
Sex and a Career

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Sex and a career

She

Abstract

In this autobiographical statement, I show how sex and sexuality have determined the education, regional specialization, co-authorships, social network, and opportunities I have had in archaeology. In particular, it is homosexuality that has coloured interactions, peer network formation, and the mentoring of students in both positive and negative ways.

Keywords

Autobiography; profession history; sociology; mentoring.

What does a sexualized personal history offer the larger project of documenting the history of archaeology? We have long recognized that academic programme and mentor are crucial nodes of knowledge formation in an individual practitioner. We all know of cases where a sexual relationship has served a similar purpose, but we have not been willing to discuss this node of knowledge transfer. In this autobiographical essay, I demonstrate how sex and sexuality have shaped my career. While particulars will obviously differ from individual to individual, the reader will find here examples of the transfer of information from one individual to another, a transfer of information that is of greater magnitude than the student–teacher relationship. There are also examples of fieldwork opportunities taken and left because of a relationship, a student–faculty mentor relationship that still impacts on me decades later, of peer relationships and thus professional networks determined, of the impact of my relationship on my fieldwork decisions, and how the knowledge of my sexuality colours my ability to mentor.

The sexuality described herein is homosexual. It is important to establish what aspects of the narrative are peculiar to a homosexual lifestyle in a heterosexual and, more importantly, homophobic society and what aspects are shared across sexualities. I return to these distinctions at the end of the narrative.

I have no doubt that, in my particular case, my attraction to archaeology has a sexual component, but not one that I can bring much clarity to for it is my mother's story. When I was school age, my mother decided to relinquish her parental rights. For the rest of my childhood I was obsessed with my past, which was never discussed with my new parents, and the past of most everything else – Indians, settlers, neighbours, stamps, coins, books.



If I perceived a secret life in something, I wanted to study it or collect it. I announced in elementary school I was going to be an archaeologist.

My lesbianism emerged in high school, as erotic and social attachments. In the summer after 10th grade I began my sexual odyssey with a teacher and, while this two-year long affair had much to do with my emotional needs, it also set the stage in important ways for my career in archaeology.

At the time I met this teacher, I was a B student. Our intimacy gave her the power to demand of me better performance in school and to demand college attendance. I achieved a 4.0 grade point average all senior year. I elected to go to the college she had attended and live in the dormitory she lived in. The night before I went off to college she devastated me by saying our relationship had been bad and wrong and was hereby ended.

The excellence she demanded of me coalesced with an extremely fortuitous choice of school and my ten-year desire to be an archaeologist. The emotional debilitation created a workaholic. I had taken four anthropology courses by the end of my freshman year and achieved the highest grade in each.

Towards the end of my second year I 'came out'. In my third year in school I began hanging out at the campus women's centre which was populated mostly by graduate-school folks and many lesbians. It was there I learned about the Women's Movement and feminist politics. It was within those walls that I learned to conflate 'radical feminism' and 'lesbian feminism'. It was there I learned of a woman anthropologist who committed suicide because of her lesbianism, and I was given her library.

It was also in my third year that I met Storm in a North American Indians class. I introduced her to the women's centre crowd, and she in turn introduced me to other graduate students in archaeology, many of them women. I moved in with her and four other women graduate students the next August for my final year. We became lovers. During that Fall semester she criticized my course papers for failing to identify hypotheses, she posited how I could organize my honours thesis following Plog's research design prescription, she proselytized Binford, Schiffer, and a new archaeology. I sat in on a class she was taking. I hung out with the graduate students and faculty. I did weekend contract work with her. I got a job in the archaeology lab. I figured out my professors' theoretical stances and harboured some resentment that they had not done this for me. By Christmas I was finished with my course work and had only my honours thesis to write, so I decided to move away. Storm gave me five books for a Christmas present: Charles Redman's *Current Anthropology*, Mark Leone's *Contemporary Archaeology*, Fred Plog's *A Study of Prehistoric Change*, Lewis Binford's *An Archaeological Perspective*, and *Archaeological Explanation* by Patty Jo Watson, Steven LeBlanc, and Charles Redman. I read every word.

Two months after moving, I was broke and lonely. I moved back in with Storm and finished my thesis while attending her classes and publishing two articles. I went next to a field school which I abhorred for its blatant heterosexism and sexism, and then went away to graduate school.

I probably cannot adequately evaluate the tremendous impact the relationship with Storm had on my formation as a scientist. In my undergraduate courses I memorized site names, dates, sequences, learned how the environment shaped group experience. I knew nothing that I could articulate, prior to Storm and her classes about theory, about the

scientific method, about professionalization of students into the discipline. I met the intellectual pulse of the New Archaeology and over a dozen of its future carriers through her.

