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Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality[1]

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ABSTRACT: Sociological analysis of Irish sexuality has been notable for its absence. This paper examines the contribution which Foucault's theory of sexuality as a discourse of truth and apparatus of power makes toward elucidating key issues in the history and contemporary field of Irish sexuality. Although Foucault provides good insights into the constitution of a hermeneutics of the self within different ethical regimes, his analysis of sexuality is inadequate when it comes to explaining how sexuality operates in everyday life and the individual struggle to attain power and position in social life. In this respect, the paper turns to the work of Bourdieu and examines the field of Irish sexuality in relation to his concepts of habitus, practice and capital.

Introduction

One of the results of the dominance of the Catholic Church in the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism was the confinement of what was said and written about sexuality within a religious discourse. A constellation of interests and an alliance of power, especially between Church and State and between mothers and priests, drove sexuality into the dark recesses of Irish society. Doctors confined themselves largely to a medical or natural scientific discourse and talked about sex as an anatomical and medical phenomenon. The realms of desire, pleasure and being sexual were censored in public life and silenced in the family.[2] They were reduced to a detailed and rigorous discourse of sexual morality; a classification of who could do what to whom, when, where and how. The Pope, theologians, canon lawyers and bishops devised the discourse, and priests, nuns, brothers and mothers implemented it. Those who deviated were branded as sinners. Those who could not or did not reform, the unmarried mother, the homosexual, the lesbian, the fornicating bachelor farmer, were excluded from society and put into convents, homes and asylums.

In recent years the Catholic Church's monopoly over the discourse of sexuality has been fragmented. The initial resistance came from women, and then the challenge was taken up by various interest groups supporting, in general, secular liberal individualism, which, in turn, were supported by the media and the State. But it was the media that did most to shatter the Church's dominance of sexual discourse. The owners and directors of newspapers, radio and television may have been conservative Catholics, but they operated in the marketplace; and the editors, journalists, producers who worked for them were quick to see and exploit changes. They began to write, talk about and portray sexuality in a way which was a direct challenge not just to the Church's moral teaching, but which undermined their philosophy of the self, family and community. Instead of confessing privately to priests, people began to talk and write openly with each other and in the media about their personal pleasures, predilections, and problems. Concepts such as sexual diversity, orientation and preferences took over from the priestly language of adultery, fornication and concupiscence. The habitus of Irish sexuality, the unreflective, immediate, ongoing disposition which people had when encountering sexuality, began to change from fear, doubt, suspicion, guilt and shame more towards positive pleasure and enjoyment. The media also forced a reinterpretation of the history of Irish sexuality. We now know that alongside the religious discourse emphasising celibacy, purity, innocence, virginity, humility and piety, there existed practices of child abuse, incest, paedophilia, rape, abortion and infanticide. We have moved from priests extracting confessions from unwilling penitents to the media exposing the sins of bishops, priests and brothers.

But there are other curiosities in the history of Irish sexuality. Reducing the growth in population, which was at the heart of the modernisation of Irish society, centred on a strict control of marriage and on a repression of sex outside of marriage. By the middle of the twentieth century, Ireland had the highest proportion of bachelors and spinsters in Western Europe. It also had the highest level of postponed marriage (Kennedy 1973; Clancy 1991; Clancy 1992). Sex was obviously not confined to marriage, but there was a low level of births outside of marriage (Coleman 1992, p. 61); and there does not appear to have been the same level of prostitution as in Victorian Britain (see Luddy 1990; Corbin 1990; Mason 1994a; Barry 1995). Another curiosity was that although they married later in life, the Irish had for a long time the highest level of marital fertility. The absence of fertility control, which was much more prevalent elsewhere in Europe, meant large families. There is evidence of successful attempts at birth spacing and stopping, but these tended to be confined to the middle classes, those living in urban areas and those living in religiously heterogeneous communities (O'Grada and

Duffy 1989). Large families meant that in the next generation sons and daughters who wanted to marry, or did not want to postpone marriage, had to emigrate. The practices of postponed marriage and permanent celibacy became associated with a perception of the Irish being a sexually repressed, priest-ridden people who sublimated their libidinal drives in religion and alcohol (Bestic 1969; Connery 1968; Mahoney 1993; Messenger 1969; O'Connor 1971; Scheper-Hughes 1979; Wallace 1972).

Given the historical background; the demographic characteristics; the level of debate and discussion in the public sphere, particularly the media; the changes which have taken place in sexual attitudes and practices; and the changes in social legislation, it is noteworthy that the study of sexuality has not been high on the research agenda of Irish sociology. With some notable exceptions (Finlay *et al* 1994; Ryan 1994), Irish sociologists have tended to avoid the subject. Important studies have been done within feminism and women's studies (Barry 1992; Condron 1989; Delamare 1985; Smyth 1992); within journalism (O'Kelly 1974; Sweetman 1979) and within psychiatry (O'Donoghue 1991). But, in general, while poets, novelists, artists, film-makers, radio and television producers and journalists have unashamedly rushed headlong into trying to understand Irish sexuality, sociologists have stood back cautiously. Visiting anthropologists (Brody 1982; Messenger 1969; Scheper-Hughes 1979) did raise the issue of sexuality, but their insights and challenges to the dominant Catholic ethos tended to be dismissed as naïve. It was as if the virtue of the Irish, like their faith, had to be defended at all costs; that in our vulnerable post-colonial mentality there was a reluctance to reflect critically on the creation of our social and personal being. Thus a shroud has hung over Irish sexuality, preventing rigorous scientific investigation. The legacy of the Catholic Church's monopoly over sexual discourse has lingered longest in the halls of academia, especially in sociology departments.

