



Facilitator Notes

Sexuality, The Body and Personhood

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This module was created by Dr Sean Slavin, Dr Harriet Birungi and Dr Chi-Chi Undie and adapted by the Advancing Sexuality Studies short course team at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

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Background

Sex and sexuality have long been assumed to be inextricably linked with the physical and social body. Notions of the body and personhood are therefore endowed with the ability either to constrain or to broaden notions of sexuality. This module is designed to introduce participants to the ways in which understandings of the body and personhood, as socially constructed, intersect with understandings and experiences of sexuality.

The aims of this module are:

- To theoretically examine the cultural construction of bodies and the relationship between bodies, personhood and sexuality
- To problematise singular notions of the body and personhood.

Participants will:

- Consider and critically evaluate the role of culture in shaping bodies
- Understand and engage with various debates about the relationship between the body and personhood
- Consider some ways in which cultural constructions of the body shape ideas about sexuality and desire
- Consider the implications of these debates in relation to disability, chronic illness, and/or virtual technologies.

Module approach

While the module includes important lecture material, the overall aim is to involve participants in active learning. Group work is undertaken in each of the four sessions (see below), and time is given for review and discussion of issues raised. The short course team advises that any review or amendment of the module maintains a focus on active learning wherever possible.

Overview

Session 1. The social construction of the body, personhood and sexuality

Participants will be introduced to key social constructionist approaches to the body, personhood and sexuality in Critical Sexuality Studies.

Session 2. The relationship between the body, personhood and sexuality

This module will use the pre-readings as tools from which to consider the relationship between the body, personhood and sexuality. Variations in understandings of the body, personhood and sexuality across cultures will also be considered.

Session 3. Disability case study

This session is designed to strengthen intellectual resources to re-think disabilities and sexualities work (including research, programming, teaching, advocacy, and other actions) by balancing a concern for health with a sex-positive approach, highlighting issues such as desire, love, and wellness.

Session 4. Virtually human: The future of the body and the body of the future

This session will introduce participants to new social technologies and the ways in which sexuality appears in them. The implications of these technologies for human sexual relationships will also be explored, through reference to the world of Second Life where people appear as avatars. The session will also examine a case study of cyber rape.

Pre-reading

Helliwell, C. (2000) 'It's only a penis': rape, feminism and difference, *Signs*, 5, 789-816.

Izugbara, C. & Undie, C. (2008) Who owns the body?: Indigenous African discourses of the body and contemporary sexual rights rhetoric, *Reproductive Health Matters*, 16, 159-167.

Materials

Film: Dance me to my Song (1998). Director: Rolf de Heer.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0154378/> Available from Madman entertainment

<http://www.madman.com.au/>

Film: Wonderland: Virtual adultery and cyberspace love. Producer: Fergus

O'Brien. (2007). Available to watch online at:

<http://www.moviesfoundonline.com/wonderland.php>

Index cards.

Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens.

Module structure, materials and timing

Session & approach		PowerPoint	Other materials (provided or required)	Est. timing
Introduction, aims, schedule		1-5		5 mins
Session 1: The social construction of the body, personhood and sexuality		6		40 mins
Lecture	Facilitator delivery	7-16	Lecture included in Facilitator Notes	20 mins
	Review	17		20 mins
Session 2. The relationship between bodies, personhood and sexuality		18		90 mins
Pre-reading review	Pairs reading summary	19-20	Chimaraoke Izugbara & Chi-Chi Undie (2008) Who owns the body?: Indigenous African discourses of the body and contemporary sexual rights rhetoric, <i>Reproductive Health Matters</i> , 13(31), 159-167. Christine Helliwell (2000) 'It's only a penis': rape, feminism and difference, <i>Signs</i> , 5(3): 789-816.	30 mins
	Pairs discussion	21		30 mins
	Feedback & whole group discussion	21		30 mins

