

## A sociology of queer implications?

Methodological *inquietudes* and ethical involvements in  
the study of non-normative sexualities

## *Uma sociologia das implicações queer?*

*Inquietudes metodológicas e envolvimentos éticos no  
estudo das sexualidades não normativas*

**Cirus Rinaldi**

Senior Lecturer of Sociology of Law,  
Deviance and Social change,  
Department of «Culture e Società», University of Palermo  
[cirus.rinaldi@unipa.it](mailto:cirus.rinaldi@unipa.it)

## Abstract

The article represents an epistemological and methodological enquiry on the use of qualitative research methods, and specifically ethnographical practice, in the study of non-normative sexualities. It will take mainly into account a series of ethnographic observations of an ongoing research project on male sex work in southern Italy.

Keywords: Auto-ethnography; reflexivity; male sex work; homosexuality

## Resumo

O artigo representa uma investigação epistemológica e metodológica sobre o uso de métodos de pesquisa qualitativa, e especificamente a prática etnográfica, no estudo das sexualidades não normativas. Levará em conta principalmente uma série de observações etnográficas de um projeto de pesquisa em andamento sobre o trabalho sexual masculino no sul da Itália.

Palavras-chave: Auto-etnografia; reflexividade; trabalho sexual masculino; homossexualidade

## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present a series of epistemological and methodological reflections on the use of qualitative research methods, and specifically ethnographical practice, in the study of non-normative sexualities. These reflections are divided into two main sections: a) the first will look at the main destabilizing factors in queer methodological reflections, while c) the second will focus on an analysis of the role, the body and the emotions of the researcher in the reflexive research process and in encounters with the other, as well as looking at the progression of self-narration in so-called autobiographical techniques, and at the consequent methodological and ethical implications, which are particularly evident in the study of non-normative genders and sexualities. This last section and the final reflections will look specifically at the analysis of contexts, processes and modes of sociological production which form the basis for a series of ethnographic observations of an ongoing research project which I'm working on in Naples and Palermo, Italy, on male sex work, involving native subjects and immigrants.

### Queer concerns: the researcher and (self) reflexive implications.

Sociological analysis has neglected the subject of “sexualities” “desires” and pleasure, of Eros and bodies, rendering it marginal and subordinate to the dominant orientations and themes in *standard* research. It is impossible to consider here the various political and cultural impediments, therefore I will simply refer you to Rinaldi (2013b). As a result, sometimes paradoxically, there is a tendency to study sexualities as taboos, to render them “exotic”, and to focus research on all the phenomena which are different from “normal” sexual practices and the expectations of society, reproducing theories limited by sometimes sexist choices and, among the most worrying aspects, absorbing the

*aporia* regarding forming theories on a subject which is only studied if it is “deviant” (Rinaldi, 2008). At the beginning of the nineties a series of studies heavily influenced by French post-structuralism, deconstruction and Jungian psychoanalysis, especially in literary and social criticism, assumed a radical constructivist position with primarily cultural and political effects (Butler, 1990; de Lauretis, 1991; Fuss, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993). Though movements developing theory and politics did exist, most of the new theoretical stances brought together under the term *Queer theory* (Stein and Plummer, 1994, p. 181). The concept of *queer* indicates the “strange”, the “bizarre”, the “irregular”, the “inauthentic” and from a pragmatic point of view implies an “aggressive reappropriation” by the subjects who have been stigmatized by it, because they rename themselves, introducing difference and actually expanding the discourse of differences. Queer theory involves analysis of all those dimensions of gender, sex and sexuality which can’t be investigated within the margins of the category of “normality” and which lie, in fact, beyond social typicalities, casting doubt on them because of their conflicting, contradictory, indefinite nature; in summary all of those states of desire which *exceed* our capacity to name them (Edelman, 1995, p. 345; my italics, author’s note). But how is it possible to imagine a fruitful dialogue between sociology, methodology and queer theory? What are the characteristics of ethnography inspired by queer theory? Put very simply, Plummer notes, there is not much that can really be “considered as new or surprising”, other than the underlined interest of social research in reflexivity (Plummer, 2005, p. 369) and a deep reconsideration of categorical orthodoxy. Greater qualitative awareness enables the experiences of the subjects to be emphasized, they are no longer considered merely as objects of research but as *co-researchers* able to define, and therefore to highlight, the position of the researcher, who looms over like a disembodied, general, abstract, unemotional, asexual institutional entity. Gender-sensitive research, symbolic interactionism

and the interaction between qualitative methods, biographical, ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Adams and Holman Jones, 2008), along with humanistic critical projects (Plummer, 2001), are the most plausible ways, within a rigorous agenda, to use empathetic, reevaluation research strategies, to interpret, through a vision “from within”, the actions of subjects in their ability to behave in a meaningful way, able to consider their actions, which become meaningful units of analysis, always bound to the observations and the reflections of the researcher.

But how does queer theory enable a different research procedure to be considered? Queer theory introduces, though in the context of contradiction and discontinuity, severe criticism of dominant models of scientific research both in terms of their research practices and the research policies which they use. From the point of view of the political practices of scientific text and methodology, it can be considered that queer theory: a) enables the experience of the non-normative subjectivities to be understood in their social worlds and through their “categories”; b) questions scientific knowledge and its methods, which aim to identify and reproduce normal and *normative* bodies, genders and sexualities; c) uses a new vocabulary through which non – normative sexualities can express themselves; d) demands change in the relationship between researchers and the object/subject of research. The experiential components are fostered and cannot be disregarded and, therefore, there is a significant element of *co-involvement* between the researcher and the object/subject of research, as repeatedly underlined by reflexive sociology and summarized in the methodology of symbolic interactionism and other constructivist approaches (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Queer social research calls into question the traditional dimensions of objectivity and the separation of the experiential role of the researcher: the researcher’s personal characteristics assume particular relevance precisely because they influence the whole process

