
Identity without Selfhood proposes an original conception of identity and subjectivity in the context of recent post-structuralist and queer debates. The author argues that efforts to analyse and even 'deconstruct' identity and selfhood still rely on certain core Western techniques of identity such as individuality, boundedness, autonomy, self-realisation and narrative. In a detailed study of biographical, media and academic representations of Simone de Beauvoir, Mariam Fraser illustrates that bisexuality, by contrast, is discursively produced as an identity which exceeds the confines of the self and especially the individuality ascribed to de Beauvoir. In the course of this analysis, she draws attention to the high costs incurred by processes of subjectification. It is in the light of these costs that, while drawing substantially on, and expanding, Foucault's notion of techniques of the self, the argument presented in the book also offers a critique of Foucault's work from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective.

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Identity without Selfhood

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Mariam Fraser



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Dedicated, in loving memory, to J.H.T.F.

*The room fills with a twilight of words
Strung with violet light*

I have my identity and I have my sex: I am not new yet.

Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam to Identity*

Our only chance is to explore the idea of resisting the self ...

Roy Boyne, 'War and Desire'

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page x</i>
Introduction	1
1 Identity and selfhood	4
2 Identity and embodiment	25
3 Telling tales	47
4 Preclusion	79
5 Displacement	102
6 Erasure	124
7 Lose your face	141
Conclusion	164
<i>Notes</i>	171
<i>References</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	210

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Identity and selfhood

It is not unusual in much contemporary, and particularly post-structuralist, social and cultural theory to preface any analysis of 'identity' or 'subjectivity' with the caveat that these are subject positions without essence and, to a greater or lesser extent, to assert that selfhood itself is socially and/or discursively constructed. These claims, which might loosely be situated under the umbrella of 'deconstruction', have been of special interest to those who seek to politicise the self and, in so doing, to expose the naturalised and universalistic notion of the self for what it is.¹ Feminists such as Rosi Braidotti, for instance, argue that it is precisely because 'systems of knowledge and scientific discourse at large' (Braidotti 1994: 152) conflate the specifically White masculine point of view with the generally human standpoint, that a history of Western feminism from Simone de Beauvoir's work in the 1950s through to 1990s feminist post-structuralist theory, has constantly questioned, revised and produced concepts of identity and difference.²

While the move away from a notion of identity as fixed and immutable has been welcomed, particularly because it calls attention to differences within and among 'women', it has nevertheless produced its own share of tensions. Feminists have shown that there is much pleasure to be had in 'having' an identity, and that sometimes having an identity, or passing as a particular identity, is not a question of pleasures, but of life and death (Phelan 1993). Patricia Waugh (1992) notes that the deconstruction of concepts such as identity, history and agency is itself a privilege; they must exist before they can be dismantled. While broadly in favour of the destabilisation of identity, Braidotti herself has also noted that: 'contemporary philosophical discussions on the death of the knowing subject . . . have the immediate effect of concealing and undermining the attempts of women to find a theoretical voice of their own . . . in order to deconstruct the subject

one must first have gained the right to speak as one' (Braidotti quoted in Benhabib 1995a: 32). Waugh and Seyla Benhabib also point out that post-modern theories are themselves not free of the 'patriarchal metanarratives' (Waugh 1992: 199) which they seek to deconstruct: 'it [should] be important to note right at the outset that much of the post-modernist critique of Western metaphysics itself proceeds under the spell of a metanarrative, namely . . . that "Western metaphysics has been under the spell of the 'metaphysics of presence' at least since Plato . . ."' (Benhabib 1995a: 24). Nevertheless, the problems with, and within, these theories might not necessarily have a bearing on the question of whether feminism should or should not build alliances in this area. Alice Jardine for example, argues that it would be a 'fatal mistake' (Jardine 1985: 257) to dismiss modernity entirely since it offers a number of theoretical concepts which may be useful to feminist theories and practices. Elizabeth Grosz too, suggests that feminists should acknowledge rather than disavow 'patriarchal frameworks, methods, and presumptions' and, further, that it is the '*immersion* [of feminism] in patriarchal practices (including those surrounding the production of theory) [which] is the condition of its effective critique of and movement beyond them' (Grosz 1995: 57).

The 'deconstruction' of identity then, raises a number of issues for feminists and has forced further reflection on the concept of 'feminism' itself, as well as on the category 'women' which is usually assumed to be its foundation. For example: although the act of deconstruction – and especially the deconstruction of the notion of an 'essence' of identity – has been acknowledged to have 'radical' implications (not least because it reveals that processes of knowledge production, and knowledges themselves, are not neutral), it is also the case that identity and selfhood remain the privileged terrain from which a politics can be articulated (such as the identity 'woman', for example, in feminist politics).³ In response to this paradox, Gayatri Spivak has suggested that although 'it is absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism . . . strategically we cannot' (Spivak 1984/5: 184). And indeed, the value of strategic essentialism was recently illustrated when a number of anti-gay politicians and activists in America revealed themselves to be eager to situate homosexual identities in the arena of voluntary choice rather than biological essence:

The response of antigay politicians and activists to the recent wave of biological reports on sexual orientation has been a uniform 'It ain't so!' When former Vice President Dan Quayle was asked in 1992 about the brain and genetic studies, he said 'My viewpoint is that it's more of a choice than a biological situation . . . it is a wrong choice.'

