

STRUCTURATION

Human agency (micro level activity) and social structure (macro level forces) continuously feed into each other. The social structure is reproduced through repetition of acts by individual people (and therefore can change).

1998), we find Giddens untroubled by his critics' efforts to find problems in the detail of how this might actually work. His 'oh, you're making it very complicated, but it's perfectly simple' attitude might frustrate some, but you can't really argue with it, because the whole idea of structuration is perfectly straightforward and, like many Giddens arguments, eminently sensible.

SOCIAL ORDER AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

If individuals find it difficult to act in any way that they fancy, what is the nature of those invisible social forces which provide resistance? Giddens finds an answer by drawing an analogy with language: although language only exists in those instances where we speak or write it, people react strongly against others who disregard its rules and conventions. In a similar way, the 'rules' of social order may only be 'in our heads' – they are not usually written down, and often have no formal force to back them up – but nevertheless, people can be shocked when seemingly minor social expectations are not adhered to. Harold Garfinkel's sociological studies in the 1960s showed that when people responded in unexpected ways to everyday questions or situations, other actors could react quite angrily to this breach of the collective understanding of 'normal behaviour' (see Garfinkel, 1984 [first published 1967]).

In the case of gender this form of social reproduction is particularly clear. When a boy goes to school wearing eyeliner and a dash of lipstick, the shockwaves – communicated through the conventions of punishment and teasing – can be powerful. Yet he only supplemented his appearance with materials which are used by millions of women every day. Women who choose not to shave their legs or armpits may be singled out in a similar way, treated as deviants for ignoring a social convention about feminine appearance.

People's everyday actions, then, reinforce and reproduce a set of expectations – and it is this set of *other people's expectations* which make up the 'social forces' and 'social structures' that sociologists talk about. As Giddens puts it, 'Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in

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so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do' (Giddens and Pierson, 1998:77).

But why should we care about maintaining this shared framework of reality? Would it matter if other people were surprised by our actions? Giddens argues that people have 'a "faith" in the coherence of everyday life', which is developed very early in life – when we have to place absolute trust in our carers – and sustained by our ordinary interactions with others (Giddens, 1991:38). It is because of this faith – a kind of routine trust, extended without a second thought – that some people are so shaken when others challenge the taken-for-granted consensus about how, say, women and men should behave.

We could say, for example, that this explains why some men are disturbed – even angered – to see other men acting in an 'effeminate' manner, because this behaviour challenges their everyday understanding of how things should be in the world. (TV entertainers in drag, on the other hand, pose no threat as they are just 'entertainment' which can easily be read as a *confirmation* of gender stereotypes.) People have an emotional investment in their world as they expect it, and for some, certain aberrations are most unwelcome. Others, of course, don't mind at all. Unfortunately, this account does not explain exactly why appearance or behaviour which crosses traditional *gender* boundaries can be so much more contentious than other unexpected things, such as unusual forms of hair colour or politeness.

The performance of gender appears here – as it does throughout this book – as something which is learned and policed, and which has to be constantly worked on and monitored.

GIDDENS, LATE MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNISM

We are not in a postmodern era, Giddens says. It is a period of *late modernity*. He does not necessarily disagree with the characterisations of recent social life which other theorists have labelled as postmodern – cultural self-consciousness, heightened superficiality, consumerism, scepticism towards theories which aim to explain everything ('meta-narratives' such as science, religion or Marxism) and so on. Giddens doesn't dispute these changes, but he says that we haven't really gone beyond modernity. It's just developed.

So it's inappropriate to call it *postmodernity*. It's just modernity with bells on: late modernity. Giddens is undoubtedly right that postmodernity isn't a completely new era. But most major theorists of postmodernity, such

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as Lyotard, did not actually say that postmodernity replaced, and came after, modernity, anyway.

Nevertheless, the focus on modernity is useful because the most important contrast for Giddens is between pre-modern (traditional) culture and modern (post-traditional) culture. The phenomena that some have dubbed 'postmodern' are, in Giddens's terms, usually just the more extreme instances of a fully developed modernity.

POST-TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

It is important for understanding Giddens to note his interest in the increasingly *post-traditional* nature of society. When tradition dominates, individual actions do not have to be analysed and thought about so much, because choices are already prescribed by the traditions and customs. (Of course, this does not mean that the traditions can never be thought about, or challenged.) In post-traditional times, however, we don't really worry about the precedents set by previous generations, and options are at least as open as the law and public opinion will allow. All questions of how to behave in society then become matters which we have to consider and make decisions about. Society becomes much more *reflexive* and aware of its own precariously constructed state. Giddens is fascinated by the growing amounts of reflexivity in all aspects of society, from formal government at one end of the scale to intimate sexual relationships at the other.