Session 3. Case study: Disability		22		165 mins
Background	Facilitator delivery	23		5 mins
Screening <i>Dance me to my Song (1998)</i>	Screening	24	Need to access a copy of <i>Dance me to my Song (1998)</i> . Director: Rolf de Heer.	100 mins*
	Exercise & discussion	25-26		30 mins
	Small group discussion	27		30 mins
Session 4. Virtually human: the future of the body and the body of the future		28		110 mins
Mini lecture	Facilitator delivery	29-32		5 mins
Screening <i>Wonderland: Virtual adultery and cyberspace love (2007)</i>	Screening & discussion	33	Need to access a copy of <i>Wonderland: Virtual adultery and cyberspace love</i> . Producer: Fergus O'Brien.	60 mins*
Cyber rape: A case study	Facilitator delivery	34-35		5 mins
	Group discussion	36		40 mins
Conclusion & acknowledgements		37-38		5 mins
Total				395 mins (about 7 hours)
*If pre-viewing of both films is a requirement, the length of the module is reduced to about 4 hours.				

Key to symbols and formatting

Throughout these notes, the following symbols and formatting ‘clues’ have been used:

⇒ This symbol marks an instruction to the facilitator.

- Use of a bullet point indicates steps to be followed in completing an instruction.

|| This symbol, plus a different font which is larger and more widely spaced, indicates text to be read aloud. The end of the text to be read aloud will be indicated with the following symbol. ||

We have also indicated the points where a slide transition occurs on the PowerPoint presentation by inserting:

SLIDE

Module instructions

SLIDE 1

Introduction

(5 mins)

⇒ Read the following (or amend / replace as you wish):

|| Sex and sexuality have long been assumed to be inextricably linked with the physical and social body. Notions of the body and personhood are therefore endowed with the ability either to constrain or to broaden notions of sexuality. This module is designed to introduce participants to the ways in which understandings of the body and personhood, as socially constructed, intersect with understandings and experiences of sexuality. The module is designed to produce a conversation between social theory and lived realities. It aims to enhance participants' critical and theoretically informed understanding of the body, personhood, and sexuality and to develop their ability to apply this knowledge meaningfully in their own social or professional contexts.

Being a seminar-type course, active class participation is essential. Some participants may find some of the course materials controversial. Participants should feel free to disagree with each other and with the convener as long as each person's opinion or experience is respected.

A selected list of readings is provided that may assist participants who wish to further pursue the themes raised in the module.

SLIDE 2

Here's a key question to keep in mind throughout the course:

'Why are 'bodies' simultaneously so ubiquitous and yet so hard to get our hands (and minds) around?' (Sarah Coakley, 2000) ||

SLIDE 3

Module aims

Read:

|| This module aims to:

- Theoretically examine the cultural construction of bodies and the relationship between bodies, personhood and sexuality
- Problematise singular notions of the body and personhood

SLIDE 4

Participants will:

- Consider and critically evaluate the role of culture in shaping bodies;
- Understand and engage with various debates about the relationship between the body and personhood;
- Consider some ways in which cultural constructions of the body shape ideas about sexuality and desire;

- Consider the implications of these debates in relation to disability, chronic illness, and/or virtual technologies. ||

SLIDE 5

Schedule

⇒ Remember to include tea/coffee and lunch breaks, as required.

SLIDE 6

Session 1. The social construction of the body, personhood & sexuality (50 mins)

Lecture (30 mins)

⇒ Read (bullet points on slide):

|| In this lecture, we will discuss the ways in which the body, personhood and sexuality can be understood as socially constructed. While many of the conceptual approaches to the socially constructed body are based on 'Western' examples, they enable Critical Sexuality Studies scholars from anywhere in the world to situate the body, sexuality and personhood in social and historical context. In the subsequent sessions, we will have an opportunity to reflect on the suitability of these approaches to participants' own social contexts.

SLIDE 7

The body

In Western philosophy, the body has usually been thought of as distinct from and in opposition to the mind. The early Enlightenment scholar Rene Descartes drew a distinction between the mind and body when he coined the neologism 'I think, therefore I am'. Modern liberal philosophy progressed on the basis of this conception of autonomous and

independent selfhood, whereby rationality was demonstrated by the self-management of bodily processes, desires and emotions in accordance with civilised norms of European society. However, certain subjects were understood to be more capable of exercising control and restraint over their bodies, desires and emotions than others. In studies of 'sex' and 'race', 18th-century science progressed the notion that European men were more capable of rational, autonomous and independent selfhood, warranting greater social power and freedom, than those who were perceived to be more closely associated with their bodies, desires or emotions. These included women, indigenous or perceived inferior races, homosexuals, the mad, the disabled, etc. Under the conditions of modernity, the *sexed* and *raced* body were thus the basis to a number of distinctions that ultimately favoured European men, and justified patriarchal social relations, and the colonial enterprise more broadly.