(LeVay 1996: 249)

If homosexuality is a choice, rather than an inherent essence, then it may also be figured as a 'wrong' choice (as Dan Quayle puts it). A further implication here is that, *as a choice* (rather than a biological or genetic attribute), homosexuality may be 'unchosen'. Biological essentialism – and the assertion of an identity which cannot be wilfully 'detached' from the self – may therefore be used to shield lesbians, gays and bisexuals from the wave of anti-gay discrimination. As culture and choice are themselves deployed as essences, biology and genetics are transformed from that which oppresses to that which can protect homosexuals.⁴

It is in the face of such stark and reductive dismissals of identity once its 'essence' – whatever form that essence might take⁵ – has been disputed, and in an attempt to maintain *both* an anti-humanist position *and* some working notion of 'identity', that some feminist theorists have turned their attention to Michel Foucault's work. In the short but important article 'What is enlightenment?' (Foucault 1991a), Foucault outlines the reasons for his rejection of humanism and situates his own work against it. Although arguing that 'not . . . everything that has ever been linked with humanism is to be rejected' (Foucault 1991a: 44), he is critical of the way that humanism, leaning 'on certain conceptions of man' (1991a: 44) – such as the conception that human consciousness is 'the original subject of all historical development' (Foucault quoted in Deleuze 1988: 21) – subsequently colours and justifies these assumptions 'to which it is, after all, obliged to take recourse' (ibid.). Nevertheless, while Foucault argues that the subject cannot be understood to be the originary source of discourse, this stance does not lead him to dispense entirely with an analysis of identity and selfhood. On the contrary, in what has become known as his genealogical phase (Foucault 1991b), he addresses the production of subjectivity and argues that discourse is constitutive not only of statements but of the subject itself, as both the target and object of power. In other words, the speaking subject, as a discursive site, is implicated in the very same power relationships that allow the theoretical text to function.

It is this redefinition of discourse, where discourse constitutes the bridge between the material and the theoretical (Braidotti 1991: 78–9, 88–9), which has been one of the most productive and significant features of Foucault's work in the context of post-structuralist feminist theory. For this reason, it is worth considering it in more detail.

Foucault's neo-materialism

The shift from the textual to the material corporeality of the subject, Deleuze argues, begins when Foucault focuses his attention not just on 'the

primacy of the statement in knowledge' (Deleuze 1988: 33), as in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1992a), but also on 'the form of the visible, as opposed to the form of whatever can be articulated' (Deleuze 1988: 32).⁶ In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1979b) for example, the penal code is understood as that which *articulates* criminality, while the prison itself makes the criminal *visible* and itself constitutes a visibility, the Panopticon: 'a visual assemblage and a luminous environment' (Deleuze 1988: 32). Hence the visible, a further dimension of discourse, does not refer simply to what is, literally, 'seeable' (such as the material form of the prison or empirical bodies), but is also productive of what we are and are not able to visualize: 'For example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century masses and populations become visible, and emerge into the light of day' (ibid.). In this respect, unformed matter is formed into substances, which 'are revealed by visibility' (Deleuze 1988: 77).

According to Deleuze then, *Discipline and Punish* marks a turning point after which the visible and articulable are linked – by knowledge as well as by power, which are themselves bound to each other. Knowledge does not appear where power relations are suspended; rather, all knowledge expresses or implies a power relation. Because power has no essence (no independent form or content), its domain is strategic: power is a *strategy*, or non-formalised relation, whose effects are attributed 'to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings' (Foucault quoted in Deleuze 1988: 25). While the domain of power is *strategic*, that of knowledge, by contrast, is *stratic* (Deleuze 1988: 112). Knowledge arranges, regulates and normativises. Concerned with forms, it forms substances (formed matter, which is revealed by visibilities) and formalises functions (which are revealed by statements).

Foucault develops the notion of a 'diagram' which is 'a display of the relations between forces which constitute power' (Deleuze 1988: 36). Two forms of regulation, description-scenes and statement-curves (which correspond to two systems: that of light and that of language, visibles and articulables), realise the diagram of forces. Thus:

The *diagram* is no longer an auditory or visual archive but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field . . . It is a machine that is almost blind and mute, even though it makes others see and speak. (Deleuze 1988: 34)

It is the very blindness and muteness of power, and that it does not 'reveal' anything of itself (any hidden depth or meaning), which incites *us* to see and to speak.⁷ This is because in itself power is only 'virtual, potential, unstable' (Deleuze 1988: 37); it is affirmed, realised, or 'integrated' (ibid.) only when it is carried out. And conversely: 'Seeing and Speaking are

always already completely caught up with power relations which they pre-suppose and actualise' (Deleuze 1988: 82). Power is therefore productive before it is repressive, it may incite, induce, seduce and provoke:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1991c: 61)

Foucault's redefinition of power as productive, as a microphysics which informs the whole social field, coupled with his emphasis on the way that knowledge forms substances as well as formalises functions, lends what Braidotti calls a 'neo-materialis[t]' (Braidotti 1991: 265) aspect to his work: 'materialism [is redefined] in such a way as to include the bodily materiality of the subject' (Braidotti 1991: 89). The term *assujettissement* describes subjectification as both an active (subject of) and passive (subjected to) process connected to power and knowledge through discourse. The definition of truth too, is extended. Not only a system which produces and regulates statements, truth is now inextricably linked to power: "'Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A "regime" of truth' (Foucault 1991c: 74).

This redefinition of discourse enables Foucault to consider the material effects of processes of subjectification while at the same time, because the subject is understood to be produced through a matrix of power relations, displaces the concept of an essential and transcendent self, a humanist self which 'runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history' (Foucault 1991c: 59). From now on, the self is perceived to be the site of an historical problem where even the question 'What kinds of human beings have we become?' (N. Rose 1996: 294) represents a historically and culturally specific project. Lois McNay suggests that in the final phase of Foucault's work: 'Established patterns of individualization are rejected through the interrogation of what are held to be universal, necessary forms of identity in order to show the place that the contingent and the historically specific occupy within them' (McNay 1994: 145).

It is this focus on the self and particularly processes of individualisation, without recourse to humanism, which enables Foucault, as Elspeth Probyn argues, to develop 'a mode of theory that is not organized around individuals but that with force offers us a space where we can take seriously how we are individuated' (Probyn 1993: 136). Thus for example, Foucault reveals that the author appears in discourse at a 'privileged moment of

individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences' (Foucault 1991d: 101). This means not that an act of volition on the part of the individual produces that individual as an author, but rather that the subject position 'Author' contributes to the production of individuality (see chapter 3 especially). As Rosalyn Diprose says, 'the operation of power is ahead of conscious intervention' (Diprose 1994: 29). Hence even if the individual were to attempt to overturn the 'traditional image' (Foucault 1981: 59) of the author, by setting out, for example, 'to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is prowling', it would still be from 'some new author-position' that this 'trembling outline' (ibid.) would be cut. Critiquing reflective Cartesian consciousness, Foucault displaces the centrality of the self in favour of 'a process of knowledge production where . . . the code precedes and is independent of the message' (Braidotti 1991: 89).

