

Sexuality and the Politics of Everyday Life

Director's Dialogue with Susie Orbach

Date: Friday 15th November 2002

Time: 1pm

Venue: Peacock Theatre, LSE

Speakers: Anthony Giddens and Susie Orbach

Anthony Giddens

Good afternoon everybody. Although people are still coming in I think we'll have to start because we've only got an hour for this event.

This is the second in this series of so called "Director's Dialogues" and we've so far got two fixed up for next term I'd like to register in your consciousness; one with Javier Solana - as I mentioned if anyone came to the last Dialogue with George Soros - he's the Foreign Policy Chief of the EU and one of the most important people in the world, I suppose, at the moment given what's going on in the Middle East and so forth; and second is Joschka Fischer who is German Foreign Minister and Leader of the German Green Party. They've both agreed to come at some point in February and we're still negotiating with Hilary Clinton - we hope that she might come to be the third, so there will be five of these Director's Dialogues altogether.

The subject of this dialogue seems different from the one I had last time with George Soros - and, of course, I've got to welcome Susie Orbach - but I'd just like to say something about

this because the last dialogue was about globalisation, the role of financial markets and so forth and that might seem miles away from sexuality, the family, the body and those kinds of issues, but this is not the case. One of the most important global forces is the changing position of women, the entry of women to the labour force, changing patterns of family life and so on; they're really, really global influences. If you ask what the single most important factor in attacking global poverty is, well, it's the emancipation of women, especially emancipation of women in poorer countries from traditional family structures that keeps them out of an autonomous, wider participation in the society. So, contrary to appearances there is actually quite a strong tie – at least in some respects – between what we talked about last time and what we propose to talk about today.

Well, can I briefly introduce Susie to the audience? Susie Orbach is a visiting professor at the LSE, now attached to the Sociology Department. She herself is a global figure, she's the most important writer, I think, on therapy in the UK and has a very wide international audience. She's written, I don't know how many people will actually know this, a famous series of columns for *The Guardian* over, what, a four or five year...

Susie Orbach

Nine!

Anthony Giddens

... nine year period and she's written a number of famous books which include *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, a big seller across the world. A book that influenced me quite a lot when I was, in my old academic days, working on the issues of personal life, identity and sexuality was *Hunger Strike*, which was about eating problems - one of the issues that I'd like her to discuss with me today. Her most recent book is called *The Impossibility of Sex* and I'll be

asking her a bit later what that title actually means, what it means to her and what it might mean for our lives, because most of us don't seem to think that it's completely impossible.

I'd like to introduce this debate by actually referring to this, to me kind of amazing but also in some sense now typical, history of a friend of mine, and his relationships. I mentioned this scenario last year, when I was giving "Director's Lectures", which had a very different format from this, but Susie was actually a discussant at one of these lectures and I'd like to start with this story this time because it leads us into some of the issues which we're concerned with today.

This is a friend of mine who lives in California and is actually, himself, a very well known sociologist - let's call him "X". Until he was in his early thirties X had a normal, so far as one can tell, family life. He had two children and he lived a sort of orthodox situation of domesticity. Then a tragedy happened, whilst they were on holiday in Greece his wife was killed in a car accident. After that time, for whatever reason, he became gay. He had first of all a kind of promiscuous period and then he entered into a stable gay relationship with another man - let's call X's lover 'Y'. Y has a sister who is also a lesbian – she has a lesbian relationship – and the lesbian couple decided they wanted children. Well, they got Y, X's lover to supply sperm that would make Y's sister – if you're still following me – pregnant. Well, this happened...

Susie Orbach

You know in psychoanalysis we just use false names! It's makes it much easier.

Anthony Giddens

Anyway, so one of the women had twin boys. So, you've got twin boys brought up by a lesbian couple; now who are the parents? You've got one person in the male gay relationship who is actually the father of the two boys, you've got two women in the relationship bringing them up and you've got the other person who acts as a kind of benevolent uncle. No one knows quite who has legal rights over the children and what obligations they have. This issue has recently been discussed in parliament, if you remember, and there was a vote about whether gay parents can bring up children. But this much more interesting than that because this is a tale of what I like to call plastic sexuality, the fact that sexuality is not just given in the body but has become a kind of malleable, transformable thing in the light of life experience. It's also, if you like, a thoroughly post modern situation, but I see no reason myself why these children shouldn't grow up happy and well cared for, they've just got four people, at the moment, caring for them rather than traditional family structure.

So, Susie also knows the people involved in this relationship, I'd like to ask her first what she makes of it, how she would comment on it and how she would elaborate some of the things this means for most of us. I think in lots of ways you might think this is an unusual situation, but in many ways it's typical of our lives, it's not an unusual situation, it's points up things that are happening to all of us in the domain of relationship, sexuality and family structures.