SLIDE 8

In regard to gender, feminists have been attentive to the ways in which a change in the conception of male and female bodies at the end of the 17th century, from similar to oppositional, lead to an elaboration of distinct social difference on the basis of anatomical sex. Prior to the 18th century, men and women were understood to be essentially the same, with women's genitalia the inversion of men's. However, in the 18th century, men's and women's roles diverged in the context of industrialisation,

increasing urbanisation and the breakdown of the extended family household. Increasingly, women were understood to be more *naturally* suited to roles as wives and mothers due to their capacity to give birth. Menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation were evidence of women's closer relationship to nature, and were increasingly linked to a perceived feminine inability to control passions or strong emotions. Women were thus understood to be less capable of rational thought than men, and were understood to be better suited to domestic responsibilities in the private sphere.

In contrast, men were understood to be capable of transcending the messy specificity of their bodies and controlling their emotions and desires. Consistent with the mind-body dualism, men's privileged roles in public life, and in the nuclear family, were based on this 'new' reading of the fundamental difference between male and female bodies. This ideology justified the exclusion of women and 'less civilised' men from knowledge-making institutions and practices. Thus, feminists and post-colonial scholars have much to say about the body in explaining contemporary social relations.

SLIDE 9

In Critical Sexuality Studies, much of the contemporary interest in the body stems from the work of French social philosopher/historian Michel

Foucault. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), and especially *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault developed a social history methodology called genealogy that explored how systems of knowledge came to constitute widely observed regimes of truth and social practice in modern European societies. Foucault argued that modern life was less characterised by the imposition of state or sovereign power – that is, by force – than through more insidious and coercive means of compliance. Taking madness, illness and sexuality as examples, Foucault demonstrated how institutional power came to be exercised *through* the bodies and subjectivities of individuals via authoritative discourses that regulated social conduct.

According to Foucault, in the 18th century, growing state concern with the management of populations under the conditions of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation led to the development of regulations specifically related to the management of bodies: fertility and reproductive health, public health, hygiene, sanitation, family welfare, heredity, and sexuality all emerged as key areas of personal life that the state had an interest in regulating. A healthy and orderly populace was, after all, central to the maintenance of a productive workforce. Each of these concerns produced authoritative discourses related to personal conduct, against which individuals came to evaluate and categorise themselves and others in acts of self-surveillance and self-discipline.

SLIDE 10

Perhaps Foucault's best and most influential application of this understanding of power was in his analysis of sexuality. Whereas 19th century Europe is generally portrayed as a prudish and sexually repressed society, Foucault argued that there was 'an incitement to discourse' where sexuality was concerned. Rather than requiring the repression of sexual instincts, the proliferation of discourses around the management and regulation of sexuality led individuals to view themselves as having an innate sexuality, as an extension of their character or true nature. Foucault's primary example is the invention of homosexuality as a category of identification for men and women who participate in same-sex sexual behaviour. Prior to the 1880s there was no such thing as a homosexual person, nor prior to the 1930s was there such a term as heterosexual. Other Victorian-era preoccupations with sexual behaviour included masturbation, childhood sexuality, paedophilia, sexual hysteria in women, and criminal sexuality. Each of these preoccupations produced clinical, medical and psychological discourses which came to constitute their particular subjects as degenerate, perverted, unstable, and/or mentally ill. Many of these categories were in opposition to sexual and gender norms that were said to be based on the 'naturalness' of heterosexual monogamy.

Thus, whereas we (in the West, particularly) think of sexuality as a distinct thing we have inside us, Foucault's insights help us to see that this is in fact a condition of the time and place in which we live and reflects the dynamic relationship between sexual practice, institutional power and knowledge. Foucault's work has thus been of enormous value in providing a methodological approach to thinking about how bodies and sexuality are socially constructed. Whether we are referring to Victorian England, or social life in *any* contemporary society, Foucault's approach to discourse as social practice allows us to analyse the ways bodies and sexualities reflect the power relations of the societies in which they can be seen to exist.