That power relations can penetrate the body without first having been mediated by consciousness indicates that Foucault's analysis of subjectivity extends further than the analysis of the stratic or formalised relations of knowledge and the relations between forces (power). Foucault identifies a third axis, 'the axis of ethics' (Foucault 1991a: 48), which is folded force and which constitutes subjectivity:

What I want to show is how power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representation. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first been interiorized in people's consciousness. (Foucault 1980b: 186)

Whereas in his earlier works Foucault defined the subject as derivative of the statement, in his later work the 'interiority' of the subject, and indeed the subject itself, is understood as an in-folding of the outside or the folded inside of the outside. The fold, therefore, is not something other than the outside, nor does it reflect the outside. Instead, it is 'precisely the inside of the outside' (Deleuze 1988: 97), a 'doubling' movement whereby the fold relates 'back to itself' and in this folding back, a relation to the self emerges ('subjectivation'). In other words, subjectification is *constitutive of interiority*. Deleuze writes:

This is what the Greeks did: they folded force, even though it still remained in force. They made it relate back to itself. Far from ignoring interiority, individuality or subjectivity they invented the subject, but only as a derivative or the product of a 'subjectivation'. (Deleuze 1988: 101)

How did the Greeks do this, what Deleuze calls 'subjectivation'? In his analysis of Greco-Roman philosophy in the first two centuries AD, of

Christian spirituality and of the monastic principles developed in the fourth and fifth centuries of the late Roman Empire (Foucault 1988b), Foucault demonstrates: ‘the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed’ (Foucault quoted in Probyn 1993: 122). In other words, Foucault makes explicit the way that the self under examination is itself the *result* of the processes which attempt to explore and/or describe it. Confession is no longer the only instrument which produces truth (as implied in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*);⁸ Foucault turns his attention to the *variety* of techniques which enable individuals to affect ‘their own bodies, their own souls, their own thought, their own conduct’ (Foucault quoted in Probyn 1993: 120). Hence subjects not only perform operations on their own bodies and thoughts, but also, in so doing, transform and modify themselves. I will outline some of these operations briefly, since the implications *for* the self, of techniques – such as self-reflection, writing and confession – *of* the self, will be examined throughout this book.

Greco-Roman and early Christian techniques of the self

In Greek and Roman texts the injunction to care for the self is ‘a *real activity* and not just an attitude’ (Foucault 1988b: 24. My emphasis.). The Greeks developed a ‘mirror relation’ (Foucault 1988b: 31) to the soul, believing that the truth lay within it, while the Stoics subjectified truth through a mnemotechnical formula: they memorised their teachers’ statements and converted them into rules of conduct. The constant writing activity undertaken during this period served to intensify and widen the experience of the self. Foucault argues therefore, that writing about the self was an established practice long before either the Reformation or romanticism.

Although the method through which the Stoics subjectified truth was different to that of the Greeks, for them too, these practices constituted a permanent principle of action, which were, additionally, subject to examination: ‘Is this truth assimilated enough to become ethics so that we can behave as we must when an event presents itself?’ (Foucault 1988b: 36). Notably, in what Foucault describes as a ‘pre-Freudian machine of censorship’ (Foucault 1988b: 38), the self was to watch over and weigh up its own representations of its thoughts in order that they may be controlled. In a similar vein, monastic techniques of the self required the self to scrutinise its thoughts continually (in order that they might always be directed toward God) and, in order to purify them, to continually verbalise them to a higher authority: ‘scrutiny is based on the idea of a secret concupiscence. [. . .] It

implies that there is something hidden in ourselves and that we are always in a self-illusion which hides the secret' (Foucault 1988b: 46). Hence confession becomes a mark of truth (Foucault 1988b: 48).

While Stoic care of the self was a private matter, for the Christian it was a public event: one was obliged to disclose one's faults, temptations and desires 'either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself' (Foucault 1988b: 40). Penitential behaviour included not only self-recognition and self-revelation but also self-punishment: 'To prove suffering, to show shame, to make visible humility and exhibit modesty – these are the main features of punishment' (Foucault 1988b: 42). Two paradoxes emerge: firstly, renunciation of the self was possible only through a knowledge of the self and secondly, confession, while necessary in order to rub out sin, simultaneously exposed 'the true sinful being of the sinner' (ibid.). The point of confession therefore, was to break with one's past identity and impose the truth through violent rupture and dissociation: 'Self-revelation is at the same time self-destruction' (Foucault 1988b: 43). Foucault argues however, that a 'decisive break' (a discontinuity)⁹ occurs in the eighteenth century, after which time techniques of the self no longer require a renunciation of the self, but are instead employed to 'constitute, positively, a new self' (Foucault 1988b: 49).

Not only did the Greeks invent the relation to the self, they also linked this relation to oneself to sexuality (Deleuze 1988: 102). Indeed, it is the concentration of normative knowledge around sexuality that indicates that it is an especially dense transfer point of power. Sexuality gives rise to 'scientia sexualis' and all the concomitant processes of individuation (for example, the identification of the homosexual as a species) and also ties the subject 'to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Deleuze 1988: 103).¹⁰ Hence while Foucault does not identify sexuality *itself* as a technique of the self (I will return to this point below), he does suggest that, in the modern age, the processes of subjectification, and especially individuation, that take place in the search for the 'truth' of the self are often anchored around the search for the truth of sexuality:

Between each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness . . . A double petition, in that we are compelled to know how things are with it, while it is suspected of knowing how things are with us. (Foucault 1990a: 77–8)

What is significant here, and central to the thesis developed throughout this book, is Foucault's emphasis on the way that sexuality and selfhood are understood to be entangled in each other. The 'double petition' to which he

refers implies that sexual identities, in the modern era, are bound to the self, a self which is (principally) intelligible precisely because it is both possessed of, and possessed by, sexuality.

