

Wikisexuality: Rethinking sexuality in cyberspace

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Abstract

Scholarship in cyberculture studies often frames the “real” world as the epistemic point of reference in thinking about identities in the virtual world. This article, however, considers cyberspace as its own epistemic point of reference and proposes “wikisexuality,” a new category of sexuality in cyberspace that takes into account the fluidity of sexuality, highlights the constant formation of sexual identities, and reflects the non-linear, postmodern, and chaotic formation of sexuality that moves us beyond the mono versus multiple categories of sexuality and beyond the nature versus nurture debate by evoking the notion of sexuality as constantly shifting with every encounter.

Keywords

Cyberspace, interactive sexuality, play, sexuality, Tantric goddesses

How would the knowledge produced about sexuality be different if we were to consider cyberspace as its own epistemic point of reference? Scholarship in cyberculture studies often frames the “real” or the “actual” world as the epistemic point of reference or point of comparison in thinking about identities in the virtual world (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Boellstorff, 2008; Downes, 2005; Paasonen, 2005; Ross, 2005; Waskul, 2003; Weinstone, 2004). A study by a health scientist Michael Ross, for example, shows how heterosexual men who have sex with other men online would still claim themselves as heterosexuals because for these “heterosexual” men the experiences of the body in the physical world are more privileged than the virtual world when it comes to constructing their identity (Ross, 2005: 139). That these heterosexual men disregard their online experiences in constructing their sexual identity exposes the limitation of present categories of sexuality, which should allow us to name this fluid articulation of sexuality in virtual space.

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It is precisely the issue of limiting categories of sexuality that this article addresses. I will therefore offer a new category of sexuality that I call “wikisexuality,” a new formation of sexuality in cyberspace that will allow us to consider the virtual space as its own epistemic point of reference.

Before I further explain the term wikisexuality, I first would like to clarify that by focusing on cyberspace as its own epistemic space, I do not wish to completely disengage with the “real” world, nor do I find it productive to discount the knowledge produced about sexuality in the physical world in my rethinking about sexuality in cyberspace. Rather, I consider this physical world as one of my (not “the” only) points of departure from where I can then expand and challenge existing and limiting categories of sexuality that privilege experiences in the actual world to provide a more nuanced understanding of sexuality in cyberspace. As such, this article builds on a category of sexuality that Dennis Waskul, Mark Douglass, and Charles Edgley previously coined, “altersexuality,” which they define as “sexual experiences that differ from those in ‘real’ life” (Waskul et al., 2004: 43). This article expands the altersexuality category by emphasizing the constantly shifting formation of sexuality with each encounter and further highlighting the fluidity of sexuality that traverses various layers of “reality,” that is, the virtual and the physical/actual/“real” worlds. Hence, I do not focus solely on sexual encounters performed online or the “outercourse” without taking into account its meanings and relationships to the physical world (Waskul et al., 2004). Another point of departure that I also incorporate into this article is the spiritual world, to which some cyberculture studies scholars have likened the virtual world. That is, previous scholars have indeed viewed cyberspace as having “its conceptual roots in religion” in the way it frames “soul space” as virtual space that is “symbolically real” (MacWilliams, 2005: 181).

In naming this novel construction of sexuality in the virtual space as wikisexuality, I purposefully adopt the word “wiki” to draw on its meanings and usages in cyberspace. In the internet world, wiki is employed to signify a collaborative website. According to c2.com,¹ a website of a company by Ward Cunningham, the person who first hauls this Hawaiian term to cyberspace, the idea of wiki suggests that the website is always a work-in-progress and that the “conversation” on wikiwebsite happens in the “timeless now.” This is one of the aspects of wiki that I am borrowing here: sexuality is always a (collaborative) work in progress.

Wikisexuality is a category of sexuality that takes into account the fluidity of sexuality as it traverses various layers of reality. It is a collaborative- and interactive-based sexuality rather than an essence-based sexuality that hints at the absolute truth and fixed sexuality, without any external interactions. Wikisexuality thus highlights the constant formation and reformation of sexual identities. It reflects the non-linear, postmodern, and chaotic formation of sexuality that moves us beyond the mono (i.e., homosexual, heterosexual) versus multiple (i.e., bisexual, pansexual) categories of sexuality and beyond the nature versus nurture debate by evoking the notion of sexuality as constantly shifting with every encounter. Offering a new category of sexuality allows me to redress what psychologists Kelly Brooks and Kathryn Quina refer to as “unlabeled” sexuality:

women who in their study refused to be called lesbians or bisexuals because these women consider their sexuality as more fluid than these categories may suggest; they claim that when it comes to sexual orientation it is the “person, not the gender” that matters (Brooks and Quina, 2009: 1031). Psychologist Lisa Diamond calls this “sexual fluidity”: “situation-dependent flexibility in women’s sexual responsiveness” (Diamond, 2008: 3). As such, this new category of sexuality offers a fresh perspective at a rupture of the saturation point that Michel Foucault terms as the “‘over-knowledge’ or ‘hyper-development’ of discourse about sexuality” (quoted in Urban, 2003: 206).