This paper examines the contribution which the work of Michel Foucault can make to an analysis of Irish sexuality. Foucault's approach is different as he saw sexuality on the one hand, as one of the most subtle, penetrating and productive forms of power and, on the other, as central to a hermeneutics of the self. He was engaged in a nine-volume history of sexuality, of which three were completed, when he died of AIDS in 1984 (Bernauer 1991 p. 49; Miller 1994 p. 34). Despite the many insights which derive from Foucault's approach to sexuality, it is limited when it comes to describing and analysing the habitus and practice of sexuality as a social interactive process; how as a form of accumulated power (or capital) it links into the struggle by actors to accumulate other forms of capital; and, finally, how this interactive process and struggle leads to changes in the discourse and the emergence of new

ways of writing, talking and thinking about sex. For such an analysis, I turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Although they were colleagues in the Collège de France, there seems to have been little academic collaboration or contact between them – at least not until the last couple of years of Foucault's life, and then mainly in relation to politics (see Eribon 1992). Bourdieu, in effect, saw Foucault as working in the field of philosophy rather than sociology and, in particular, in an outdated area of structuralism or 'subjectless philosophy' which emphasised epistemology and the history of science (Bourdieu 1988, p. xxii). There are similarities in their approach, particularly the importance both give to revealing and analysing the elementary classifications which structure social life, especially unquestioned social conceptions which Bourdieu refers to as *doxa*. Furthermore, although the concept of 'field' is more associated with Bourdieu (1990a; 1990b; 1993), Foucault also saw sexuality as a 'very complex field' of relations of power which are based on strategies constructed by and against congealed forms of domination (1991, p. 3). But, as Fowler (1997, p. 92) points out, there are very real differences between the two, particularly their conceptions of power, practice and agency. Bourdieu has written on many areas of culture, but he has never addressed the field of sexuality, except parenthetically in his study of male domination (1990c). Nevertheless, his methodology for studying other fields seems readily applicable for analysing Irish sexuality.

The *Deployment of Sexuality* and the Hermeneutics of Self

It is difficult to understand what was going on in the minds and hearts of Irish people in the past, but we can, following Foucault, trace links and regularities between ideas, thoughts and knowledge about sexuality and, in doing so, identify not only unities in the way sexuality was perceived and understood, but also discontinuities (1972, pp. 7-9). Foucault conducted this type of archaeological analysis in relation to the human sciences in general, and the development of psychiatry, clinical medicine and discipline and punishment in particular (Foucault 1973a; 1973b; 1975; 1979). However, by the time he came to write about the history of sexuality (1980; 1987; 1990), Foucault had abandoned his archaeological analysis of systems of knowledge for a genealogical approach which linked knowledge to systems of power (Davidson 1986). He was no longer interested so much in tracing continuities and discontinuities in epistemes and discursive formations as in linking the search for knowledge and truth to the operation of power. What becomes crucial in this new genealogical analysis of sexuality is 'to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak,

the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said' (Foucault 1980, p. 11).

Much that Foucault says about the history of sexuality applies to Ireland. There are three major discursive formations. In the first formation, the discourse of sexuality centres on the policing of bodies in marriage, family and property relations within the discourse of Christian ethics and secular law. In the nineteenth century, sexuality becomes a special problem announced within the expert discourse, first of theologians, then of scientists. This discourse becomes embodied in everyday life in homes, schools, churches and hospitals under the watchful eyes of priests, nuns, doctors and mothers. Finally, in the late twentieth century, sexuality becomes central to an intensive system of care, knowledge and appreciation of the self. In the present era, the intensive system of sexuality is linked to an obsessive concern with rooting out the forces of sexual repression and the search for the truth and emancipation of sexual being (Foucault 1980, p. 77). The hiding, silencing and denying of sex are castigated, and there is a rush to blame the Catholic Church for everything that is wrong about our sexuality. Sexuality and the requirement to be sexy is preached in the media and consumer society and operates within individuals as a positive pursuit of an ethical, healthy, pleasurable lifestyle. It is part of the drive to create a new society in which, as Foucault says, sex will be good again (1980, p. 7).

In Ireland up to the eighteenth century, while there were sexual codes and practices, and obedience and transgressions, sexuality was not the subject of expert discourse or of public debate and discussion. It remained, so to speak, in the body rather than on the mind (Foucault 1980, p. 3). Life, sex and the body were open, coarse, obscene, indecent, tragic and funny. They were not subject to intense specialised investigation or supervision. Sexuality was tied into a fixation of reproducing and developing kinship ties, names and possessions. The control of sexuality largely took place through the control of marriage or, as Foucault terms it, the '*deployment of alliance*'(1980, p. 106). It was firmly tied to the transmission and circulation of wealth. It was about setting definite relations and strict regulations about who could get married to whom, when, where and on what basis.[3] It was an era of arranged marriages, of designated inheriting sons and dowried daughters. There were mechanisms of constraints and what Foucault refers to as a complex knowledge of local practical knowledges. But what characterises the discourse on sexuality in Ireland at this time is its scarcity. Except for esoteric theological debates, sex was not written about. It was not seen as an issue of public concern. A country-wide survey of manners and customs in Ireland undertaken towards the end of the eighteenth century had little to say about sex or the sexual morality of the people (MacLysaght 1979, p.

54). Sexuality did not permeate beyond specific prohibitions and mechanisms of constraint. It operated within a system of rules which defined partners and rights and what was permitted and forbidden.

