

# **Gender and Sexuality**

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## Abstract

This chapter will outline how anarchism's anti-authoritarian and autonomous ethic has been extended to gender hierarchy and domination and sexual normativity, considering how freedom is restricted by these phenomena. Anarchists have made unique contributions to analysis of these phenomena and resistance to them that will be explored in this chapter, both applying anarchist principles to gender and sexuality in wider society and applying feminist and queer perspectives to anarchism. These include critique and analysis of the hierarchical components of gender including the public/private hierarchy; greater emphasis on the 'personal' terrain of politics; focus on how identity can be part of coercion and control; gendered analysis of the state; prefiguration of alternative modes of living and relating including freedom from gender hierarchy and sexual freedom; and approaches to organising that do not collapse back in to the hierarchies of gender.

## Pervasive and Oppressive: Gender and Sexuality as Coercive Elements of Society

Gender and sexuality are categories that are both socially and institutionally defined and maintained, regulate and are regulated and restrict autonomy. Conceptually, therefore, anarchism's anti-authoritarian and autonomous ethos ought to, and often has, extended to gender hierarchy and domination and sexual normativity, considering how freedom is restricted by these phenomena. Anarchists have made unique contributions to analysis of these phenomena and resistance to them that will be explored in this chapter, both applying anarchist principles to gender and sexuality in wider society and applying feminist and queer perspectives to anarchism. These include critique and analysis of the hierarchical components of gender including the public/private hierarchy; greater emphasis on the 'personal' terrain of politics; focus on how identity can be part of coercion and control; gendered analysis of the state<sup>1</sup>; prefiguration of alternative modes of living and relating including freedom from gender hierarchy and sexual freedom; and approaches to organising that do not collapse back into the hierarchies of gender. However, the diversity of perspectives and approaches to anarchism have often shaped how this has been conceptualised, and the extent to which gender and sexuality have been a focus in anarchism.

This chapter considers how anarchism has been and can be applied to the social categories of both gender and sexuality, which are often conflated or placed side by side. Gender refers to the assigned or (increasingly) chosen category of male, female or increasingly alternative options.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, and still predominantly attributed by assigning a congruent sex at birth by identification of genitals, it remains a binary concept, with associated social 'rules'.<sup>3</sup> In the contemporary gender scholarship, there is near consensus that gender is 'a socially constructed stratification system'<sup>4</sup> and that it is still a *compulsory* category for making a person intelligible within current

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<sup>1</sup> L. Nicholas & C. Agius *The Persistence of Global Masculinism: Discourse, Gender and Neo-Colonial Re-Articulations of Violence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> S.J. Kessler & W. McKenna *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> M.A. Gilbert, 'Defeating Bigenderism: Changing Gender Assumptions in the Twenty-first Century', *Hypatia*, 24:3 (2009), 93–112.

<sup>4</sup> B.J. Risman, Barbara J. 'Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism', *Gender & Society*, 18:4 (2004), 429–450, 430.

cultures.<sup>5</sup> Within this scholarship, there may be different emphases or foci on the institutional, interactive or individual levels, but most thinkers take as a given that gender plays out across these levels. Anarchist thought was a forerunner in this way of analysing gender, situating it in wider analysis of power and domination.

Sexuality is an identity constructed around ‘sexual or erotic desires, behaviours and relationships’.<sup>6</sup> Sexuality scholars have likewise long been concerned with analysing how sexuality has been regulated by the law and social norms, because ‘sexuality is constructed into hierarchies and is interconnected with other forms of social divisions including gender, sexual orientation, class and ethnicity’.<sup>7</sup> Like gender, sexuality is understood as socially constructed but also stratified in terms of more and less sanctioned identities and practices, often based on arbitrary attribution.<sup>8</sup> (Hetero)sexual norms have long been interrogated in anarchist thought and practice, with a parallel prefigurative element that considers how hierarchical power can be minimised in the sexual and relational domain. This includes interrogation of the coercive and compulsory nature of heterosexuality, the institutional and legal restrictions on sexuality and intimate relationships and the ways that domination can play out within sexual relationships and interactions. On the whole, it is unproblematic and ‘ideologically consistent for anarchists to take up queers’ resistance of the established hierarchical valuation of sexual identities and practices’<sup>9</sup> and, I would add, genders.

As theorists have long been pointing out, while they are separate and different, as social and political concepts, gender and sexuality often inform each other. Queer theory forerunner Judith Butler is instructive here, positing as she does that each makes the other ‘intelligible’ because ‘gender hierarchy serve[s] a more or less compulsory heterosexuality’,<sup>10</sup> and notably Butler has recently been more explicit about her conceptual alliances with anarchism.<sup>11</sup> As Heckert points out, “sexual orientation” exist[s] as a hierarchy of gendered desire, but, as a nexus of gender and sexuality it also serves to support (and at the same time it is supported by) both the gender order and the hierarchical organisation of sexuality’.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter will outline how applications of anarchist ideas to gender and sexuality are informed by broader patterns in anarchist theory and activism. These terrains of authority have been ignored or sidelined, as well as being reified by some anarchist thought and activism, especially in ‘classical’ anarchism which often appealed to essential binary gender characteristics, the nuclear family and heterosexuality. However, there was a shift to explicit focus on gender politics shortly thereafter and the last century and a half has seen a diversity of perspectives, wherein these stratifications have been understood using a variety of frameworks, from structural, state-oriented perspectives, to institutional, through to a focus on the cultural and interpersonal. This

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<sup>5</sup> J. Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 4th edn (London: Routledge, 2007 [1990]).

<sup>6</sup> J. Heckert ‘Sexuality/identity/politics’ in J. Purkis & J. Bowen (Eds) *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist theory and practice in a global age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 101–116, 101.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>8</sup> G. Rubin, ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’ in H. Ablove, M.A. Barale, & D. Halperin (Eds) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993 [1984]), 3–44.

<sup>9</sup> L. Portwood-Stacer ‘Constructing anarchist sexuality: Queer identity, culture, and politics in the anarchist movement’, *Sexualities* 13:4 (2010), 479–493, 480.