To explain the term wikisexual further, I turn to 75 websites² of American Tantric goddesses (sexual and spiritual women healers) and closely analyze the ways in which they represent their services and sexuality online. Turning to American Tantric goddesses’ websites serves the purpose of shifting the emphasis further away from coupling an analysis of the virtual world with the “real” world and toward examining the virtual world through a theoretical lens of spiritual studies. Both the virtual and spiritual worlds provide, I argue, a way to understand a dimension of reality that is not fully “physical” or material-based. My turning to the virtual and spiritual worlds to understand sexuality is an attempt to access a layer of “reality” in a different way to arrive at a sort of different understanding of that reality. As Buddhist studies scholar Mangala Chinchore argues, “every means of knowledge would enable us to know just one kind of real, such a means would be incapable, by nature, to enable us to know the other sort of real as well” (Chinchore, 1995: 22–23). In other words, if we were to use only the “real” world as our frame of reference in our attempt to understand how sexuality functions in the virtual world, we would be unable to access and produce other forms of knowledge about sexuality in cyberspace. It is by way of considering the virtual space itself as its own epistemic point of reference and incorporating the lens of spiritual studies that I was able to offer a fresh perspective and a new category of sexuality in cyberspace.

Cyberspace is indeed an important site of analysis to study about sexuality. As media studies scholar Wendy Chun argues, cyberspace is “marked as a heterotopia of compensation—as a space for economic, social, or sexual redress that simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted all other ‘real’ spaces” (Chun, 2006: 55). For Dennis Waskul and Mark Douglass, cyberspace is “a hyperreal technology of social saturation that dislocates space, time, and personal characteristics as variables of human interaction” (Waskul and Douglass, 1997: 381). Sue Thomas even boldly celebrates the power of the internet: “the Internet is my body. It’s an extra set of senses, an additional brain, a second pair of eyes” (Thomas, 2004: 18). Nonetheless, as sociologists Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows have pointed out, cyberspace has been represented as “overly utopian” (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995: 8). Most of these “playful” sexual interactions that allow people to be whatever gender and sex they want to be online tend to be text- or chat-based (Gauntlett and Harley, 2004). There are, however, many expressions of sexuality in cyberspace that are beyond these text-based encounters and therefore trouble these existing studies. This article, for example, is interested in examining Tantric sex websites.

In analyzing and rendering these websites as important sources of information and data, I view them the way modern philologist Antonio Gómez views personal weblogs. Referencing J Pennebaker, H Schau and M Gilly and L Karlsson's works, he argues:

personal weblogs provide their creators with a cyberspace where they can give free reign [sic] to their fantasies and portray their reality as they want it to be. Therefore, online weblog writing becomes the means whereby people in general and adolescents in particular can self-express and discursively construct their self. (Gómez, 2010: 29)

Thus, these websites provide us with a useful site of analysis to understand how Tantric goddesses engage in playful and discursive representations and constructions of their sexuality through the medium of new media and thereby allowing us to further understand the formation of sexuality in cyberspace.

A word of caution is necessary here, however. I recognize that a website analysis cannot stand for my claiming that these are the "real" experiences of people interacting in cyberspace. Carefully reading these websites simply allows me to understand the *discourses* of sexuality and gender that are at play. Arguing so, I nonetheless do not frame the "real" world and the world of "representation" as two distinct and separate worlds. As a cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall argues, "reality does not exist outside the process of representation" (Jhally, 1997). This is also the stand that I take in this article.

In what follows, I will ground my discussion about Tantric goddesses by providing a brief context of Tantra. Then, using Tantric goddess websites as a site of analysis, I will explain how the sexuality of these Tantric goddesses exemplifies wikisexuality: (1) as non-essentialist, interactive, and collaborative sexuality; and (2) as playful and performative sexuality.