Years later I would be assigning students Chapter 2 from Plog to structure their research papers. Even more long-lived in my teaching has been my use of the narrative in the Binford book she gave me. I discuss formation processes and assign Schiffer's book in my theory class. While my subsequent engagement with the works of these authors has long superseded her translation of this material to me, and that of the professors whose classes I attended, the introduction of these materials in an intimate setting and their immediately evident practical application in my papers and thesis meant a profound engagement with these books.

Storm was my personal mentor in the field as well. Through my connections to Storm, who had a departmental research assistantship, I learned of and gained employment in field and laboratory work. We were hired on several week and weekend contract projects. My experiences of fieldwork were contextualized within this intimate relationship – I learned what she, the more experienced of us, saw; I dug as she dug; and we influenced each other's perceptions of standard recording practices and objectionable social behaviour on a dig. I learned a model for how to juggle personal life and intimate life for public presentation. Because of our class and party attendance the department members knew or sensed our intimacy and we were both framed by our peers and mentors as sexualized beings, more particularly as homosexual beings.

Graduate school dislocated me from most of the frameworks I was comfortable with. It re-sexualized me as heterosexual since no one knew me. It dislodged me from the regional archaeology I was familiar with and from Storm, and it was not a place where the New Archaeology was revered. Furthermore, the feminist community was located in the city, not on campus, and here the lesbian community and feminist communities did not overlap. Instead of my sexuality and political commitments leading me deeper into the discipline as they had in the previous two years, they led me outside archaeology, away from the department. I was startled by the lack of community within the department, jarred by the lack of women on the faculty or in the student ranks, isolated by the insularity of the students and their competitiveness, where my undergraduate institution's community had been alive with a strong sense of purpose, of forging something new, of experimenting. We are still friendly when we meet at conferences. We remember how and why we know each other.

As a lesbian feminist in a small, male-dominated department, I had no interest in going to the student and archaeology parties – the ones I heard about anyway. I imagined both sexist behaviour and heterosexualized behaviour that I did not want to be confronted with. My absence from student activities meant that my peer network was weak, and has been useless in the years since.

There was, in fact, a women junior faculty member among the archaeologists who was on sabbatical during my first year. On a short visit to campus, I met Amanda, and was immediately captivated. She invited me to join her summer excavation team in Latin America, and assigned me the task of devising a computerized coding system for the project. I boldly asked if Storm could come as the project photographer and field worker. The answer was yes.

Shortly after the field season started Storm got hypersensitive to our physicality. She

was convinced that if someone saw us touching we would be jailed or deported. My frustration with her paranoia paralleled my growing attraction towards the director. Amanda was engaging and brilliant, while being simultaneously inconsiderate and private. I wanted to know everything she knew; I wanted to reach her sensibilities. The new academic year began with her as my adviser.

For the next two years, I signed up for all of Amanda's courses, worked with the project data, and I flirted with her. We spent two to three evenings a week together; we drank beer together. During the second field season Storm was even more paranoid. She moved in with me during the following academic year, but left after two days – taking refuge with Amanda for another three days before returning home. I feared that Amanda's allegiance had settled with Storm. A paper I wrote in a class of Amanda's was accepted for publication which led to an invitation to participate in a prestigious venue usually only attended by senior scholars. Another publication came out of that experience.

In my second year of graduate school I met Ann. Her influence on my mind equalled that of Storm and Amanda. In a 16-hour conversational marathon, Ann radicalized me. I had understood the feminist language issue, the movement for equal rights, the lesbian subversion of femininity, and the lesbian alternative to heterosexuality. I had not understood power or power politics or capitalism. I was shocked when she initially said that police were bad. I had awoken that day naive. I did not go to sleep that night. I was agitated. I was transformed. I was transfigured. The sexual relationship that developed soon thereafter incubated the politics, took me further away from campus. For the rest of my graduate life I was plagued by the possible interpretations of my actions, of my appearance, and I strove to fix the correct interpretation. My humour was guarded, my pessimism freely offered. I was adrift in the department, I was hostile to most men. I defended and then dropped a dissertation proposal. I suffered a crisis of relevancy. Maybe I should be in cultural anthropology or law, or political organizing. Sometimes I just wanted to lie forever in someone's arms. My growing radicalism made it hard for me to make new friends.