<sup>10</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

<sup>11</sup> J. Butler in J. Heckert ‘On anarchism: An interview with Judith Butler’ desires’ in J. Heckert & R. Cleminson (Eds) *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (Routledge: Oxon, 2011), 93–100.

<sup>12</sup> Heckert ‘Sexuality’.

has been informed by divergent ontological assumptions about the nature of sexuality and gender, as well as ethical and political perspectives regarding how best to approach gender and sexuality politics.

These anarchist approaches reflect debates around gender and sexualities more broadly including that of their nature (put simply, the extent to which they are or are not social and thus malleable), that of the terrain of their enforcement (structural, institutional, interpersonal, personal) and strategic ethical and political questions around the corollaries of this (should it be challenged, eradicated, etc.?). These play out in particular ways in anarchist thought and practice on the topic. After considering the presence of gender hierarchy *within* anarchist theory and anarchism, the chapter will address anarchist approaches to gender and sexualities chronologically, touching on these conceptual concerns throughout.

## Manarchism Then and Now: Gender and Sexuality in Anarchism

In addition to being a key stratification in wider societies, gender and sexual hierarchies have existed and persisted *within* historical and contemporary anarchism. Gemie emphasises how, in the nineteenth century, ‘the anarchists, so proud of their anti-authoritarianism, of their sceptical analysis of power structures, of their real ability to challenge the dominant political cultures ... were yet so blind to the existence of gender-based tyrannies’.<sup>13</sup> There was support for decentralisation of state power, but reification of essential, that is naturalised and therefore inevitable, gendered power within the family structure, reifying the public/private divide that so many feminist thinkers have identified as a key mode through which women’s experience has been depoliticised and non-public domination ignored.<sup>14</sup> It is thus possible to say that, despite ostensible anti-authoritarian politics, this often did not extend to women, and gender roles and hierarchy were naturalised: “Anarcho-sexism” was a real and powerful thing; it was a strong influence on many anarchist theorists and organizations, and it stunted much anarchist thought’.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, in the contemporary context, many activists decry the incapacity of many male anarchist activists to reflect on the more interpersonal gendered power dynamics at play in attempts to decentralise decision making and in activism. While gender equality and anti-homophobia may be paid lip service in most anarchist contexts now, some queer anarchists have pointed out that often this does not extend to anarchists who do not consider themselves directly affected by these issues focusing on them as key elements of anarchism, or changing their own practices.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that the more masculinised and traditionally ‘political’ practices in anarchist activism such as conflict with police are valued more highly than the more feminised and prefigurative work of community building and the interpersonal domain: ‘some Black Bloc participants deploy a hollow political and moral discourse to account for what they derive from the use of force: a feeling of elation, a rather macho sensation of power’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> S. Gemie ‘Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey’, *Women’s History Review* 5(3) (1996), 417–444, 418.

<sup>14</sup> S. Benhabib, Seyla *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Gemie, ‘Anarchism and Feminism’, 417.

<sup>16</sup> J. Greenway ‘Preface: sexual anarchy, anarchophobia and dangerous desires’ in J. Heckert & R. Cleminson (Eds) *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (Routledge: Oxon, 2011), xiv–xvii, xv.

<sup>17</sup> F. Dupuis-Deri ‘The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle: Anarchism, Direct Action, and Deliberative Practice’, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4:2 (2010), 45–82, 58.

Broader feminist scholarship and activist writing has produced a great deal of empirical work demonstrating the prevalence of domination of space by men, as in the systemic gendered phenomenon of ‘mansplaining’.<sup>18</sup> These same informal gendered dynamics can persist in anarchist activism, reifying on a micro level some of the issues that anarchists critique on a macro scale. Even among anarchists who explicitly embrace an anarchist analysis of gender and sexuality, more informal and implicit hierarchical gender and sexuality practices can persist. Indeed, the term ‘manarchist’ has become commonplace and is defined as follows on *Urban Dictionary*:

Manarchists are macho “anarchists” who talk too much at meetings, adhere to the cult of the great [male] thinkers (drop Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon, Chomsky, etc.... all the time), negate others’ experiences, take up space, [and] exert their privileges.<sup>19</sup>

Such behaviours have been identified in anarchist communities even for those who make claim to feminist or queer labels or critiques but do not interrogate these in their own interactions. In a recent study of self-identified North American anarchists, some participants ‘used the term “manarchist” to describe self-identified anarchists who claim to be critical of hegemonic gender relations, but who consistently (if unconsciously) invoke and benefit from their heterosexual male privilege’.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to providing exciting and radical critiques of the coercive aspects of gender and sexuality, then, as in wider ‘malestream’ discourses, anarchism has also perpetuated the downplaying of gender as a category with material effects, sidelining it as less oppressive because it is cultural.<sup>21</sup> This thus reifies the public/private divide that has universalised men as default and made women less than subjects, invisibilised women’s existences and the social and informal ways that power plays out, a theme that will be returned to at the end of this chapter.

## **Feminism in ‘the [Anglo] Anarchist Century’: Classical Approaches to Gender and Sexuality**

Early anarchist approaches to feminism were distinctive for their divergence from the reformist politics of social purity campaigners and suffragists and socialist approaches to feminism that sought to integrate women into current structures, including the state. Unsurprisingly, early anarchist feminist focus was on the rejection of state-sanctioned marriage but also on the imagination and prefiguration of alternative, non-dominative gender and sexual relations such as ideals of free love. These anarchist approaches of prefiguration of non-dominative relations in the personal realm persist in the contemporary context. Conceptually, anarchist feminists of this time were groundbreaking in their analysis of gender as a social construct, and the process

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<sup>18</sup> R. Patel ‘When Small Talk is Big Talk: Microtranslation and conversation analysis’ (2016) [https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/45667488/RP\\_SmallTalkBigTalk.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1504928857&Signature=KdLgflZ%2BzizeiuYexwol6content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DWhen\\_small\\_talk\\_is\\_big\\_talk.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/45667488/RP_SmallTalkBigTalk.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1504928857&Signature=KdLgflZ%2BzizeiuYexwol6content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DWhen_small_talk_is_big_talk.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Manarchist> (Accessed 12.10.2017).

<sup>20</sup> Portwood-Stacer, ‘Constructing’, 490.