Grounding Tantra in history

Tantra is a sedimented spiritual practice that combines Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions and is compatible with some aspects of other spiritual teachings such as Taoism, Sufism, Kaballah, and indigenous shamans (Barrat and Rand, 2007: 7). It has been around since the 5th or 6th centuries CE and is seen more as a "way of living life in meditation" (Barratt and Rand, 2007: 7; Flood, 2006; White, 2000). Its sexualized form, however, is specific to South Asian Tantrism and could be traced as far back as 7th-century Hinduism and Buddhism (White, 2003: 7). In India, specifically, Tantric sex workshops may have existed since the 4th and 5th centuries (Chakravarti, 1963: 93). In its early form, Hindu Tantra sees sexual intercourse as a way to perform offering (i.e., the sexual fluids) to the Tantric gods/goddesses (White, 2000: 16).

Tantrism as we know it today is a construction of 19th-century Orientalist scholars and a commodified and commercialized version of Tantra produced and

circulated by Tantric gurus including Osho-Rajneesh (Urban, 2003: 2, 236). In the USA, Tantra could be found as early as the 1900s, although the “western appropriations” of Tantra existed since the late 19th century (Urban, 2003: 208). By the 1960s and 1970s, Tantra has been popularized by celebrities such as Jimi Hendrix and Mick Jagger (Urban, 2003: 203–204). This undoubtedly created an American version of Tantra, now known as “American Tantra,” which as Hugh Urban claimed, has become a “registered trademark, representing a whole line of books, videos, and ‘ceremonial sensual’ merchandise” (Urban, 2003: 2). The main targets of these commodities seem to be the monogamous heterosexual couples who desire to spice things up in their bedroom.³

By the end of the 20th century, Tantra was known mostly for its teachings that squarely locate desire at the epicenter of liberation (Shaw, 1994: 195; Urban, 2003: 229; White, 2003: 15). It is seen as a spiritual practice that values “erotic energies” through “*breath, movement, sound, visualization, and touch*” and considers “sexual activity [a]s a rich form of prayer” (Barrat and Rand, 2007: 8, emphasis in the original; see also Bullis, 1998: 112). Sex is thus seen as a “gateway to heaven” (Feuerstein, quoted in Urban, 2003: 8).

From its 5th-century, to its 19th-century, to its 21st-century incarnations, Tantra has indeed evolved in different forms. In a sense, Tantra has become a “floating signifier” (Urban, 2003: 23). Nonetheless, throughout its different manifestations Tantra has created a faithful group of followers obsessed with Tantric practices. This contemporary obsession⁴ with Tantra may be considered as “part and parcel of our larger preoccupation with and anxieties about sexuality, a source of both titillating fascination and moralizing censorship” (Urban, 2003: 206). Tantra becomes the “Dakini’s warm breath” of fresh air in a space that is full with stagnant and stale repression of sexuality.

In this article, I specifically focus on Tantric goddesses; in present-day American society they are referred to as spiritual and sexual healers who guide their worshippers through their sensuality. My turn to specifically focus on women who are spiritual *and* sexual teachers and healers is partly driven by the fact that dominant narratives of religious teachings often devalue women who take pleasure in sexual activities and that spirituality or “mysticism” is most often attached to celibacy or “asceticism” (Hutchins, 2010; Jackson, 1992: 86). This article thereby offers a more complex analysis of the construction of sexuality in cyberspace through a mindful incorporation of a gender lens.

Wikisexuality as non-essentialist, interactive, and collaborative sexuality

One of the most prominent and salient features of a “wiki” website is the ability of its users to edit its content on site. An example of a very well-known website that employs a wiki concept is Wikipedia, where various users can add, edit, and delete information on the website. Calling sexuality in cyberspace wikisexuality, I therefore suggest that sexuality in cyberspace is something that is editable (even by

stranger others)—it is unfixed, fluid, and thereby non-essentialist. This notion of editable sexuality implies that the (sexual-)self is a collaborative and interactive project between a person and others around them (Simpson, 2005: 123).

Wikisexuality as non-essentialist sexuality suggests that sexuality is not something that one is born with and therefore remains fixed throughout one's lifetime. Here, I would like to draw from one of the basic Buddhist principles to further explain this notion. In Buddhist tradition, the basic concept of "not-self" or "*anatta*" refers to the notion that a person does not have a fixed self because the self changes with each passing moment. There is thus no fixed subjectivity. In Buddhadasa Bhikku's words: "[Buddha] described that impermanent entities always change and never yield what we expect of them—and this is not-self" (Bhikku, 1990: 43). Brian Lancaster explains this further:

The concept of *anatta* is not simply a statement of the absence of self . . . It is more a conceptual focus for developing a distinctive view of impermanence as this pertains to the mind . . . The *eternalism* inherent in this view of self inhibited the individual from seeing the essentially conditioned nature of mind as process. (Lancaster, 1997: 189)

Thus, building on this line of thinking that the self is impermanent, I propose that subjectivity is performed and constructed at the moment of encounter: a particular encounter produces a particular kind of subjectivity; sexual subjectivity is therefore not something that one is born with or articulates in isolation, but rather, it is formulated at the moment of being interpellated by others. There is no essence in one's sexuality. We are not bisexual or heterosexual *prior* to the encounter.