Foucault's approach has been extended by scholars such as Judith Butler (1993) and other queer theorists who encourage us to view sex as a 'regulatory ideal'. According to these scholars, the significance of the sexed body lies not in male or female sexual difference per se, but in how sexual difference is understood to function as the foundation for male and female social roles and heterosexuality as an ideological, rather than 'natural' principle of social organisation. In other words, it is not male and female genitals or sexual characteristics that determine male and female roles and the norm of heterosex, but *discourses of nature* that take the body to be the pre-discursive basis to all social order.

SLIDE 11

The proliferation of discourse on sexuality is, of course, a key feature of contemporary societies where sex and sexuality tend to be central to public and private life, including:

- Debate between conservatives, liberals and radicals about the meaning and significance of sex, particularly in relation to marriage, monogamy, divorce and ‘the family’;
- Saturation of sexualised media imagery, advertising, sex scandals, pornography, and the influence of changing technologies such as the internet on sexual practices and intimate life;
- The rise of social movements related to sexual identities, communities and subcultures, including gay and lesbian movements;
- Feminist scholarship and activism, particularly in relation to the ‘male sexual gaze’, the sexualisation of women’s bodies, the sexual double standard, and the sexual liberation of women; and
- Personal anxieties about sexual performance and intimate relationships, and a reliance on experts – including social researchers, medical doctors and pharmaceutical companies – to alleviate anxieties.

SLIDE 12

Many of these aspects of sexuality in contemporary life relate explicitly to the body and involve questions of how one should live. A number of sociologists have thus argued that contemporary life in Western societies is characterised by increasing individualisation, with an emphasis on the body (Turner, 2008). In the context of neo-liberal consumer capitalism, the body is said to be a site for the expression of unique self-identity. Yet, due to the instability of traditional sources of identity, including work, family and community, identity in contemporary life is also unstable, and requires anxious and ongoing work upon the self. This takes place in an environment where certain kinds of bodies are celebrated and admired, such as those of celebrities, while other bodies are understood to be ill-disciplined and worthy of contempt (such as obese bodies). Cosmetic surgery, dieting and exercise are body techniques that enable women and men to achieve favoured body ideals and generate feelings of empowerment and satisfaction.

Increasingly, scientific developments in medicine, genetics, and technology promise the possibility of overcoming the material limits of the body, curing illness, improving cognitive or physical capacities, and even delaying death. In the process, social problems come to be interpreted as individual body problems that may be overcome with the use of a pill or an operation. Such an example is the emergence of the

impotence drug Viagra, which has usurped prior approaches to impotency based on psychological or relational understandings of erectile dysfunction. The effect of Viagra has tended to be a prioritisation of the erect penis and penetration as the normative mode of sexual intercourse.

A significant criticism of this approach to the body is that it is overly theoretical, and ignores the messy reality of bodies themselves. Thus, according to Ken Plummer, the sweaty, heaving sexual body is hardly anywhere to be found in sexuality research!

SLIDE 13

There is a clear division in conceptual approaches to the body then, between those that emphasise discourse and power, and those that explore the *lived experience* of being/having a body. These latter approaches are no less social constructionist in their orientation to the body, but attempt to take the material, fleshy, desiring body more seriously than those using the radical discourse approach. These approaches have not been taken up so readily by sexual researchers, however.

Other conceptual approaches to the body that explore the 'lived reality' of embodiment include:

- Phenomenology (Marcel Merleau-Ponty) – Rejects the mind-body dualism by arguing that we perceive the world from our bodies – consciousness is always embodied
- Symbolic interactionism (Harold Blumer, Erving Goffman, George H Mead) – Argues that we make sense of ourselves in interaction with others. We perceive our bodies through others’ perspectives upon us, and the conceptual orders that make our embodiment meaningful. For example, the experience of being ‘disabled’ only makes sense through the eyes of others and the social order defining disability as a lack.
- Logic of Practice (Pierre Bourdieu) – Bourdieu’s work analyses how bodily practices, such as the way we walk or talk, or our preferences for particular types of food, reflect our position in the social hierarchy. Bodies are involuntarily invested with social capital, and are thus cultivated to reflect cultural (particularly, class) values. We embody these values in our habitus.