<sup>21</sup> L. Dragonowl ‘Against Identity Politics: Spectres, Joylessness and the contours of resentment’, *Anarchy: A Journal for Desire Unarmed*, no. 76 (2015), 29–51.

of the 'othering' of women as less than human in the gender order and the division of the public and private that maintained the hierarchies. Additionally, thinkers such as Lucy Parsons were forerunners of intersectionality in dealing with multiple terrains of subordination. A greater exposition of some of these 'classical' anarcha-feminists can be found in Chap. 14.

The key divergence among thinkers in 'classical' anarchist thought was around the essentialness or not of gendered roles and of the desirability of challenging them, that is, whether they were properly a part of anarchist analysis. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, for example, was famously socially conservative and romanticised the private sphere of the family as an ideal microcosm of anarchist-socialist relation, leaving the structures, social relations and sexual and social reproduction within this patriarchal sphere completely naturalised.<sup>22</sup> Owing to his essentialist conception of men's greater strength over women, and the 'natural' complementarity of men and women's discrete characteristics, for Proudhon the family is 'the primordial unit of society and the father is, for him, the natural leader' and 'marriage is the lynchpin of the social fabric'.<sup>23</sup>

However, for those anarchist thinkers who did engage in anarchist critique of gender and gendered institutions and practices such as sexuality and the family, these early perspectives have not been dated in terms of their analysis of gender norms and hierarchies as unnatural and socially constituted in a context of power. Of the well-known 'classical' 'malestream' anarchist thinkers, Bakunin was perhaps most progressive in his analysis of patriarchy in the public and private spheres as part of his anarchist thought, followed later by Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre. All of these thinkers applied anarchist analysis through opposition to the institution of marriage and advocating a sexuality without coercion. Bakunin's perspective on gender was that women were different but not inferior, describing the 'patriarchal principle', in *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), as 'an odious tyranny, a cowardly submission, and the absolute negation of all individual and family rights',<sup>24</sup> distinguishing himself from socialists of the time by refusing to reduce all oppression to the one axis of class, and refusing to romanticise the working-class private sphere, within which he identified other hierarchies. Other anarchists of the period likewise extended the analysis of hierarchy to gender, with nuanced understandings of gender as a hierarchical social category that is historically and socially constructed but has huge material impact. For example, demonstrating a perspective that would not look out of place in twenty-first-century gender literature, Paris Commune member Louise Michel argued in 1886 that 'man is master and women are intermediate beings ... it is painful for me to admit that we are a separate caste, made one across the ages'.<sup>25</sup> She made an explicitly anarchist argument that women do not seek the positions of governance or titles of men under the current order, do not wish to take a place at the tables of power but, rather, seek 'knowledge, education and liberty'.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, prefiguring Simone de Beauvoir's key twentieth-century analysis of woman's position as 'other' to men,<sup>27</sup> and later feminist analyses such as those of Luce Irigaray,<sup>28</sup> Emma Goldman sought to

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<sup>22</sup> A. Prichard *Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (London: Routledge, 2013), 107.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Bakunin in G. Robert *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas Vol 1* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 237.

<sup>25</sup> Michel in *ibid.*, 238.

<sup>26</sup> Michel in *ibid.*, 242.

<sup>27</sup> S.D. Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (Trans. H.M. Parshley) (London: Vintage, 1997 [1947]).

<sup>28</sup> L. Irigaray *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Trans. Catherine Porter) (New York: Cornell University Press, New York, 1985).

highlight the extent to which women were othered under the current gender order: 'We have not yet outgrown the theologic myth that woman has no soul, that she is a mere appendix to man'.<sup>29</sup> For Michel, the argument of sex inequality was made to demonstrate that women were as capable as men of being revolutionaries and warriors, using the idea that women's subordination is taught rather than innate. However, many of these thinkers also hinted that the patriarchal world of men may conversely have something to learn from more feminine values, an argument explicated and extended more by mid-twentieth-century feminism and feminist ethics.

In terms of opposition to marriage, Bakunin called for an end to state-sanctioned marriage but in its place imagined 'free marriage' and 'natural family'.<sup>30</sup> He advocated for non-authoritarian relationships and family relations by decrying 'invasion by one of the liberty of the other',<sup>31</sup> demonstrating his extension of the analysis of authority in to interpersonal relationships. For Emma Goldman, the analysis of marriage pertained to the mode through which the institution undermined love but also reified the public/private divide that impacted more heavily on women's subordination: 'The marriage insurance condemns [women] to lifelong dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social. Man, too, pays his toll, but as his sphere is wider, marriage does not limit him as much as woman'.<sup>32</sup> Voltairine de Cleyre perhaps summarised an anarchist analysis of the gendered nature of marriage, (hetero)sexuality and the family when, in 1895, she described the oppression at their core in:

this ill-got thing you call morality, sealed with the seal of marriage ... in it the consummation of immorality, impurity, and injustice ... [behold] every married woman what she is, a bonded slave, who takes her master's name, her master's bread, her master's commands, and serves her master's passion; who passes through the ordeal of pregnancy and the throes of travail at his dictation, not at her desire; who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent, and from whose straining arms the children she bears may be torn at his pleasure, or willed away while they are yet unborn ... Yes, our masters! The earth is a prison, the marriage-bed is a cell, women are the prisoners, and you are the keepers!<sup>33</sup>

In their pursuit of greater freedom, in this period, for many thinkers, anarchism also entailed sexual emancipation. Goldman, for example, considered sexuality to be a key aspect of human experience and expression, although this was usually framed in a heterosexual context. Exemplary of this is that, in contrast to the social purity campaigners, 'as sexual expression, in Goldman's view, was the core of each human personality, to reject male sexual partnership ... was to reject "life's greatest treasure, love for a man"'.<sup>34</sup> This demonstrates that, while Goldman spoke about prejudice against 'homosexuality' as part of her anarchism,<sup>35</sup> there was a reluctance to link her

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<sup>29</sup> E. Goldman, *Marriage and Love* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing, 2007 [1911]), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2162>, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Bakunin in Graham, *Anarchism*, 236.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Goldman, *Marriage*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> V. De Cleyre *Sex Slavery*, The Anarchist Library, accessed from [https://archive.org/stream/al\\_Voltairine\\_de\\_Cleyre\\_Sex\\_Slavery\\_a4/Voltairine\\_de\\_Cleyre\\_\\_Sex\\_Slavery\\_a4\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/al_Voltairine_de_Cleyre_Sex_Slavery_a4/Voltairine_de_Cleyre__Sex_Slavery_a4_djvu.txt) (2009 [1895]), 1–2.