It is at this moment of encounter when sexuality is expressed, made visible, and performed. Sexuality in this sense then becomes a verb, a doing. It is not an essence, a fixed entity, or a being. Cyberculture scholar Dennis Waskul pointed out that "self is not something that we 'have'; instead, it is something that we communicate" (Waskul, 2003: 13). Identity as a "verb" suggests that identity is "something that we *do* in a process of communication" (Simpson, 2005: 123; Waskul, 2003: 15). Taking this understanding of identity to further help us understand wikisexuality, I argue that wikisexuality is sexuality as it is expressed at a particular moment, something that one does and not necessarily an essence or a *being* in itself. On these websites, when these Tantric goddesses represent what they *do* with their clients during their Tantric sessions, such as teaching them the breathing techniques or the rituals they perform, they are articulating their sexual-self by way of verbalizing what they *do*.

On their websites, these American Tantric goddesses represent their sexuality as one that is "open." On *sacredsensualist.com*, for example, a Tantric goddess advertises that she will welcome "men, women, transfolk, and couples (of whatever gender makeup) onto [her] table."⁵ Such openness seems to be the norm on these websites and suggests a fluidity of sexuality that registers beyond existing categories of sexuality. Depending on whoever comes to their "table," these Tantric goddesses express their sexuality and the sexuality of their clients

in fluid ways. There is no essence to these postmodern Tantric goddesses' sexuality. Some have indeed used the term "heteroflexible" to move away from the limiting categories of "heterosexuality" or "bisexuality."

This tendency of being open to any sexuality can be traced back to ancient sexual healers and ancient mythological goddesses who were represented as bisexuals (Gross, 1978; Hutchins, 2010: 218; McDermott, 1996: 285). However, in this article, rather than highlighting the bisexuality aspect of these sexual healers, I emphasize the fluidity of sexuality that is context-based. That is, I shy away from claiming these Tantric goddesses as bisexuals or heteroflexible. Rather, I propose to call their sexuality wikisexual in that it is being formed and performed at the moment of encounter with others. The "self" is produced for and in the anticipation of encountering some specific others of whatever genders with whom the Tantric goddess will perform the sexual healing and/or teaching sessions. Such a view of the body and subjectivity as fluid is not foreign in Tantric tradition where these are considered as context based and "tradition-dependent"; even gender is considered as "malleable" (Biernacki, 2007: 26; Flood, 2006: 5).

From these websites, sexuality as a collaborative and interactive project can be seen from the ways in which these Tantric goddesses claim that they can help and work with others to "heal," "liberate," and "empower" women in their journey of sensual life. For example, in a two-day session called "Sexual Healing: The Next Step, A Workshop for Women" women are invited to "unpack [their] history, and with [the Tantric goddess's] skill and gentle guidance, take the next healing step in [their] journey toward wholeness." They will "receive the support to explore the obstacles in [their] physical, emotional and spiritual body that keep [them] from [their] full feminine expression. When we do that, freedom is the next step!"⁶ Similarly, in another website, sacredsexyes.com, women are told that:

It is time to liberate, heal and empower ourselves as women. Sacred Sexuality is a powerful vehicle to use on this journey. Dr. Juliana invites you to allow her to facilitate your emotional release, achieving greater depths of intimacy, cultivating orgasmic energy, healing traumas and awakening [you] to your radiant sensual nature.⁷

Hence, in these examples, these websites function as an invitation, a public one, indeed, for the audience to interactively and collaboratively formulate and articulate their sexuality with the guidance of these Tantric goddesses. That is, these goddesses will help these women to better articulate their sexuality. Their sexuality is in formation at the moment of collaborative encounter.

It is also interesting and important to note here that these goddesses hold classes that especially invite women to heal and embrace their sexuality. Such a move is important particularly because women's sexuality has often been repressed, denied, or looked down upon. As one of the Tantric goddesses on sacredloving.net writes:

In today's culture women are taught to repress or use the gift of their sexuality in ways that are often not aligned with their deepest needs and inner truths. Very few

women manage to grow into the full and rich potential of their sexuality in an untainted way.⁸

To provide these women with an access to liberatory sexuality is indeed an empowering exercise both for the clients and goddesses themselves.