By the nineteenth century, a new distinct and dominant layer had emerged in which sexuality became private, problematic and repressed. This was epitomised in England and America by the Victorian bourgeoisie (Mason 1994a, 1994b; Seidman 1991, 1992). On the one hand, sexuality was publicly silenced and hidden, especially from children. On the other hand, it became the subject of intensive religious, moral, medical, scientific and literary investigation. The beginnings of a *deployment of sexuality* in Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, began with the pervasive application of the Catholic sacrament of penance. The reticence and delicacy of dealing with sins of purity began to give way to 'meticulous rules of self-examination'(Foucault 1980, p. 19). 'Sex,' he argues, 'was taken charge of, tracked down as it were, by a discourse that aimed to allow it no obscurity, no respite' (1980, p. 20).

The change in Catholic confessional practice was indicative of a new 'political, economic and technical incitement to talk about sex'(1980, p. 23). Because of State suppression of the Catholic Church in Ireland during the eighteenth century, confession did not become a regular practice until the nineteenth century. About the same time a series of texts began to emerge which focused on such issues as virtue, morality and politeness (Anon. 1811, 1821; Pinnock 1827; Tuke 1836). Much of this literature was similar to what was being produced in Victorian Britain and America (Mason 1994b; Seidman 1991). However, it is doubtful that this advice literature ever attained the same popularity in Ireland, because it was a peasant society with high levels of illiteracy. Moreover, much of the literature was Protestant, whereas nearly three-quarters of the Irish population was Catholic. The Protestant literature was oriented towards development through self-knowledge, while Catholics were subject to Church regulation and control. In other words, while Protestants tended to be constituted as sexual subjects through their own reading and embodiment of advice literature, Irish Catholics tended to be constituted through the advice of priests and the practice of confession. Thus, for example, in the first half of the nineteenth century moral instruction tended to be confined to enabling priests to extract good confessions.

> Since the confessor acts the part of both judge and a physician, he ought to become acquainted with the diseases and the offences of the penitent, in order that he may be able to apply suitable remedies, and impose due penance, and lest a sin that is mortal should be accounted as venial, or the foul viper lurking in the deep recesses of the heart should not venture to put itself forth to view, he ought to therefore sometimes question the penitents on the subject of the 6th (7th) commandment, where he suspects that they

> are not altogether pure, especially if they be rude, ignorant, bashful or agitated (Irwin 1836, p. 13).

Confession was the primary means by which sexual discipline and control began to be exercised over Irish Catholics during the first half of the nineteenth century (Connolly 1982, p. 90; Inglis 1987, p. 148). However, the problem of putting discourse into practice at this time centred on the relatively low number of priests and churches. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the institutional control of churches, schools and homes enabled more subjects to be constituted within the Catholic Church's increasing monopolisation of morality, particularly sexual morality.

The confessional continued to be a main form through which sexuality was constituted as a personal and social problem. Transgressions were identified, monitored, examined and punished. However, sexuality was not constituted and channelled just within churches and confessionals, but also within the State, schools and the home. Foucault argues that sex became an issue between the State and the individual (1980, p. 26). The whole concern of the State with 'population' reached Ireland during the first half of the nineteenth century (1980, p. 25). It operated in two ways. There was the systematic classification of the population and there was the systematic separation, ordering and disciplining of bodies in schools. Foucault argues that it was necessary for the State to know what was happening with its citizens' sex, and the use they made of it. Sex became a public issue and was articulated within a whole web of discourses, special corpuses of knowledge, analyses and injunctions (1980, p. 26). The most detailed census ever carried out in Ireland, or elsewhere at the time, was in 1841. It was necessary for the State, as Foucault says,

> to analyse the birth-rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices (1980, p. 25).

During the first half of the nineteenth century the State instigated numerous investigations to map out the characteristics of the Irish population and the habits of its people. As well as the first detailed censuses of population, numerous other reports were produced (Inglis 1987, p. 110). But in effect the Great Famine (1845-48) removed these concerns of the State and by the latter part of the nineteenth century they resided in, and became the main concern and responsibility of, the Catholic Church.

The *deployment of sexuality* in children was not all about denial, silence and repression. At the same time that sex was hidden from children, it was created as a problem. Sex was introduced into social spaces in a way which

was more than just gender differentiation. Boys and girls were separated from each other in desks and rows in schoolrooms, in pews in churches and in beds in the home. Children learnt to identify who knew and talked authoritatively about sex, who had jurisdiction over their bodies, their language and their activities. It was within the space of this discourse, within the physical spaces of homes, schools and churches, that a local knowledge was developed with all its nuances and practicalities, which not only enabled individuals to behave socially but, at the same time, constituted them as sexual human beings.

But whereas Foucault sees the operation of sex in education, as well as the psychiatric and medical discourse, as part of the 'dispersion of centres from which discourses emanated'(1980, p. 34), in Ireland they remained tied into Catholic discourse. There was not the 'same quantity of discourses concerned with sex' which Foucault suggests was characteristic of the West. Nor was the there the same compulsion on everyone 'to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse'(1980, p. 37). Moreover, in comparison with Britain and America alternative or resistant discourses were relatively absent (Mason 1994b; Gardella 1985; Seidman 1991). Transgressions were limited and, in general, confined to dirty jokes, teases and giggles (Arensberg and Kimball 1968, p. 201; Andrews 1982, p. 53).

Foucault delineates three main aspects to the *deployment of sexuality* which have relevance for an analysis of what happened in Ireland: (a) a strict regulation under Canon Law and a surveillance of marriage by priests in relation to fecundity, forbidden times, positions, etc.(1980, p. 37); (b) the separation, labelling and analysis of the whole range of sexual libertines, deviants and perverts who had been confined, supervised and studied (1980, p. 39); and (c) the constitution of sexuality as a problem for children who had to be kept ignorant and innocent of sex and to be constituted as modest, chaste and pure by being made aware and becoming constantly vigilant of the mortal danger of sins of the flesh (1980, p. 41).