Bisexuality

I want to pause here, briefly, to illustrate the ways in which the constitution of selfhood and processes of individualisation, in contemporary Western societies, may be closely tied to sexuality – and specifically, in the following examples, to bisexuality. I choose to focus on bisexual identities firstly because, although I will be questioning the assumed relation between (bi)sexuality and selfhood throughout this book, it should nevertheless be acknowledged, at the outset, that individuals who identify, and are identified as, ‘bisexual’, can and do ‘exist’. And secondly, it is largely because this existence has only very recently been acknowledged, celebrated, and also criticised, that bisexuality is particularly interesting, and yields itself to rich analysis (as much of the current literature on the subject indicates). In a paper given at a recent seminar series, Merl Storr reminded her audience that it was, as far as she could remember, only in 1992 that the first academic conference in the United Kingdom included the word ‘bisexual’ in its subtitle. At that conference however, bisexuals found themselves:

having to defend not just the viability of bisexual politics or theory but the very existence of bisexuality as an adult sexual orientation: ‘bisexuality just *isn't* a sexual orientation’, Elizabeth Wilson blithely informed one bisexual woman who challenged her from the floor. (Storr 1997a: 2. See also Hemmings 1993)

By contrast, today, judging by the numerous publications on bisexuality (see Hemmings 1997, Morris and Storr 1997 and Storr 1997a for summaries of this literature) – and especially Marjorie Garber’s massive tome *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (1996) – the ‘existence’ of bisexuality as a ‘viable’ sexual orientation, whether sympathetically received or not, is largely accepted.

So what might the ‘truth’, as Foucault puts it, of bisexuality be? Some researchers have implied that it is a ‘riddle’ (Weinberg, Williams and Pryor 1994: 4) (which presumably requires solving). Although this position suggests an ignorance of bisexuality, or even ignorances, given that knowledge and power are conjoined in discourse, no knowledge of bisexuality can be ‘pure’ or ‘free’ from the power/knowledge relations that produce it.¹¹ Indeed, Eve Sedgwick contends that ‘far from being pieces of the originary dark, [ignorances] are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth’ (Sedgwick 1994:

25). To suggest that bisexuality is a riddle then, is not to place it beyond knowledges of sexuality nor is solving the riddle of bisexuality beyond the fecund propagation of truths. Indeed, the notion of bisexuality as *the* riddle might be no more than another exploitation of *the* secret which must be spoken of *ad infinitum* (Foucault 1990a: 35).

Given the riddled status of bisexuality, it is tempting to invoke a conspiracy of oppression *par excellence*, tempting to try to 'liberate' bisexuality from veils of misrepresentation, misrecognition or 'misinformation' (Blasingame 1992: 49) and to 'expose' its hidden truth. Various examples of this sentiment are manifest in literature on bisexuality (Hutchins and Kaahumanu 1991; Weise 1992; Eadie 1993). Here, the constituted (bisexual) self is a given, even if it is presently invisible: 'invisibility is, for the present, how we [bisexuals] experience oppression' (Baker 1992: 266). This central presupposition – that the bisexual self, although invisible, objectively 'exists' – forces the question as to how such oppression has come about. A narrative subsequently emerges, wherein bisexuality's apparently singular and unique history (Baker 1992: 265) is perceived to offer a radical and emancipatory potential which other sexuality identities, including queer, do not: 'Bisexuality alone calls these assumptions ["the dichotomization between politics and desire"] into question' (Weise 1992: xi); the 'bisexual community would pose a significant and unique challenge to the dual gender system and the limitations inherent in compulsory heteromonosexuality' (Baker 1992: 266); 'The queer community was established on a set of norms of what constituted queer . . . If we only replicate the system that has oppressed us, then are we as progressive as we would like to think we are?' (Blasingame 1992: 49).

These perspectives suggest that, although the self-identified bisexual, or bisexuality, stands in an isolated, and even lonely, position with respect to lesbian, gay and queer theory and politics, it is precisely this distance which has enabled it to maintain an autonomy from the tarnishing processes, authorities and legitimisations which enable 'other' identities to be adopted. This is an approach to bisexuality which implicitly relies on a narrativisation of being: the (bisexual) self is understood to run continuously throughout history, while a 'core', very often perceived to be individuality, remains 'static' even though external events change, and even if external events act 'on' the self in some way.¹² Inevitably bringing contemporary presuppositions about the self to its analysis, the existence of the bisexual subject is assumed, whereafter the theory seeks 'to recreate the conditions that have made its existence possible' (Simondon 1992: 297).

Rather than try to understand what the (bisexual) self 'is' or how it came to be what it 'is' through time, an alternative trajectory will be fashioned

here which seeks to understand the ‘*a priori* of our existence as subjects’ (N. Rose 1992: 161). Beginning from the Foucauldian premise that it is the processes of subjectification (the processes by which force is folded), rather than the subject itself, which has a history, I will be taking the self to be no more (or even, no less) than an aggregate of the very techniques which seek to describe it.¹³ No form of bisexuality therefore, can be understood in isolation from the techniques which constitute selfhood; bisexuality is not ‘free’ from the authorisations and legitimisations which enable identities to be claimed. Indeed, the very ability to lay claim to the identity ‘bisexual’ suggests that bisexuality is entangled in processes of subjectification. As Foucault writes in *The Use of Pleasure*, his analysis ‘of desiring man is situated at the point where an archaeology [*sic*] of problematizations and a genealogy of practices of the self intersect’ (Foucault 1992b: 13). Thus both knowledge (problematizations) and experience (practices) of the self, as well as the knowledge and experience that forms a relationship between the two, are inculcated, organised and acted upon by the self itself. And because problematisations and practices of the self fold force – and this is why Foucault’s description of the fold is particularly important in the context of this book – they are themselves *productive of* selfhood.