Represented as such, sexuality thus becomes a social and public activity. It even necessitates an audience (the other) for it to be fully articulated. Mary Bryson and Lori MacIntosh, in analyzing queer youth's articulation of their sexuality online, argue that it is indeed the stranger and/or the public that "orient the subject" (Bryson and MacIntosh, 2010: 116). They point out, "The act of always performing oneself with an audience's potential response in mind and the need for a reciprocal exchange are products of a social and technological persistence, the exigencies of a posthuman life, a public life" (Bryson and MacIntosh, 2010: 115). Thus, this shift to a more public form of sexuality is itself a product of historically situated technologies such as the internet. Indeed, as a medium of communication, the internet is unique for it allows for a new mode of encountering others: through interactivity (Dawson, 2005: 31; Lövheim and Linderman, 2005; Slevin, 2000: 70, 78ff.). Unsurprisingly, cybersex has mostly been understood as "the interactive sharing of fantasies, using real-time cameras, looking at sexually explicit photographs, and/or sharing similar sexual interests" (Wysocki and Childers, 2011: 220).

In some ways, wikisexuality can be thought of as an audience-oriented sexuality. It is produced *for* and *with* others. Wikisexuality is a sexuality that relies on the public, or on others, to complete its articulation. This in some ways reflects the nature of new media: "unlike traditional media, which positioned users as receivers, the new media participant must consciously construct an identity for others to evaluate. This may be as basic as choosing a 'username' or as detailed as constructing an avatar and customizing an interactive profile" (Jones, 2010: 263). In Anna E Ward's study, "self-display" such as on Facebook or the Beautiful Agony website that she observed, has become "a necessary precondition for identity creation. Self-discovery is now interchangeable with self-expression, specifically, self-expression that demands an audience" (Ward, 2010: 162). Thus, the "self" is produced for and in the anticipation of encountering some specific others. That is, our presentation of ourselves often depends on how we perceive how others might view us, and in gaining that understanding of how others would react to us, we begin to have a better understanding of ourselves (Zhao, 2005: 387). Sexuality here is something that one works at and with, and mostly with others.

Wikisexuality as playful and performative sexuality

If wikisexuality is an interactive and collaborative sexuality, then its mode of interaction and collaboration is play. Play is indeed one of the dominant modes of encounter in cyberspace. Cyberspace is even considered as a fertile "playground" for identity formation (Downes, 2005: 91). Analyzing text cybersex, webcam cybersex, and erotic rate-my-picture websites, Waskul and Vannini argue that internet

sex play can be considered as a form of “ludic” relationship in that “it is generally playful, casual, distant, and noncommittal,” and “ludic(rous)” when it is “laughable—even hilarious—due to apparent absurdity or incongruity” (Waskul and Vannini, 2008: 242). They gave an example of how playful cybersexting functions as ludic and a man pretending to be a woman while having an outercourse with a woman who pretends to be a man ludic(rous). However, whereas Waskul and Vannini see these internet sex-play activities as more ludic and ludic(rous), “fleeting,” or reflecting “a lack of concern for depth, solemnity, seriousness, civility, and respect” (2008: 259), I see them as formative. Internet sex play is more than simply a playful mimicry or a laughable activity. Even in those moments of laughable encounters, people are expressing and experimenting with their sexuality nonetheless. They are engaged in the process of wikisexuality. Moreover, play provides a suitable discourse for understanding wikisexuality particularly because, as Sartre claimed, “. . . play is the characteristic mode of being of a being that has no Being, understood in the sense of a stable and essential metaphysical presence” (Küchler, 1994: 17). That is, because the subjectivity of wikisexual is one that recognizes the “not-self,” play, which in Buddhist terms is simply about impermanence, it lends itself perfectly to being the most suitable mode of being for these wikisexual beings who have “no Being.” Moreover, such a view of play is indeed common in Indian Tantric tradition, where play is considered as:

the removed self-awareness of an actor performing a role or the self-recollection of a dancer performing graceful gestures and choreographed dance steps. Play also refers to erotic sport and enjoyment. The ‘five natural kinds of erotic play’ probably refer to the enjoyment of the five sense objects. Play is also a term that is used when spiritual discipline becomes light and effortless. Thus, the imagery of play poetically conveys the meditative concentration of Tantric partners, their identification with deities, and the choreographic quality of their intimacy. ‘Play’ is an apt term for the contemplative yet amorous gestures of lovemaking as a religious discipline. (Shaw, 1994: 185)