There are other important characteristics to Foucault's theory which have relevance to Ireland. The first is that the family becomes the locus of the shift from the *deployment of alliance* to the *deployment of sexuality*; particularly in relation to the constitution of the feminine body, the concealment of sex from children, the regulation of births and the prevention of deviance (1980, p. 111). However, whereas Foucault sees the new technology or apparatus of sex escaping from ecclesiastical institutions from the end of the eighteenth century and becoming primarily a secular concern of states, medicine, economics and pedagogy, in Ireland the *deployment of sexuality* remained, until the end of the twentieth century, within the 'thematic of sin' (1980, p. 116).

Secondly, Foucault tells us that the *deployment of sexuality* was not something engineered by the State or a dominant class on an unwilling people. It was not an authoritarian capitalist regime; rather it was operated first and foremost by the bourgeoisie on themselves (1980, p. 120). In Ireland, then, the *deployment of sexuality* by the Catholic Church was central to the self-affirmation of social class. However, this was not an established bourgeois class, as Foucault argues and as may indeed have been the case in France and elsewhere in Europe, but rather a new class of Catholic tenant farmers – a class of Irish rural bourgeoisie in the making. It was through the *deployment of sexuality* within the thematics of sin of the Church that the tenant farmers of the nineteenth century became a fully Catholic bourgeois class in the twentieth. However, this *deployment of sexuality* was still part and parcel of policing marriage, family and property relations. It had to do with the regulation of marriage within the stem-family system – the identification and regulation of the inheriting son and the dowried daughter. It had to with the passing on of farms and property. It was the *deployment of sexuality* which permitted the identification and regulation of the precocious child and the constitution of the shy, distant bachelor brother who became the awkward uncle who drank in the pub. It was the same *deployment of sexuality* which made girls chaste, pious and demure and which regulated the inappropriate desires of youth.

But it was not that the new class of tenant farmers and later an established bourgeoisie just employed, so to speak, the Church as a means of inculcating this new sexuality on themselves. Nor was it that mothers and fathers inculcated sexuality on unwilling children. The real power – the real success of this whole new apparatus of sexuality – was that men, women, girls and boys inculcated sexuality in themselves. The key to the deployment of this sexuality was a continuous, rigorous examination of the self using the rules, regulations, principles and practices of the Catholic Church. It was the establishment of a sexual self which denied sex to itself. This self-*deployment of sexuality*, this concern for the health, rigour and regulation of the body was established in the homes and schools of the new bourgeois class from the middle of the nineteenth century. However, it did not reach the Irish working classes until much later (see Foucault 1980, p. 121).

Another important characteristic of Foucault's theory is that it reminds us that experience, knowledge and understanding of the self is constituted through regimes of sexual ethics. In this way, sexuality is not something essential, not a universal biological constant which seeks outlets. Rather sexuality is moulded historically and culturally. To write about sexuality is to write a hermeneutic history of the desiring subject constituted within fields of knowledge (ethics, religion, science). It is to write about the

disciplinary practices which regulate sexuality and the way individuals operate and employ what is written and said about sex and in this process constitute themselves as reflective, self-knowing subjects (1980, p. 146). It is necessary

> to analyse the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen (Foucault 1987, p. 5).

The constitution of the sexual self within the Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was achieved within a system of rules and regulations. There was a 'proliferation of codifications (concerning permitted and forbidden places, partners and acts)' (Foucault 1987, p. 32). The whole regime of the Catholic Church, as it had been since St. Augustine, was to make desire and the sexual act inherently dangerous. It was a necessary evil for the proliferation of God's people, but it had to be confined to marriage and, within marriage, to specific acts at specific times with specific intentions (Foucault 1987, p. 138). Among the Greeks, it was not so much a question of the forms of sexual activity, that is of unnatural positions, unseemly practices, masturbation, *coitus interruptus*, or methods of contraception. It was more a question of one examining an overall aggregate of sexual activities – how often with whom and in what circumstances (Foucault 1987, p. 114).

In the Irish instance we have to focus on the 'games of truth' operated by the Catholic Church and other regimes of morality 'through which being is historically constituted as experience' (1987, p. 7). Foucault emphasises that the type of arts of existence in which sexuality was constituted in Ancient Greece through which men set themselves rules of conduct and sought to shape themselves according to aesthetic and stylistic criteria as well as moral obligations, became supplanted by priestly power (1987, p. 11). This power confined sex to heterosexual, monogamous, married couples, made it fearful, and 'consigned pleasure to the realm of death and evil' (1987, p. 16).

The fourth thing which Foucault tells us is that it is the same bourgeoisie who affirmed themselves as a class through the self-repression of sex, who have been the first to say that they have been sexually repressed (1980, p. 130). In Ireland, it has been the contemporary bourgeoisie – particularly intellectuals, novelists, poets, journalists, film, television and radio producers – who have put this repression into words; who examined its specific causal effects on individuals and themselves; and who, finally, challenged that which was previously taboo. It was this class which first challenged the Catholic Church's taboos on sex outside marriage, artificial contraception,

abortion, homosexuality and divorce. It was they who began to display and analyse their sexuality in newspapers, magazines, radio and television. They began to expose and attack the Church for making them the class they were. In a turning of history back in on itself, in the same way the Church had hunted out the masturbating child, the fornicator, the childless couple and the homosexual, the bourgeoisie – particularly those who worked in the media – hunted out those who they felt were the cause of their sexual repression; that is, the paedophile priest, the promiscuous bishop, the abusive nun or brother. The bourgeoisie re-examine their childhood to discover the specific ways in which they were personally repressed. It is they who say 'with such passion, with so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present and against ourselves, that we are repressed'(Foucault 1980, p. 8). Meanwhile, the specific class effects of the *deployment of sexuality* which they instituted, continues among those classes who still cherish virginity, despise the homosexual and adore children and large families.