Susie Orbach

Well, I'm not sure what I can say that's particularly profound. I think what's extraordinary about this situation is how ordinary it has become, how it becomes simply a story to be told rather than the fact that there are two women raising these twins and then there's a biological father who's engaged; and this uncle, and then there's the grandparents right, because there's a

grandmother involved as well, who's really quite actively involved; and I suppose what it put me in mind of...

Anthony Giddens

But there's also a sexual transformation because he was originally a seemingly straight person then somehow an event transformed his sexuality too.

Susie Orbach

But it's not just the event is it? I think it's the times in which it was possible for heterosexuality to be challenged. The moment at which he lost his wife was also the moment of fantastic sexual experimentation, which this generation, your generation [to the audience], has inherited without perhaps maybe quite the same struggles that this man had to go through in this transition.

So, I think what we're talking about, what's interesting about this family is actually there are a lot of parents involved and that for my generation and your generation we were all really raised by single parents; even though there may have been a father around, the father certainly wasn't engaged. Most women raise children on their own and...

AG: You mean because fathers are out at work or away, generally.

SO: And disengaged.

AG: It's sometimes called the period of the absent father, right?

SO: Sort of, the absent/present father...

AG: Even though people think of it as the period of the traditional family it was the period when fathers didn't appear very much inside the family.

Susie Orbach

So I think there's that issue: what does it mean to have so many present parents? What does it mean for children to grow up knowing that sexuality is something that can change? What options does that open for the children? I mean I think for us it's startling because there are such dramatic changes . . .

AG: Well, of course, you couldn't have had the genetic means of having the child before either. The gay female couple used a new technology to make that possible too.

SO: Well, certainly when I started the Women's Therapy centre which attracted an awful lot of gay women to therapy as it was a safe place, there was certainly plenty of very low tech importation of semen. So, I'm not sure...

AG: Nevertheless, there are a series of technological changes, which are plainly affecting our nature, aren't they? I mean aren't they affecting what we are as human beings?

SO: Well, I think what's interesting in some of the reproductive technologies is the notion that reproduction is now a technological phenomena as opposed to a human interchange and relationship. I think there are very worrying issues about that, particularly in terms of this

technology being offered to people who have short term infertility, who are being offered a way of science doing this rather than actually...

AG: Well, can you tell us what some of the worrying things are in your eyes? I don't know if you saw it in the paper yesterday, I had to go and give this lecture in Southampton and I was reading in, I think, *The Times* that I picked up somewhere, that women can now get pregnant at any age, there is no bar to being pregnant, doesn't matter whether you're fifty, sixty. The thing happened in Italy, which was I think the first case of this, and it is now apparently eminently generalisable to anybody. I mean that is a fantastic transformation. So, what are the anxieties about them?

SO: I suppose there are social anxieties and I don't know that I'm particularly qualified to comment on them. I think I can only really comment as a clinician who deals with women who actually feel that they can't ever mourn not having had a child. They come up to being fifty and the process of mourning that they feel they ought to be engaged in is impossible now because there's always this fantasy operating that they really could go and get one of these things...

AG: But it's not a fantasy, is it, it's a reality?

SO: Well, it is and it isn't. It isn't like clicking your fingers. It does involve the ingestion of extraordinarily dangerous hormones and a whole set of questions about what one might be thinking about in terms of one's later life. I don't know – call me old fashioned - but maybe this is post-modernism gone too far for me. I think there is something problematic about the notion of a woman having a baby at sixty.

AG: But what inference would you draw from that though? That there are some kind of legal limits that you should put on the structure of family? I mean it's surely obvious all this is transforming the family massively, you know, one of the biggest changes in Western Europe is simply declining family size. Most European countries now have a birth rate somewhere between 1.2 or 1.6 children. This is absolutely transforming, demographically, society and a lot of that is to do with the increasing power of women over their lives. Then you've got the other side of that, people who can't have children...

SO: But I think I'd rather see the money going into the issues of decreasing fertility. I think that one of the things that one thinks as a psychoanalyst is the importance of stability in childhood. It doesn't matter whether you have two, three or seven parents, you know, the more the merrier actually. I do have slight worries, even though we know lots and lots of times that grandparents raise children, particularly in cultures where children are sent abroad; if you think about the Caribbean cultures where women go to the States or here to work and their children are raised by *their* mothers for example. But I'm not sure that starting a family at sixty is a particularly brilliant because you do want consistency. That is the one thing that we do know from therapy: children require attachment figures who are solid, available and reliable.

AG: Yeah, but ...

