actually taking place, it's something that you're thinking about most of the time. It's always in the back of your mind. You don't actually rate your performance but you're wondering, is she enjoying it or what else could you do, there's all thoughts going on at the same time.

Although many might at first be pleased that women's pleasure is being attended to, we suggest that what is happening here can be read as an elaboration on the male sex drive discourse. Giving women an orgasm is a demonstration of the man's sexual capacities and skill - again he seems to be "doing" sex on an undifferentiated woman's body. Women's pleasure, unlike men's, is not seen to be natural, but rather as dependent on men's work. Thus women's orgasm is not pleasure for pleasure's sake, but is used to prove the quality of men's technique.

## SEXUALITY AND EMBODIMENT

So two stories emerge from our research: a women's story of love and relationships, and a men's story of technique and work. Where do these stories come from, and why do they seem to fit into sexually aligned groups?

In attempting to answer similar questions, feminist theorists have examined the underlying structures of our culture and the know ledges which inform them. They have found that much modern western thought is characterised by a privileging of a mode of thinking which utilises binarisms: a series of mutually dependent "opposite" pairs in which only one side of the pair has a positive definition, whilst the other side is defined as everything that the other is not (Grosz, 1987; Jay, 1991). Examples of these binarisms include: reason-emotion, mind-body, active-passive, public-private, culture-nature, presence - absence. In each of these, men are aligned with the first side, and women with the second. As we will argue, these splits fundamentally inform the ways our interviewees spoke about their sexual experiences.

But how do these binarisms actually come to affect individuals at the seemingly "personal" level of sexuality? In answering this, we have looked toward recent feminist writing which has taken the body as its subject -for, as these theories demonstrate, it is the body which seems to constitute the interface between culture and subjectivity.

This writing is based on a denaturalisation of the body -the body is no longer seen as a "purely" biological entity, but rather as socially and psychically constructed. In this way of thinking, individual bodies are situated in a particular cultural space and are lived, that is, they are experienced as having meanings and significances beyond anatomical or biological existence. Indeed, "biology must itself be amenable to psychical and cultural transformation, to processes of retracing or inscription" (Grosz, 1987, p. 7). Because human biology is always experienced within culture it is "always already cultural" (Grosz, 1987, p. 7). Bodies are sexed -that is they are either the bodies of men or women - and are in part brought into being by a "historically based culturally shared phantasy about male and female biologies" (Gatens, 1983, p. 152). In other words, these are bodies produced in and by a certain culture and which also produce themselves at an imaginary (or psychical) level, on both an individual and a cultural level (Gatens, 1983).

These bodily inscriptions also mark identities. As Gross (1986) explains in delineating the work of Luce Irigaray, the culturally inscribed body "internalised in the form of an image (an imaginary) forms the limits or boundaries of the subject's ego or sense of self' (p. 142). Thus, people's experiences of their bodies, feelings, and beliefs as their own are intrinsically connected to cultural inscriptions of their bodies. Thus, a woman experiences herself as a woman because she is inscribed with cultural stories of femininity (and of its dependent 'opposite:' masculinity). Thus, in our data, for example, it is not that women do not know about or believe in the masculine story of technique and work, or that men do not have any knowledge of or investment in the relationships narrative, but rather that when they are asked to speak about themselves they speak the stories associated with their own sex.

So, binarisms such as the mind-body split are inscribed onto the sexed bodies of individuals. This is evident also in the dominant account of masculine embodiment where the body is conceptualised as being the property of the person who is somehow separate or above his biology (Grosz, 1987, pp. 4-5). For this account to operate, there must be a body which is biologically given and which can be controlled by the mind. The mind must be able to transcend the body, but at the same time be able to use the body to achieve the mind's ends.

This traditional conceptualisation of the body seems to be reflected in our male interviewees' technique/work narrative. The emphasis on masculine technique and work shores up a notion of the body as controlled by the mind. As is evident in the following quote, women's orgasms are seen as being a result of masculine work and expenditure of effort. Sex is conceptualised as men using their bodies as tools to work on the bodies of women.

