

SEX
KNOWLEDGE

DANGER !!!

A DANGEROUS METHOD? GETTING PERSONAL IN SEXUALITY RESEARCH

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PREFACE

Just a couple of weeks ago, the publisher in China for the collection of papers edited by Sikying Ho and me took off three papers from the book because of their explicit sexual content, which was considered incompatible with the image of their house.

The explicit reference to sex organs and sexual acts (especially anal intercourse among gay men) were considered problematic.

We negotiated, and the papers have to be re-edited. One of them (on anal sex among gay men) will definitely not be included.

THE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

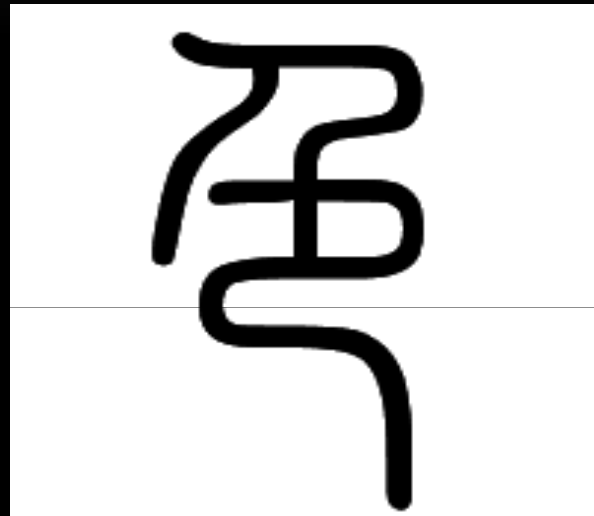
Genesis 2:17

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Genesis 3:17

(New International Version)

色字頭上一把刀



The sword on top of se(x)

DANGER !!!

- From John Kerr (1993) to Hollywood (Sony, David Croneneberg, 2011)
 - Pleasure and danger (Carol Vance and the *1982 Barnard Sexuality Conference*)
 - Danger and “protection”: e.g., protecting women and minors (however defined) from moral danger, exploitation, harm
 - Academic respectability, discipline, ethics, convention
 - Academic discipline and “unethical” research activity (boundary violation)
 - How do we conceptualize people we talk to in research (subjects, participants, informants): Vulnerable, less powerful, passive objects, autonomous agents?
 - What rules are needed?
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1982 BARNARD CONFERENCE ON SEXUALITY

The **Barnard Conference on Sexuality** marked the beginning of the Feminist Sex Wars. It was held at Barnard College on April 24, 1982. The theme of the Conference was Sexuality. The Conference was set up as a framework for feminist thought to proceed regarding topics that many felt uncomfortable talking about.

- At that time, the Women Against Pornography (WAP) movement was growing. The aim of the meeting was to “move beyond debates about violence and pornography and to focus on sexuality apart from reproduction.” The Conference itself was not fully supported by the college itself. Many Barnard faculty members dropped out of the planning committee.
- Days before the Conference itself, the President of Barnard College began receiving phone calls and letters from WAP and other groups against the premise of the Conference. The day before the conference was scheduled to begin, Barnard College officials—in response to phone calls from angry members of anti-pornography groups—confiscated 1500 copies of *Diary of a Conference on Sexuality*.

1982 BARNARD CONFERENCE ON SEXUALITY

- The *Diary* was a compilation of steering committee minutes, personal narratives, information about conference events, and work by feminist artists. Angry letters and threats of losing funding were also major concerns. Despite all of the contention, the organizers went ahead with the event.
 - The day of the Conference itself was extremely controversial. The Conference was picketed by the anti-pornography feminist group. WAP members picketed the conference and gave out handouts, leaflets and protests, wearing t-shirts with the words “For a Feminist Sexuality” on the front and “Against S/M” on the back. Accusations about the specific sexual practices of individual women involved in the conference were central to the outcry around the event. The Conference was very publicized in the news afterwards. Many articles and books have been inspired by this conference, the most famous being Carole Vance's *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*.
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HOW DO WOMEN GET SEXUAL PLEASURE IN PATRIARCHY?

FROM THE BARNARD CONFERENCE DIARY

- Given the paradox that the sexual domain is a dangerous one for women, either as an arena of restriction and repression or as an arena of experimentation and resistance, how do women of various ethnic, racial and class groups strategize for pleasure?
 - What are the points of similarity and difference between feminist analyses of pornography, incest, and male and female sexual 'nature' and those of the right wing?
 - Dare we persist in questioning traditional sexuality and sexual arrangement in the current political climate? If not, when is a 'good' time for feminists to do so?
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HOW DO WOMEN GET SEXUAL PLEASURE IN PATRIARCHY?

FROM THE BARNARD CONFERENCE DIARY

- What is the political significance of the position outlined by Betty Friedan, which would jettison gay and lesbian rights and sexual non-conformity as issues marginal to feminist goals?
 - What is the nature of the current conflict between the 'social purity' and 'libertarian' factions in the feminist community?
 - What can be learned from similar debates during the first wave of feminism in the nineteenth century?
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CAN WE DO THESE?

- Revealing your own sexual experience and practice in research
 - Explaining/arguing why your sexual practice is OK (e.g., erotica/pornography, significant age-difference, same-sex relationship, BDSM, open or multiple-partner relationship, purchased sex)
 - Using yourself and/or people you know (partners, family, friends) as a research subject in sexual knowledge production
 - Reporting and analyzing your own sexual desire and fantasies – dark side and forbidden acts (including politically incorrect ones disapproved by feminist, queer, critical colleagues, and the like)
 - Having sex with someone who got to know you professionally (patient, client, student, research subject/participant)
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ACADEMIA & SEXUALITY

- The language of science, research, and knowledge production
 - Theoretical imperialism and the reconstruction of everyday life
 - Discourse and intercourse: Sex as language and communication
 - How relevant is our analysis of disciplinary practices, power, discourse, et cetera, to our understanding and regulation of how sexuality research is done?
 - Can we imagine knowledge being produced while having sex?
 - Eros towards the world: Always erotic, always personal
 - Professional role, research, and the subject-object split
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ETHICS AND SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Can consenting adults do whatever they want sexually?

- Have sex, conventional or not
 - Talk about sex, conventional or not
 - Write about sex, conventional or not
 - Produce knowledge regarding sex together, conventional or not
 - Produce knowledge while/through having sex, conventional or not
 - Publish academically to report their views and experience, conventional or not
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IT IS ALWAYS PERSONAL

- Who is a researcher? The people involved in “research” are sexual beings
 - Responding sexually to people in research: Natural or evil?
 - What aspects of sex are to be kept “out of bounds”?
 - Can we not work together to make meaning, tell stories, and construct reality in whatever way we want (including sex)?
 - Knowledge production outside of academia: Arts, journalism, non-academic writing, film, online social media, personal journal (+historical scholarship – permissible after you’re legally dead)
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WELL, SEX IS DIFFERENT; BUT IS IT?

- Why is sex different? The particularization of sex
 - The order and discipline we subscribe to
 - What marks academic research different from other forms of knowledge production?
 - Can I tell you what I do and who I really am?
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FINI



AND NOW YOU'RE SAFE

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