This production of selfhood is especially evident in some of the late 1980s and early 1990s literature on bisexuality. Many of the articles in anthologies such as *Bi Any Other Name* (Hutchins and Kaahumanu 1991) and *Closer to Home* (Weise 1992) are, as partial or full confessions, constitutive of a subject who declares the truth of the self. In the following extract for example, a number of techniques of the self, some of which are described by Foucault (see above), are deployed by the individual in order to construct the self as ‘bisexual’:

It was not easy for any of us. My wife and I went through many traumas and sleepless nights coming to terms with my bisexuality. I experienced feelings of guilt and other emotional issues . . . For a long time I was unfulfilled in my bisexuality. One day I decided to change all that. I contacted the local gay and lesbian newsletter, and with their encouragement, wrote an article about my bisexuality. I received over sixty supportive, affirmative letters and phone calls . . . Today . . . I have a relationship with a bisexual man who is supportive of my chosen lifestyle. He and my wife are friends. I feel freed of my own bondage and this has freed me creatively. I am writing more and more, and with greater clarity . . . I now wear my bisexuality as a badge of honor and no longer carry it as a liability . . . I believe that it is time to become more visible, to have a group identity and pride. (Brewer 1991: 142–3)

Here, guilt and remorse are relieved, as in the early Christian techniques of the self, through public confession. This confession does not contribute to

the renunciation of the self however, but rather serves to 'constitute, positively, a new self' (Foucault 1988b: 49), and marks a transition from shame to 'pride'. Another key feature which enables this shift is the empathy and mutual recognition of others which contributes not just to the identification of one bisexual identity, but to the production of a 'bisexual community', a community which demands recognition and visibility. The 'freedom' that confession occasions is perceived to bring with it still more 'freedom' (for the author of the extract) to magnify the self through writing (a well-documented technique of the self). The confession itself is a narrative which brings all these techniques together to produce a 'bisexual' self.

This extract is indicative of *only a tendency* in the literature on bisexuality. Nevertheless, the tendency to claim bisexuality as a 'legitimate', if not 'authentic', subject position is a potent one, and one which I would argue sets limits for bisexuality. While the extract clearly illustrates Nikolas Rose's claim that 'in making our subjectivity the principle of our personal lives, our ethical systems, and our political evaluations, [we believe] that we are, freely, choosing our freedom' (N. Rose 1989: 11), at the same time, the *costs* of the 'freedom' to 'be' bisexual are also clear. *Assujettissement* (whereby the self is actively subject of and passively subjected to regimes of power/knowledge) serves only to bind the self all the more tightly into discursive networks of knowledge and power. Processes of stratification – where, endowed with an origin, interiority and depth, a subject is produced through the positions made available by discourse – give rise to what Deleuze would call 'molar' entities, entities whose forces are congealed into binary oppositions, such as those of men and women or homosexual and heterosexual. For Deleuze and Guattari: 'Bisexuality is no better a concept than the separateness of the sexes. It is as deplorable to miniaturize, internalize the binary machine as it is to exacerbate it; it does not extricate us from it' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 276). Deleuze and Guattari appear to confine bisexuality to androgyny and then suggest that it holds within it the two molar entities of male and female.¹⁴ Although the author of the above extract is not referring to bisexuality-as-androgyny, it is arguable that the account nevertheless sediments desire into an identity which binds and folds force to produce the 'bisexual' subject and the interiority conferred on it.¹⁵

Jonathon Dollimore – considering the often hostile responses from parts of the lesbian and gay community to those who would call themselves bisexual – describes the 'psychic, social and political investments' (Dollimore 1996: 524) that impel the consolidation of identities (a consolidation that may be as compelling, as the above extract illustrates, for bisexuals as for lesbians and gay men):

identity politics are often most invested when the fortunes of a minority have improved, but not securely; in some cases identity remains precariously dependent upon that improvement, and in a context where hostility not only remains, but has actually intensified, in part as a response to the increased social visibility which the emerging identity entails.¹⁶ Identity politics are inseparable from a consolidation of this ground recently gained and precariously held. Such consolidation is inevitably also a struggle for survival, which includes a struggle for the means of continuing visibility. (Dollimore 1996: 524)

It may be the privileging of identity in relation to other sexual identifications that makes the move to claim an 'authentic' bisexual identity especially attractive. Nevertheless, bisexual theory and politics has gone through, and continues to go through, a considerable number of twists and turns. Morris and Storr point out that debates around bisexuality are no longer concerned primarily with 'speak[ing] out' (Morris and Storr 1997: 1), but are also characterised by a variety of features which include a valorisation of 'fluidity' and a desire to interrogate some of the problems invoked by bisexuality in the very moments that it appears to be most radical. Thus while it should be acknowledged that confessional 'personal stories' – the title of the second section of *Bisexual Horizons* (Rose and Stevens 1996) – still have a highly visible (and understandably significant) place in the literature, it is also the case that recent theoretical interventions seek to destabilise some of the assumptions on which Western selfhood rests in elegant and sophisticated ways. Maria Pramaggiore's and Donald Hall's (1996) introductions to the edited collection *Representing Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, for example, deploy the very term which is frequently used to berate bisexuality and bisexuals as a trope through which to question the relations between gender, sexuality, sexual objects and desire:

Fence-sitting – an epithet predicated on the presumption of the superiority of a temporally based single sexual partnership – is a practice that refuses the restrictive formulas that define gender according to binary categories, that associate one gender or one sexuality with a singularly gendered object choice, and that equate sexual practices with a sexual identity. (Pramaggiore 1996: 3)

The productive force of an 'epistemology of the fence' (D. Hall 1996: 11) is explored in various guises throughout the collection. Many of these essays trace not what bisexuality 'is' (they are not concerned with a narrativisation of being), but the effects of the term within discourse: what does (and what can) bisexuality (be made to) 'do'? Similarly, the introduction to the Bi Academic Intervention's (BAI) (1997) collection *The Bisexual Imaginary: Bisexuality and Representation* explicitly draws attention to, and theorises,

the specifically *ironic* use of 'derogatory' terms, such as 'fence-sitting', in recent bisexual theory and activism. Irony, they argue, 'is a particular – though by no means exclusive – bisexual approach to representation' (BAI 1997: 10), enabling well-worn sexual tropes to be recycled and regenerated for a bisexual culture which suffers from a poverty of images. The San Francisco bisexual magazine *Anything That Moves* for example:

plays on both biphobic and bi-positive discourses. Here bisexuals are able to take a common insult and make it 'mean' differently: it's a joke, pleasurable and playful for many bisexuals, but open to abuse, misunderstanding or even incomprehension from outside. (ibid.)