Interviewer: How, how does it make you feel? [that his partner does not have orgasms.]

Peter: It makes me wonder what I'm doing [giggles] or what I'm meant to do. 'Cause I find myself spending four times as much time on her than me, she is on me. And mate I'm finding it, I'm, I'm orgasming, but she, she doesn't so.

Interviewer: Mm.

Peter: That, I don't know if it's like that with all women or not, so.

Interviewer: Mm.

Peter: Ah, but it doesn't seem to worry her. I mean I say, "I'll keep going" you know, and she says, "No, don't worry."

As with all binarisms, both sides are dependent on the existence of the other. Thus, when men's bodies are positioned as controlled by the mind, women's bodies are positioned as out of control, or needing control (or work). Women's positioning as the recipients of masculine technique reinforces the male - female binarism of active - passive: Women's bodies become reminders of men's activity and control. Thus, women's response to men's technique is also very important -for unlike men, women, who are already positioned on the body side of the binarism, are more able to fully immerse themselves in the body's pleasures. This immersion would be too risky for men, as according to the binarism, it entails a loss of mind. Thus, women's sexual pleasure - her loss of mind - reaffirms men's own control and stability (Waldby et al., 1991).

Women's position on the body side of the mind-body binarism is also linked to their alignment with emotionality. As Elizabeth Grosz (1987) argues, "patriarchal oppression justifies itself through the presumption that women, more than men, are tied to their fixed corporeality. They are thus considered more natural and biologically governed, and less cultural, to be more object, and less subject than men" (pp. 5-6). One result of this alignment with the body and with nature, Grosz goes on to explain, is that women are given a "pseudo- evolutionary function in the reproduction of the species" (p. 6). Because women are seen to be closer to nature than are men, they are seen to exist for the purposes of reproduction, and to be the people who are best suited for tasks such as child-rearing. Unsurprisingly, these tasks are also linked with emotionality, nurturing, and the maintaining of relationships.

## FAKING IT

So how does this discussion help us to make sense of women faking orgasm? We have argued that what is demanded of women in the technique/work narrative is proof of the value of the man's work, of the soundness of his technique. Thus, women are expected to experience orgasm. But part of the "problem" with women's sexuality is that women's orgasm is not visible. Unlike men, women do not ejaculate visibly, and although in recent times it has been stated that women's capacity for orgasm is at least multiple, their partners still cannot see what is going on.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is a demand for noisy and exaggerated display.

Sally: He'd probably love it if I started to, not faking it but he'd probably like it if I was a bit more. . . vocal about it, what I was experiencing. 'Cause he sort of says I'm a silent achiever.

Interviewer: Oh yeah? [laugh]

Sally: But sometimes I think he's too much of, it's not that he makes a lot of noise either, but I mean. . . he vocalises a lot about how he feels and asks, you know, sort of asking questions all the time.

Interviewer: So you don't actually like talk- ing during sex?

Sally: Ah, I like talking but. . . not during it, and the only thing I like saying during it is sort of. . . what you feel about that person. ...Not about sex, the mechanics sort of it. I feel like he sort of gets into the mechanics a bit of it.

As is clear in Sally's case, the demand for display, for noise, is a demand for the affirmation of technique or "mechanics" as she puts it. The demand for noise also indicates that heterosexuality becomes an economy in which the woman's orgasm is exchanged for the man's work.<sup>4</sup>

This demand for noise as proof of orgasm not only indicates the limits of our male interviewees' understanding of feminine sexuality, but shows the importance of cultural constructions of sexuality in individual's experiences: cultural representations of women's orgasm as overwhelmingly pleasurable and, therefore, loud are common in women's popular magazines and pornography. Sally's initial equation of this affirmation with faking orgasm is also very telling. For indeed faking orgasm can only work because of this representation -it is far easier to make a bit of noise than, for example, to fake a vaginal spasm!