<sup>34</sup> B. Haaland, *Emma Goldman: Sexuality and the Impurity of the State* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993), 148.

<sup>35</sup> L.J. Marso 'A Feminist Search for Love: Emma Goldman on the Politics of Love, Marriage, Sexuality and the Feminine', in P.A. Weiss & L. Kensiger (Eds) *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 71–90, 88.



anarcha-feminism with same-sex sex for women. Arguably, this was a strategic decision in response to the social purity campaigners' essentialist demonising of men generally and sex with them more specifically, such that Goldman prioritised a vision of heterosexuality that could be based on something other than only men's pleasure.<sup>36</sup>

These applications of anarchist principles such as the deconstruction of the institution of marriage and refiguration of it with an anarchist ideal of positive free love demonstrate an anarchist politics taking place both through opposition to the state and at the interpersonal level of making the personal political.

## Twentieth-Century (Anglo) Anarcha-Feminism

[...] as far as I'm concerned, when I say that I'm an anarchist you should know that means women's liberation is going to be a primary concern. (1977 interview with anarchist 'Emma')<sup>37</sup>

According to Judy Greenway, 1970s anarcha-feminism was active both in challenging male domination within the anarchist movement and in applying anarchist approaches to feminism more broadly.<sup>38</sup> In terms of this second focus, during the second wave of feminism (usually considered to be from the 1960s), anarchist approaches to feminism offered an alternative to liberal and reformist feminism, and the women's liberation movement offered to anarchism a model of politics and organising that was truly decentralised, horizontal and collective anarchist in nature. Carol Ehrlich,<sup>39</sup> for example, argued that what she called 'social anarchism' or communist anarchism was inherently compatible with radical feminism because, in her view, both are concerned with challenging all hierarchies in both theory and practice. The feminist principle that the 'personal is political' was cited by every respondent in Greenway and Alderson's interviews with anarcha-feminists in the 1970s as shaping their perspective on the anti-authoritarianism of anarchism. In this way, Ehrlich's list of what she perceives as the common concerns of both radical feminists and social anarchist feminists, spanning all levels of formal and informal institution, is instructive and echoes de Cleyre's list above:

control over one's body; alternatives to the nuclear family and heterosexuality; new methods of childcare that will liberate parents and children; economic self-determination; ending sex stereotyping in education, in the media, and in the workplace; the abolition of repressive laws; an end to male authority, ownership, and control over women; providing women with the means to develop skills and positive self-attitudes; an end to oppressive emotional relationships.<sup>40</sup>

This, then, demonstrates an approach critical of top-down and overtly dominative power, and the ideal of fostering positive and enabling 'power-to' in order to maximise autonomy. Many

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<sup>36</sup> B. Haaland, *Emma Goldman*, 148.

<sup>37</sup> "1977 interview with anarchist 'Emma'", Greenway, Judy & Alderson. Lynn (2014 [1977]) *Anarchism and Feminism: Voices from the Seventies*. [www.judygreenway.org.uk](http://www.judygreenway.org.uk). Creative Commons.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> C. Ehrlich *Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism* <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/carol-ehlich-socialism-and-feminism> (2009 [1977]).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

feminist thinkers of this time linked anarchism to feminist ideas that valued ethos and practices that had traditionally been regarded as feminine, rather than seeking the entry of women into traditionally masculine realms. The realms of domination, capitalism and the public sphere can be understood as masculinist, and their alternative feminist.<sup>41</sup> This means that many feminists who were imagining different ways of interacting and organising had much to offer anarchists thinking through the same issues, and vice versa. Indeed 1970s anarcho-feminist ‘Emma’ said at the time, ‘I think it’s very important for men to work more like women’,<sup>42</sup> demonstrating a key distinction from institutionalised liberal feminism that sought for women to enter the masculinist public sphere. Sci-fi writer and anarchist feminist thinker Ursula le Guin made these links between gender hierarchy and other forms of dominance. For example, discussing a novel in which she imagined a world without sexual difference and thus without gender, she argued in 1976 that without sex/gender:

our central problem would not be the one it is now: the problem of exploitation—exploitation of the woman, of the weak, of the Earth. Our problem is ... a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied. The dualism of value that destroys us, the dualism of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used, might give way to what seems to me, from here, a much healthier, sounder, more promising modality of integration and integrity.<sup>43</sup>

This ‘feminine’ value of interdependence (essentially mutual aid) is revalued and rendered central by many anarcho-feminists, to replace the masculine values of atomisation, selfishness and competition. A British feminist activist interviewed in 1977 articulated this, stating, ‘I really believe in a basic anarchism in all women, because of their experiences. Women being more at home, more in small groups ... I think that’s something that excludes hierarchical structure’.<sup>44</sup> While approaches such as these, and the second wave of feminism in general, have been charged with a crude essentialism that attributes anarchist ethics to women’s ‘nature’, the words of women organising at this time demonstrate rather the prevalence of an understanding that the feminisation of the informal sphere is historical and social.<sup>45</sup> This reflects the work of feminist ethicists such as Carol Gilligan<sup>46</sup> who likewise argue that a better way to evaluate moral worth is through relationality rather than individualism. Subsequently, a theory of care ethics or care feminism has developed that continues to influence contemporary anarchism, feminism and queer theory.<sup>47</sup>

Activist accounts from the 1970s demonstrate that for many anarcho-feminists at the time, gay liberation and non-monogamy figured as part of their broader analysis of restrictive and oppressive norms. Making the personal political often meant for them, for example, an enabling ethos of allowing children to consider being gay as an equally valid option and a focus on changing perspectives on ‘homosexuality’.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the critique of monogamy common to ‘classical’