My politics and generally 'out' reputation on campus actually landed me a free room and board situation in a dormitory on campus. I was given a budget with which to draw together the lesbian community on campus. For three years I interacted with some fascinating undergraduate women, worked on the radical newspaper, had a radio show, held dances. I am still friends with several of these women. I attended meetings about women's studies and sexual harassment on campus. I became friends with a faculty member active in women's studies, who explained the tenure process to me. On a trip out of town with Amanda, unusual attentiveness turned erotic and on our way back to town, Amanda asked me to come home with her. In her living room I became unsure of her intentions and I froze. She was my adviser. I could not afford to guess wrong, to act wrong, so I froze. I lay awake on her living room couch the rest of the night.

That moment was gone and may have constituted a major road-not-taken. The next year Amanda was denied tenure and changed schools. All of her younger graduate students made the move with her. Nothing was ever said to me about going. I declined to return to Amanda's project that summer for I could not tolerate any more of Storm's paranoia, or any more of the emotional roller-coaster I experienced around Amanda. We parted ways. The end of my involvement with prehistory in that region was as arbitrary

as its beginning, entirely shaped by sexuality. To this day I cannot relax in the presence of Amanda. I cannot shed my need for acknowledgement from her of what could have been, and for closure with her.

I left school for a year to work for a state government doing archaeology, in the same office as Storm. Again I was learning basic skills from her – how to fill in a National Register nomination form, accompanying her on public school jaunts. I discussed dissertation topics with her and others.

I returned to graduate school. I got a teaching job for a semester. I settled on a dissertation topic and worked steadily. I got employment running the archaeology laboratory and learning various laboratory analyses from the woman assistant laboratory director. After a year of loneliness and poverty I gave in to her advances. She cooked for me, she bought me presents, she gave me jobs. We co-authored two articles and, through her and my new adviser, I was pulled into the hard sciences and a new, stronger, belief in Truth and infinite possibilities.

My first year on the job market got me only a post-doctoral fellowship, due, I am sure, to my failure to align with a senior faculty member. I moved the day I turned in my dissertation. I fled Storm and the laboratory director. There was no one left in the department I felt connected too, but the place was hard to leave. At a conference that fall I had my only conference affair, with a married woman; and, when it came time to offer a field school, we combined efforts. As she had stated at the conference, no mention or allusion to the affair was ever made again. That work led to a paper at the regional conference and a publication and began my assimilation into the region.

A year later I had an academic job, back in the state where Storm lived. I avoided her. What I did not know for another eight months was that my predecessor in the job, who had been a friend of mine and Storm's from our undergraduate days, told all of his classes, the janitors, secretaries, and colleagues, when he learned that he had not been hired, that they had hired a radical lesbian feminist. I do not fully appreciate how that information has coloured my relationship with that institution. My second field school, co-taught with a man, left me resolved never to again put myself in a situation where it looked like men run field schools and women teach classes.

Two failed relationships and four years later, I felt hopelessly trapped in a town with too few lesbian academics. The woman who sounded most intriguing was on leave for my first three years there, probably not to return. My research focus and my productivity were floundering as well, for I was never one to recover quickly from a breakup. Loneliness was paralysing.

In the fall of my fourth year, the absent professor, Mary Lou, returned. We met several times with negative results but several semester break events changed the tide. That next summer she bought into my house, significantly changing my financial situation as well as my personal one.

It is difficult, in retrospect, to pull apart the weaving of our lives. For over a decade, her influence on my scholarship has varied between subtle and obvious. It was Mary Lou who introduced me to critical theory, to postmodernism, to agency theory, to black feminist theory, to queer theory, to 1990s white feminist theory, just as the profession of archaeology was simultaneously encountering much of the same material. She caused me to doubt the certitude with which I so often talked. She reflected my hostility towards the

world, in both ways altering my personality. She supported my opinions of others. She reawakened my interest in ethnography and tourist art. Now I use words like 'encoding' and 'decoding' in my classes, and we are engaged in an ethnography of lesbians. We were tenured the same year and promoted the same year. Our salaries differ by only \$40. We are both the lowest paid and ranking persons in our respective colleges. We share the same study at home. She now reads and comments on many papers I write, often providing me citations or literature. A beloved spouse and a stable relationship have brought to me the peace of mind that has freed up immense places in my intellect and my spirit.

This relationship also means I am not free to seek employment elsewhere. She will not give up tenure. I shall have to wait until she retires if I want to change my academic environment. This stasis has both negative and positive ramifications for my teaching and intellectual life. The relationship also means that I am reluctant to be gone for even four weeks on a summer field school. That reluctance sets up costs to my research agenda, saddles me with analysis and report responsibilities for sites that hold little interest for me, and sets up a particular type of field-school experience for the students.