of knowledge development. All social actors (researchers included) have sexual, gendered and embodied experiences of the social world which cannot be concealed by their supposed neutrality in observing in a research process, even in its more orthodox versions, without undervaluing the role of both the research and the other subjects of the research. A neutral and detached presentation of their data and analysis usually has the following effects: a) it keeps the reader in the dark in terms of what happens in the places and relationships which it is not possible to access; b) it does not benefit in any way the subjects of the research, as it does not involve them and does not create an egalitarian relationship with them; c) it does not measure itself against the criterion of the “functioning” of the theory (“does it fit the data and subjects’ experiences?” is a main concern of pragmatist perspective and research; see Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The detachment idealized by the researcher and sociological research which has perhaps never been neutral (and is in fact a badly practiced orthodoxy, in some cases even a myth!) oblige the social and personal characteristics of the researcher to be hidden, and the interaction between researchers and subject is almost never reported or analyzed. Queer theory, on the other hand, suggests immersing oneself and collecting data where there are non-normative subjects, in some cases in marginalized areas, but this process of involvement is of the utmost importance for the researcher’s training, because it subverts and calls into question his beliefs (Schutz, 1967).

The sociological analysis of non-normative sexual configurations poses intellectual and epistemological challenges which encourage methodology to be seen not only as a standardized set but rather as forms of activity, of reflection and reflexivity, which coincide with the *practice* of this very sociological research. As the historian H.I. Marrou claims, «the rigor of a scientific discipline requires from its scholars a certain *methodological inquietude*, a continuous urge to

explore the mechanism of their progress, and finally a commitment to rethinking the problems resulting from the 'theory of knowledge' which that progress implies» (Marrou, 1962). The researcher aims fitfully to seek protection in methodologies made of formulas and schemata to protect themselves from any self-reflexive analysis of their role, as an embodied subject, in the choices of their object/subject. It is worth going back to the origins of the discipline and recalling Weber's lesson which states that«[...] essentially true methodology can only bring us reflective understanding of the means which have demonstrated their value in practice by raising them to the level of explicit consciousness» (Weber, 1949: 115). Weber's reflections take us back to the centrality of the subject as an acquaintance and constructor of meanings who necessarily must reflect on the methodology as a practice applied each time according to cognitive objectives, a subject who is "involved" in a web of meanings which he himself helps to weave (Geertz, 1973), to perceive, to feel, to caress, to smell in his everyday life. The researcher is subject(ed), both in cognitive and physical terms, to the various demands of the reality which surrounds him (Schutz, 1967, 22). An interpretative and embodied analysis, as noted, urges reflection on the construction of social contexts in sociological research and the personal context of researchers, calling for analysis of the assumptions resulting from these contexts and the ways in which these assumptions influence the research process, whether it regards explicit assertions or silence or downplaying: the main risk lies in taking for granted the observer and the observed (though, actually, are we so sure of who is observing who?), making them complicit in the standards and hegemony which conspires to repress of that which, actually, *must be said* (whether in terms of the universalization of homosexual as well as heterosexual orientations, of whiteness, masculinity, able-bodiedness or social class).

## Intimate alliances: Qualitative research, Self and Ethnography

According to the phases of development in qualitative research as identified by Denzin e Lincoln (1994, 1998, 2000), the focus on reflexivity and author visibility corresponds to the latest ones. Between the eighties to nowadays, there has been a period of crisis and of legitimization and representation within the field of ethnographic research, researchers gained visibility in ethnographic texts, their authoriality has been called in question and, especially, in the late nineties a series of voices and research agendas emerged (i.e. postmodernism and feminist analysis) having paved the way for a number of different voice and outlooks which call intoquestion and, at the same time, put the focus back on the self. Contemporary ethnographic works focused mainly on criticism directed towards the researcher as interpreter of the Other, as a privileged observer who risks subordinating the object of the observation and description. The reflections, therefore, move towards the relationship between authorship and audience: is the author really a detached and invisible subject? Does the production of a text imply power relations? Do the texts succeed in involving the “polivocality of social life and the complexity of social forms, experiences and biographies” (Coffey, 2002: 322)? Pertinent questions such as these direct ethnographic research towards instruments which are capable of rendering the author’s presence in the text visible and creating a specific ethnographic genre, capable of analyzing socio-cultural tension *through* and *in* the self. The autobiographical tension in contemporary ethnography retraces the “reflexive turn” present in social sciences over the last thirty years<sup>1</sup>, which in very general terms is the awareness of the self (the researcher) in that which can be defined fieldwork policy and in the processes of

---

1 It is impossible to relay here the vast theoretical debates on reflexivity in social sciences. See on general topics of debate and social theories Mead (1934); Giddens (1991).



“situated” knowledge building (Haraway, 1998). Preparation for the research project, and the collection and interpretation of data are reflexive activities and practices through which meanings are produced rather than “discovered” (Mauthner et al., 1998). The reflexive tension, through feminist, postcolonial and queer theory, calls into question the assumption that the researcher, method and data are separate, and suggests that these are interconnected and interdependent dimensions; no method or technique can be considered as a neutral and decontextualized procedure which can be applied to any case, and the researcher cannot be considered an invisible actor without evaluative judgments. The emphasis on reflexivity in social research enables understanding of how meanings are the result of the interpretative negotiation occurring in the field between researchers and participating subjects as embodied subjects (Blumer, 1969: 86), both knowledge producers whose interactions (both in the field and in textual strategies) are filtered and constructed on the basis of gender, sexuality, nationality, race and ethnicity, social class, age, physical ability. These complex, polyphonic, multi-layered positions call into question and, certainly, render problematic the observation (who is observing whom? Are they both observing the other observing?) but they also present opportunities – even in *ethical* terms – because they mean the researcher can avoid the risk of objectifying their subjects (a very real risk in quantitative analysis), to deconstruct the researcher’s authority and to balance (as much as is possible) power differentials existing between researcher and participants. Reflexivity, as an analytical tool, enables me to be aware and to monitor myself during the research, and in more active and meta-analytical terms it allows me to analyze the relationships which I create with the participants, our “historicity” and the constraints (and opportunities) of the gendered, sexualized, racialized, embodied self. One hidden aspect which needs to be “explicated” is, for example, masculinity. What happens when a researcher with specific identity

