

THE REGULATION OF DESIRE: SEXUALITY IN CANADA

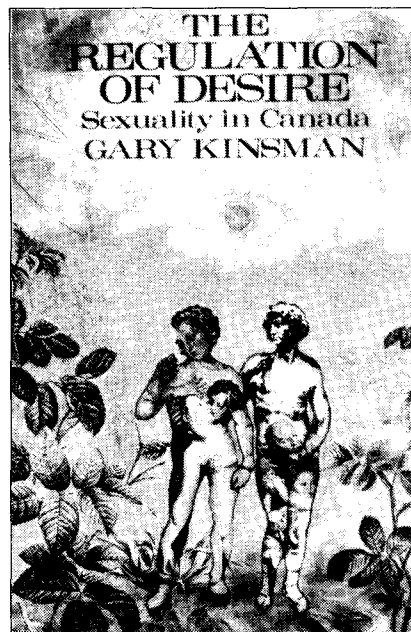
Gary Kinsman. Montreal and New York: Black Rose, 1987.

Lorna Weir

Canadian women's studies programmes and the Canadian political economy tradition have for the most part kept their ears firmly plugged to the enormous growth of interest in the history of sexuality which has taken place in England, the United States and Western Europe over the last decade. Particularly in the American case, the history of sexuality occupies a central place in contemporary women's history and feminist political debates. The emergence of a literature on the history of same-gender sex parallels and overlaps this feminist historiography. The history of sexuality has moved from its earlier focus on gay and lesbian history to an examination of sexual desire in all its forms, marking a realization that heterosexuality too has a history, and that the social dominance of certain forms of sexual practice and the subordination of others must be seen *relationally*.

Kinsman's *The Regulation of Desire* is a comprehensive overview of the history of sexuality in Canada, the sole such survey which has thus far been published. The book constitutes an immense contribution to the history of sexuality. In keeping with the recent literature, Kinsman aims to explain/problematize the development of both same and different gender sex. Drawing on the writings of Dorothy Smith, Kinsman's text employs a more sophisticated sociology of knowledge than has appeared to this point in the historiography. He is centrally concerned with the question of how to explicate the disjuncture arising between the practices/categories of regulation and the daily experience of populations targeted by regulatory agencies. The book references a host of unpublished lectures and community publications of the Canadian gay and women's movements, a literature accessible to Kinsman given his long-standing participation in Canadian sexual-political organizing.

The exposition becomes especially excellent in those areas where Kinsman has himself done primary research. Complementing John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*,¹ which showed the existence of homophile organizations in the United States prior to the mythical birth of gay liberation, the Stonewall Riots (1969), Kinsman docu-



ments the existence of numerous Canadian homophile groups during the early 1960's. Strongest on legal history, the text adds much to our understanding of the inclusion of "gross indecency" in the 1892 Criminal Code, the administration of "criminal sexual psychopathology," the Canadian reception and interpretation of the Wolfenden Report, with its suggestion for legalizing private, consensual homosexual acts — and more strictly regulating "public" ones. Citing unpublished work by Philip Girard, Kinsman summarizes evidence regarding the little-known purge of homosexuals from the federal civil service during the 1950s and 1960s, a purge which appears in Canada to have been far more virulent for gay men (and lesbians?) than for leftists.

Discussion stretches very thin on some topics, partially due to the patchy state of the present literature. Treatment of the changing relations of heterosexuality proceeds in a perfunctory fashion; two pages (plus footnotes) on "Heterosexual Hegemony and the Welfare State" signals rather than develops an important topic. The section on native peoples is, despite Kinsman's good intentions, dreadful, characterized by an all-too-common fascination with the *berdache*, a corresponding disinclination to examine kinships systems, offensive reference to "tribes," an overconcentration on the fur trade as a determinant of social/sexual relations versus, for instance, compulsory schooling/sedentarization, a homogenizing of native peoples, and an inaccurate and inadvertently disempowering view of native sexual and gender relations as being "replaced by those of Europeans."² A manic drive for comprehensiveness

leads to telegraphic "contextualizing" introductions which no one other than a specialist could decipher. Similarly, the chapter on the historical emergence of homosexuality and heterosexuality does a capable, condensed description of the English, American and German cases, but the selection of topics should have been motivated more in terms of the Canadian "reception" of social forms rather than a synopsis of the historiography.

Kinsman's introductory remarks note that the text deals principally with gay men due to the state of the secondary literature, but that he regards the inclusion of lesbians as crucial to writing the history of sexuality. Elsewhere he repeats Gail Rubin's and Jeffrey Weeks' observation that contemporary sexuality is becoming increasingly autonomous from gender relations. It is difficult to grasp what might be meant by "autonomy" here, other than the increasing independence of sexual regulation from marital relations. This, however, does not mean that the system of sexual regulation has been constituted as genderless. Is it not possible to conceive of, say, psychiatric/legal regulation as gendered? Feminist historians have certainly found this a double project, and have theorized social processes as gendered even where women were not historically present. The problem of "including" lesbians stands in for this more general — and more difficult — understanding of sexual regulation as gendered.