Modernity is post-traditional. A society can't be fully modern if attitudes, actions or institutions are significantly influenced by traditions, because deference to tradition – doing things just because people did them in the past – is the opposite of modern reflexivity. Because of this, Giddens suggests that societies which try to 'modernise' in the most obvious institutional sense – by becoming something like a capitalist democracy – but which do not throw off other traditions, such as gender inequalities, are likely to fail in their attempt to be successful modern societies.

MODERNITY AND THE SELF

In modern societies – by which we mean not 'societies today' but 'societies where modernity is well developed' – self-identity becomes an inescapable issue. Even those who would say that they have never given any thought to questions or anxieties about their own identity will inevitably have been compelled to make significant choices throughout their lives, from everyday questions about clothing, appearance and leisure to high-impact decisions about relationships, beliefs and occupations. Whilst earlier societies with a social order based firmly in *tradition* would provide individuals with (more

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Figure 5.1 Thinking about identities with lifestyle magazines

or less) clearly defined roles, in *post-traditional* societies we have to work out our roles for ourselves. As Giddens (1991:70) puts it:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.

The prominence of these questions of identity in modern society is both a consequence and a cause of changes at the institutional level. Typically, Giddens sees connections between the most ‘micro’ aspects of society – individuals’ internal sense of self and identity – and the big ‘macro’ picture of the state, multinational capitalist corporations and globalisation. These different levels, which have traditionally been treated quite separately by sociology, have influence upon each other, and cannot really be understood in isolation.

Take, for example, the changes in intimate relationships which we have seen in the last 60 years – the much greater levels of divorce and separation as people move from one relationship to another, the substantially increased openness about sexuality and much more conspicuous sexual diversity. These changes cannot be understood by assuming they were led by social institutions and the state, not least of all because conventional thinking on both left and right has been that both capitalism and the ‘moral authorities’ of the state would prefer the population to have stable, monogamous family lives.

But these changes cannot be explained by looking only at the individual level, either: we couldn’t just say that people spontaneously started to change their minds about how to live. A serious explanation must lie somewhere

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within the network of macro and micro forces. The changes in marriage, relationships and visible sexuality are associated with the decline of religion and the rise of rationality – social changes brought about by changes in how individuals view life, which in turn stem from social influences and observations. These developments are also a product of changes in the laws relating to marriage and sexuality (macro); but the demand for these changes came from the level of everyday lives (micro). These, in turn, had been affected by the social movements of women's liberation and egalitarianism (macro); which themselves had grown out of dissatisfactions within everyday life (micro). So change stems from a mesh of micro and macro forces.

The mass media is also likely to influence individuals' perceptions of their relationships. Whether in serious drama, or celebrity gossip, the need for 'good stories' would always support an emphasis on change in relationships. Since almost nobody on TV remains happily married for a lifetime – whether we're talking about fictional characters or real-life public figures – we inevitably receive a message that monogamous heterosexual stability is, at best, a rare 'ideal', which few can expect to achieve. We are encouraged to reflect on our relationships in magazines and self-help books (explicitly), and in movies, comedy and drama (implicitly). The news and factual media inform us about the findings of lifestyle research and actual social changes in family life. This knowledge is then 'reappropriated' by ordinary people, often lending support to non-traditional models of living. Information and ideas from the media do not merely *reflect* the social world, then, but contribute to its shape, and are central to modern reflexivity.

FEATURES OF LATE MODERNITY

- The self is not something we are born with, and it is not fixed.
- Instead, the self is reflexively made – thoughtfully constructed by the individual.
- We all choose a *lifestyle* (even if we wouldn't call it one).
- Relationships are increasingly like the 'pure relationship' of equals, where everything has to be negotiated and there are no external reasons for being together.
- We accept that all knowledge is provisional, and may be proved wrong in the future.
- We need *trust* in everyday life and relationships, or we'd be paralysed by thoughts of unhappy possibilities.
- We accept *risks*, and choose possible future actions by anticipating outcomes. The media adds to our awareness of risks.

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THE REFLEXIVE PROJECT OF THE SELF

If the self is 'made', rather than inherited or just passively static, what form is it in? What is the thing that we make? Giddens says that in the post-traditional order, self-identity becomes a reflexive project – an endeavour that we continuously work and reflect on. We create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives – the story of who we are, and how we came to be where we are now.