characteristics carries out qualitative research with other men who construct their own identity configurations according to exchanges and relationships based on homosexual desire, behavior and customs? What happens when they have to confront their research objects/subject with sensitive issues? It is therefore necessary to examine the male gender and understand what kinds of methodological repercussions it can have (McKeganey e Bloor, 1991: 196-198): a) firstly, it is necessary to declare it, to make it manifest so as not to universalize, essentialize and render invisible the researcher; b) secondly, it is necessary to take into account masculinity in relational terms and, therefore, to analyze the relationship between the masculinity of the researcher and of the other males (intra-gender relations) and females (inter-gender relations); c) thirdly, to understand how gender could be a dimension open to negotiation or how it can create hierarchies, in which it is difficult to imagine its negotiability; d) the fourth aspect concerns gender as an attributed status which can condition or limit fieldwork activities (McKeganey e Bloor, 1991: 197); e) the fifth aspect concerns the kind of masculinity which is taken for granted, normalized “masculinity” and its relationship with other identity characteristics like race, age, physical dis/ability, sexual orientation. To avoid the universalization of identity categories and the use of preconceived ideas, it is necessary first and foremost to develop reflexive awareness of the power structures in which we find ourselves embroiled in the field. Identifying my own masculinity within ethnographic text and using methodological devices which focus on embodiment and emotions gives me the chance to challenge the representation of “rational man” and the “macho ethics” of male researchers who “discover”, “conquer”, who are “systematic” or “rigorous”, playing the role of the inexpressiveness and emotionlessness (Kanter, 1977). It is not simply a matter of questioning an ideological representation which has become the standard, that of the rigorous male researcher, but also of understanding how distant and detached writing

and the question of objectivity are to be found in the criteria of the social structure of academic writing (Becker, 1986; DeVault, 1999). The interweaving of self-narration and autobiographical reflections and their “coming out” - allow me to use this term - can be used to criticize this chauvinistic and sexist version of research (Kirschner, 1987: 27). By making the emotional relationship between researcher and researched explicit, therefore, one can go beyond the position justifying a “hidden ethnography”, all the concealed controversial data of the researcher who is afraid of being discredited (Blackman, 2007), with the aim of understanding in more detail how studies are conducted and how theory is constructed. Emotions can become an analytical tool, capable not only of renewing research and its “standardized” ideas in epistemological terms, but when they are both a social process and a social product they become crucial dimensions to understand interactively how social factors are deployed in processual terms (Hochschild, 1983). Moreover, fieldwork (and more generally psycho-social theory and in neuroscience) shows that thought and emotions are strongly correlated, and neglecting this relationship means significantly neglecting the interactive dynamics in the field (Kleinman and Copp, 1983). To take emotions into account is a matter of considering the reflexivity and emotions in view of the application of what Doucet e Mauthner call «epistemological accountability» (Doucet and Mauthner, 2002), the idea that the researcher accounts are accountable to the readers, (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003: 424). The emotional dimension, therefore, can be subjected to criteria of validity and epistemological relevance (Jaggar, 1989) in the research process, just as it adheres to ethical criteria, because as Edwards affirms, research on sensitive topics makes the observer ‘self aware’ and at the same time ‘other aware’, throughout the emotional and intimate time of interactions (Edwards, 1993). This process of embodied knowledge permits us to learn and discover also through our senses, our movements, our bodies as a

«whole being in a total practice» (Okely, 1992: 15) and to move towards a “carnal sociology” in which the researcher “submits to the fire of action in situ”, a sociology not just of the body as an object (“sociology of the body”) but rather which considers the body as an instrument of inquiry and knowledge (“sociology from the body”) (Wacquant, 2004:viii).

## Reflexivity in fieldwork: the case of male sex work

Even if sexuality has been of interest to ethnographer sociologists (Coffey, 1999: 77), non-normative sexualities have been tabooed by researchers and within academic discourses and usually they have been dominated by the rhetoric of risk. Another factor which has impoverished ethnographic research on non-normative sexualities is the representation of the subjects as disembodied rational actors (Turner, 1992: 23) or as un-reflexively disembodied (Crossley, 2006). Regarding the subject matter and application of this study, reflections on the reflexive role of the researcher in observing the context of sex work and, in particular, of homosexual male sex work, are limited (Rinaldi, 2013, 2013a, 2012). In this section of the present essay, I will look at some extracts from ethnographic observations of an ongoing research project which I'm working on in Naples and Palermo, on male sex work, involving native subjects (with no fixed address, drug addicts and so on) and immigrants. Data is still being collected, and I've been prompted to wonder about the role of the researcher and the subjects of research in sex work. Specifically, I am trying to understand how the link between sexuality, gender, and processes of racialization can result in forms of social structuring. It's worth noting how the position sex workers in a hierarchical system, in which they occupy the lower levels, serves to maintain a market of what I term *lumpen-erotic racial(ized) services*. Through this concept I refer to the “consumption” of male sex work as a form of production of classed, sexualized and racialized bodies and

