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Why Sex Matters: Abstract

In her essay *Unspeakable Subjects*, Nicola Lacey argues that many of the key values and risks of sexual activity, including “self-expression, connection, intimacy, relationship” as well as “violation of trust, infliction of shame and humiliation, objectification and exploitation” are overlooked in both a legal framework and a body of academic literature which focuses on a narrow, individualised conception of autonomy as the primary value that should underpin laws on sexual offending.

Taking up Lacey’s challenge, this paper – based on a chapter from the author’s forthcoming monograph *Re-Negotiating Sex and Sexual Violation in the Criminal Law* – builds a richer picture of the potential normative underpinnings of sexual offences law.

It is argued that ‘sex’, broadly conceived, is a site at which several vital aspects of the human condition are played out, including:

- **Affect** – desire, pleasure and pain
- **Choice** – autonomy, agency and ambivalence
- **Boundaries** between self and others and self and world
- **(In)equality**
- **Personhood** and objectification

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