Significantly, the use of irony offers a path to negotiating *both* the impulse to claim an authentic identity *and* to deconstruct the very concepts of authenticity and identity. 'Ironic authenticity' thus represents something of a signature tune for bisexuality as it struggles to find a place on the broader map of contemporary sexualities: 'such an identity is "on the edge" of authenticity and artificiality . . . The bisexual imaginary is both iconic (setting up an image) and ironic (destabilizing that image), without ever having to choose between the two' (BAI 1997: 11). As in Pramaggiore's and Hall's book, this collection is characterised by a focus on the discursive efficacy of 'bisexuality' – in genealogy (Storr (1997b) argues that the term 'bi-sexuality', in Havelock Ellis's and Richard Von Krafft-Ebing's work, illustrates the mutually constitutive role of sex and 'race'), in literature (see for example Ann Kaloski (1997) on the position of bisexuality in Nancy Toder's *Choices*) and in visual culture (Jo Eadie (1997), for instance, demonstrates how bisexual characters, in two contemporary films, 'carry' anxiety).

Although Dollimore does not direct his criticisms of bisexual 'post-modern' theorising (what he calls 'wishful theory') at the collections that I have mentioned here, he might nevertheless claim of these too, that they posit bisexuality as '[u]nstable, yes, but not in a self-threatening way: this is a liberating, dynamic state of unfixity, and one which seems oddly secure in its very instability' (Dollimore 1996: 526). There is some truth in this insofar as bisexuality, while frequently perceived as a bug that disrupts various dualisms, is often (although not always) considered to be an identity tied to a self (a self which is produced, in large part, through the very identity which is apparently disruptive). However, this is not Dollimore's concern. Instead, he 'warns' that:

when identity is destabilized by desire we should not underestimate the potential cost. It is then that we can become flooded by apprehensions of loss endemic to our culture and which it is partly the purpose of identity politics to protect us against.

In this sense too, identity can be as much about surviving, even evading desire, as about expressing it. (Dollimore 1996: 531)

Dollimore urges 'us' not to underestimate the cost of the loss of identity. But perhaps it is the very high costs of identification itself which are themselves underestimated. Nikolas Rose suggests that in contemporary modern Western society: 'we are *condemned* to make a project out of our identity' (N. Rose 1992: 153. My emphasis.). While this may sound like a reincarnation of the existential 'burden' of freedom, Rose is in fact arguing, like Foucault, that although 'the great promise or the great hope of the eighteenth century . . . lay in the simultaneous and proportionate growth of individuals with respect to one another' (Foucault 1991a: 47), the concomitant growth in 'the acquisition of capabilities and the struggle for freedom' (Foucault 1991a: 47–8) has in many instances been matched by an intensification of disciplinary knowledge and power. This point is not necessarily best illustrated through an analysis of texts which are directly concerned with the issue of sexuality (*especially* if they claim that (bi)sexuality destabilises the self), but of those which implicitly – and sometimes (although rarely) explicitly – engage with the production of intelligible and plausible selfhood. It is here that high costs of subjectification are made clear.

Simone de Beauvoir

I have argued that (sexual) identities do not emerge in isolation (in and of themselves), but are rather produced in conjunction with a variety of cultural formations which are linked to the self. While different practices enjoin the self to develop a different relation to her or himself, these practices 'are neither merely *different versions* of a self, nor do they *sum into* a self' (N. Rose 1997: 136). Thus 'individuality', 'subjectivity', 'identity' (and even materiality, as the following chapter will show) are all understood to be contingent techniques of the self none of which either work in identical ways or make up the totality of the self under study. Individuality in particular, and the concomitant processes of individualisation, are key practices whose longstanding endurance has been documented by a variety of theorists (including Michel Foucault, Nikolas Rose, Zygmunt Bauman, and feminists, such as Sandra Bartky, Celia Lury and Elspeth Probyn). It is because of this emphasis on the individual in discourses of selfhood and sexuality that it is appropriate to consider not the assumed or taken-for-granted individuality of the (bisexual) self, but the way that the production of bisexuality is bound up (or not) with the *construction* of individuality.

The significance of the figure of Simone de Beauvoir to the analysis of

bisexuality here is now apparent. 'De Beauvoir' is employed as a vehicle through which to explore some of the techniques which constitute the self: *individuality*, *femininity*, *responsibility* (for herself and for others) and *the ability and willingness to choose* are among the techniques which render 'de Beauvoir' intelligible. Not only these, but shame, self-knowledge and conscience are also examples of techniques through which de Beauvoir's interiority is folded, and the self ascribed to her rendered stable (such that the relations between forces are fixed and regularised). As noted above, Foucault (and Deleuze) take the notion of folded force as a general definition of the self¹⁷ – I will also draw on this concept throughout the book. In short, with the exception of parts of chapter 7 and chapter 8, the majority of my argument will focus on the *techniques* which fold force and which are productive of the selfhood, and particularly the individuality, attributed to de Beauvoir.