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<sup>41</sup> Nicholas & Agius, *Persistence I*.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Emma’ in Greenway & Alderson, *Anarchism and Feminism*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> U. Le Guin, Ursula ‘Is Gender Necessary?’ in S.J. Anderson & V.N. McIntyre *Aurora: Beyond Equality* (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1976), 138–139.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Susan’ in Greenway & Alderson, *Anarchism and Feminism*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>47</sup> L. Nicholas *Queer Post-Gender Ethics: The Shape of Selves to Come* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> ‘Louise’ in Greenway & Alderson, *Anarchism and Feminism*, 11.

anarchism continued, with a gendered understanding of monogamy as ‘closely related to the way that men oppress women in society, it implies possession’.<sup>49</sup> As Gayle Rubin, theorist of sex oft cited by anarchists,<sup>50</sup> outlined in 1984, ‘A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression’.<sup>51</sup> Anarchist activists perhaps came closest to noticing the ‘subtle legal codification of more stringent controls over adult sexual behaviour [that] has gone largely unnoticed outside of the gay press’.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of practice, then, given this focus on analysing dominative power and prefiguring more cooperative ways of relating, both anarchist feminism and radical feminism were concerned with building grassroots institutions according to non-hierarchical ethos and bottom-up approaches to politics rather than reform of existing institutions. Having said this, Ehrlich argues that radical feminists would have benefitted from a knowledge of anarchist theory and practices early on.<sup>53</sup> Influential feminist essay *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* offers to anarchism or radical politics more broadly an excellent feminist critique of simplistic and solipsistic approaches to anarchism that neglect the informal and everyday terrains of power that second-wave feminists drew attention to. In this essay, Freeman prefigured analyses of privilege, noting that:

A “laissez faire” group is about as realistic as a “laissez faire” society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of “structurelessness” does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones ... Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power.<sup>54</sup>

This essay offers organisational strategies that are premised in feminist activism but demonstrate an anarchist ethos that was a key part of radical feminism and are strategies that are still useful for all anarchist organisers seeking to avoid the congealment of hierarchy in their own groups and communities. As I will elaborate below, many of these second-wave anarcho-feminist perspectives paved the way for subsequent feminism, subsequent approaches to anarchism that implicitly include analysis of all terrains of power and domination and subsequent late twentieth- and twenty-first-century development of queer theory and queer politics.

## Twenty-First Century: The Queer, Relational Turn

While ‘manarchism’ (which is inherently heteropatriarchal) occasionally still rears its head, especially in US-style libertarian perspectives, in the twenty-first century, an analysis of the oppressive elements of gender relations, sexual relations and sexual identity is almost a default in most social anarchism, even if only by lip service. There is near consensus that gender needs to be attended to, compulsory heterosexuality is clearly tyrannical, and non-monogamy has almost congealed into a new anarchist norm. As an illustration of this pervasiveness, there was a time in

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Olive’ in *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed Rubin’s ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex’ (1975) took its pre-colon name from Goldman’s 1910 essay ‘The Traffic in Women.’

<sup>51</sup> Rubin, ‘Thinking Sex’, 149.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>53</sup> Ehrlich, *Socialism*.

<sup>54</sup> J. Freeman *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm> (1971).

the early 2000s when it seemed every anarchist share house in the Global North had ‘the Crime-thinc. Gender poster’.<sup>55</sup> Using Nancy R. Smith’s poem about the restrictions of gender norms, and a cartoon of a person split in two with a feminine and masculine side, this widely distributed poster zine from the USA anarchist collective encapsulated an anarchist perspective on gender norms as restricting autonomy for women, trans folk and men and a vision of a freedom from this gender tyranny. DIY anarcho-punk communities in the early 2000s have been identified as holding ‘a politics that seeks to deconstruct gender as a site of authority and reconstruct it on autonomous non-hierarchical terms’,<sup>56</sup> a vehemently anti-essentialist position that sees human nature as potentiality not determining. This was clear in practices such as men’s gender discussion groups and women- and queer-centred practices. Indeed, Grubacic and Graeber emphasise how, in the twenty-first century, anarchists are:

constantly expanding the focus of anti-authoritarianism, moving away from class reductionism by trying to grasp the “totality of domination”, that is, to highlight not only the state but also gender relations, and not only the economy but also cultural relations and ecology, sexuality, and freedom in every form it can be sought.<sup>57</sup>

This shift or expansion in focus in anarchist communities is paralleled by a turn to poststructuralist analyses of power in anarchist scholarship at the same time. Early twenty-first-century anarchists tended to approach anarchism relationally, as an ethics that minimises interpersonal power hierarchies. Poststructuralism ‘offers a full account of the way that subjectivity and intersubjectivity is a site of power and dominance by narrating the way that they are produced according to dominant hierarchical ethics and assumptions’.<sup>58</sup> This means that often contemporary anarchism entails relational critiques of gender, sexuality and relationships, from a poststructuralist-influenced understanding of power as playing out in interpersonal relationships, perpetuated by individuals within wider discourses. There has certainly been an explicit shift to relationality and considering ‘new ways of relating to one another’.<sup>59</sup> This perspective is clear in the subtitle of a germinal twenty-first-century queer anarchist book collection entitled *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power*. This collection is surely influenced by earlier ‘waves’ of feminism and owes much to the notion that the personal is political, and the introduction and endorsement is from Judy Greenway who was a key thinker in the 1970s anarcho-feminism and considers this queer approach an extension of this project. The collection is explicit in its expansive definition of the political and sees itself as part of a project of ‘putting anarchistic ethics in to practice’.<sup>60</sup> In scholarship, the oeuvre of Jamie Heckert, in particular, has been instrumental in developing

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<sup>55</sup> L. Nicholas ‘Approaches to Gender, Power and Authority in Contemporary Anarcho-punk: Poststructuralist Anarchism?’, *E-Sharp Journal*, Issue 9 (Spring 2007).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> A. Grubacic & D. Graeber ‘Anarchism, Or The Revolutionary Movement Of The Twenty-first Century’, *The Anarchist Library*, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andrej-grubacic-david-graeber-anarchism-or-the-revolutionary-movement-of-the-twenty-first-centu.pdf> (2004), 5.