SO: So, I'm uneasy about that possibility myself, but I wouldn't legislate against it, because I think there will always be a situation where for some individuals and some couples it will be absolutely crucial for them to be able to express themselves by having a baby very, very late

in life. I know when I had a child I was considered an elderly primigravida and now it's absolutely nothing to have a child at thirty-seven or forty-two, it's not even a category. But, you know, only eighteen or nineteen years ago it was, one was a major trouble to one's doctor, it meant that the doctor felt they could control you even more during pregnancy. So, yes of course, it's about change, but I suppose we need to think about it a bit more and I don't just welcome it unequivocally.

AG: I'd agree with that but do you think there's any such thing, any longer, worth calling the traditional family?

SO: I don't think there is a traditional family, but I do think there are longings that people have for intimacy and for connection and for being recognised and for continuity...

AG: But in traditional families there wasn't much intimacy was there?

SO: Exactly. There was the notion that there was intimacy and then we had this whole ideology of romance to kind of compensate for the disappointments in the nuclear family. But I certainly don't meet anybody who is just great with lots of casual encounters. People do really want some kind of contact with somebody who's known them through a period of time and not just on friendship level.

AG: Yes, but I mean, "the family" is a battleground isn't it? It's a kind of cultural battleground because you have a lot of cultures which are very insistent on a very traditional family structure with male power, male violence, confined position of women battling against all these quite extraordinary trends going on in Western countries. How do you see that?

SO: Well, I think in the obvious way, that as there are enormous changes in the family structure and as women have asserted, either tentatively or collectively, their wish to challenge the family, or have opted out of the family at a certain age, or have led the divorce statistics in the West. This has become extremely threatening to people, and you get a kind of fundamentalist response in all sorts of parts. So I don't think it's very hard to explain, but I'm not sure what your question is behind that really?

AG: Well, is there something sick about Western versions of transformation of family life which more traditional family structures somehow protect you against or not? You've got the *Daily Mail* against *The Guardian* or however you put it. You know, there is a big battleground around that politically and socially, and it's right and proper that there should be, because people's lives are at stake and the fate and prosperity of children is stake and so forth.

SO: But I suppose...

AG: You need a position on that.

SO: ... the underlying assumption that I would take you on about is 'so what?' if families are a battleground for the individuals who are in them. What's so terrible about conflict within the family? We seem to have a notion that conflict is uncontrollable and therefore we have to bust up the family, or bust up relationships, as though difficulties aren't things that are part of life. You know, it's as though the family becomes disposable, or the relationship becomes disposable, rather than hanging on to see what it is about, which of one's longings and desires aren't met in that situation, and whether they can be met in a different way. I suppose, we

need mobility of labour, we need all sorts of things that the traditional family can't cope with. So we do need something very different but does that mean we don't want to have relationships that are committed? I think not, I think people do want committed relationships. They perhaps want to choose their partners and they perhaps don't want the same kind of sexual constraints that pertain for our parents.

AG: Yeah, I think that although people want to defend the traditional family there are a lot of rather horrid things about the traditional family in most cultures.

SO: Well, most violence that happens, happens within the family, certainly rape, certainly violence towards women.

AG: I think a lot of the transformations that people object to from the political right are actually positive transformations of people's lives and I think you have more open lives in relationships than you used to do and I think there's potentially a democratic principle in that. I think you have public democracy and that's an important part of our societies and getting the vote for women was a major part of that. But in personal life that hasn't necessarily been accompanied by the same kind of transformations. I wrote this stuff about what I call a democracy of the emotions a few years ago in which I argued that the kinds of uncoupling of the family from nature and tradition, which is what we're talking about, has actually generated a lot of possibilities for a more egalitarian relationship between men and women, for same sex relationships and parenting, as long as you have a good legal framework which protects children's rights and ensures continuity. It's no longer going to be true that most people will live in the same kind of family structure all of their lives, they have to make lots of transitions and they have to achieve stability through those transitions.

SO: Yeah, I mean I completely agree with you and I do think the transformations that have happened to the Western family since the women's liberation movement haven't just changed the grown-ups in the family, but they have made it possible for us to hear children. I mean first we could hear women and now we can actually hear what children's experience is and that's where all of the information about sexual abuse and violence within the family has emerged from ...

AG: In organisations like the churches and orphanages, a terrible hidden history being revealed there.

SO: Yes, but I mean if you come from my position as a psychotherapeutic worker you wonder where the reproduction of all of this sexual violence towards children - whether it's in the priesthood or it's in the children's home - comes from and you have to actually look at the history of the family and see that it must have been experienced and that these are enactments that first occurred somewhere else. You don't suddenly pluck out the idea, "Okay, let's go sexually abuse people" and you don't have people consorting together to do it unless you have a history in which that has already occurred. So, there was something about the traditional family that hid this sexual practice, which was...

AG: What was that thing that hid it?

SO: Well, it was the politics of privacy...

AG: Just male dominance? Or . . .