Self-identity, then, is not a set of traits or observable characteristics. It is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. Self-identity has continuity – that is, it cannot easily be completely changed at will – but that continuity is only a product of the person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography (Giddens, 1991:53). A stable self-identity is based on an account of a person's life, actions and influences which makes sense to themselves, and which can be explained to other people without much difficulty. It 'explains' the past, and is oriented towards an anticipated future. This narrative can always be gently revised, but an individual who tells conspicuously different versions of their biography to friends may be resented and rejected, and acute *embarrassment* is associated with the revelation that one has provided divergent accounts of past events.

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self.

(Giddens, 1991:54)

A self-identity is not an objective description of what a person is 'like', and we would not expect it to be. Take, for example, a middle-aged man who has recently left his wife and moved in with his new lover, a younger woman. His biography covering these events might say that he was the victim of a failed and ultimately loveless marriage, and that his rational move into this new relationship has brought the happiness which he always sought and, indeed, deserved. His wife's biography, on the other hand, might assert that she did everything she could to make the marriage work, but her pathetic husband was enticed by younger flesh. The younger

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woman's account might view her lover as misunderstood, or exciting, or something else. None of these views is 'correct', of course – they are merely interpretations of a situation. Nevertheless, each person's own view is true as far as they are concerned, and they retain pride in their self-identities.

The ability to maintain a satisfactory story, then, is paramount: to believe in oneself, and command the respect of others, we need a strong narrative which can explain everything that has happened and in which, ideally, we play a heroic role. This narrative, whilst usually built upon a set of real events, needs to be creatively and continuously maintained. Pride and self-esteem, Giddens says, are based on 'confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity' (1991:66). Shame, meanwhile, stems from anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative on which self-identity is based – a fear that one's story isn't really good enough.

This, again, is all very *modern*. Giddens links the rise of the narrative of the self with the emergence of romantic love. Passion and sex have, of course, been around for a very long time, but the discourse of romantic love is said to have developed from the late eighteenth century. 'Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual's life,' Giddens says (1992:39) – a story about two individuals with little connection to wider social processes. He connects this development with the simultaneous emergence of the novel – a relatively early form of mass media, suggesting ideal (or less than ideal) romantic life narratives. These stories did not construct love as a partnership of equals, of course – instead, women were associated with a world of femininity and motherhood which was supposedly unknowable to men. Nevertheless, the female protagonists were usually independent and spirited. The masculine world, meanwhile, was detached from the domestic sphere, both emotionally and physically, and involved a decisive sense of purpose in the outside world.

Whilst passionate affairs might come and go rather unpredictably, the more long-term and future-oriented narrative of romantic love created a 'shared history' which made sense of two lives and gave their relationship an important and recognised role. The rise of this 'mutual narrative biography' led individuals to construct accounts of their lives, so that, even if the relationship with their partner went awry, a story still had to be maintained. And so now the biography of the self has taken on a life of its own, encouraged by a range of narratives suggested by popular media. Feature films, for example, often include the story of two people who are 'destined' to be together – they have found 'the one', and are happily united as the credits roll. Soap operas, on the other hand, almost always feature characters who move from one relationship to another, and sometimes even back again, because of the demands of the continuous serial form. Lifestyle magazines,

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as we will see in Chapters 8 and 9, have yet another vocabulary for relationships, which places a heavy emphasis on sexual fulfilment. These sources suggest a (potentially confusing) mix of ways of considering oneself and one's relationships.

THE REFLEXIVE SELF AND SEXUALITY

Freud famously argued that society sought to repress sexuality. Foucault later suggested that sexuality was not repressed but was more of a social obsession – any efforts to 'repress' sex reflected a fascination with it, and would always create even more awareness and talk about it. (More on this in the next chapter.) But Giddens argues that neither of these views is particularly satisfactory. His own argument is that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sexual behaviour became 'hidden away' not because of prurience, but because it was being connected to the newly emergent sphere of intimate relationships – partnerships characterised by love and trust (which, we are told, were not common features of marriages in earlier times). 'Sexual development and sexual satisfaction henceforth became bound to the reflexive project of the self,' Giddens says (1991:164). This is really a view shared with Foucault, although Giddens's emphasis here is more on the recent development of intimate relationship discourses which are fitted into autobiographical narratives (whereas Foucault's emphasis is more on discourses of the individual sexual body).