subjectivities. The whole process must be considered in the context of a neoliberal economy in which, although the immigrant, for instance, acquires value (or is devalued) as a sexual object. Such processes, which can't be more thoroughly examined here, are of particular interest if we consider the convergence of social class, sexuality and ethno-racial factors in the construction of male sexualized subjects (Rinaldi, 2013, 2013a). The aim is to understand, from an epistemological point of view, what it means to construct an ethnographic text, becoming aware of one's position as a "white", male, able-bodied, salaried, homosexual subject. How do these observational filters, resulting from my cultural background, determine my relationship with the subjects I am observing? In what way do my identity characteristics, with all their cultural scope, "normalize" the subjects being observed? Is there a risk of involving, inevitably, normativities, even if only in the text (Roos, 2010: 25)? What kind of influence does the relationship between the knowing subject and the known subject, reflexivity and intersubjectivity have? Given the ambiguous position of the researcher, how should the structuring (and normalizing) effects of heteronormativity and homonormativity be considered? These considerations lead me to focus on identity categories and the practices which generate them, paying particular attention to "deviant" activities in their situated and contextualized meanings, analyzing emerging experiential web and symbolic codes and ritualized understanding which constitute deviance and criminality" (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998). The researcher introduces into the field preconceived knowledge which is formed according to their professional, identity and economic status and it is re-configured within the research process: it is precisely this aspect on which I would like to focus. The process of undoing, alteration and reconfiguration prompts me to consider the analysis of Ferrell e Hamm, focusing in particular on what the two authors define as criminological *verstehen*, «[...]an engaged methodological process such that researcher and

research subjects come to share, at least in part, in the lived reality of deviance, crime, and criminality. Within this methodology, then, the experiences of field researchers matter, and matter profoundly» (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998, 13). Ethnography provides opportunities for partial immersion in the situated logic and emotion which define subjects' experience(Ferrell, 1998, 20).

## Palermo, Friday 15 February 2013.

### 4:00 p.m.; Cinema.

I go in: the young man at the till gives me a ticket, the elderly owner checks it. I go in through the main entrance, with haste, as I have learnt from watching others: from the outside the entrance seems even darker so that the inner room is almost invisible. I stumble down the corridor, becoming aware of the presence of other patrons. After about three minutes I can completely make out the space around me, the interactions going on: there are about forty people between the last row and the seats in the middle, mostly masturbating; in the shelter of the back rows the layout of the room creates a nook where group sex usually takes place. The tops stand against the wall, displaying their genitals or stroking them, the bottoms turn their backs to them, and gradually approach them with their trousers falling below their butt-necks. I move away and go towards the bathroom, stopping to look around and sitting on one of the steps of the entrance. A man between 30 and 35 years old, Lorenzo, starts talking to me. He says he is a worker and is just passing through: "I move between two worlds, this world and that world. And you? Do you take it? Do you give? What do you do?" "Me?" I reply, surprised, mainly because I had to decide what my role there was, and how to enter into the social world of getting and selling sex between men. I hurriedly answer "Whatever happens, whatever works best!". I try and brush over it, continuing: "Did you say you move between two worlds?" "Yes! I have two parallel worlds" "And which do you prefer?" "This one,

that one, the one before...I come [here] now and again, sometimes I feel like escaping, like transgressing, you know?" He continues, "Why do you come here?" "I come for convenience". "I've already been here for two hours". Me: "And you haven't found anything? What are you looking for?" Him: "Someone who you can tell straight away is relaxed, no old people or Tunisians... Someone looking for the same thing as me, otherwise nothing can come of it". "And why did you stop to talk to me?". "You... there's something about you... there's something to put in my mouth...a really big thing... and you can tell you're clean, you smell good!". "Oh, yeah?". "I can tell straight away. Hahahaha! [He laughs happily]". "You see" he continues, "30% of this place impresses me, the other 70% is in the other world [laughs]... yeah, 70%!... maybe I'm looking for a good-looking guy, maybe one with a nice dick, and I also like nice guys. But the first thing is to have sex! To meet someone [he takes a more serious tone], I don't want to lie to myself, I mean if I meet him, yeah, if it's a soft meeting, like us today... hi! Good luck!... I'm not interested in getting to know a person well". "Why?" I ask. "Because I've chosen another road, I'm on another road, I'm going at 80km an hour down the other road... sometimes I come here, I turn at a junction". Me: "Is it a junction, a shortcut, or are you lost? [I smile]" "What would I find here? Of course I don't know you, but what is there for me to find here? Nothing! Just that something happened here once, and it affected me." "Affected?". "Yes, I mean, it affected me, I mean I liked it...but just a few times, because then I leave, because nothing can come of it and I leave because I think I'm just wasting time... Don't you want to have some fun?". I reply "I like watching, to understand how it works". "If only you knew! Earlier, a guy wanted 20 euros for a blow job... Piss off! They should pay for a mouth like mine [and I shouldn't pay]. You see? [He shows me a scarf with which he dramatically covers his face]. I put this on to avoid lots of things, certain smells, it's a mask, and I lower it only to give blow jobs". Rachid approaches, a Tunisian, twenty-something, he

moves away towards the bathroom. “He pisses me off!” You can’t pay for sex with someone like him!” “Why?” I ask. “He didn’t do anything after I gave him the money! I gave him the 5 euros... and nothing! I told him to go and buy cigarettes...I did him a bit, I masturbated him, I didn’t even like it...I need to be satisfied, there’s a crisis of dicks these days... what’s yours like? [He murmurs] Flaccid? Big? Normal?”. I smile and go back into the cinema.