SO: Yes, and I think you need to be a historian to see the changes from the agrarian life to industrialisation to look at what actually happened in the development of the private life and a hidden life and the impossibility of emotions being allowed and therefore being challenged, or channelled through these particularly sexualised forms. I mean what's interesting about sexual views from a clinician's point of view is that it doesn't ever really seem – or very rarely seem - to me to be about sex.

AG: They're about power?

SO: Powerlessness and helplessness and frustration and terror and disintegration and taking over the role of having been in the position of being aggressed upon and being identified and just identified with the aggressor. So, it's much more complex than sexuality, than it being about sex. It happens to be a sexual act, but it's really an act of violence.

AG: Well, I don't want to do you good people sitting in the audience a injustice, but probably most people didn't come to hear about the family, they came to hear about sex! So we might as well move on to that point and maybe I can ask this question: why did you call your book *The Impossibility of Sex* and what does that actually mean?

SO: What, you didn't think that was a sexy title? I thought it was pretty good title myself.

AG: Yeah, I think it's a very good title.

AG: It's a good title because it's very puzzling.

SO: I called that for a lot of reasons.

AG: Well, I'm not so interested in why you called it that but what it means.

SO: I'll tell you why, because I'm trying to explore what on earth sexuality means at this particular moment in history through looking at the annalistic experiences in the consulting room with the patient. What does everybody know about psychoanalysis? They know this caricature that a cigar is not a cigar and that all psychoanalysts see are phallic symbols and sex; I suppose what I've wanted to interrogate is the notion that sexuality is the fundamental motivator in life. I've also thought that Freud's theory of – the libido theory – of how we get to be human and what civilisation is about, which he argued at one point was the suppression or the redirection of sexual energy into other activities, was a really unsatisfactory way of looking at sex; sex cannot be explained in those terms. We don't really have a theory of sexuality, like many aspects of psychoanalytic theory people agree to things because they're too difficult to unravel and actually we don't understand sex at all. But I also think that one of the things I was...

AG: Who is “we”, though? Therapists or the rest of us, or...

SO: All of us. I mean therapists are supposed to understand...

AG: Well, can you help us in our dilemma then, to...

SO: Well, do you mean can I help people have more and better sex? Yes, but...

AG: Well, St Augustine said everyone can handle time but as soon as you start to look at it you don't know what time is.

SO: Thank you...

AG: Well, is it the same for sex, because people seem to be able to have it all right but ...

SO: Well, I don't know...

AG: ... are you saying they don't understand what they're doing?

SO: I'm not sure they do have it. I mean if what I see in my consulting room is anything and if I look at what goes on, on the tele - I remember my daughter being captivated by the Spice Girls at the age of four and five - and if I look at young women who come to see me, and young men, gay and heterosexual, and if I look at older people in long term relationships which are essentially celibate, even though the people have all of the sexual jealousies that go along, I think actually it is precisely like that. It's not that people know how to do it so easily; it's that they don't know how to do it so easily. It isn't always satisfactory, it is both an alienated and a sort of promising activity for people and there are all sorts of impossibilities associated with it.

AG: Can I get you to unravel that more though? I mean what does that mean? I mean can you talk about one or two of your cases - without calling them X and Y - and just tell the audience

what you're talking about? Then I can decide whether I agree with it or not. I mean sexuality is a complex business, you know, we could say that. . .

SO: . . . I thought you just said it was perfectly straight forward...

AG: No, no, no.

SO: ... and we all know how to it?

AG: No, no, no. No, I said that it's this juncture between how people live their lives and what it looks like when you think about it - which is true of many things and the most ordinary things are the most difficult things to puzzle through when you try and think about them.

SO: Well, what about the fact that one of the most extraordinary things in long-term relationships is the number of no sex couples, i.e. celibacy in long-term relationships. Now, why should that be?

AG: Well, there is eating in the same restaurant theory of that isn't there?

SO: But I think eating in the same restaurant usually gets better and having a conversation with somebody that you love...

AG: . . Not when you know the menu so well, you know . . .

SO: Well, I think you've exposed who you are, Tony. But I mean many of us don't feel that way...

AG: I'm not saying that reflects my view, I said that's one theory of it.

AG: I wouldn't be able to say such a thing in the LSE and represent it as my view, I can assure you.

SO: But, Tony, I wonder why that theory would that view come to mind, because I was going to say, that is the women's magazine's view - you've got to spice it up with some lingerie, you've got to sort of do something, but why is that? Most aspects of social intercourse are more pleasurable if they are repeated. I mean, we find more and more in listening to Mahler's Fifth; we don't find less and less. We find more and more by looking at a picture, so why shouldn't we find more and more in a sexual activity with a partner?

AG: Yeah, go on, why not, then?