In this sense, then, Tantric union embodies

playfulness and reciprocity. Mutuality is essential to the meditative aim of the practice. The loss of a sense of separate selfhood occurs through a merging of identities and is predicated upon a unitary experience wherein, in her own words, ‘one ceases to know who is the other and what has happened to oneself.’ Through the dance of union the partners lose their individual subjectivity and discover psychic unity, or intersubjectivity. (Shaw, 1994: 187)

This notion of letting go of one’s separation from the other and sinking deep into one’s oneness with others perfectly captures and indeed follows the idea of wikisexuality as non-essentialist, interactive and collaborative sexuality. Sexuality is something that comes into being through an articulation that is made possible by being present with others at the moment of collaborative encounter.

To take the notion of play one step further, I position play within the discourse of performativity. Evoking the notion of performativity suggests that within these online contexts, play involves “a prescribed set of rules enacted by the context” (Jones, 2010: 254). In the cases of these Tantric goddesses, their play falls within the context of the rituals and carefully choreographed sensual encounters that they represent on their website.

The word “play” itself is very common and used in many of these Tantric websites, suggesting the ways in which the discourse of play deeply permeates the Tantric goddesses’ world. On some websites such as *partnerplayshop.com* and *tantradakini.com*, the word “playshop” is used instead of “workshop.”⁹ A Tantric goddess even calls her session a “Tantric playground,” a space for people to “div[e] into . . . play to expand who [they] are.”¹⁰ She claims that play provides spaces for “explorations [that] are great for total true wellness and happiness. As a lifelong student of psychology, [she has] an appreciative intelligence of role-play and a true talent for it.”¹¹ Thus, here, play and role-play are evoked as an avenue for self-exploration and ultimate happiness.

As a space for playful performance of one’s sexuality, Tantric spaces, as these goddesses represent them online, can then be considered as a liminal space. Here, I view liminal space as defined by Matthew Jones as “experimental zones where social roles and relationships are tested and redefined” (Jones, 2010: 255). For example, Miss Christina, a Tantric practitioner of 10 years, offers a goddess training for men who would like to cross-dress. She claims that, “in Miss Christina’s Goddess Training, there is only celebration, play, and education—never ever humiliation. With a flick of [her] wand, [she] will help you transform into the bombshell you want to be—if only for an hour or two.”¹² On her website, she offers her service as a service for a “gentleman” who has

never explored [his] feminine side but would like to with someone whose [sic] discreet and enthusiastic, wants to learn the arts of being a Goddess, loves receiving a “full make-over”—from make-up to garter belts, seeks a Personal Goddess Shopper who will help [him] pick out the finest fashions—from head to toe—so [he] can feel [his] best, would love to share [his] passion for “everything feminine” with a sexy gal who gets it.¹³

In addition to all of these, she will also help the man find his “feminine walk, voice, name, and attitude.”¹⁴ This kind of “playful deviance” can indeed become a site for these men to experience “self-validation” (Redmon, 2003, quoted in Jones, 2010: 257). It is in this sense that we can comprehend cyberspace scholar Daniel Downes’s argument that “play allows us to leave the bonds of the social order for a while. The play space is safe; we can experiment without fear of extreme consequences. Play is distinct from ordinary life not only in locality but in duration” (Downes, 2005: 91). The Tantric clients are thus invited to come out and play with their sexuality, hence articulating their wikisexuality, even if only in this space of temporality, or, in Miss Christina’s words, even “if only for an hour or two.”

Articulation of sexuality in this corner of the virtual world therefore seems to be about employing various modes of play and playing with various modes of being (sexual). Play is, according to James Hans, “a *structuring* activity, the activity out of which understanding comes. Play is at one and the same time the location where we question our structures of understanding and the location where we develop them” (Hans, 1981: x). Seen as such, play functions as a system of knowing, an epistemological act and activity that affects the lives of the players in all significant ways. Play thus requires that we constantly pay attention to the changes that would influence our mode of living and playing (Hans, 1981: xi). Play exposes “how we make choices and how we give value to things through our choices” (Hans, 1981: xii–xiii). A subject is produced within the field of play. Tilman KÜchler puts it even more strongly: “There is thus no subject beyond the field of play” (KÜchler, 1994: 12).