This "orgasm for work" economy of hetero- sexuality however, is not unproblematic. For as we outlined earlier, women's sexuality is seen as opposition to men's "natural" sexuality, and their orgasms are thus "unnatural."<sup>5</sup> This also springs from women's alignment with the body: women's overimmersion in the body -their lack of mind -means that their bodies are perceived as being chaotic and out of control. Women's orgasms are thus seen as being difficult to achieve -bringing women to orgasm is seen by both men and women to require not only the correct state of mind (in fact a relinquishing of mind and a retreat into the body), but also a good deal of skilled masculine work.<sup>6</sup> Thus the value of men's technique is affirmed -if women do reach orgasm, their partner must be "good" at sex - but yet women's sexuality is in some way contained - the difficulties women experience "prove" that women are not as "naturally" sexual as men.

The economy of heterosexuality, as we have already suggested, can also only operate be- cause women provide background networks of love and nurturing. In focussing on maintain- ing relationships, women make sure there is a space for the smooth functioning of this economy. When the economy is disrupted, for in- stance, when the woman does not reach orgasm despite the man's skilled work, there are disruptions also to the relationship.

Tracy: Like Jeff used to get really upset. Like he used to get so upset all the time. . .Cause he used to say, "Oh but why, why can't I make you come?". . . he used to talk about it all the time and it used to sort of piss me off because like I thought, "Oh well there's something wrong with me". ...And then I realised that it's not, it's just something I've just got to live with. I've just got to work at it. So he's, like we used to talk about it all the time 'cause he'd go, "Gonna happen one day" ...and he was like "OK, this is what we're gonna do. [interviewer giggles] We're gonna try all these different ways [giggles] and we're gonna make you come," and it was like -and he'd be talking to me the whole way and he'd be going, "Oh, just imagine," he'd be going, "Imagine this, imagine that. Imagine your wildest fantasies," and I'd be going "Oh, shut up!" [Both giggle] ...

Interviewer: Was it that important to you or was it. . .

Tracy: Yeah, it was, but it used to get me down so much.

Interviewer: You'd rather sort of just. . .

Tracy: Yeall, I guess, oh you know, like. . . it's obviously a really good feeling, but you want it to happen all the time but it can't. . . So it still gets me down sometimes now, but I just can't let it get to me because I think, "Oh," but I mean, it's not everything.

Like Tracy, the women who had difficulties with orgasm reported experiencing a great deal of anxiety and spoke of numerous difficult encounters with their partners over the issue. When men "failed" to bring their lovers to this necessary "peak," this was dealt with by both partners in one of two ways. One response, as with Tracy's Jeff, was to assume that the "problem" was one of masculine technique, and thus the way to overcome it was with the man's ever renewed attempts, involving more and more complex skills. The other response was more pessimistic -here both partners assumed that the body of woman is simply faulty, that it is unrealistic to expect a woman to orgasm every time, and that it is better not to worry too much about it. This response springs from the previously mentioned cultural construction of women's bodies as intrinsically flawed and is also reinforced by the cultural discourses of sexuality which suggest that women enjoy "foreplay" much more than "real" sex (penetration)<sup>7</sup> anyway, and so will not mind if they do not reach orgasm.

Here we return to Cosmopolitan's advice: if a woman cannot "achieve" orgasm she should fake one to please her partner and to avoid relationship problems. Hence, it is at the site of faking orgasm that the two narratives we have outlined -the technique/work narrative and the love/relationships narrative -intersect. Faking orgasm, as we stated in the beginning, is clearly involved with technique: the pretence techniques of the woman and the affirmation of masculine technical skills. However, it is also interwoven with the emphasis on relationships: The "reason" women give for faking is that it keeps the man happy and, thus, the relationship functioning.

Interviewer: Do the guys you know sort of worry about giving a girl an orgasm, like they sort of (oh yeah), or do they just. . .

Jane: Oh yeah, did you get off, did you get off, did you get off. .