<sup>58</sup> L. Nicholas ‘Anarchism, Pedagogy, Queer Theory and Poststructuralism: Towards a Positive Ethical Theory of Knowledge and the Self’ in R. Haworth (Ed), *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education* (Oakland: PM Press), 242–259, 245.

<sup>59</sup> Greenway, ‘Preface’, xvi.

<sup>60</sup> J. Heckert & R. Cleminson (Eds) *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (Routledge: Oxon, 2011), 2.

a perspective of anarchism as an ‘ethics of relationships’, taking a poststructuralist perspective that allows for interrogation of all of the ways that domination plays out.

This means that poststructuralist-influenced queer theory has found a fairly uncontested and harmonious relationship with anarchism. Both approaches can be understood as ethical frameworks rather than ideologies with blueprints for ideal societies and relations. Through these ethos, both queer theory and poststructuralist anarchism are critical of the binary modes through which the social and relational worlds are interpreted in dominant discourses, and how these lead to hierarchy and othering across multiple terrains. This makes the extension of this critique to other axes of difference useful. Contemporaneously, this focus on deconstructing hierarchy and othering means there is fruitful analysis and activism at the intersections of gender, sexuality, ‘race’, ethnicity, religion, anti-fascism, ability and so on. For example, current Texas, US-based group *Black Women’s Defense League* describe themselves as ‘fighting that battle on every single front’,<sup>61</sup> uniting anarchist, feminist, anti-racist and queer ethos in their opposition to oppression. From the premise that ‘the state is the problem but its helped create interpersonal problems’, they focus on all levels of activism, in particular fostering critical reflection in individuals on how gender restricts people, encouraging black and brown men to reflect on gender privilege and linking all of this to white privilege. This means ‘understanding white supremacy and its patriarchal, paternalistic role’.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, contemporary opposition to the rise of the fundamentally white and male supremacist alt-right<sup>63</sup> means that groups of ‘women and non-men’<sup>64</sup> are uniting with and working across Black Lives Matter, Antifa and anarchist groups to oppose the alt-right in recognition of the intersectionality of ‘race’, gender and sexuality.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, those challenging ableism find affinities with queer anarchism, and crip politics, or ‘cripping’ has a similar impulse to ‘queering’, that is, interrogating the norm from the perspective of the ‘other’ in order to imagine what a more enabling world would look like. Indeed, ‘ableism and heteronormativity are both oppressive ideologies and cultural constructs that hinder the full potential of realising the scope of human sexuality and modes of being in the world’.<sup>66</sup> In this way, all of these perspectives and approaches to activism have in common a deconstruction of the normal and a reconstructive vision of a more inclusive mode of ordering society and relating to one another.

Perhaps the one uniting feature of queer theory is its critique of ‘heteronormativity’, defined as the way that ‘society implicitly assumes heterosexuality to be a stable, essential “thing,” and to be the norm and, more than this, implicitly maintains and promotes it through both formal social institutions and more informal social norms and culture’.<sup>67</sup> The concept of heteronormativity is particularly useful because it draws out the connections between the normativity in gender,

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<sup>61</sup> Niecee X, in Final Straw ‘Final Straw: Black Women’s Defense League on Feminism, Anti-Blackness, and Sexism’, *Final Straw*, <https://itsgoingdown.org/final-straw-black-womens-defense-league-feminism-anti-blackness-sexism/> (April 10 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas & Agius, *Persistence*.

<sup>64</sup> Niecee X, ‘Final Straw’.

<sup>65</sup> D.T. Williams, ‘Boston’s Anti-Fascist Protest Was Planned by Black, Queer, Radical Women’, *Telesur*, 21 Aug 2017 <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/analysis/Bostons-Anti-Fascist-Protest-Was-Planned-by-Black-Queer-Radical-Women-20170821-0027.html>.

<sup>66</sup> L. Ben-Moshe, A.J. Nocella & A.J. Withers, ‘Queer-cripping anarchism: Intersections and reflections on anarchism, queerness and dis-ability’, in *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2012), 207–220, 208.

<sup>67</sup> Nicholas, *Queer Post-Gender*, 6.

sexual identity and sexual practices. Queer, then, is a verb not a noun<sup>68</sup> in that it is concerned with a 'queering' or making the normal strange and is a perspective that is beyond the positive advocacy of pre-determined minority identities. Instead, this interrogation of normal and non-normal, this 'queering', comes from an ethos of self-determination, marking an important shift from feminist or gay identity politics to a queer ethic of gender and sexuality that advocates for self-determination of identity, presentation, behaviour and sexual acts. This is a process of politicising the norm not the exceptions because 'Maintaining the illusion of heterosexuality as apolitical ... inhibits the questioning of normative heterosexual practice and traditional masculinity and femininity'.<sup>69</sup> Queer analysis of sexuality is influenced by Michel Foucault's historicising of sexuality, his demonstration of how differently what we now call 'sexuality' has been understood historically and cross-culturally, and how the concept of it as a core part of identity was first coined in the nineteenth century, and has served a disciplinary function.<sup>70</sup> Queer theory is interested in how certain sexual acts are sanctioned or not, and what power interests this serves. Heckert summarises this perspective that is respectfully critical of gay liberation approaches:

Politicising coming out seems to me to have effects other than those intended by its proponents. Making the (queer) personal political may inhibit discussion of the underlying issues (e.g., gender and sexuality) as well as maintaining the division between LGBT (problematic/political) and straight (unproblematic/apolitical). Of course, politicising homosexuality is not the source of the problem; rather, to do so is to be uncritical of the roots of the problem. This is the social division called 'sexual orientation', within which normative heterosexuality is dominant.<sup>71</sup>

Given this inclusion of challenging heteronormativity in anarchism, Portwood-Stacer<sup>72</sup> has illustrated that in the Global North twenty-first-century anarchist community, it is almost pervasive that the 'repressive conformity of heteronormativity' be challenged, or at least be seen to be challenged. For example, it is common in anarchist communities to practice polyamory, and a swathe of political publications were produced and circulated among anarchists in the early twenty-first century to elucidate ethical anarchist approaches to non-monogamy.<sup>73</sup> For Portwood-Stacer's North American anarchist participants, non-monogamy was part of expanding the 'non-state' approach to anarchism to 'all forms of hierarchy'.<sup>74</sup> This is reflected in the literature, where privileging one romantic or sexual relationship is seen to subordinate other relationships in a hierarchy.<sup>75</sup> Ironically, however, this commitment to challenging the coerciveness of monogamy has often congealed into a new norm of polyamory in both anarchist and queer anarchist communities which can 'privilege certain practices' leading to 'anarchonormativity'.<sup>76</sup> As with relationship norms, however, from an anarchist and queer perspective, it is

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<sup>68</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

<sup>69</sup> Heckert, 'Sexuality', 112.