A Critique of Foucault's Approach

Through Foucault's archaeological method we can readily demonstrate that the way sexuality is being written about in Ireland in the 1990s is significantly different to what was written thirty years ago. It is important to realise that then, as now, there are different discourses and voices within the overall apparatus of sexuality. Some of these are complementary, but there are also those which resist and challenge. So although the counsellor, therapist and analyst may talk differently to the priest, bishop and theologian, they are part of the *deployment of sexuality* and the will to truth about the self. However, Foucault does not analyse the process by which the dominance of the priest's discourse has been supplanted by the journalist, the film-maker, television producer, advertiser, beautician and analyst. What were the mechanisms by which the discourse of the priest ceased to be associated with orthodoxy and became instead a discourse of resistance? Of course pornography existed thirty years ago, but what has enabled the pornographer to speak freely with such a strong voice and to push the priest from commanding the public pulpit? How have the tables been turned so that it is the priest who has become the counter-cultural figure engaging in resistant discourse? Who else, beyond the priest, are resisting the narcissistic concern for self and body which characterises much of contemporary sexuality (Heath 1984; Lasch 1979)?

Foucault is a master of showing us discontinuities and ruptures in the writing of sex so that we can say with confidence, for example, that we have

moved from a system of well-codified Catholic ethics to a more individually constructed art as well as ethics of existence. However, even though the second and third volumes on the history of sexuality represent a shift to concerns of the self – the hermeneutical as opposed to the structural side of the same coin of discourse (Foucault 1991, pp. 10-11) – there is still a problem of discovering how these discourses were translated into everyday social life (McHoul 1986, p. 68). Given that there is a gap between the official discourse and the way messages are encoded and the way people decode and make use of them, the problem with Foucault's analysis is that while he describes practices, he omits: a description of the way they were embodied; the symbolic interactive process by which they were constantly renegotiated; the logic which they developed; and the experience of this logic as an ongoing, flexible, but preordained way of experiencing, understanding and living in the world. Yes, we can imagine how a Catholic self was constituted within the rigours of confession and the detailed application of permissions, denials, rules and regulations by parents, but what we do not gain from Foucault is an anthropological understanding of how Catholic teachings actually operated in the minds, bodies and lives of Irish people; how they evolved into a shared understanding through symbolic interaction and how they articulated with discourses and interests from other social fields. In other words, as much as it would be wrong to assume that the discourse of the pornographer corresponds to the way Irish people view and understand their sexual selves, so too would it be wrong to assume that, when priestly discourse predominated, the way priests talked and wrote was the way Irish Catholics read, interpreted and enacted sexuality. The logic of the discourse often does not correspond to the logic of the practice, to the way sexuality was adapted and embodied in everyday life. What is missing in a Foucauldian analysis is an understanding of the Irish sensibility about sex; the particular way the 'game' of sexuality was played in Ireland; and the way it was acted out in kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, classrooms, bars, discos and dances.

It is from an understanding of the way in which the Irish game of sex is played that we can develop an understanding of the practices which emerge from people's game-plays and strategies. In focusing on the logic of everyday practices – that is, what people do and say about sex and how they go about it – we can gain an understanding of the logic of their practice. But the practice is not some mindless embodiment of a discourse which exists above and beyond the practitioners. It is something which is borrowed from numerous different sources and made personal by the practitioners. It is not that the discourse gives rise to a commitment to permanent shared values, norms and beliefs, but rather that it has a structuring effect on the ongoing

shared understanding. This common understanding, sensibility and predisposition is being continually revised through the strategic applications and manipulations of the practitioners. It is this sense of actors engaging in strategies and tactics in the game of sexuality which is missing in Foucault: an engagement which is not just a deployment of power or a hermeneutics of the self, but part of a struggle for social survival. What is lacking is a sense of how sexuality is thought of, enacted and talked about in concrete social situations, whether it be in the pub, between men and women meeting for the first time, or between husband and wife lying in bed together. More important is to discover how engagement in sex was related to fulfilling not only sexual and erotic interests, but also other interests such as being desirable, well-liked and honourable as well as attaining political position and economic wealth. And how were these interests fulfilled not just within the specific contexts of pubs or living rooms, but within public life and wider society? Again it is this notion of the individual being an actor who actively embodies, manipulates and changes discourses and makes them his or her own which is absent in Foucault. And it is an important absence, since it helps provide an understanding of how discourses change and develop; how some have become dominant while others fade away and how new discourses emerge. Such an understanding is provided in the methodology of Bourdieu and in his notion that within the different fields of social life, of which sex is one, people struggle to attain different forms of capital.