Megan: Yeah.

Jane: 'Cause otherwise it says something about them I think.

Liz: Yeah it does.

Jane: And if I say "No," then that means like he wasn't good or. . .

Megan: Yeah, they feel inadequate.

Jane: So in a sense they're more worried about themselves. And so you think they're worried about you enjoying it but, I mean, (they're not) it's sort of, they're more worried about if they were good or not

Megan: Yeah.

Alison: That's why I think girls fake it, so that they can sort of like get it over with.

Jane: I fake it sometimes. Just. . .'cause my boyfriend gets really worried. . . because. . . he wants to know that he's giving me pleasure too. And so sometimes I'll just fake it, if I'm not really in the mood. . .

Alison: Yeah, I used to do that a lot

Jane: I just, you know, just sort of fake it a little bit. I think everyone does sometime.

Interviewer: So that he won't get upset?

Alison: Yeah.

Jane: Not upset, but so he won't feel inadequate.

It is clear that as the site of intersection between the two narratives, faking orgasm generates anxieties and difficulties for both men and women. Women worry that it is unfair to their partners to fake, but, yet, are not willing to risk upsetting them by admitting the 'truth' about their enjoyment. Men are concerned about their partners faking orgasm because of its connections with poor technique which they read as a questioning of their masculinity. The fact that faking orgasm is a well-known "syndrome" also creates further anxiety for men by touching upon the culturally prevalent fear that women's desire is in essence unknowable and insatiable. If women are faking

orgasm, it might be that masculine technique is in itself lacking. Even worse, women could be experiencing some undetectable pleasure during sex which is not dependent on the man's skills.

Thus, we can see that faking orgasm is a site where cultural inscriptions of sexuality are played out - faking orgasm reaffirms women's position as the passive recipients of masculine technique. Paradoxically, however, (and this may also have something to do with both men and women's high anxiety levels surrounding faking orgasm) faking orgasm is simultaneously a disruption to the traditional alignment of women with the passive side of the binarisms -when women fake they are being active and are using their minds to perform (being) the body! This paradox shows the complexity of sexed subject positions: Women's position on the passive side of the binary is shown to require their activity.

### FAKING ORGASM: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR HIV/AIDS EDUCATION?

In their problematisation of the dualism of a purely biological body and a controlling mind, the reconceptualisations of the body we discussed earlier provide us with a different way of thinking about subjectivity and desire. If the body and subjectivity are products of social inscription and conscious and unconscious workings over of these inscriptions, we can understand how the stories about sexuality we have been outlining in this paper come into play in individual people's lives. This does not mean that there are no possibilities for change -either on an individual or societal level -for this is precisely what these denaturalising theories allow. If subjects are exposed to different cultural inscriptions, or if their personal experiences allow for different interpretations of these inscriptions, they can begin to experience a different embodiment.

As we stated in the beginning, governmental HIV/AIDS educational materials aimed at heterosexuals tend to promote negotiation and assertion in sexual encounters. The underlying premises of these strategies are that men and women are on an equal footing in relationships, that they can talk together about sexuality, and that they will both negotiate to ensure that their own pleasure is obtained. In earlier work we have shown that the first of these assumptions is simply incorrect: Men and women are not on an equal footing in relationships, they do not have equal power to negotiate such things as condom use (Waldby et al., 1991).

The theories of the body we have outlined demonstrate the inaccuracy of the second two premises. If we accept the roles of social inscription and unconscious workings over of this inscription, then it is clear that there are many aspects of sexuality which are not available for discussion: People do not know where their ideas are coming from, or why they believe what they do. By definition, those things which are unconscious are unknowable to the subject. The stories which heterosexual people self-consciously use to make sense of their own behaviours are the ones which are culturally available and hence believed unproblematic. One of the most important of these is that heterosexuality is "natural" and "right" - thus for heterosexual couples there does not seem to be anything to discuss.