With sexuality and sexual identity being regarded, in modern societies, as so central to self-identity, issues in this area take on a profound level of importance. The question of one's sexual orientation, for instance, is of much more fundamental concern to us than taste in music or preference for certain kinds of foods. To have a 'problem' in the sexual department can lead people to declare that they no longer feel like a complete man or woman. This is heightened because sexual feelings are the subject matter of a huge number of songs, films, books, dramas and magazine articles. Other topics of everyday concern, such as food, shopping, pollution, work and illness, do not feature in anything like as many popular media products.

CONSUMERISM AND IDENTITY

Modernity does not, of course, offer up an unendingly diverse set of identities for citizens, newly freed from the chains of tradition, to step into. Many social expectations remain – although these are perhaps the remnants of the traditions which modernity is gradually shrugging off. But in addition, there is *capitalism*. Here, think not of the dirty factories we associate with Marx's

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critique, but of fashion and glamour, must-have toys, blockbusting bands and movies, fine foods and nice houses. As Giddens puts it, 'Modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by the standardising effects of commodity capitalism' (1991:196). The stuff we can buy to 'express' ourselves inevitably has an impact upon the project of the self.

Advertising promotes the idea that products will help us to accent our *individuality*, but of course the market only offers us a certain range of goods. The project of the self is redirected, by the corporate world, into a set of shopping opportunities. Giddens sees this as a corruption of, and a threat to, the true quest for self. At the same time, he notes that people will react *creatively* to commodification – they will not be compelled to accept any particular product in one specific way. Nevertheless, he says that the reflexive project of the self 'is in some part necessarily a struggle against commodified influences' (1991:200), since the identities which are directly 'sold' to us are, by their very nature, similar to the fixed identities of tradition, which the reflexive citizen will question.

LIFESTYLE

Consumerism is one of the clearest ways in which we develop and project a *lifestyle*. Again, this is a feature of the post-traditional era: since social roles are no longer handed to us by society, we have to make choices – although the options are not, of course, unlimited. 'Lifestyle choices' may sound like a luxury of the more affluent classes, but Giddens asserts that everyone in modern society has to select a lifestyle, although different groups will have different possibilities (and wealth would certainly seem to increase the range of options). 'Lifestyle' is not only about fancy jobs and conspicuous consumption, though; the term applies to wider choices, behaviours, and (to greater or lesser degrees) attitudes and beliefs.

Lifestyles could be said to be like ready-made templates for a narrative of self. But the choice of one lifestyle does not predict any particular type of life story. So a lifestyle is more like a *genre*: whilst movie directors can choose to make a romance, or a western, or a horror story, we – as 'directors' of our own life narratives – can choose a metropolitan or a rural lifestyle, a lifestyle focused on success in work, or one centred on clubbing, sport, romance, or sexual conquests. The best-known lifestyle template must be that of the 'yuppie', perhaps because this model emerged in the 1980s as the first radically post-traditional professional identity, based on the individualistic desire to amass personal wealth. This lifestyle stemmed from particular occupations, but also came complete with a handy set of

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accessories by which would-be yuppies could identify themselves: mobile phone, braces and hair gel (for men), and a conspicuous designer wardrobe. Identifiable yuppie apartments made it easy to decide where to live, and yuppie wine bars gave them somewhere to go in the evening. (Yuppies were effectively satirised by Bret Easton Ellis in *American Psycho* (1991) – and by Mary Harron in the film of the novel (2000) – in which the protagonist finds he can get away with satisfying any desire, including killing people, because no one will challenge his smooth designer-label identity.)

Lifestyle choices, then, can give our personal narratives an identifiable shape, linking us to communities of people who are 'like us' – or people who, at least, have made similar choices. The behaviour associated with our chosen lifestyle will likely have practical value in itself, but is also a visible expression of a certain narrative of self-identity.

The choices which we make in modern society may be affected by the weight of tradition on the one hand, and a sense of relative freedom on the other. Everyday choices about what to eat, what to wear, who to socialise with, are all decisions which position ourselves as one kind of person and not another. And as Giddens says, 'The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking' (1991:81).

An identity fitted into a lifestyle is not entirely free-floating. A lifestyle is a rather orderly container for identity, each type coming with certain expectations, so that particular actions would be seen as 'out of character' with it (ibid.: 82). However, an individual might have more than one 'lifestyle', each one reserved for certain audiences. Giddens calls these 'lifestyle sectors' – aspects of lifestyle that go with work, or home, or other relationships.