SO: So, to me one of the big issues to understand is celibacy in long-term relationships. I would think that one way to look at that is not that sex is boring, not that you've eaten in the same restaurant too bloody often, but that in fact it's too exciting, too intimate to be in love, to be sexually engaged. I mean just imagine and maybe you're all too young in the audience, but I see a few with grey hair, but the people with grey hair...

AG: . . . yeah, hand's up who's got a long term relationship!

SO: ... just imagine being in love and erotically involved every single day. That would be really quite burdensome ...

AG: Sounds oppressive, yeah, I agree . . .

SO: ... and even though we can have longings and fantasies I think that one of things that we have to understand, is that not having sex, or only having sex with a stranger, or having mistresses or lovers, becomes a regulator of much more profound problems around intimacy. This then makes me think that sex is not so much an appetite as Freud argues but something that is constructed much more in the context of relationships and is perhaps something that is an emergent property of the species, if I could talk about it in this terms. If I could make the argument that just as there is eating there's also dining when you have a particular level of civilisation, perhaps you only have a notion of the erotic when you have a certain level of culturally intimate relationship, and that really sex is very much more like a language, it's something that is a species property that only develops in certain kinds of ways under certain kinds of conditions. Does that help at all?

AG: Yeah, I think all this is really interesting. When you deconstruct these things it's very hard to see what in the end they are and when you put them together again, what do you get? I mean what is a good long-term relationship in terms of its erotic qualities then? I presume it's not a celibate one.

SO: No, I think it means being able to handle one's own fears...

AG: Because at least celibacy, it's clear isn't it? You know, if you're celibate you've clear life haven't you?

SO: No, but it isn't clear because the problem about celibacy for most people is the jealousies they have if their partner has an attachment to another. So, it isn't clear at all, it's mucky.

AG: Well, that's not celibacy, not in a priestly sense, because you're not supposed to do it with anybody.

SO: Okay, okay, I'm using language in a loose way, but at least not sex. I think the other thing that I see a lot in my clinical practice and what I try to write about in *The Impossibility of Sex* is what does it mean if somebody is compulsively sexual, a compulsive fornicator, a kind of Casanova who has to be loved every second?

AG: What, James Bond? In the first James Bond films as opposed to the later James Bond films. Well, he's changed, you know, in the later ones...

SO: Well, he's become socialised, hasn't he?

AG: . . . he only has, you know...

SO: I stopped going when I was fifteen or twenty or something.

AG: James Bond changed a lot, you know, from the early films to the later ones where he's more empathic and has only one or two women rather than hundreds of them.

SO: And?

AG: Well, you know, Pussy Galore.

SO: Yes. I thought I was the one you told not to put four letter words on this platform and listen to you.

AG: I told her she mustn't say fuck because she was saying it all the time when we had a conversation before.

SO: You want to move right along now?!

AG: Well, yeah I do. There's a very serious side to this really, which I think concerns obsessions and compulsions. I mean I'm more of a sociologist so I've a different relationship to these issues than Susie, but I got really interested in the issue of addiction as culturally created. It didn't seem to exist in the nineteenth century and then you get the emergence of the idea of the addict with the emergence of the idea of "drugs" and that happens in late nineteenth century, early twentieth century. There was no connection between opium and opiates and so forth, and the idea of addiction - it was a socially created thing. Now we have drug addicts and all the rest of it. I mean you could say these patterns always existed but certainly the concepts didn't always exist. The idea of addiction then became generalised, it was first of all used in relation to drugs which were defined as illegal then it spread so that you get books on addiction to work...

SO: Love even.

AG: ... addiction to shopping and you get a big literature of sexual addiction. Many people think, especially men, the idea of sexual addiction makes no sense because that's what male sexuality is - a kind of driven, serial relationship to women in which you don't invest much in any particular one and you're always looking for the next one down the line. A lot of people have said this notion has no sense but to me it's a really crucial thing. I'm going to let you get a word in a minute, because this kind of obsessional nature of male sexuality is related to male sexual violence against women and I think to some extent against children. That was culturally sanctioned for quite a long while but I think it's much less culturally sanctioned than it used to be. So, I think, in general the edge of our lives with obsession and compulsion is really important. I don't think there's anyone sitting in the audience who won't have some obsessive element in their lives. To me this is bound a bit with the retreat of tradition and the past because you have to actively develop habits today to structure your life, it's not done for you by and large, except in certain cultural settings by traditions that are handed down to you and when you can't handle that autonomy that's when you slip into addiction.

So, to me addiction and obsession are the other side of the liberating aspects of autonomy which the changes we discussed at the beginning can unfold for people. But that's not a psychological view of it so much, but I think this is really interesting, the rise of the idea of addiction and what function it has. It has a legal function of course, it means you get punished if you smoke marijuana but of course you don't get punished if you drink alcohol or if you go down to the chemists and get other kinds of drugs. So, there's a big cultural and historical insertion into all of this.