These approaches emphasise that we experience the world from our bodies first and foremost, and the particularities of our bodies, including our sex, skin colour, and body shape. Even our deportment and food preferences, and the value or significance placed on these things, are entirely reflections of the societies in which we live.

For our purposes today it is simply necessary to know that there are a number of different approaches to the body but that they all have one important thing in common: the body is not in any simple sense a natural object.

⇒ Ask participants if they have any questions.

(5 mins)

SLIDE 14

Personhood

In Western culture, personhood is usually understood to encompass the individual body, consciousness, free will, societal rights and responsibilities as a citizen of a nation state and, often, some notion of soul or spirit. For example Western Christians believe that each soul is unique and each body is inhabited by one soul.

SLIDE 15

In many non-Western cultures, however, personhood is understood as communal and related to kinship rather than to individual bodies. For example, Confucians believe in a continuous relationship between ancestors and living persons, while Hindus believe in reincarnation, thus a person may be reborn in a new body after death. Many tribal societies believe that a new person is created and an old one dies during adolescent initiation ceremonies.

SLIDE 16

In certain situations or contexts, personhood can be partial or potential. Legally, a prisoner is a partial person (with partial rights). There are ongoing and contentious debates about when a foetus can be thought of as a person. Across cultures, understandings of the body and of personhood are interlinked. Certain kinds of bodies and certain kinds of persons are given different symbolic (and institutional) meanings; for example racist ideas about black persons are linked to black bodies. In particular historical contexts, black bodies have been denied the (legal and ethical) status of persons.

In some societies, transgender and intersex people reveal personhood to be based on fairly rigid ideas about sex and gender. If a person is not clearly male or female, they may face prejudice and exclusion from established understandings of citizenship and personhood. On a government census form in Australia, for example, it is impossible not to be either male or female. In other societies, there are clearly established identity positions for people who do not conform to male or female categories of person. For example, in Samoa, Fa'afine are Samoan boys who are raised as girls. Yet, outside of Samoa, Fa'afine may face misunderstanding and exclusion due to the fact they confound accepted understandings of gender. Here, cultural understandings of personhood

and the body intersect to inform who is considered a viable or acceptable person.

What these examples demonstrate is that understandings of the body and personhood are culturally and historically contingent. Neither sexuality nor the body are universal, but reflect the social and historical conditions of a particular society. ||

SLIDE 17

Review

(20 mins)

- ⇒ Ask participants if there are any questions about the lecture.
- ⇒ Ask participants to brainstorm together the following questions (on slide):
 - In your culture, is personhood individualised, or communal and kinship related?
 - Is it possible for someone to have sexuality in your society? Does sexuality refer to what people do, or who people are?
 - Are there discourses that define appropriate sexual conduct in your society?
- ⇒ Make a list of these discourses or rules on the flipchart paper or whiteboard.
 - Whose bodies do they refer to?
 - Whose values do they reflect?

SLIDE 18

Session 2. The relationship between bodies, personhood & sexuality

(90 mins)

⇒ Tell participants that this session will begin with a review of the two pre-readings.

SLIDE 19

⇒ Remind participants that the two pre-readings were:

- Chimaraoke Izugbara & Chi-Chi Undie (2008). Who Owns the Body?: Indigenous African Discourses of the Body and Contemporary Sexual Rights Rhetoric. *Reproductive Health Matters*.
- Christine Helliwell (2000). 'It's Only a Penis': Rape, Feminism and Difference. *Signs*, 5(3): 789-816.

⇒ Check: Did half of the participants read one article and half the other, or did everyone read both? Amend the following instructions dependent on participants' responses.

SLIDE 20

Pre-reading review

(90 mins total)

⇒ Divide everyone into pairs (randomly, if everyone read both articles, or purposively, if half read one article and half the other).

- In each pair, one person will focus on the Izugbara & Undie pre-reading and the other on the Helliwell pre-reading.
- Each person should take 15 mins to summarise their reading for their partner.