Our discussion of faking orgasm indicates that sexuality is not based on a rational decision making process, but, rather, is intensively written over with cultural inscriptions and unconscious desires. To understand faking orgasm we have shown that we need to understand that individuals' behaviour is produced within cultural stories such as those of technique and love, their different positions in the series of binarisms we have discussed, and culturally acceptable notions of what are appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour and attitudes. Sexual behaviour is not dictated by a mind which controls a body, but rather is part of, and springs from, the lived experience of a culturally situated

body. Sexuality is not an issue which individuals can openly and fully discuss. There are many more things at stake in a sexual encounter than pleasure or sexual satisfaction, or even safety from diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

So what then of HIV/AIDS education? We suggest that any serious attempt to encourage behaviour change amongst heterosexuals must take these sorts of issues into account. We must stop thinking of the body as a passive object of mental control. Instead, we believe, the (admittedly much harder) task of looking at such things as constructions of "proper" or "appropriate" masculinity and femininity, culturally shared unconscious fears and imaginary body maps (Gatens, 1983), and personal desires for intimacy and recognition must be undertaken. If these forces are not taken into account, education will be severely limited and will reinforce a status quo which not only makes the uptake of safe sex strategies very difficult, but which is oppressive to women. Educators would perhaps be best advised to encourage people to look at the narratives which they use to understand their sexuality and relationships, and to problematise ideas about what is "natural" and "normal," for only then can people begin to examine and understand their own attitudes and behaviours and, thus, undergo change.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of mature age students was approximately 16% for the interviews, whilst the percentage was approximately 21% for the groups. The age range for the mature students was between 26 and 45 years.

<sup>2</sup> In this historical episode we see what happens when a phallogentric culture takes on and, thus, changes a feminist demand.

<sup>3</sup> In pornographic films the "come shot" or "money shot" (a picture of male ejaculation) stands in for both men and women's orgasm (Williams, 1989). Our women interviewees also suffered anxiety as to whether they actually had experienced orgasm, and some time was spent in at least one of the women's groups discussing whether what they had experienced actually was an orgasm.

<sup>4</sup> Gilfoyle, Wilson, and Brown ( 1992) also see heterosexuality as a kind of economy, but for them orgasms are a gift men give to women in exchange for women's offering of their own passive bodies. The notion of heterosexuality as an exchange is also argued on a more general conceptual level by Luce Irigaray (1985) and Carole Pateman ( 1989) who suggested that western culture is based on the exchange of women's bodies between men.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the historical development of this positioning of women's orgasm as "unnatural" see Laquer (1990) and Spongberg (1992). The positioning of men's orgasm as "natural" uncharacteristically positions men on the natural side of the culture-nature binarism. We would argue that this is an interesting and quite specific instance, as in fact the story of technique/work shows. During sex, men are seen to be driven by "nature," however, this is only in relation to their own orgasm. Their sexuality in every other respect is seen to require technique/work, which, as we argue in the text, repositions them on the culture side of the nature-culture binarism. Men's nature, as opposed to women's, is always seen in terms of possible or probable (mental) control. The men who are perceived to be unable to exercise control over their nature are usually considered criminals or deviants, or are excused by extenuating circumstances (such as provocative dress).

<sup>6</sup> Both the men and the women we interviewed had numerous stories which they used to explain women's ability or inability to orgasm. These ranged from the psychologistic to the "scientific" and statistical, and from the practical and technical to the emotional. These complicated explanations, however, usually boiled down to the two basic "truths" outlined in the text: Women find it inherently "difficult" to orgasm (for either psychologistic or physiological reasons) and that it is men's technique which can, in some cases and where various conditions are "right," bring women to orgasm. Some women did feel a responsibility to help their partner in his endeavour by providing the information to help their partner "fine tune" his technique and to assist by getting themselves in the "right frame of mind," but the actual physical stimulation was seen to be the man's job.

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<sup>7</sup> Nearly all of our subjects defined "having sex" as vaginal penetration.