SO: Well, yes, there's a way of being transgressive and there's a way of drinking your cup of tea in the morning and brushing your teeth, which you would probably not consider addictive and yet ...

AG: Well, Freud thought of those kinds of compulsions as the most important ones. The kind of everyday ones, when you've got to have your piece of paper in a particular way on your desk, or you go to an exam and you've got to have a little teddy bear on your desk and your teddy bear's got to be in exactly the right position.

SO: Right, but I suppose from where I sit I'm always looking at what the functions is? What is this a solution to? In other words, what's the choice? I mean (until heroin flooded the market, which is clearly has a whole set of other global aspects to it, but let's go back to the period just after, or even to the '60s when heroin was legally prescribed) what was it that heroin addiction or anorexia, let's say, were a solution to? What couldn't be managed? What did it mean to have a life caught up in being in need of a drug as opposed to something else?

AG: Well, let's leave eating problems to one side, because we want to come to those because they're very important and interesting. But, what relationship do you see between obsessiveness and sexuality? It seems to me a lot of sexuality has a basic compulsive character for both sexes and it's very hard to escape from that.

SO: Well, I think at a superficial level 'yes', but if you listen with the kind of ear that I do in my work, the kind of obsessive sexuality you're talking about, and the kind of general obsessiveness that you're talking about, are ways of coping with the difficulties of being in the world, or being one's self, or being with another. They're reasonable autistic activities: if

one is compulsively sexual or compulsively involved with finding your drug or whatever it is, every pain, every distress, every joy is focused into that area and actually there isn't space for anybody else to be there. It's about the problem of being an individual and not having the psychic equipment to be both individual and engaged with another which is the problem of our time. So, I would look at it that. I'm not sure the sexual obsessive is actually at all interested in being engaged with his partner or her partner, they're engaged with being recognised in that moment, being wanted because they don't experience internally a sense of being valued, they don't feel filled up with this thing that one requires in order to live a life.

AG: But are there different generic patterns between men and women in that?

SO: Well, of course there are, because girls and boys are still socialised in entirely different ways, and we're introduced to our bodies in a fundamentally different way and we're introduced to emotional life in totally different ways.

AG: So, what's the difference in a pattern then? I mean, and why are so many men violent towards women?

SO: Well, I suppose a traditional account of that is that as long as you have mother reared children, and mothers are the authority figures as well as the loving figures in the family, and boys have to dis-identify with the mother without having a male to identify within a positive way then you have a void - you have a boy not really being able to manage helplessness at the point at which he discovers he's not a girl. I mean, you've had children, you know that you're children felt they probably both boys and girls at a certain age and then they realised

this terrible wound that most children feel that actually I'm only a girl or I'm only a boy, right? The question is how that is managed in a culture in which fathers are absent.

AG: Well, how much of Freud's theory of femininity do you accept? I mean, he seems to identify being a woman with an absence essentially.

SO: Well, I don't think for me as a kind the modern feminist what he identified as an absence was accurate, but he saw a lack and that was accurate. I think what the lack was the women's difficulty with having a subjectivity; what was passed from mother to daughter in terms of a kind of emotional deprivation in which mothers bequeathed to daughters a life in which they shouldn't expect to be loved and nurtured and cared for, but that they should be providing that for others. So something that's missing inside of girls and women is not the penis but the feeling of a reciprocal mutual relationship in which they will be regarded and seen, whereas boys were brought in Freud's terms to be seen as other and to be regarded. So, although they boys have deficits, enormous deficits and enormous rage at women, I think it has a different taste to Freud's account, actually...

AG: Do you think there's a generalised male hatred of women?

SO: Yes, I certainly think there is but so is there female misogyny. I mean I'm not wanting to let women off the hook either. I mean I think women have an unconscious misogyny too and a much more profound self hatred which they also visit on their sons. I mean it's a very complex pattern in terms of the kinds of sense of what femininity is that's given to boys as well as to girls.

AG: And are there escape routes? To me there's a social way forward for a lot of these things: you've got to have a framework of law; you've got to have more egalitarian relationships; men have got to manage their emotions and women have got to manage their emotions differently, but is there a kind of therapeutic ideal of how one should live?

SO: Well, I suppose giving our children an emotional vocabulary and acknowledging their emotions would be an important start because one of the experiences that allows for...

AG: I mean if I say I hate you, it's better is it?

SO: No, you're being too superficial, Tony and you don't need to be that silly!

AG: My normal problem as everyone in the LSE knows, I think.