A brief note here then, about the concept of 'techniques of the self', which I will be employing in two different capacities. My first use of the term is closely allied to Foucault's own understanding, where 'techniques' refer to specific practices (such as confession or diary writing) which are deployed by individuals upon their own selves in order to transform themselves (towards a desired state, such as wisdom, virtue, authenticity). This is the effect of self on self, as Deleuze would have it (Deleuze 1988: 97–105). I am also however, referring to the way that *narratives* are employed as a technique through which the individual is rendered (and renders itself) intelligible. Although Foucault draws attention to the writing activity undertaken by the Stoics, as well as the role of confession in early Christianity, he does not explicitly comment on the link between these techniques and the emergence of narrative as a notable technique of the self. Nikolas Rose however, argues that the minutely detailed documentation of spiritual pilgrimages, and of 'the lives and writings of those such as St Bonaventura, Meister Eckhardt, Thomas à Kempis and others' (N. Rose 1989: 219), were early examples of narratives which are today found, for example, in the 'modern literature of psychotherapeutics' (*ibid.*). This suggests that narrative emerged alongside the early Stoic and Christian techniques of writing and confession as a *techne* which was 'crucial in the development of the modern Western self' (N. Rose 1989: 218).

While the Stoics' writings and Christian confessions point to an early use of narrative in the production of selfhood, Huck Gutman argues that: 'it is with Rousseau that a genuinely modern temper . . . first comes clearly into view' (Gutman 1988: 101). Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, Gutman argues, although 'an enormously important work in that history of the gradual emergence of a visible self' (Gutman 1988: 103), is concerned less with Augustine's own spirit and more with the spirit of God. Rousseau's

Confessions, by contrast, are concerned entirely with the development of an individualised self in its autonomy:

the reader of the *Confessions* understands that its immense significance, its aura of newness, has to do with its documentation of the emergence of that subject which was theretofore largely hidden: 'For a long time ordinary individuality – the everyday individuality of everybody – remained below the threshold of description'.

(Gutman 1988: 116)

One of the means by which Rousseau 'lower[s] this threshold' (ibid.), and establishes a relation to the self, is through narrative. Not only, Gutman argues, does Rousseau 'create himself as a character with a history' (Gutman 1988: 106) but he also recognises 'that it is in time, through temporal succession, that the self comes to be what it is' (Gutman 1988: 101).

History and temporality are two features which Paul Ricoeur identifies as central to narrative identity (Ricoeur 1991b). Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity will be exploited in chapters 3 and 4 to explore the way that the question 'who is de Beauvoir?' is answered and how, in that answer, the sexual-narrative-identity ascribed to de Beauvoir is constituted. Chapter 3 will look at those events which are perceived to warrant enumeration and which are subsequently configured into a plot such that de Beauvoir's story is rendered meaningful and her individuality established. However, assuming that a 'meaningful life is one that aspires to the coherency of a story with a plot' (White 1991: 144), chapter 4 will consider the implications of and for events which are *not* incorporated into the narrative of de Beauvoir's life. In this context Ricoeur's distinction between identity-as-selfhood and identity-as-sameness is especially apt because it illustrates that, where bisexuality is concerned, identity-as-selfhood is not always a given.¹⁸

Within the framework of narrative then, particular presuppositions about what it is to be 'human', particular beliefs and understandings, are employed to constitute the self *as* a plausible self. Such narratives are historically and culturally specific.¹⁹ I would suggest that in Western society today, for example, narratives which relate (to) sexual identity are especially common. This may partly be a result of the women's and the gay and lesbian liberation movements and partly because of the high profile of the psychotherapeutic industry throughout the course of the twentieth century (Plummer 1995). 'Stories' about one's (sexual) practices (and fantasies, desires, etc.) are told and recounted (in more or less literal or intentional ways) in order that the self may perceive itself (and be perceived) to 'have' a particular sexual identity. Hence although Foucault does not refer to sexuality *itself* as a technique of the self, insofar as sexuality is often – through narrative – construed as a problem upon which the self consciously

reflects, and a practice which is carried out by the self (sometimes, as chapter 6 will demonstrate, in order to transform itself), sexuality might itself increasingly be understood to be just such a (narrative) technique.

There are two reasons for choosing the figure of Simone de Beauvoir specifically as the cipher through which to study representations of bisexuality and the construction of selfhood. Firstly, de Beauvoir has had a 'visible' persona in the West (particularly Western Europe) for a large part of this century. She was a central figure in two cultural movements (existentialism and feminism), played an active part in feminist and French (inter)national politics until the end of her life, and continues to be seen, by some, as a French national icon (see chapter 5 especially for an analysis of the perceived relation between de Beauvoir's national identity and her sexuality). Secondly, de Beauvoir was a prolific writer for almost fifty years, reaching not only academic readers but also readers of newspapers, journals and women's magazines. All her major works reached a mass audience (Moi 1994: 74):

Challenging established hierarchies and conventions, they [de Beauvoir's major works] often provoked intensely enraged responses ranging from profound admiration to violent hostility. By producing a highly public persona for their author, her autobiographies added fuel to the controversies. (ibid.)

The 'controversies' surrounding de Beauvoir's personal life are numerous: she was the ninth woman in France to pass the *agrégation* in philosophy (Moi 1994: 1) and among the first generation of women to attend the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. She neither married nor had children (although towards the end of her life she adopted Sylvie Le Bon) and, after only a few years teaching, was able to earn an independent living by writing. Her 'open' relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre has been a source of contention almost from the moment it began as, more recently, have her relationships with women.²⁰ One of the consequences of leading such a colourful and *public* life is that the figure of de Beauvoir has generated an enormous amount of literature not only engaging with her work, but also with her life: in 1994 there were 'over forty full-length studies . . . hundreds of scholarly essays . . . and . . . massive newspaper and magazine coverage' (Moi 1994: 74).

The 'celebrated'/celebrity figure of de Beauvoir therefore, whose life spans most of the twentieth century, appears at the crossroads of feminism, high/low culture, existentialism, the media and the academy. As a (feminist) thinker, and woman who did (or did not, some argue) break with the traditions of femininity, 'de Beauvoir' has been, and continues to be, a productive field of enquiry for writers in many fields (academic and media, as

well as popular biography). This is the case even, perhaps especially, when such writers are engaged in a critique of her life and work.