Both Lorenzo and I are performing: he is an occasional client, I am a reticent researcher-observer. My appearance is what other patrons would call masculine: I have an unkempt beard, I’m approaching forty, but I try to pass for an older chav (trainers, ripped jeans, t-shirt and hoodie). Lorenzo sees me as a potential partner in an economic transaction, “positioning me” according to appearance and eroticism. I have a high status, based on characteristics of hegemony (I’m white, male, I seem to be in good shape, I’m clean, I “smell good”, I’m mature but not too “old”, I know his language, I’m “acceptable”, a kind of standard). These characteristics make me, in his eyes, a potential partner, someone who doesn’t seem to want payment; I don’t show Rachid’s vulnerability. The question to be asked here is whether Lorenzo sees me as desirable (for the aforementioned reasons) and even more as a potential partner for impersonal sex rather than as a bumboy, which would suggest that a bumboy is characterized by visual and sensorial elements (appearance and smell, as in the case of the extract from my ethnographic notes). Abdul, in fact, a 24 year old former bumboy, asked me if I’d ever smelt the “the smell of the cinema, the toilets. It can’t be forgotten!” The anthropological-cognitive elements of the arenas of sex work reflect these configurations. Lorenzo hopes to have sex with me, because perhaps he wouldn’t have the money to “enjoy himself”, and he can’t pay me a small amount as he did with Rachid (is he embarrassed about cheapening me? Or is the exchange more equal and not based on any hegemony? Or does he see me as an equal subject because he thinks I’m willing to have



an impersonal sexual relationship?) or he has every intention of saving money. Various actors are found in arenas of sex work. Power structures are based on symbolic, economic, political and cultural supremacy, and social interaction takes place in a network separate from interests (in terms of money, emotions or relationships), from the construction of models of reputation, from incentives and disincentives to identification (sexual and/or of gender), from the use of strategies of social mimicry, and of resistance, and from the construction of representations and from the alternation of economies of pleasure and of identities. These aspects make the phenomenon complex, heterogenous and polysemous. I can understand aspects of Lorenzo's life, which lies between "two worlds", I remember what it means to go through certain things or to hide oneself, I know the techniques of passing, when those who have to hide themselves (whether because they are afraid of being judged or because they are afraid of their own Self) because of their desires, confront themselves. But Lorenzo's words worry me in two ways: they transmit the fear which I once had – when I was passing between the two worlds, when I inhabited both – and, at the same time, since I came out a long time ago, Lorenzo strikes me as vulnerable, pitiful. Both these reactions, apparently conflicting, actually respond to two symbolic power structures: on one hand the power of the being in the closet, with all the implications of concealment and heterosexual hegemony, on the other the power of the demand for homosexual identity. Neither is able to intercept Lorenzo because they imply, in relational terms, the construction of "normality": heteronormativities and homonormativities. The arenas of sex work, difficult to categorize, are based on relationships and the interactions which take place within them depend on identity. These are also social spaces within which symbolic and material resources are exchanged and lost; the possession of such resources determines an individual's position and their ability to accumulate certain assets. Marx responds to the question "What is

a Negro slave?” in *Wage Labour and Capital* (1847) by saying that it is «A man of the black race. ... A Negro is a Negro. Only under certain conditions does he become a slave. [...]. In the process of production, human beings work not only upon nature, but also upon one another. They produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place.» Marx’s affirmations can be applied to our understanding of the social relationships involved in sex work and in its social organisation. Even I, as observer, am not disinvolved, and cannot avoid taking a position. I am implicated in the production of different subjectivities. And if I thought I wouldn’t have to deal with any kind of symbolic violence, Lorenzo led me to understand exactly the opposite; my homosexuality, while in some ways a resource (in terms of accessing the field), reproduces a coherent and standard identity which uses, in symbolic terms, the representation of Lorenzo’s identity configuration to attack it, subordinate it (“To me you represent those who don’t declare themselves, who don’t accept themselves, who are scared! I feel sorry for you!”). At that point, I felt sorry for myself too, I entrenched myself to protect myself behind an image of a proud and dignified identity which, however, could not grasp the violence which it projected into the dark corners of the toilets instead of managing to see the identitary work of confines and in-between spaces going on there. The embarrassment and anxiety in the field enabled me to develop reflections, only briefly mentioned here because of space restrictions, on the recreation of my identity, which I wrongly believed was immune to constructions which could cast doubt on the possibility of collecting data. As Jaggar states, feeling must be used as resources and analytical tool, but emotions may«[...] be dishonest or self-deceptive, they may incorporate inaccurate or partial perceptions, or they may be constituted

by oppressive values” (Jaggar, 1989: 163). My sympathy was motivated by emotions and feelings which resulted from oppressive values, by a compulsion towards coming-out which, *de facto*, if not questioned would have contributed to defining stereotypes and reproducing them like any other “normative” research. The ethical question is if I had continued the research without asking myself questions of reflexivity, I would have risked reinforcing stereotypes, essentializing or rendering exotic the subjects, or considering them as cultural enemies who slow down the “normalization” of homosexuality. I can share sexual behavior with them but there are limits and barriers regarding other identity configurations which must be negotiated throughout the research process; «having certain identities is not enough to presume an insider status, idiosyncrasies are embedded in our identities that inevitably create moments of intimacy and distance between informant and researcher» (Few, Stephens and Rouse-Arnett, 2003: 207). So, as in the case of “colorism”, a hierarchy based on shades of skin color in an ethnic group (Russell, Wilson and Hall, 1992), masculinity creates aesthetic and physical hierarchies capable of defining forms of stratification in sexual practices.

After going back to the waiting area near the toilets, I meet Rachid and I offer him a cigarette. He is standing behind the glass door which enables him to check the whole of the internal room, keeping an eye on the porn film playing and the stream of people between the toilets and the cinema. I ask him if he’s a bumboy (*marchettaro*) and he says yes. We carry on smoking together. I ask him how long he’s been in the cinema and if he makes enough money. He says he comes to the cinema when he needs money to pay the rent, about every two weeks. He says he earns between twenty and forty euros, though he used to earn much more. A forty-something man comes up, Tony, he is sturdy, 5’11”, with long, thinning hair: he says hi to Rachid, kissing him on the cheeks. He starts talking to him, touching him, fondling him, I understand that he wants

fellatio, confirmed by Rachid when he rejects the rather unfavorable offer of just five euros. The guy moves away, starting to nervously smoke a cigarette. Rachid identifies me as an occasional bumboy. I can see why: I don't seem to be involved like the other patrons of the cinema. He talks about how hard it is to find people willing to pay you enough. After about ten minutes Tony comes back, meets Rachid's eyes and indicates for him to follow him to the toilets. Rachid follows, turning back towards me he smiles and gives me a pat on the stomach, almost rejoicing for his "victory". They shut themselves in one of the furthest toilets, I can hear the sound of belts and zips. I go back into the cinema. Rachid joins me and I ask him how it went, he says he got ten euros, so at least he has made back the cost of the entrance ticket.