The importance of the media in propagating many modern lifestyles should be obvious. Whilst some ways of life – rural farming lifestyles, for instance – are not reflected too often on television, and will mostly be passed on by more direct means, ideas about other less traditional ways of life will be disseminated by the media – *alongside* everyday experience, of course. For example:

- A young person interested in dance music and clubbing might 'learn' about this scene first of all from the glossy dance music magazines: then real-life experience might lead this view to be adapted or replaced – but the magazines would still exert an influence over associations of the lifestyle with glamour, or drugs, or whatever.
- A young schoolteacher's idea of what it means to be a teacher will mostly be based on their real-life training, experience and observation – not on something they've seen in some TV drama about teachers.

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Nevertheless, a meaningful part of their ideal notion of what a teacher *could* or *should* be like may be based on 'inspirational' films or dramas about teachers such as *Dead Poets Society* (1989) or *Wonder Boys* (2000).

- People who have moved into a social group which they were previously unfamiliar with – such as a working-class woman who suddenly lands a job on Wall Street – may (initially, at least) try to acquire some of the personal styles, and possessions, which the media typically associates with them.

The range of lifestyles – or lifestyle *ideals* – offered by the media may be limited, but at the same time it is usually broader than those we would expect to just 'bump into' in everyday life. So the media in modernity offers possibilities and celebrates diversity, but also offers narrow interpretations of certain roles or lifestyles – depending where you look.

THE BODY, AGENCY AND IDENTITY

Just as the self has become malleable in late modernity, so too has the body. No longer do we feel that the body is a more or less disappointing 'given' – instead, the body is the outer expression of our self, to be improved and worked upon; the body has, in the words of Giddens, become 'reflexively mobilized' – thrown into the expanding sphere of personal attributes which we are required to think about and control.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) wrote about 'impression management' as the means by which a person may adjust their facial expressions, posture or clothing to suit a particular situation. In every interaction with another person or group, each of us routinely fosters more or less of an illusion (which may or may not reflect how we 'really' feel) designed to give the 'right impression' to our 'audience'. Goffman's argument should apply to human interactions at any point in history – even cavemen must have adjusted their faces and apparel to encourage feelings of affection, admiration, or fear, in those they met.

So in what way is the 'reflexive mobilisation' of the body a new feature of late modernity? Giddens would suggest that it is to do with the ways in which all aspects of the body are now 'up for grabs' to a previously unheard-of extent. At the grandest of extremes, operations can now make people taller, slimmer and bustier. Even sex can be changed. On a more commonplace level, we assume that anyone these days can adopt a regime which will make them look more slim, or athletic, or muscular. Whilst we have to admit that different regimes of the body have existed for thousands

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of years, in different forms, the diversity of the different bodily manipulations available today – and in particular the amount of *thought* we put into these regimes – may be unique. Certainly the level of media coverage of these possibilities, in magazines and guidebooks, must be unprecedented. As we will see in Chapters 9 and 10, almost all lifestyle magazines for both women and men contain advice on how readers can change their appearance so that they can ‘feel good’ personally, and be more attractive to others. There are even popular magazines which have the reconstruction of the body as their primary aim, such as *Celebrity Bodies* (‘You can get one too!’) and *FHM Bionic* (‘We can rebuild you’), as well as the many specialist dieting and fitness titles.

Curiously, Giddens is unhappy with Foucault’s account of the body and how we present ourselves in society. Foucault ‘cannot analyse the relation between body and agency’ – the relationship between our outer display and our inner consciousness – ‘since to all intents and purposes he equates the two’ (Giddens, 1991:57). In other words, since Foucault sees people as all ‘surface’ – with no true ‘inner self’ (that’s nothing but discourse, Foucault suggests, all that talk about your inner self) – he is unable to conceive of an inner consciousness driving the external presentations of self. For Foucault, Giddens complains, ‘the body plus power equals agency. But this idea will not do, and appears unsophisticated when placed alongside the standpoint developed prior to Foucault by Merleau-Ponty, and contemporaneously by Goffman’ (ibid.).

It’s strange that Giddens suggests Goffman is more sophisticated than Foucault, because everybody normally thinks of Foucault as being at the height of sophistication and complexity, whereas Goffman’s theatrical metaphor for everyday life – ‘all the world’s a stage’, basically, with everybody presenting a performance for their various audiences – is simple and almost obvious (which doesn’t mean it’s actually wrong, of course). Foucault’s argument is relatively difficult to pin down, whereas Goffman presents his case clearly and in detail, with lots of well-observed examples. Giddens is unimpressed by the challenging vagueness of Foucault and (refreshingly, perhaps?) plumps for the down-to-earth sociological reportage of Goffman.