<sup>70</sup> M. Foucault *History of Sexuality vols. 1-3* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1984]).

<sup>71</sup> Heckert, 'Sexuality', 112.

<sup>72</sup> Portwood-Stacer, 'Constructing anarchist', 480.

<sup>73</sup> For example, W.O. Matik, *Redefining Our Relationships: Guidelines for Responsible Open Relationships* (Oakland: Regent Press, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Portwood-Stacer, 'Constructing anarchist', 9.

<sup>75</sup> Matik, *Redefining*.

<sup>76</sup> Portwood-Stacer 'Constructing anarchist', 490.

important to be critical of the possibility of new norms forming, a critique that has been levelled at LGBT politics that rely on fixed identities and assimilation to the mainstream.

In terms of non-heterosexual sexualities, and non-normative genders, ‘this antagonistic relationship with the normal has ... led to an anti-assimilationist ethic that often sets queer politics apart from mainstream “G(lbt)” politics’,<sup>77</sup> and queer politics tends to be critical of the state. Exemplary of this is Lisa Duggan’s theory of ‘homonormativity’ and her critique of gendered, monogamous heterosexual models of family and sexuality that can be idealised in LGBT politics. In contrast to this, Duggan presents a prefigurative vision of alternative modes of kinship and being sexual that are less sanctioned by the state and that many queer people already live, demonstrating a clear parallel with anarchist approaches.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Judith Butler, whose critique of identity politics in *Gender Trouble* was so influential for subsequent queer theorists, has explicated that, for her, ‘queer anarchism poses an important alternative to the rising movement of gay libertarianism’.<sup>79</sup> For Butler, anarchism represents an important alternative because it does not isolate one axis of domination and othering from another, noting that ‘gay libertarians defend the state, are even recruited by them, and help to sustain violence against other minorities’.<sup>80</sup> As outlined above, an anarchist analysis ideally does not allow for this. Indeed, Heckert argues that ‘anarchism should move beyond the social division of “sexual orientation” upon which LGBT politics depends’.<sup>81</sup>

It is important to emphasise, then, that as with Duggan’s alternative ethics of kinship, for anarchism, this queer deconstructive or critical approach is also always oriented towards greater freedom, or self-expression, whatever language is used to articulate this. As a 2012 collection of queer anarchist essays explains:

...understanding sexuality and gender in terms of rigid, easily identifiable, and heavily policed identities effectively invisibilizes and robs people who do not fit neatly into our available identity categories of a viable social existence—not just for sexuality, but also (and of course, relatedly) for gender and sex.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to a critique of gender hierarchy and normative sexuality, both anarchist and queer theories allow for exciting and radical frameworks with which to challenge compulsory binary gender normativity and compulsory binary sex. Gender anarchy is perhaps the most ‘queer’ and terrifying prospect for mainstream society, just becoming comfortable with LGBT tolerance, for whom the dissolution of binary gender seems to be one step too far.<sup>83</sup> This poststructuralist perspective can in theory, then, mean feminist arguments only for altering the hierarchical *contents*

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<sup>77</sup> C.B. Daring, J. Rogue, A. Volcano & D. Shannon *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>78</sup> L. Duggan ‘Beyond Marriage: Democracy, Equality, and Kinship for a New Century’, *S&F Online*, 10.1–10.2 (2012), <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/a-new-queer-agenda/beyond-marriage-democracy-equality-and-kinship-for-a-new-century/>.

<sup>79</sup> Butler, ‘On anarchism’, 93.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> Heckert, ‘Sexuality’, 115.

<sup>82</sup> Daring et al., *Queering Anarchism*, 11.

<sup>83</sup> For an extreme reactionary response to the fear of gender anarchy, Family Watch states that freedom of gender expression is dangerous because ‘In essence “gender identity policies that include protections for “expression” and “behavior” facilitate gender anarchy’ [http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/gender\\_anarchy.pdf](http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/gender_anarchy.pdf) but please don’t give their website more hits.

of gender, or for a more queer transfeminism, that can propose either rejecting the binaries all together or eradicating gender as an intelligible social category towards the freedom of a plurality of identities and expressions. This is apparent in my arguments for a poststructuralist anarchist-influenced 'queer post-gender ethics' of self-determination.<sup>84</sup>

Like previous anarchists, contemporary anarchoqueers are dedicated to congruence between means and ends which entails prefiguration of freer relations and communities. A potential criticism here is one of 'life-stylism' as strongly warned against by Bookchin<sup>85</sup> that I will address briefly below. However, in my view, anarchist approaches to gender and sexuality have always necessarily been cognisant of the co-constitutive relationship of the individual and the structural, with a nuanced usage of the idea of the personal being political. Some critics of queer theory have suggested that it entails an unproductive politics of negativity, but many contemporary anarchist thinkers consider this to be a productive way to enact a politics and ethics that is non-essentialist, not based on assumptions of fixed foundations and also open-ended, thus preventing the congealment of new tyrannical norms.<sup>86</sup> Grassi calls this 'anti-utopian utopianism' and Nicholas, influenced by the utopian 'logic of futurity'<sup>87</sup> of queer theorists such as Munoz, demonstrates the positive ethic of both queer and anarchism by proposing the key to be 'critical modes of thought and non-closure, and proliferation'.<sup>88</sup> Giffney demonstrates the anarchist ethos at queer theory's core, when she states that:

We as queer theorists must continue to chip away at, what Michel Foucault refers to as, the 'net-like organization' of the norm, and expose all norms for the way they define, solidify and defend their shaky self-identities by excluding those (dissident others) who fail or refuse to conform.<sup>89</sup>