The historical materialist method used by Kinsman has beneficial effects in shaping commonsense notions which naturalize and make eternal our contemporary sexual relations. As social critique, a realist, historical narrative of sexual regulation has credibility and puts questions of class and the state firmly on the agenda. Nonetheless, I don't think we should conflate historical with sociological analysis, a path down which Weeks' notion of the "historical present" might lead. As Marx emphasized, the order of exposition in *Capital* is determined by the social relations of the capitalist mode of production, not by the history of capital or successive modes of production. By analogy, description of contemporary sexual regulation will have its order of exposition determined by the present social relations of sexual organization, not by the order of the history of sexuality/sexual regulation. Differences between sociological and historical analysis should make us cautious of substituting one for the other even in the midst of the boom in the history of sexuality.

The Regulation of Desire should be read by all those interested in the history and sociology of sexuality. It synthesizes, systematizes and gives new theoretical direction to the literature on the history of Canadian sexual regulation.

¹John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

²On the non-disappearance of hunter-gatherers and the difficulties anthropolo-

gists have had in interpreting changing social relations among native peoples, see Eleanor Leacock and Rich Lee, eds., *Politics and History in Bank Societies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

LESBIAN PASSION: LOVING OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER

JoAnn Loulan with Mariah Burton Nelson. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

Janice L. Ristock and Margo Rivera

Passion is a source of greatness within each of us. This is true of great works of art, great deeds of service, and the ordinary greatness required to love ourselves and other people on a daily basis...passion is not only about sex but about the life force that energizes us. (p.2)

In her new book, JoAnn Loulan describes some of the passions of lesbians and offers suggestions for removing the barriers that keep women from living fully and from freely loving ourselves and each other.

The first chapter, "Healing the Child Within," sets the stage for exploring the central issue in the book. Loulan is a licensed psychotherapist with a practice in California and a sex educator who presents workshops for the lesbian/feminist community and training seminars for mental health professionals throughout the U. S. and Canada. According to her, no matter what our personal histories, we all have a broken-hearted child who lives inside of us and needs to be nurtured and healed so that we are free to meet our adult needs for work, socializing and sex. The book proposes a number of practical ways for focusing on the child within from imagery exercises ("You can do it in your car at stop lights — something to do instead of taking it personally that the light turned red" p.19), to looking at old pictures of yourself as a child, to getting a baby doll and taking good care of her.

One of the reasons that it is so important to take care of the child inside of us, Loulan insists, is that she tyrannizes us if we do not, constantly trying — often successfully — to run the show. This can be a real problem when you are attempt-

ing to present yourself as competent and sophisticated in a job interview, for example, or when you are making love. Loulan sees one of the central problems in lesbian relationships as the tendency for women to nurture others as a substitute for giving ourselves the care we need:

One of the ways we lesbians sabotage our relationships is to say to each other, "Aha! Childcare for life! You take care of my baby, I'll take care of yours, okay?" It's all unspoken, but it's a deal that we frequently make. Then, of course we hate the way our lover takes care of our kid, and we tell her so as often as possible. (p.17)

The table of contents provides a good overview of the range of topics *Lesbian Passion* covers, including the following:

- "The Lesbian Date": There are two possible outcomes of the lesbian date: either the two women never date again, or they get married (p.83).
- "Lesbian Self-Esteem": No matter how much fun we have, no matter how proud we feel, no matter how in love or loved we may be, we all internalize the homophobia that surrounds us (p.27).
- "Celibacy": Often a woman who has

been celibate is actually much better equipped to be fully present, to be loving, warm and caring about others, because she has tapped into a source of self-love, (p.64).

• "Fanning the Flames: How Couples Can Keep Their Sex Lives Exciting": Sex is supposed to be romantic. She's supposed to want you. But after a while she doesn't want you. She wants you to pay the rent on time. That's what she is passionate about. Keeping love alive is perhaps our greatest task. Not companionship and camaraderie. Not roommate energy or best friend connection. The love that is difficult — but important — to keep alive is the kind of passion we have for our lovers (pp.116-117).

Other chapters include "Sex Toys and Other Hot Ideas" (with the 19th century quote "It doesn't matter what you do in the bedroom as long as you don't do it in the streets and frighten the horses" as the tone setter); "After Incest: The Road to Recovery"; "Partners of Incest Survivors"; and "What Do Lesbians Need to Know About AIDS?"

In her chapter "Passionate Friendships," Loulan suggests that the passion for friendships seems universal among lesbians and that friendship itself is a lesbian act, since it is an act of loving between two women. But women are generally less ego-invested in their friends than in their lovers and therefore allow them more room to be themselves — to eat what they want, to wear what they want, to hold the political and spiritual beliefs that they want. Also, because women friends are not discriminated against as such in this culture, they are freer to express their love more openly. Loulan talks about walking arm-in-arm with a close friend in a setting where she would not necessarily consider it safe to do so with a lover, realizing that she felt secure because she was sure that everybody would know that they were "just friends." For many women, friendships are the only way they allow their love for women to shine through.

In the last chapter of the book, Loulan describes her research on the lives and sex practices of the 1,566 lesbians who completed the detailed questionnaire for her study. There are some interesting findings. For example, 38% of the women