The relationship between physical characteristics and money paid demonstrates how the physical traits associated with "hegemonic masculinity" are particularly "valued": older *escorts*, and those that are too thin or too fat (both associated with femininity) are "undervalued"; "muscly" men are particularly prized, as a sign of masculinity and supremacy associated with male dominance. Sexual practices are interpreted according to the implications for male dominance: tops have more prestige than bottoms. "Tops" are more desirable, both within the gay community and within the "quasi-heteronormative" representations of groups of "men who have sex with men". The relationship between ethno-racial factors, gender and sexuality shows how individuals have an advantage if they are a top, though it is non-whites who are most prized. "Non-white" men embody the stereotype of "*hyper-masculinity*" and all those who do not conform to ethnic groupings are violently stigmatized. Street work, in fact, is divided up in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation, relative identity construction and sexual practices (top vs bottom); appearance and age; the amount of pay requested and where the services are provided. Sex work can also act as a resource which individuals use to construct informal support

networks, and what can be defined as the creation of sexual capital on the streets. The involvement of the individuals in the direct and indirect exchange of sexual acts and the relevance of their activity is strongly determined by their ability to occupy other social worlds. Those who have resources beyond their sexual transactions can obviously leave that world whenever new and more interesting opportunities present themselves (in terms of money, emotions, or relationships) given that they only depend in part on its emotional and structural conditions (as represented, for example by Lorenzo). For others, those who could be defined as marginal even within the arenas of sex work, like drug addicts, those with no fixed address, those affected by HIV and AIDS, those who don't adhere to ideas of male dominance (transgenders or particularly effeminate individuals), those who do not have access to sufficient economic resources, and immigrants (particularly illegal immigrants), the social worlds of sex work acts as an informal social network of support for essential needs, those often not provided by official and "normal" networks. These individuals therefore find themselves in informal systems of work and exchange (of drugs, sex, money and other items coming from illegal activities) within various contexts, and together with various participants. Rachid is dependent on Tony's mood (the "hesitant" client); Tony, although he has a certain relationship with Rachid, attempts to get one over on him - because five Euros is enough, "because they meet often", "because not everyone would give him five euros". Rachid is the subject who must be satisfied: he doesn't offer his services in more visible public places (for example the train station and its surroundings) because he may be faced with the cultural sanctions of his ethnic group (or more likely the formal sanctions of the authorities, in terms of his legal status) and therefore he tries to survive in the shadows of the toilets, among images of German porn, and the offers of more or less elderly clients. Rachid has no access to other structural bases from which to negotiate, his body is affected by

his lifestyle (drugs: marijuana and cocaine) and he is gradually losing symbolic power and sexual capital in the arenas of sex work. This is not to represent Rachid as a “victim”. Research has often contributed to the definition of prostitutes as static, definable, measurable identities, particularly as victims, ignoring the subjectivity of sex workers. An assumption is made that the individuals are “victims”. Those who want to abolish it, for example, claim that the rights of sex workers to “work” on the streets are challenged, and that the individuals – only if they accept their status and position as a victim – are being helped to escape that life. The subordination of status (gender, race, sexual orientation) is rooted in institutionalized models of cultural value, while the subordination of class (the poor, workers) is already incorporated in the structural characteristics of the economic system – capitalism produces poor people. So it must be considered whether redistribution creates mis-recognition and if recognition creates misdistribution (Fraser, 1997). A policy can only work if it is based on these two analytical angles. Researchers and others (social workers, etc.) approach sex work with prejudices in terms of the sex worker; they expect to hear sob stories; however, the differing experiences of individuals must be looked at - it is necessary to pay attention to “meaning” and not to “facts”, to understand why a story is told in a certain way and not in another, to understand how the position of the person telling the story defines the story and how that of the audience affects what is heard: to take into consideration, in short, what is at stake in political, personal and strategic terms when representing certain versions of a story, at specific moments and in specific contexts. These considerations go for both sex workers and their clients. For Rachid, sex work is the social space within which he has a certain amount of capital, in terms of his body and sex: he is desired and respected because of these characteristics, unlike in other social contexts in which he is excluded (the “official” public sphere) and stigmatized. Sex work enables him to survive, unlike other, less

risky activities. Non-white males, partially through gay marketing, are considered an erotic (“consumable”) subjectivity. These are ethno-racial and class characteristics, which I call ethno-lumpen-eroticisation. Like representations of chavs and lads, British tearaways, the *eroticization of the racialized-lumpen-males* is shown by elements like vulgarity, sexual and predatory availability and appetite, primitive and wild authenticity, the size of genitals, and ethnic characteristics (olive and dark skin). It is clearly an eroticized representation which is not immune to implications of class and race. “Non-white” males are naturalized and sexualized through those characteristics which cause them to be marginalized: they are desirable because they belong to those dangerous, transgressive and criminal categories. They are not “sophisticated”, they are not “cultured”. A class of “dangerous” and “disgusting” individuals seen as risky, even within the homosexual community.