(30 mins)

SLIDE 21

⇒ Tell participants to stay in their pairs and try to answer the following focus questions (on slide):

- What does each article say about the relationship between the body, personhood & sex or sexuality?
 - What might be meant by the phrase “the body is a cultural construction”?
 - Does this contradict the commonsense idea that bodies are material things?
 - If bodies are cultural constructions, how might they vary across cultures and what effects might this have for sex and sexuality? **(30 mins)**
- ⇒ After 30 minutes, bring everyone back together and ask for volunteers to provide feedback. Use feedback from two or three volunteers to initiate a whole group discussion.
- Wrap-up by asking if participants still have any questions regarding the readings, and clarify any misunderstandings.
 - Review the ways in which understandings of bodies are culturally constructed. **(30 mins)**

SLIDE 22

Session 3. Disability case study

(165 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend / rewrite):

|| This session is designed to strengthen intellectual resources to re-think disabilities and sexualities work (including research, programming, teaching, advocacy, and other actions) by balancing a concern for health with a sex-positive approach, highlighting issues such as desire, love, and wellness.

Work on or with people living with disabilities has tended to be narrowly defined, overlooking questions such as how desire or sexuality may be a source of happiness, personal fulfilment and well-being for people with a physical impairment. The reality remains that conventional negative constructions of sexuality attract the most attention (and, therefore, funding) for work related to people living with disabilities.

In this session, we will:

- Question common assumptions about the sexualities of people living with chronic illness/disabilities;
- Consider whether people living with disabilities have a right to a sexual life;
- Reflect on how these issues are related to the concepts of ‘the body’ and ‘personhood’.

This work will draw on the recognition that individuals—disabled or not—have sexual desires and make conscious choices and efforts in seeking meaningful sexual relationships as a way of contributing to their wellness. As such, love and intimacy are part and parcel of wellness. Thus, the session will discuss themes covering experiences and desires that are physical and emotional expressions of sexuality. The session seeks to challenge the predominant medical discourse on sexuality and explore how work in the context of disabilities needs to change in order to contribute to the achievement of greater well-being. ||

SLIDE 23

Background

⇒ Read (quote and bullet points on slide):

|| As long ago as 1948, Meyerson noted:

There is general agreement in the literature on physical disability that the problems of the handicapped [sic] are not physical, but social and psychological.

While the language has moved on (for instance no one now says ‘the handicapped’, there remains a need for more widespread (and acted-upon) recognition of the ways in which societal norms and expectations

can adversely affect people with disabilities. This is particularly true in relation to the sexuality of people with disabilities.

Work on/with people living with disabilities has tended to de-sexualise their bodies. Questions such as how desire or sexuality may be a source of happiness, personal fulfilment and well-being for people with disabilities are often overlooked. ||

SLIDE 24

Screening: *Dance Me to My Song* (100 mins)

- ⇒ Tell participants that the film they are about to watch was written by Heather Rose, the physically impaired woman in the film.
- ⇒ Ask everyone to keep notes on their own (positive and negative) emotional reactions to what they see and hear during the screening.
- ⇒ Screen the film.

SLIDE 25

Exercise and discussion (30 mins)

- ⇒ At the end of the film, give participants 5 minutes to review their notes on their emotional reactions to the film.
- ⇒ Ask everyone to collect two index cards each (instructions are repeated as bullet points on the slide).
 - Each person should write a positive emotion on one index card, and a negative emotion (if they had one) on the other. Tell them not to write their names on the cards; these reactions are anonymous.

- Collect the cards in, shuffle them and redistribute them randomly among the group.
- Ask each person in turn to read aloud what is written on the cards they have been given. **(10 mins)**

SLIDE 26

- ⇒ Ask all participants to brainstorm the following questions together (on slide):
- Were there any similarities between participants' reactions to the depiction of sexuality in the film?
 - Did you find particular aspects of the film more confronting than others?
 - How do you think others in your social/cultural context would react to the film? **(20 mins)**

SLIDE 27

Small group discussion (20 mins + 10 mins feedback)

- ⇒ Break participants into small groups and ask them to discuss the following focus questions (on slide):
- In your context, are the sexual lives of people living with disabilities denied, resisted, controlled? How and at what level?
 - What does this say about the 'reading' of impaired bodies?
 - What does this say about the 'reading' of personhood?
 - Are there ways in which the sexual lives of people living with disabilities are (or could be) acknowledged and facilitated?
 - Does (or would) the 'reading' of their bodies change?
 - Does (or would) the 'reading' of personhood change? **(20 mins)**
- ⇒ Bring the groups back together and brainstorm answers to the questions regarding if, how and at what level the sexual lives of people living with disabilities are denied, resisted or controlled.