While my sexuality continues to shape my archaeological education, it is also shaping the education of students in my department. The local field schools and my lack of interest in the research problems of the area where I teach deprives the student of the benefits of long-term research projects – clear developmental stages in the conceptualizing and analysis of the project, the web of experts that becomes associated with the project, the full force of my enthusiasm and intellectual engagement. My marginal status in a heterosexual world, however, leaves me sensitive to other marginalized students, particularly ones who are homosexual, and for them I am a reference point. However, since most students do know about my sexuality, or think they do (student lore from appearances together at departmental parties, rumour because they know I am not married, assumption because of how I look or talk), they opt to stay away from me outside the classroom. I rarely get asked to offer an internship or independent study or to advise during registration period, even though my teaching evaluations are positive. When I was the only archaeologist most of the concentrators were women but now that there is a male archaeologist very large numbers of students are male and manage to avoid taking classes from me. (I have only recently come to the conclusion that my low student involvement outside class is to be attributed to my sexuality.)

My sexuality has also shaped my professional network by *widening* the number of women I count as colleagues. I have, over the years, become friends and co-authors with women archaeologists older and younger than I am simply because they knew or sensed I was gay and either wanted to seek support or offer support. I also suspect in several cases, and know in others, that my sexuality has *limited* the number of men who are comfortable with me. Homophobia also has been one way of discounting some of my work and candidacy for professional office by both women and men.

In general, my life as a homosexual has left me reluctant to be in situations where I have to reveal my personal life. In graduate school this meant I was not comfortable with peers or at archaeology socials. Today, this means I am not comfortable at student parties or attending departmental functions with my spouse where students are present. It means I am not comfortable running for professional office or interviewing for jobs. All of these absences have their costs. Finally, my sexuality has also figured prominently

in the opportunities for fieldwork and publication I have had. My sexuality has, thus, shaped the type of archaeologist I am in the classroom and the type of archaeologist others see me as.

It should be apparent there are some aspects of my life and career that are universal to all sexual beings and some aspects that are shaped by my particular sexuality and, therefore, characteristic of a minority of archaeological practitioners.

All archaeologists are aware of how their relationships and children influence their decisions to do fieldwork near their loved ones. This strategy of balancing work and personal life has a long history in our field and is unlikely to vary with type of sexuality. Also, there are surely hundreds of co-authored articles that have been written by lovers, and field schools jointly directed by lovers. Hundreds of archaeologists are where they are, doing what they are doing because of a spouse who will not or cannot move. Many people have been introduced to theoretical positions, articles, regional archaeological records, and formed networks based on a lover's connections, education, and opportunities. None of these aspects of my career are unique to a homosexual lifestyle.

But, there are aspects of our careers that are unique to our sexuality. For instance, because homosexual graduate students strongly believe they have more to lose than most undergraduates, they may choose, as I did, to avoid the heterosexual social scene – even dreading fieldwork and field schools. They then turn outside their departments for social interactions, while heterosexual graduate students often do the opposite, even seeking relationships with peers and faculty. In fact, homosexual graduate students have told me they feared for their scholarships should faculty members find out about their sexuality. Consequently, they kept a low profile around the department. Low-profile students are not offered assistantships as often, or research opportunities.

Women's rights and gay rights were the dominant social movements of the 1970s, the years of my graduate training. During this time my homosexuality was instrumental in the formation of my politics, my perspective on science and its role, and in some ways my field practice. The knowledge of my lesbianism in some circles and the assumption of it in others have shaped how I am viewed by others, particularly by male archaeologists and students. While other women archaeologists and professors may not be sexualized by students or not primarily so, I am primarily or often just-momentarily-not a sexual being for many people. The knowledge of my sexuality has charted who constitutes my professional network, and what professionals my students have immediate access to. The homophobia of our society places a particular burden on me to use the knowledge of my sexuality strategically, to be successful at what I choose to do, to be out enough that gay students and professionals can identify me, and to fight homophobia.

Sexuality affects all of us, whether or not we choose to satisfy it. Every autobiography or biography that has been written without mention of sexuality has failed to explain adequately the person and the career. Sexuality and intellectual development are inseparable in many careers and lovers often influence what data sets a researcher uses, what methods are adopted, the hypotheses considered, the references cited, the written product (as attested to by many acknowledgements). Sexuality. Everyone had it, everyone has it, and every discipline wishing to understand its history needs to embrace it.