## Conclusions

From an analysis of the aforementioned studies, and according to the data I have collected thus far, we can certainly consider that there are arenas of sex work in which specific actors are inserted in contexts and power structures based on forms of symbolic, economic, political and cultural dominance, in which social interaction takes place in a network separate from interests (in terms of money, emotions or relationships), from the construction of models of reputation, from incentives and disincentives to identification (sexual and/or of gender), from the use of strategies of social mimicry, and of resistance, and from the construction of representations and from the alternation of economies of pleasure and of identities. Future research must look into two things: firstly, the construction of masculinity and sexuality, and their relationship to power, social class and ethnic inequality; secondly, the risks intrinsic to policies of normalization within (male) homosexual communities, and the creation of “new standards” of citizenship. Clients, as in the extract

mentioned, contribute to the production of forms of subjectification: they contribute to a definition of standards which define social class and ethno-sexual factors as products of homosexual eroticization. The question to be asked is whether the factors which determine the production of new subjectivities function as standards for new forms of normalization and reification. We can't separate considerations on sex work from a wider structural analysis of socio-economic factors, which determine the conditions through which certain sexual practices, behavior and identities emerge, and not others. We can't tire of examining in depth the emerging subjectivities, the invisible phenomena, or that which is taken for granted, and we must endeavor to understand how individuals move within structural contingencies, gaining power and privileges, or losing them, investing resources and practicing strategies and tactics of identity, negotiating resources and trying to elude control. These aspects are very much evident in acts of (homosexual) male sexual exchange. Essentially, it is a matter of realizing how we are all implicated, men and women, in sex work. One of the implications, and perhaps the most risky, is the awareness (yet to be acquired) that we researchers are responsible, together with other institutional subjects, for spreading "acceptable" representations which can be shared, which institutions, policy, services, social workers, nurses, doctors, politicians, psychologists draw on to conclude that only some types of subjects deserve those interventions, services and policies. Starting to pose questions in queer terms means examining one's position, clarifying this position in the research process and understanding to what extent observation, as a sexual subject, influences and is influenced by the subjects of research. This conscious reflexivity leads the researcher not to separate theory and practice, but rather to realize to what extent the theories correspond to social practices. A reflexivity which, as we have indicated, must be a «call for accountability and responsibility in research», «not a property of the self», «not for self-formation and



self-promotion» (Skeggs, 2002: 369). A situated theory, as would derive from the queer fascination, creates awareness of the existence of a centre which would impose unity and hierarchy, prompts us to consider the subjects as a multiplicity interconnected with other multiplicities, and to verify how analysis of the “unusual” and the “transgressive” makes us understand the conspiracy of normality.

## References

ADAMS, T. E., JONES, S. Holman, *Autoethnography is queer*, in DENZIN, N.K. and LINCOLN, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2008, pp. 373-390.

BECKER, H.S., *Writing for social scientists*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.

Blackman, Shane J. (2007), ‘*Hidden ethnography: crossing emotional borders in qualitative accounts of young people’s lives*’, in «Sociology», 1986, 41(4): 699-716.

BLUMER, H., *Symbolic interactionism. Perspective and method*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ. 1969,

BUTLER, J. *Gender trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York. 1990.

BUTLER, J., *Undoing gender*, Routledge, London. 2004.

CHAPKIS, Wendy. Productive tensions: Ethnography engagement, complexity and contradiction. *Journal Of Contemporary Ethnography*. vol. 39, issue 5, 2010, p. 483-497.

COFFEY, A. (1999), *The ethnographic self*, Sage, London.

COFFEY, A., *Ethnography and self: reflections and representations*, in MAY, Tim (ed.), *Qualitative research in action*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Cal., 2002, pp. 313-331.

CROSSLEY, N., *The networked body and the question of reflexivity*, in WASKUL, D. and VANNINI, P. (eds.), *Body/embodiment. Symbolic interaction and the sociology of the body*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, pp. 21-33.

de LAURETIS T. (a cura di), *Differences*, 3(2), special number «Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay sexualities», Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.

DENZIN, N.K. and LINCOLN, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks, Cal., Sage, 1994.

DEVAULT, M.L. *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1999.

DOUCET, A. and MAUTHNER, N.S., *Knowing responsibly: linking ethics, research practice and epistemology*, in MAUTHNER, M., BIRCH, M., JESSOP, J. and MILLER, T. (eds.), *Ethics in qualitative research*, Sage, London, 2002.

EDELMAN, L., *Queer theory: unstating desire*, in «QLQ: A journal of lesbian & gay studies», 2, pp. 343-346, 1995.

EDWARDS, R., *An education in interviewing: placing the researcher and the research*, in RENZETTI, C.M. and LEE, R.M. (eds.), *Researching sensitive topics*, Sage, London, pp. 107-122, 1993.

ELLIS, C. and BOCHNER, A.P., *Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity*, in DENZIN, N.K. and LINCOLN, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca., pp. 733-768, 2000.

FERRELL, J. and HAMM, Mark S., *True confessions. Crime, deviance and field research*. Introduction, p.9 in Iid. (ed), *Ethnography at the edge. Crime, deviance and field research*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1998, pp. 2-19

FERRELL, J., *Criminological verstehen. Inside the immediacy of crime*, p. 20, in FERRELL, Jeffe HAMM, Mark S. (eds), *Ethnography at the edge. Crime, deviance and field research*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1998, pp.20-42.

FEW, A.L., STEPHENS, D.P. and ROUSE-ARNETT, M., *Sister-to-sister talk: transcending boundaries and challenges in qualitative research with black women*, in «Family Relations», 2003, 52(3): 205-215.

FRASER, N., *Justice interruptus*, Routledge, London. 1997.

GEERTZ, C., *The interpretation of cultures*, Basic Books, New York. 1973.

GIDDENS, A., *Modernity and self identity: self and society in the late modern age*, Polity, Cambridge, MA. 1991.

GLASER, Barney G. and STRAUSS, Anselm L., *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*, Aldine, Chicago. 1967.

HARAWAY, D., *Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective*, in «Feminist Studies», 1988, 14: 575-599.

HOCHSCHILD, A.R. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1983.

JAGGAR, A.M., 'Love and knowledge: emotion in feminist epistemology', in JAGGAR, A.M. 1989.

JAGGAR, A.M. and BORDO, S.R. (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

KANTER, R.M. *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Basic Books, New York. 1977.