This does not mean an 'anything goes' chaos. As the authors of *Queering Anarchism* emphasise, as well as the critical element of anarchist thought, the necessary 'negative' project of 'struggle against the state and capitalism ... white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and all forms of oppression and exploitation',<sup>90</sup> there is the reconstructive side.<sup>91</sup> Heckert describes these positive values as 'respect, empathy, informed consent and shared pleasure [...] to sustain non-hierarchical relationships, organisations and societies'.<sup>92</sup> This queer anarchist politics, or anarchic queer politics often, then, entails prefigurative approaches to addressing this in practice. Activist groups or communities have grown around an anarchist focus on deconstructing gender and sexuality norms from a queer perspective, and a concomitant ethic of mutual respect and self-determination in terms of gender and sexuality. Examples of this include *Queeruption* and *Queer Mutiny* collectives, camps and festivals and queer barrios at major protests. Evidence of

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<sup>84</sup> Nicholas, *Queer Post-Gender*.

<sup>85</sup> M. Bookchin, *Social Anarchism of Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> S. Grassi, 'The anarchy of living with negativity', *Continuum* 30 (2016), 587–599.

<sup>87</sup> J.E. Muñoz *Cruising Utopia: The then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 220.

<sup>88</sup> Nicholas, *Queer Post-Gender*, 128.

<sup>89</sup> N. Giffney 'Denormalizing Queer Theory: More Than (Simply) Lesbian and Gay Studies', *Feminist Theory*, 5(1) 2004, 73–78, 75.

<sup>90</sup> Daring et al., *Queering Anarchism*, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Nicholas, *Queer Post-Gender*.

<sup>92</sup> Heckert, 'Sexuality', 113.



this surge can be seen through the Queer Zine Archive<sup>93</sup> with its characteristic pink and black colour scheme. These cultures represent experiments in putting anarchist principles and ethics into practice, especially in terms of gender, sexuality and relationships. These communities allow for spaces of self-determination, where a pronoun is asked, and issues of consent and power in relationships are explicated and debated. The positive ethics that such deconstructions of gender and sexual identity are premised on and aim for are illustrated through queer sex parties with collectively developed codes of conduct, restorative justice approaches to sexual violence in anarchist communities and ethical approaches to polyamory or conscious monogamy. These are to be understood as collective enactments of values and freedom, however, as opposed to the imagined liberal and libertarian endpoints of ‘individual freedom’. This is elucidated by Butler, who asserts that an anarchist political agency ‘is an operation of freedom and agency which is not the same as that which is stipulated as the personal liberty of the individual under liberal democratic regimes’.<sup>94</sup>

## Addressing Critiques of a Focus on Gender/Sexuality and Closing Remarks

The minor exception to the near consensus that gender and sexual norms are tyrannical aspects of life that require interrogation by anarchists is perhaps the opposition from some commentators who equate any attention to these axes of power as ‘identity politics’, extending the arguments from more structurally focused anarchist theorists (e.g. Bookchin<sup>95</sup>). These commentators decry the ‘individualism’ they conceptualise at the root of identity focus and extend this to gender or LGBT politics, as well as decrying the lack of focus on class. However, to equate poststructuralist or queer approaches with ‘identity politics’ is, I would argue, to miss the point.

For example, Dragonowl’s critique of ‘identity politicians’ charges that this approach which draws attention to gender and sexual norms ‘actually reinforces binary thinking and relations of domination’.<sup>96</sup> This is similar to critiques of the notion of privilege for overly individualising power and for ‘tinkering with the social order rather than recognising that it is the current social order itself that maintains the inequalities’.<sup>97</sup> However, in my reading these critiques are purposefully and wilfully reductive of the strategic nature of identity politics, and the extent to which, as Butler would say, we are actually unintelligible without identity and, if we do not address identities, they are attributed to us regardless with real material implications. These critiques can evoke a defensiveness at being construed as a member of an ‘oppressor’ or privileged group, and often propose ‘post-identity’ standpoints that, given the current social order, would merely replicate liberal attempts at gender or ‘race’ blindness that in fact just re-naturalise the hierarchy. As most feminist, queer and ‘race’ scholars would argue, this naive call for a ‘standpoint outside the field of available identities’<sup>98</sup> is mythological and reductively liberal in its understanding of agency and collectivity. Moreover it may be dangerous, by downplaying the material effects of

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.qzap.org/v8/index.php>.

<sup>94</sup> Butler, ‘On anarchism’, 96.

<sup>95</sup> Bookchin, *Social Anarchism*.

<sup>96</sup> Dragonowl, ‘Against identity’, 10.

<sup>97</sup> D. O’Driscoll, ‘Creating an anarchist theory of privilege’, *Workers Solidarity Movement* (2013) <https://www.wsm.ie/c/anarchist-theory-privilege-iar8>, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Dragonowl, ‘Against identity’, 10.

these imposed identities and failing to draw attention to them in haste to get to a point of deconstructing them. Indeed, queer theorists have already addressed this contradiction that subject positions of identity both enable and restrict us but are still compulsory. Ultimately this attempt to transcend identity can, in a male and white supremacist and heteronormative world, only lead to a re-invisibilising of these axes of subordination. They charge 'IPs' with essentialism but in turn may well be charged with the kinds of ideas of free-floating individual agency that leads to appropriative ideas such as trans-racialism. There can be solidarity, affinity and a longing to transcend coercive social categories without a flippant libertarianism.

The solution to this tautology or 'false antithesis' seems obvious: 'whereas anarchists and anarchist theory need to look at struggle on the conceptual level that queer theory provides, queer theory needs to be coupled with anarchism's critique of structural domination, such as the state and capitalism'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> J. Liesegang, 'Tyranny of the state and trans liberation' in C.B. Daring, J. Rogue, A. Volcano & D. Shannon *Queering Anarchism*, 87–99, 96.

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Gender and Sexuality  
2019

*The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism* (edited by Carl Levy & Matthew S. Adams), chapter 34, pp. 603–621, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-75620-2\_34.

I write this as a colonial settler living on stolen land never ceded by the custodians, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, claimed by a nation that continues to refuse sovereignty.

I pay my respects to elders past, present and future. (LN)

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