The Field of Irish Sexuality

It is necessary, then, in developing an explanation of the changes in Irish sexuality to go beyond an archaeology of identifiable changes in the way it has been conceived and written about; beyond a genealogy of the way it was deployed in homes, schools and churches; and beyond an understanding of the ethics or care of the self which emerged from these discourses. We must in addition develop a sociology of Irish sexuality which describes and analyses the way sexuality was seen, understood and embodied by participants in Irish social life. It is this attempt to give equal weight to the logic of the structure, the logic of the practitioners, and the practice which is at the heart of Bourdieu's sociological project (1990a, pp. 25-51; Wacquant 1992, pp. 5-11). Social life for Bourdieu is constituted through people operating in numerous different social fields. Although the number of fields in any given society is a matter for empirical investigation, Bourdieu subscribes to the Weberian notion that modern social life is characterised by a proliferation and rational differentiation of fields (Wacquant 1992, p. 17). It is important to remember that while we conceive of these fields in an analytically

discrete manner, in everyday life action in social fields is generally overlapped and integrated. Bourdieu has studied numerous fields of social life in France, including education, academia, philosophy, science, religion, art, photography, law, sport, and television. He recognises economics, politics and the media as distinct fields. Fields have a number of social positions whose occupants interact on the basis of identifiable, known laws. Some fields are more autonomous than others. The field of religion, for example, has special personnel, laws, beliefs and practices (1971). Like other fields, it is constituted through a struggle for different stakes between challengers and established dominant actors (1993, p. 72). The outcome of the struggle depends on the participants' feel for the game: what can be said and done by whom, when and where. The dominant positions in each field depend on the resources or capital which participants have accumulated within the particular field in question as well as from their engagement in other fields. Bourdieu has identified four main types of capital: economic (property), cultural (embodied know-how; goods and artefacts; and education) and social (social connections and status). The last type, symbolic capital, is tied into the other three in that it is a question of having legitimate, acceptable or the 'right-type' of property, cultural goods and educational qualifications (1986b). In the religious field, for example, the struggle for religious capital is based on a struggle to be spiritual and ethical. But the dominant actors, which in the Irish field are Catholic bishops and priests, define how to be spiritual and ethical. It is up to challengers, who have religious capital (acquired inside or outside of the Church) as well as cultural and symbolic capital (acquired from other fields such as education and the media) to challenge the dominant position of bishops and priests.

The field of sexuality is not an autonomous field like religion. Even though it has always been (as Weber argued) a universal social field, it has been dominated by interests and people in the religious field (1946, pp. 343-50). Only in the last two centuries in the West, and the last three decades in Ireland, has sexuality become an autonomous field. But what is the field of Irish sexuality? What is the Irish sexual habitus? What are the stakes being played for? What kinds of capital are being struggled for in the field of sexuality? Here we can return to Foucault's notion of sexuality as bio-power. Taking care of the self, living a proportionate life, and being healthy, fit and virile bestow a form of symbolic capital. It legitimates other forms of capital, particularly cultural capital. If there is a specific form of sexual capital it is being sexually attractive and engaging. Sexual capital comes from looking and being sexy. It comes from a knowledge and feel for the specific way the game of sexuality is played in Ireland. It is a distinct form of cultural capital which can be traded for other forms of capital. In other

words, being sexually attractive comes from knowing and embodying the way the Irish sexual habitus is manifested in a particular time and place, and strategically and skilfully elaborating on these embodiments. Being sexually attractive in an aesthetically and ethically acceptable manner, enables players in the field of sex to accumulate sexual capital. This capital can be added to one's overall volume and quality of cultural capital which, for example, might include religious, educational, artistic and other forms of capital. Cultural capital can then be traded for economic or political capital. It is the overall level and quality of the different forms of capital which defines a person's social position in society (1986a, p. 114). More important, in the field of sexuality, the quality and level of different forms of capital are important in determining a person's or group's ability to contribute to and change the dominant discourse on sexuality. At the heart of this exploratory struggle is not an analysis of power or how individuals constitute themselves as self-critical social beings, but rather an analysis of how people use culture to make a difference. At one level this pertains to people saying and doing things differently in relation to sex. It is a change, through embodiment, of the nature and logic of the practice. At another level, it is a more formal contribution to changing the discourse through contributions within interest groups in society, through written texts, in reports, journals and debate, and through discussion in the public sphere.

But it is necessary to retrace some steps on this explanatory path. The field of Irish sexuality has only begun to be rationally differentiated from the religious field in the last thirty years. It is not that sexuality was written out of Irish history but rather, as Weber (1946, p. 345) puts it, that the fulfilment of sexual interests stood in stark opposition to the fulfilment of religious interests. The curtailment of sexuality and the development of devotional piety and rigorous morality was central to controlling population and increasing standards of living. But it was not so much that sexuality was repressed in Ireland as that what was said and written about sexuality was dominated by Popes, bishops, theologians, priests, nuns and brothers.

When we look at the discourse in the field of Irish sexuality over the last two hundred years, we can see – as Foucault envisaged – that there were many different voices and languages. However, the language of medicine – the way doctors spoke to their patients about sexuality – was not significantly different from the discourse of the Church and, in most cases, supported and reproduced it. Similarly, lawyers, judges, politicians and journalists wrote about sexuality, but not in a way which might be said to constitute, in Foucault's terms, a resistant discourse.

There were alternative, resistant discourses, but it was the religious discourse of the Catholic Church which was the main force in shaping the

ongoing, predispositional awareness and interpretation of sexuality. We can refer, then, to the traditional habitus of Irish sexuality. Habitus is the almost unconscious, almost automatic, deeply embedded structuring mechanism which enables people operating in a field such as sexuality, to classify, interpret and respond to particular contexts and actions as they evolve (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

> It [habitus] ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the "correctness" of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 54).