SO: Obviously the structure of parenting has to change and it's changed a lot less than we think it has. We still have absent fathers - even though there are a lot of fathers involved in child rearing the majority are still absent - and as long as you don't have positive male figures in the family for girls to identify with I think that's a problem. As long as you don't have male teachers in nursery schools, and the panic about sexual abuse means that we're very frightened about having men with young children, and as long as you don't have men authorising and enjoying sexuality which we're now totally panicked about, there are all sorts of problems. I think we need men more in the family and we do need men to be able to own, if you like, their own emotional lives, rather than expecting women to care of them, articulate for them and be the emotional nurse.

AG: Yeah, I think there's an absolutely an emotional division of labour ...

SO: Absolutely.

AG: ...and this is so plain in so many relationships, that is between men and women and also presumably analogue in many gay relationships as well.

SO: Yes, and I think the fact is that while women are fantastically experienced at translating and nurturing and doing the emotional labour for their men, they're very inexperienced at doing it for themselves. I mean they maybe able to talk but they also have problems with taking emotional responsibility for their own complicated feelings. So, it's not just that men need to change, women also, something needs to change in terms of how we educate our daughters in terms of how they're emotionalised. I mean, my daughter now, she's a teenager with a whole bunch of girls who have been brought up to be massively ambitious, but their mothers really didn't ever go through the struggles for their own, so they're just foisting this on their daughters. The daughters then think they have to achieve but actually they're desperately insecure inside because something about entitlement at a very deep and profound level hasn't been given to them.

AG: Yeah, I mean I think that's also true of most men, though, there are different psychodynamics to it. I'd like to just talk to the audience also about one's relationship to one's body and shaping the body and the relationship between body and self identity because, again as a sociologist all this has changed I think. Susie might say it's changed less than I think, but I think it's changed absolutely fundamentally because we now have a much more active relationship to our body, as we do to ourselves, than we ever had before because you have to

kind of make a life for yourself. You know the phrase "Get a life!" well, that has real sociological significance for us because we don't have the same fixed roles and the same fixed identities that people used to have in more traditional cultures, even up to like twenty or thirty years ago this was true. We are responsible for ourselves which is a liberating thing but it also produces fantastic new anxieties and pressures, many of which, especially for young girls centre on the body and I think increasingly for men as well. This is true as men become objects of the gaze, because, you know, most people have traditionally have gazed at women, both men and women gaze at other women, especially younger women and assess them in terms of how they look. That's sort of changing, but a lot of these pressures come on younger women; and you have this incredible expansion of eating problems, as Susie calls them, anorexia and bulimia and the rest of them.

We were just chatting before this discussion and I was mentioning when I was in California - I'm sorry to harp on about California but I used to teach there quite a bit - and it was estimated by the medical head of the university in California where I was, that 70% of young women on the campus had serious eating problems; you ask women about diet and 97% of women had been "on a diet". Being on a diet is not just about slimming, I would assure you. Being on a diet is having to choose what you eat in relation to choosing to how to look and who to be. It's a much more profound thing than just the slimming aspect of it, and the rise of eating coincides with the rise of supermarket culture where supermarkets became established in like the late 1960s. Once you had supermarkets you can eat anything from anywhere at any time and you no longer have traditional diets essentially.

So, that's when you get an infusion of medical knowledge and all sorts of information about what does you good, what makes you look good, what makes you slim or otherwise and you

get a kind of new relationship between identity, body and food. I really like Susie's book *Hunger Strike* because she said in there – she'll probably say I'm not saying the right thing – but she said to be anorectic you have to be active in relation to your body. Hysteria in the 19th Century, Freud's fainting away, the origins of psychoanalysis in some respects, posited a more passive kind of relationship with the body; but now if you're anorectic you're often out exercising all day for example, you're down the gym every day, you have this obsessional addiction or obsessional relationship to the body.

SO: But can I link this to globalism, because I think one of things that's really very alarming to me who's worked in the area of eating problems before and ...

AG: Can you just explain to everybody what eating problems mean?

SO: Well, the very fact that most people, particularly females, don't eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full, but actually evaluate everything that they eat, feel guilty about it, go kind of comatose when they are eating or promise themselves they won't eat anything today because of what they ate tomorrow or touch their stomach first thing in the morning. The fact that 70% of nine year olds in San Francisco are on a diet even though they're scrawny, the development of a culture in which to be female means that you have to actively transform your body and interrupt your hungers, override them, or eat against them produces massive problems. If you just think of what it would be like to live in a culture where you were regulated around peeing - you're only supposed urinate a couple of times of day you can see you'd have the same massive psychosis around urinary issues. You'd all be in coffee clutches: "How did you manage only to do it twice today? I wish I could do it"; "Oh, I did it five times and I did it too long"; "Oh, god, no I can go for two days without doing it" and

then you get kidney problems. Anyway you can see the whole kind of thing, we now have a culture in which it is considered absolutely the norm to interrupt what might otherwise be one's biological responses – one's biological indicator's telling you eat. Where I want to come to globalism, is that one of the indicators that seem to me to show a society entering modernity, and I could see this 25 years ago when I was sent all these Saudi girls with anorexia, is the level of eating problems – anorexia, bulimia, compulsive eating - that arises in the culture. One of our biggest exports it seems to me is the exportation of body image hatred and body hatred. In the 19th century that's what we exported was measles, now we're exporting body hatred.