The problem with *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, though, is that it is very difficult to see what might lie *behind* all of the displays of self. Apart from the idea of the inner self being basically a cynical actor who wants to get on comfortably with everyone, in any given situation, Goffman doesn’t give us much to go on. One is reminded, again, of Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991), where the narrator, Patrick Bateman, says:

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There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there.* [...] I am a noncontingent human being. [...] But even after admitting this – and I have, countless times, in just about every act I've committed – and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling.

(1991:376–377)

Bateman is troubled by the apparent lack of a coherent 'self' at his core – 'Is evil something you are? Or is it something you do?' he wonders (*ibid.*) – and, like the reader of Goffman, is aware of his own successful performances, but doesn't know where any of them come from. Since Giddens sees people, in a rather 'common sense' way, as thoughtful actors making choices, he is able to skip past this problem.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTIMACY

In the post-traditional society, as mentioned above, relationships are entered into for the mutual satisfaction of emotional needs – unlike in the marriages of traditional cultures, which (we are told) were primarily for economic and symbolic convenience. Even if love was an element of such a marriage, the partnership would not be disbanded just because one or both parties felt that it was not bringing them complete fulfilment. By contrast, post-traditional relationships are consciously constructed, analysed, or broken up, according to how the participants are feeling. This is what Giddens calls *the transformation of intimacy*, in which an intimate, democratic partnership of two equal 'soulmates' becomes important for members of modern society. The traditional idea of 'marriage for life' is here replaced with the 'pure relationship', in which communication between equal partners (of whatever sex) ensures the couple are always oriented towards mutual satisfaction. The pure relationship is typical of reflexive modernity, where people's actions are oriented towards the achievement of personal satisfaction. Lest this seem extreme, Giddens admits (1998:124) that the pure relationship is an 'ideal type', and that in real life today there is still a strong pull of tradition, as well as a consideration for the feelings of others.

Giddens is interested in sexuality and intimacy *within* – importantly – the contexts of modern everyday life. He criticises Foucault, for example, for

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putting too much emphasis on sexuality, while failing to come up with adequate accounts of gender, romantic love and the family (Giddens, 1992:24), all of which are linked with sexuality in different ways. He also suggests that Foucault isn't that great on sexuality either. The Frenchman's account doesn't really explain the explosion in sexual awareness within the past century, for example: how did we get from the dry texts written and studied by a small number of male doctors at the start of the twentieth century, to the mass appeal of sizzling sex specials in popular magazines at the start of the twenty-first? Giddens, in typically sensible and sociological mode, points to the arrival of effective contraception as an important turning-point: once sex was separated from reproduction, sexual pleasure and variety could come to the fore. Reliable birth control paved the way for the 'sexual revolution', women's liberation and the emergence of 'plastic sexuality' – sexuality you can play with.

Whilst contraception (in the days before AIDS) had a direct impact on heterosexual sex, it had a knock-on effect on homosexual lives and sexuality generally, as the idea of sexual pleasure in society became more open and less riddled with anxiety. Furthermore, although in traditional societies the important function of reproduction was necessarily focused on heterosexual couples, in more modern times, once reproduction had come under human control, heterosexuality lost its primacy. This, Giddens suggests, is part of the long march of modernity; more and more areas of life come under social control, and so choice and diversity may prosper. (This may be optimistic, and Giddens admits that a point of blithe sexual diversity has not yet been reached – lesbians and gay men still face prejudice, abuse and violence, generally from those people we rightly call 'unreconstructed'.)

The media has continually reflected – and may have partly led – the changing status of different sexual activities, attitudes and sexualities, spreading awareness of different expectations and the existence of diversity. The private world of sex, however hidden or visible it had been at different points in the past, has certainly been thrown into the popular public domain in the past two or three decades, by the mass media, in a way which is quite unprecedented. Formal studies of the changing face of sexuality, alongside the representations of sexuality in films, magazines, news reports, pop videos, soap operas, and so on, all form part of what Giddens calls the *institutional reflexivity* regarding sex – society talking to itself about sexuality. This greater openness about sex has meant that there is a greater awareness of sexual skills, techniques and possibilities; and as examples of 'good sex' and 'bad sex' become more conspicuous, so sexual performance becomes more central to relationships overall, and a factor in whether they thrive or fail. Consequently, magazines, books and TV shows contain more sex

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