Although a habitus is shaped by the discourse which exists in texts, speeches and programmes, it is different because it is a structuring mechanism embodied in concrete individuals which enables them to read, understand and engage in sexuality as they encounter it in everyday life. Habitus is not fixed. It is an ongoing predisposition, a structuring, enabling mechanism which is brought to different situations and contexts. It is the shared understanding of sex which is never quite the same between individuals. It is an understanding by which actors read, interpret and act within the field of sexuality. To write, then, about the Irish sexual habitus is to write about that which has been felt, experienced and interpreted by Irish men and women who have grown up and develop this sensibility about reading and interpreting sexual behaviour in such a way that they know almost automatically, certainly without much reflection, what is appropriate or inappropriate, required or not required, and what can be said and done in such a way that they can operate successfully within the field of sexuality and, consequently, maintain or gain, rather than lose, honour and respect from what they say and do (McHoul 1986, p. 70). So it is knowing, for example, how to walk and talk; how to dress; how to present oneself; how to exchange looks; what can be said between men and women; the jokes that are permissible between men; the things about sex that men can say to women; the teasing, bantering and cajoling. It is the game of sex; but for players to succeed in attaining sexual or other forms of capital they need to have mastered the nuances of many different contexts in which the game is played. It is the knowledge and feel for the game of sex, the Irish sexual habitus, which tells a woman where she should be or not be; what she should wear; to whom she might talk; what she might say and how she might look, particularly at men. It is only the innocent, those with no cultural capital, or alternatively those with so much capital accumulated from other fields, who can successfully transgress the habitus or break the rules of the game.[4]

Given the dominance of the Catholic Church and religious morality, the traditional way of attaining capital from the field of Irish sexuality was by

being sexless. In this way a good woman was either a virgin or a chaste mother. It was not that sex was any less present, but that it was hidden rather than presented. So it was that a good woman knew how to present and hide herself and, in particular, her body. The know-how of hiding is in contrast to the contemporary fashion of knowing how to display the body. Attaining capital in the field of sexuality was primarily a struggle to be a good moral woman or man. It was to accept the sexual lifestyle which went with one's social position. If, for example, one was identified as the marrying type, sexuality was organised around a series of matrimonial strategies primary among which was remaining untainted (Bourdieu 1976, p. 140). 'Good for marrying', meant among other things, not being sexually spoilt. It was the duty of mothers to keep an eye on their daughters. Outside the home, especially in the pub, it was the duty of fathers to keep an eye on their son. Foucault is right to argue that the *deployment of sexuality* was for a long time tied in with the deployment of marriage alliances. However, what he does not analyse is how the process operated at the level of individual action. Moreover, it was not a definite structure. Within the Irish sexual habitus and the practices which emerged from it, there was always room for alternative strategies; for those who were not identified as the marrying type to get married; for those who were to emigrate (Bourdieu 1976, p. 127). For those who remained and did not marry, the strategy was to remain ostensibly sexless and celibate. Sex could be private and silent as long as one was not caught. It used to be that women who became pregnant outside marriage lost not just sexual capital, but cultural and symbolic capital and their social position in society. Women who were ostensibly lesbian used to be incarcerated. But again, the Irish sexual habitus was never a definitive structure. There was always room for manoeuvre; for the unmarried to resist and have sex, for lesbians and gays to come out. But the success of these strategies often depended on what other forms of capital were available to the actors.

So what was the process by which change in the field of Irish sexuality took place, by which Irish men and women became not just sexualised but sexy? Again, it is not that Foucault is wrong to emphasise the increasingly subtle, more pervasive strategies in the *deployment of sexuality*, the new constitution of self, the new desires and levels of self-awareness. It is more that his explanation is not adequate at the level of change in the shared understanding of the meaning and practice of sex among social actors and how people in different positions with different volumes and qualities of capital were able to be sexually different. To understand how it was that sex came to be written, talked about and portrayed differently, we have to understand the change in the Irish sexual habitus. How was it that strategies and tactics formerly unacceptable and sinful became accepted? What was

the process by which people began to question and reject the Church's view of sex and themselves? Much of this has got to do with the overlap of social fields. In particular, it was related to people attaining symbolic capital within political, economic, media, artistic, literary and intellectual fields which permitted them to engage different tactics; use alternative strategies and make alternative moves in the sexual field.[5] This was undoubtedly related to changes at a broader structural level, including the development and penetration of economic capital and the separation of Church and State. But at the level of habitus, it was those who worked in the media who promoted new portrayals and understandings of sex; who challenged, resisted and overcame the strategies of shame and guilt about sex and made it something which was good to look at, listen to and talk about.

Two things happened in the field of sexuality which were crucial to the demise of the dominance of the Catholic Church. At the level of discourse, the arrival of television meant that a whole new range of programmes and advertisements began to be shown which portrayed a different type of self-expression, new desires and pleasures, a different positioning and posturing of bodies, and different forms of sexual communication and relationships. Unlike films and publications, television was not readily subject to established forms of censorship. More significantly, it reached increasingly large numbers of people on a daily basis. But another crucial dimension was that those who worked in television, who produced and directed the programmes, were not dependent on the Catholic Church for symbolic capital. In effect, television and radio became a major new source of symbolic capital. What was said and done became legitimate because it had been seen and heard on television and radio. The stories that people followed, the characters with whom they identified, the products which they wanted to consume, became part of the Irish habitus. The adornment of the body, the looks and glances, the gestures, the intimacies and the general way people talked to and looked at each other became characteristics of the Irish sexual habitus. So, slowly the predispositional understanding and orientation to sexuality and self-expression began to change. From the 1960s, with the development of television and private radio stations, it was good to be sexy. The way to attain sexual capital shifted, particularly in cities and among young people, away from a demure, pious, chaste display of the self to one which was expressive and outward-going. The practices which led to the accumulation of sexual capital were associated with pop music, dances, discos, fashion, magazines, films and television. People who worked and were hired to work in the media did not have high levels of religious capital. They were high in sexual capital. Moreover, as in the past when the capital attained in the religious field was able to be traded for capital in other fields, so now having

sexual capital, being sexy, was tradable in the fields of politics as well as the media. It was the next generation of programme producers, novelists, artists, intellectuals (particularly feminists) who began to produce a sexual discourse which corresponded to, rather than opposed, those being imported from wider Western society's sexual habitus.