If subjects are produced through play, then play is a site where power is exercised, articulated, and struggled over. Indeed, embedded in play are “constitutive role of power, systems of signification, and conditions of intelligibility” (Paasonen, 2002: 38). For Elise Boulding, the need to render play important is driven by the fact that “new patterns of reality emerge out of play” (Boulding, 1988: 103). This suggests that play can “provide impetus for change and defenses against repression” (Edwards, 1998: 6). On these websites, play is certainly not without its purpose to change and challenge existing power hierarchies. The play that these goddesses perform aims to heal, change, empower, and liberate. For example, the Tantric goddess of templeoftantra.com claims, “One of my specialties is working with women’s issues for healing and empowerment. A place you can be seen, heard and ‘held’ by another sister.”¹⁵ Another website asserts that sex can be used as a vehicle for transformation in other aspects of their lives:

You can transform sex into something so sacred, healing, renewing and energizing that you will never be the same! Your love can continually grow with more intimacy and pleasure than you can now imagine. By positively channeling your sexual energy, you will be more creative at work, you will enjoy better relationships with family & co-workers, & best of all, you will feel fulfilled sexually & emotionally.¹⁶

Similarly, another website advertises her service for women with “healing issues around sexuality and body image, undergoing a major transition such as marriage, divorce, motherhood, new career, seeking clear direction, feeling stuck in a life she knows she has outgrown, looking to gift herself with a healing, blissful journey with the Goddess.”¹⁷ All of these three examples suggest the empowering and liberating aspect of sexuality, particularly for women. Playing, in this context, also becomes empowering for women because these Tantric goddesses are the one in power when they play. A website straightforwardly claims, “The male **MUST** take on a passive role in a male Tantra Session, and must leave the entire session open to full relaxation.”¹⁸

Another purpose of play that these Tantric websites suggest is the breaking of taboos. For example, a session called dark tantra, offers an absolute play

experience that asks the client to leave their everyday roles and step into their non-essential self while being interactive and collaborative with the Tantric goddesses and surrendering to their power. This session

starts with opening discussions over light repast and sparkling water, candle lit bath ceremony and then we will disappear into Dark Tantra either blind folded or not, depending on the client and his or her comfort level with me during Dark Tantra. THIS is of the utmost importance. We co-create the scenario together, experiment with role play, fetish and fantasy . . . (client must be the submissive . . . this is a requirement), and must easily be able to drop the “macho” masculine image or “frilly” feminine side carried with you on a daily basis, and turn it over to your Goddess. This session allows the Goddess complete power and control over the client. Please note that these types of sessions take a long time to plan, so I require a week at least. Also note that with any session you book with me, that they are planned and master-minded by me and no one else, and not tossed together to make up a time slot. I require input from clients wishing Dark Tantra, and a letter of what you seek is of the utmost importance. These types of scenarios must be planned together, so speaking on the phone or even meeting in person to discuss your fantasies and explorations is vital for a successful session.¹⁹

This example certainly highlights and provides evidence for how sexuality that is articulated through play assumes a non-essentialist subject position. The client is invited to collaboratively co-create the scenario together with the goddess and his or her participation is “vital” for having a successful and satisfying session. The goddess is open to working with people of all genders who must let go their everyday role as “macho” or “frilly feminine” and thereby further emphasizing the non-essentialist aspect of sexuality. Lastly, the goddess explicitly uses the words “role play” in describing the session, once again highlighting the important role of play and role-play as a mode of encountering others sensually.

These previous examples certainly show how play is a form through which power is exercised. That is, the narratives constructed surrounding the rules of the game justify who and how one can play and who and what gets excluded (Nagel, 2002: 1). For Miss Christina, her rule is “Only kind, upscale, attentive gentlemen admitted.”²⁰ Upscale is indeed the correct word; her advanced training costs about \$350 per hour. The average fee charged by these goddesses usually ranges from \$200 to \$350 per hour, or \$1000 per day.²¹ Workshops that are held in some popular tourist destinations (such as in San Jose, Costa Rica, Bali, or Hawai'i) usually run about \$2000 per person per workshop that lasts about a week and does not include the airfare.²² What this suggests is that power and access to capital matters and determines even the question of who can play. Only people who have hundreds or thousands of disposable income dollars can participate in the play and feel the ultimate sensual happiness offered by these goddesses. This does not only provide us with an example of how the internet “facilitates a capitalist framework for the management of sexual expression” but

also how, although play has a possibility for leveling the playing field, there still exists inequality within the field of play (Jones, 2010: 268). Nonetheless, in all of these examples, the case remains that these Tantric goddesses provide a space for an articulation of sexuality that is playful and performative, a wikisexuality.

Conclusion

Thus far I have introduced the concept of wikisexuality and provided some examples for how Tantric goddesses' sexuality as they represent it on their websites exemplifies wikisexuality, a non-essentialist, interactive, collaborative, playful and performative sexuality. In this concluding section, I will now turn to the theoretical implication of proposing wikisexuality.