AG: Are we at least allowed to mention that Princess Di was one of those or not?

SO: One of those what? Exports?

AG: Women who experienced all these...

SO: Well, I think it's in the public domain isn't it? But I think what's really interesting is that we now have a result from Fiji that in 1995 – and this is really about the impact of the moving image on the representation of the body – one television channel starts showing *Friends* and those kinds of shows that my daughter is so addicted to, and Fiji which had no history of eating problems, no history of that whatsoever, three years later has got 13-14% of the girls being bulimic. Now, that is a pretty devastating result where their own experience of their body...

AG: And what does it mean psychologically, I mean, you've dealt with a lot of patients...

SO: Well, the thing is when you have a mass symptom like an eating problem or bulimia or anorexia or compulsive eating it will gather into all sorts of meanings. It isn't just about one thing - that's what it means to have a symptom that represents an age - and so it can represent invisibility, visibility, the struggle for identity, but more and more I think that women's engagement with these bodily obsessions is the attempt to get a body. My experience as a therapist is that we've become fantastically mentalist and it's almost as though we have to create a body. All these obsessions over what we do with the body, with the eating, with the running, with the this and that, is the attempt to create a relation to a thing that we never actually got. There are mothers, unfortunately and unwittingly, whose bodies have been so under assault by those industries that breed body and security and make themselves very rich by them, bringing a kind of troubled body to their very early relationship with their children. So those children then become very receptive to the blandishments of the market to try and fix their bodies as a notion of autonomy and grownup-ness as well as mimicry by the time they're sort of nine and ten. So, this is very much an economic as well as a psychological issue at this point - in fact there's a big campaign called "Any Body"...

AG: I got interested in these issues because a few years ago I got two Sunday supplements in the newspapers and on one of them there was a picture of a white anorexic girl and on the other there was a picture of a black starving teenager in Africa, and they looked almost identical, both emaciated; but obviously the psychodynamics and social dynamics are totally different because one is traditional hunger, absence of food, and the other is living in a society where there's too much food.

SO: But I think what's really tragic - *Marie Claire*, the magazine, ran two covers one of a sort of normal sized woman and one of an anorectic woman what this was in response to was the editor receiving letters from Africa of women with bloated stomachs, young girls saying, "How do I get the flat stomach?" - is that the image of femininity that was being pumped into cultures that had no food was an anorectic image, right.

AG: Well, it's now everywhere...Look, we've only got two or three minutes left but can you just say a bit about the politics of all this, because this was in the title...

SO: The politics? Haven't we been talking about the politics of all this?

AG: Well, I mean it leads to in your view of emotional literacy as a sort of focus of politics and I don't think, I can't form from what you're saying a view of what a good life looks like in relation to these issues.

SO: Well, maybe you're too idealist, Tony, that there isn't such a thing as a good life. I mean I think...

AG: All right, improvements, then.

SO: Aren't you there the child of the '50s who's always making things better when your supposed to be in a post modern moment where we realise it's all very – can't use a four letter word – difficult. Am I for improvement? Yes. I am for improvement but it seems to me that what's happened is that we've had the re-privatisation of personal life. Whereas for twenty years, during a period when I was much younger, there was the socialisation of private life

and an extra opening about the dynamics and personal relationships and a challenge to the notion that our bodies ought to be one way and a challenge to a kind of exploitation in relationships, these have been re-instituted. There are feelings of individual failure and fraudulence, which are now the currency in which people operate, and I think we need to re-socialise those ideas and to realise that almost everything we feel is a result of the social practices we engage in, and that we need to transform them, whether it's around the body or whether it's around our sexual and intimate relationships.

AG: And give an example of how we should transform them. I mean isn't emotional literacy supposed to be one?

SO: Well, that's one way. To be able to enter in, but not to be so frightened. We do actually know how to do mathematic and arithmetic computations, and we do know how to parse the language, we do need to know how to parse our emotions and to be able investigate them and to question them. I don't mean, *al la* Oprah, which I think to me is the expression of a lack of emotional literacy but we do need to be able to say to one another, "How are you?" "I'm okay", or "I'm not so okay" and for that to be containable. I think we need to have much more diverse images of femininity and masculinity rather than for commercial gain. I mean there's a million different things that we need, I can't give you a political programme in a minute and a half. We could have started with that.

AG: Well, I enjoyed that a lot, I hope you did, and please give Susie a big clap, if you would, for coming.