Conclusion

In the absence of historical, quantitative or qualitative sociological research about the nature of Irish sexuality, this paper has concentrated on analysing the theoretical and methodological approaches of Foucault and Bourdieu to map relevant issues for future investigation. In some respects, any reflexive sociological approach would have to begin by analysing why sexuality has been conspicuous by its absence in the research agenda of Irish sociology, especially when there has been an explosion of sexual discourse in the last thirty years, particularly in the media. This leads us from a sociology of Irish sexuality into a sociology of Irish sociology. What were the politics, mechanisms and strategies by which sexuality came to be excluded from the field of Irish sociology and, in particular, from the agenda of research institutes, the curricula of university departments, and the contents of books and journals? Was this related to the Catholic Church's traditional control over philosophy and sociology and its influence on positions held and appointments made? Did the mechanisms of censorship and repression reach so deep that sexuality was not conceived as being an issue of sociological concern? What other issues have been written out of Irish sociology? More important, in terms of the present paper, when, where and how did a resistant discourse concerning sexuality emerge within Irish sociology? The task of reflexive sociology is to analyse the structures and material conditions which make the production of certain texts possible or impossible. Foucault is important, then, in pointing us towards not just the shifts and discontinuities in the discourse on Irish sexuality, but who it is that writes and speaks most frequently and with most authority. As the priest fades into the background, the psychoanalyst, counsellor and sociologist move to the centre of the stage. They have are becoming the dominant voices in the era of the ego and the positive *deployment of sexuality*.

The main contribution of Foucault is that he helps us see sex not as something natural and essential which has been repressed by power, but as something positive which is voluntarily as well as coercively deployed as part of a programme of knowing, understanding and critically reflecting about oneself and one's relations with others. Moving from a traditional religious moral regime of sexuality to one which is more secular, does not

mean that the contemporary sexuality is unethical, but that it is operating within a different system of ethics. It is based on individuals constructing and living a life in which sex becomes part of a secular regimen of balancing pleasures, commitments and responsibilities. In some respects, we are in between a discourse based on a strict codification and regulation of sexual rights and wrongs and a discourse resembling an ancient Grecian 'arts of existence' in which the aesthetic quality and balance of a lifestyle as well as its ethicalness which matters.

What is missing in Foucault is not so much the self, but a description and analysis of the self as constituted within the symbolic interactive process of everyday life and as active agent who strategically uses culture as a tool-kit (Swidler, 1986). This is where Bourdieu makes an important contribution. We can see and understand sexuality not just as a game of truth in which the self is constituted, but as a game involving other players in which the self is engaged not just as a means toward knowledge and self-understanding but as a concrete struggle to attain and maintain position, wealth and prestige in society. However, while Bourdieu is very good at depicting the structures of different social fields, not since his early work in Kabilia and the Béarn has he given a thick anthropological description of the strategies and tactics which people use in order to attain and maintain different forms of capital (1964; 1965; 1977).

To understand the changes that have taken place in the field of Irish sexuality, we need to describe and analyse the strategies and tactics which emerge from the Irish sexual habitus and how the struggle to attain capital not only influences an individual's social position, but has an impact on the discourse which, in turn, shapes the habitus from which future practices emerge. What is missing in Bourdieu is the multidimensional sociology which he, like Alexander, calls for and yet fails to deliver (Alexander 1982, pp. 122-26). Not only does Bourdieu seem to have abandoned an anthropology of the strategies and tactics used in social fields, but he does not describe the practices and processes by which capital is attained in one field and traded for capital attained in other fields. In other words, a key to understanding the changes in the field of Irish sexuality is to understand when, where, how and among whom being sexually attractive and sexy rather than being sexually flat and virginal became the way to attain capital in the field of sexuality, and how this was exchanged for other forms of capital in other fields.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Stephen Mennell and the anonymous *IJS* referees for their helpful comments.
2. Foucault insists that there is no use in a historical analysis of sex as some kind of natural biological force which is subject to checks and balances. Rather our interest must lie in an analysis of how desires, impulses and drives come to be constructed within discourse and inscribed on bodies(1980 pp. 151-157; McNay 1991, p. 131; Porter 1991, p. 62).
3. The shift from the *deployment of alliance* to what Foucault calls the *deployment of sexuality* was a gradual progression with many overlaps. In fact, as we shall see, in Ireland the *deployment of sexuality* remained rooted in the religious discourse and practice of the Catholic Church and tied in with the regulation of marriage and the control of wealth and property (see Gibbon and Curtin 1978; Curtin *et al* 1992). While the term 'deployment' is unsatisfactory to describe the complicated process through which sexuality was both problematised and instilled in minds and bodies, I have kept to the original translation mainly because it captures Foucault's understanding of sexuality as a form of power.
4. Again, Foucault recognised that in the field of sexual relations it was possible for the dominated to engage in alternative, opposing strategies. He says, for example, that in traditional conjugal relations in the nineteenth century 'we cannot say that there was only male power; the woman herself could do a lot of things: be unfaithful to him, extract money from him, refuse him sexually'(1991, p. 12). But the question remains what was the habitus and the practices and what women had the capital to institute such resistance?
5. Foucault, of course, saw the field of sexuality as a game of truth or ethics in and through which the self was constituted. As in other fields, the way in which the game is played depends on the players involved, the closed circuit in which it operates and the consensus of values which determine what is good (true) and evil (false). But, like all games of truth – and this is where he says he differs from Habermas – games of truth are always linked to games and institutions of power (1991, pp. 16-18).

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