KIRSCHNER, S.R., *“Then what have I to do with thee?”: on identity, fieldwork and ethnographic knowledge*, in «Cultural Anthropology», 2(2): 1987, pp. 211-234.

KLEINMAN, S. and COPP, M.A. *Emotions and Fieldwork*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.:1993.

LINCOLN, Y.S. and DENZIN, N.K., *The fifth moment*, in DENZIN, N.K. and LINCOLN, Y.S. 1998.

LINCOLN (eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks.

LINCOLN, Y.S. and DENZIN, N.K., *The seventh moment: out of the past*, in DENZIN, N.K. and LINCOLN, Y.S. (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca. 2000.

MARROU, H.I., *La conoscenza storica* [1954], Il Mulino, Bologna. 1962.

MAUTHNER, N.S. and DOUCET, A., *Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis*, in «Sociology», 2003, 37(3): 413-431.

MAUTHNER, N.S., PARRY, O. and BACKETT-MILBURN, K., *“The Data are out there, or are they?” Implications for archiving and revisiting qualitative data*, in «Sociology», 1988, 32: 733-745.

MCKEGANEY, N. and BLOOR, M., *Spotting the invisible man: the influence of male gender on fieldwork relations*, in «The British Journal of Sociology», 1991, 42(2): 195-210.

MEAD, G.H., *Mind, self and society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1934.

NEWTON, E., *My best informant’s dress: the erotic equation in fieldwork*, in «Cultural Anthropology», 1993, 8(1): 3-23.

OKELY, J., *Anthropology and autobiography. Participatory experience and embodied knowledge*, in OKELY, J. and CALLAWAY, H. (eds.), *Anthropology and autobiography*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp. 1-27.

PLUMMER K., *Speaking its name: inventing a lesbian and gay studies*, in Id. (ed.), *Modern homosexualities. Fragments of lesbian and gay experience*, Routledge, London-New York, 1992.

PLUMMER K., *Critical humanism and queer theory: living with the tensions*, in DENZIN, N.K., LINCOLN, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition, Sage, CA, 2005.

PLUMMER, K., *Documents of life 2. An invitation to a critical humanism*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, Ca., Sage, 2001.

RINALDI, C., *Verso la devianza emancipativa. L'omosessualità negli studi di sociologia della devianza dagli anni Venti alla fine dei Settanta in America*, in TRAPPOLIN L. (ed.), *Per una sociologia dell'omosessualità*. Omosapiens 3, Carocci, Roma, 2008.

RINALDI, C. *Il sex work maschile (omosessuale): rappresentazioni, mondi sociali e analisi*, in CIPOLLA, C. and RUSPINI, E. (eds.), *Prostituzioni visibili e invisibili*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2012, pp. 189-222.

RINALDI, C., *Razza, genere e sessualità nelle arene del sex working maschile. Implicazioni auto-etnografiche*, in GRASSO, M. (ed.), *Razzismi, discriminazioni e confinamenti*, Ediesse, Rome, 2013, pp. 175-188.

RINALDI, C., *Il sociologo come cruiser. Riflessioni intorno ai mondi sociali dei clienti e dei marchettari*, in MORNIROLI, A. and OLIVIERO, L. (eds.), *I clienti del sesso. I maschi e la prostituzione*, vol. 1, Edizioni Intra Moenia, Naples, 2013a, pp. 95-110.

RINALDI, C., *La tentazione di essere normali e la violenza della normalità. Il queer e lo studio sociologico della sessualità non normativa*, F. Corbisiero (ed.), *Comunità omosessuali. Le scienze sociali sulla popolazione LGBT*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2013b, pp. 181-199.

ROBERTS, H. (ed.), *Doing feminist research*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

ROOKE, A. *Queer in the field: on emotions, temporality and performativity in ethnography*, in BROWNE, Kath e NASH, Catherine J. (ed.), *Queer methods and methodologies. Intersecting queer theories and social science research*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2010, pp. 25-39.

RUSSELL, K., WILSON, M., and HALL, R., *The color complex*, Doubleday, New York, 1992.

SCHUTZ, A. *The phenomenology of the social world*, Northwestern University Press, 1967.

SEDGWICK, E. Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the closet*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1990.

SEIDMAN, S., *Identity and politics in "postmodern" gay culture: some historical and conceptual notes*, in WARNER, M. (a cura di), *Fear of a queer planet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 105-142.

SEIDMAN, S., *Symposium: Queer theory/Sociology: a dialogue*, in "Sociological theory", 12(2): 166-177, 1994.

SEIDMAN, S., *Difference troubles. Queering social theory and sexual politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

SKEGGS, B., *Feminist ethnography*, in ATKINSON, P., COFFEY, A., DELAMONT, S., LOFLAND, J. and LOFLAND, L. (eds.), *Handbook of Ethnography*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Cal., 2001, pp. 426-442.

SKEGGS, B., *Techniques for telling the reflexive self*, in MAY, Tim (ed.), *Qualitative research in action*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Cal., 2002, pp. 349-374.

STEIN, A., PLUMMER, K., "I can't even think straight" "Queer" theory and the missing revolution in sociology, in "Sociological theory", 12(2): 178-187. 1994.

BOX, S., *Deviance, Reality and Society*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, London. work, in «Organization», 21(3): 346-364. 1986.

TURNER, B., *Regulating bodies: Essays in medical sociology*, Routledge, London. 1992.

WACQUANT, L., *Body and soul: notebooks of an apprentice boxer*, Oxford University Press, New York. 2004.

WEBER, M., *The methodology of the social sciences* [1922], trans. and ed. by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, with a foreword by Edward A. Shils, The Free Press, Glencoe. 1949.

ZAGO, LUIZ FELIPE. HOLMES, DAVE. The ethical tightrope: politics of intimacy and consensual method in sexuality research. *Nursing Inquiry*, vol. 22, Issue 2, June 2015. p.147-156.