It is important to repeat however, that I am not concerned with the ‘truth’ of de Beauvoir, with the significance of her relationships (to her), or with the ‘reality’ of her life. My intentions are not to explore competing representations of de Beauvoir in order that I may ‘disclose’, after analysing them, the final and authoritative ‘truth’ of her self. Instead, de Beauvoir is employed as a *cipher* through which well-documented techniques of the self, and particularly techniques pertaining to sexual identity, may be examined. Similarly, existentialism is important here only insofar as commentators understand it to have had a significant role in shaping the self that they ascribe to de Beauvoir. Toril Moi for example, whose book *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994) is one of the texts that I explore throughout this analysis,²¹ claims that de Beauvoir’s belief in existentialism had a number of specific implications for ‘her’ psyche. In this respect, the perceived role of existentialism in de Beauvoir’s life is seen to constitute her in particular ways (see chapter 3 especially). As with de Beauvoir herself then, existentialism *in itself* is not the issue here. My aim is not to discover the ‘truth’ (of a self), but rather to consider the ways in which truth is produced through discourse and to examine in detail the implications of this production.

So what is produced? I would argue that this book engages with texts which, in exploring and problematising the figure of de Beauvoir, her life and her work, are themselves productive of ways of being. The same may be said of my own analysis and, in this respect, this account is an infinitely regressive study of discourses of sexuality and selfhood. Hence although Foucault suggests that at the horizon of commentary ‘there is perhaps nothing but what was at its point of departure – mere recitation’ (Foucault 1981: 58), I am more inclined to agree with the notion that it nevertheless allows for ‘the (endless) construction of new discourses’ (Foucault 1981: 57).²²

Bisexuality and Simone de Beauvoir

The combined analysis of the discursive production of de Beauvoir and of bisexuality indicates, firstly, that bisexuality, in various forms, has a presence in most of the texts considered here and, as such, may be perceived neither as an aporia nor an absence. Secondly, it confirms that de Beauvoir is constructed as a sexual being – although her sexual identity is only constituted as lesbian or heterosexual. Between these two axioms a number of questions hover: what has the figure of Simone de Beauvoir to do with the bisexualities manifest in the texts if she is not explicitly identified to be, or

even implicitly constituted as, 'bisexual'? Is it the case that the 'truth' of bisexuality is not something which de Beauvoir possesses, nor something which she is possessed by? How is it, then, that de Beauvoir's *individuality* is nevertheless important to constructions of bisexuality?

Foucault's analysis of the role of confession and writing in the production of 'truths' and of the way in which techniques of the self are now employed in order to constitute rather than renunciate the self, will be central themes throughout the book. The relation between self-recognition, self-revelation and self-punishment (particularly with regard to shame and remorse) will also be examined throughout, as will the very *public* nature of disclosure. Indeed, it is through the act of imputed disclosure that de Beauvoir is produced as a sexual entity, and through this act that 'her' truth is known (see especially chapter 5). What I will also be concerned with however, are the *kinds* of 'truths' that are able to be extracted from de Beauvoir's confession and, given the specific discursive conditions through which the self is produced, whether it is possible for bisexuality to contain the kernel of 'de Beauvoir's' truth within it.

While many of the techniques of the self which Foucault identifies are relevant to this analysis, the construction of bisexuality and of de Beauvoir is not confined to those identified by him. For instance, although sexuality is understood to be one of the principal ways through which a relation to the self is established, it may not *always* be central. Deleuze suggests that sexuality does not have an exclusive monopoly on assemblages of desire (on assemblages such as the self). In *Dialogues* he writes: 'We do not believe in general that sexuality has the role of an infrastructure in the assemblages of desire . . . No assemblage can be characterised by one flux exclusively' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 101). This is not to deny the differentiation by sex in the constitution of the self. Nevertheless, as Rose argues, all relations to the self, including sexuality, must be open to historical investigation (N. Rose 1997: 138). Presuppositions about the self in general (whether they refer to sexuality or not) appear to preclude bisexuality. Chapters 3 and 4 for example, will consider the way that the narrative structure in four accounts of de Beauvoir's life and work produces an effect of continuity between past and present and how this serves *both* to ascribe individuality to de Beauvoir *and* to preclude her from being produced as 'bisexual'. Chapter 5 explores the implications of the presupposition that sexual identity and selfhood are linked, when press representations of de Beauvoir locate the source of her relationships with both men and women not 'in' her self, but in history, in a particular lifestyle and/or in existential philosophy. In chapter 6, the roles of choice and responsibility, and their relation, are construed as techniques of the self which, coupled with assumptions about

bisexuality, serve to erase any possibility that bisexuality might be a property of the self. In short, although the issue of precedence is open to question, it is arguable, simply, that sexuality is not produced in isolation from other techniques of the self, which may not be expressly linked to it.

In sum: to assume that the bisexual self stands as evidence of the truth of bisexuality, or that bisexuality is evidence for the truth of a bisexual self, is to take too much for granted. Most importantly, and this goes to the heart of my argument, it is to assume that a (bi)sexual identity *must* be anchored to a self, must reside within, and be expressive of, the self who possesses it. (Or, as in the ‘double petition’ described by Foucault, is possessed by it.) And yet this analysis of bisexuality indicates that the self does not always bear the great weight of sexuality, and that (bi)sexuality does not always author the self, or at least aspects of it, in the way that lesbian and heterosexuality are frequently perceived to do (whether this is desirable or not). Indeed, the position of bisexuality in these texts suggests that desire will not necessarily be bound to an individual who is ‘defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 275).²³

As Elspeth Probyn notes, ‘the question of “what are we?” marks the exigencies of acting and behaving and belonging within the present as it problematizes the task of contemporary cultural criticism’ (Probyn 1993: 109). To theorise identity then, is not merely an exercise in abstract problematisation, but also engenders an active relation to the self. All *excavations* of the self, including this one, also *participate* in the discursive productions of selfhood. Even those discourses which seek to ‘deconstruct’ the self – such as the post-structuralist feminist work with which this chapter began – will assume some features at least (materiality for example) to be constitutive of selfhood. This will be the focus of the following chapter. It is important in the context of this study because, as I will argue throughout, the pre-suppositions which create a basis for explications of selfhood are also often those which preclude, displace and erase bisexuality as an identity which ‘belongs’ to the self.