In thinking about the effects of categorizations, I am addressing Sedgwick's call that theorists need "[r]epeatedly to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating" (Hemmings, 2002: 8). Here, I would like to think about Sedgwick's concern by asking: What happens when we claim and label ourselves as "wikisexuals"?

In cyberspace, it is always easier to use readily available stereotypes to present ourselves to others because others can then easily construct who we are based on these existing stereotypes (Simpson, 2005: 127). Sexual mapping has indeed been rendered important for it allows us to know where we or others are positioned within existing sexual categories so that we can proceed and make meanings of our encounters (O'Brien, 1999: 84). That is, the fact that wikisexual is not rendered intelligible or understood will simply make it unknown to the other. To say that we are wikisexuals, to refuse to be known as either heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and so on, therefore upsets this sexual mapping and the encounters that follow. This is so because wikisexuality always suspends and fails to provide meanings to one's performative utterance (here, à la Austin, 1962). That is by uttering "I am wikisexual," I do not perform my sexuality, nor do I wish to deny it. If at all, it only makes visible the performative tensions of such an utterance.

What I suggest here, therefore, is considering wikisexuality as a subversive mode of articulating and playing with one's sexual identity within the structure of cyberspace. Play allows us to take notice of our agency ("we choose the contexts for our play" (Hans, 1981: 14) while recognizing that this agency is located within a particular discourse, "an ecology of communication," (Altheide, 1995) and therefore is governed by it.

Certainly I am aware that suggesting wikisexuality as a new sexual category runs the presumable risk of erasing, if not undermining, multiple narratives of sexuality in the mainstream arena. In some ways, this is precisely the point that I am working against. Certainly I do not propose this term as another homogenizing sexual category—that all human beings are similarly wikisexuals: to do that would betray the very notion of wikisexuality, a sexuality that is in constant formation and produced in collaboration with others and hence unique and context-specific. We need to find ways to continue thinking about some categories of sexuality that

would move us beyond the limiting categories of sexuality in this era of cyberspace. However, it is in being able to playfully claim that I am wikisexual that I could then challenge existing categorization of sexuality and make visible the fluidity of sexuality. This practice of reframing how we consider sexuality in cyberspace is an exercise of peeling another layer of that reality and accessing another realm or dimension of reality that otherwise would have remained unknown.

Notes

1. <http://c2.com/doc/etymology.html>
2. I located these websites through Google search using the keyword Tantric sex. I then chose the first 75 websites that belong to Tantric goddesses residing in the USA. This choice reflects the larger project in which I analyze transnational circulation of ideas and images of Asian sacred sex in American-based websites, charting the racial and sexual tensions and constructions on these websites. This study therefore does not purport to be a representative or comprehensive study of cyberspace. It is impossible to do so considering the massive size of cyberspace. Rather, I conduct a website analysis of Tantric sex, one of the most increasingly popular teachings of positive/alternative sexuality in North America, and render the cyberspace as its own point of epistemic reference to understand the discourse of sexuality that is articulated within this specific site of cyberspace.
3. In Australia, Tantra gained its popularity since the 1980s precisely because of this reason: long-term monogamous heterosexual couples were looking for ways to spice things up in their bedrooms (Albury, 2001: 205).
4. Some scholars, however, would see this “western” obsession with Indian Tantra as yet another form of colonialism (Urban, 2003: 269).
5. <http://www.sacredsensualist.com/about.html> (all websites cited in these notes were accessed on 13 June 2011).
6. <http://www.awakenedloving.com/honoring-the-wisdom-of-the-yon/>
7. <http://www.sacredsexyes.com/women.htm>
8. <http://sacredloving.net/Womans.html>
9. <http://www.partnerplayshop.com/OmSweetHome.html> and <http://tantradakini.com/events.htm>
10. www.christinasecret.com
11. www.christinasecret.com
12. www.christinasecret.com
13. www.christinasecret.com
14. <http://www.christinasecret.com/Sessions.html>
15. <http://www.templeoftantra.com/forWomen.html>
16. <http://dakiniLove.com/education.htm>
17. <http://www.wayofbliss.com/Sessions.html>
18. <http://www.forevertantra.com/sessions.php>
19. <http://www.forevertantra.com/sessions.php>
20. <http://www.christinasecret.com/Sessions.html>
21. <http://tantradakini.com/sessions.htm> and <http://www.sacredsensualist.com/sessions.html>
22. <http://www.stardancertantra.com/lunalodge.html>

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