- Ask for one volunteer who is willing to offer an answer to the questions regarding what this might say about readings of the body, or of personhood.
 - Check to see if anyone else has a different take on the possible answers to these questions.
- ⇒ Brainstorm answers to the question regarding ways in which the sexual lives of people living with disabilities are (or could be) acknowledged and facilitated.
- Ask for one volunteer who is willing to offer an answer to the questions regarding required changes in readings of the body, or of personhood.
 - Check to see if anyone else has a different take on the possible answers to these questions. **(10 mins)**

SLIDE 28

Session 4. Virtually human: the future of the body and the body of the future

(110 mins)

Mini lecture

(5 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend):

|| Within very recent memory, the internet and the various ways people use it have grown exponentially. As people interact with the technology and communicate with each other, cyberspace has come to house a vast array of online cultures and communities and many of these involve sex.

SLIDE 29

There are three types of websites that are relevant to this case study. The first type includes dating sites that allow users to upload information and photos of themselves and to browse the profiles of other users. People are then able to communicate directly via text and potentially meet for dates.

The second type of site allows people to communicate in cyberspace without any assumption that they may ever meet. There are many levels of technology that fall into this category. The simplest is live text communication, however this is increasingly redundant. More commonly these days communication includes sound and vision.

The third type of site includes virtual worlds or virtual realities. These have more complex and tenuous relationships with the real world. These are more like video games where players build characters known as avatars, which are represented in the virtual world as cartoon characters.

The existence and use of all of these sites raises many difficult questions regarding the body, personhood, sexuality and ethical issues.

SLIDE 30

Sex using the internet raises many tricky questions. For example: to what extent does the technology of dating sites structure users' expectations and experiences? What kind of sex is it when mediated via text or other internet software? What kinds of relationships are possible in cyberspace? And what ethical questions arise from cybersex?

SLIDE 31

The most popular virtual world is Second Life with three million residents [<http://secondlife.com/>] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life].

Second Life is not an explicitly sexual world. However, just as in real life, sex, love and relationships occur there. Other worlds such as Sociolotron [<http://www.sociolotron.com/>] are explicitly sexual and avatars

commonly explore fetishistic fantasies. Such sites are designated for people over the age of 21. Commonly, but not always, characters in virtual worlds are humanoid, with idealised human characteristics such as large muscles, breasts and so on.

SLIDE 32

Of course, it is not necessary for the owner of an avatar to design her or his avatar in their own image. It is common for gender, race, and species crossing to occur. It is possible, even common, for women to control male avatars and men to control female avatars. Thus a heterosexual sex act between avatars may be much queerer than the real world people controlling them believe. Differences in avatar and owners' ages are also common. One sexual practice in Second Life, age play, or sex among child avatars or between child and adult avatars has caused a great deal of consternation. It may also be possible for a child to control an adult avatar engaging in sex acts. ||

SLIDE 33

Screening

(40 mins)

- ⇒ Tell participants that the film they are about to see was broadcast in the UK by the BBC in early 2008.
- Ask everyone to keep notes about what strikes them as interesting in relation to the body, personhood and sexuality.

- Also ask them to make notes of anything that occurs in the film that they do not understand.

⇒ Screen film.

Discussion

(20 mins)

⇒ Ask the whole group to brainstorm their answers to the focus questions (on slide):

- What struck you about the stories represented in the film in relation to the body, personhood, and sexuality?
- Is there anything that you do not understand?

SLIDE 34

Cyber rape: a case study

(5 mins)

⇒ Tell participants that the following information is taken from the article by Julian Dibbell (1993) A Rape in Cyberspace. *The Village Voice* (included in further reading list).

- Remind them that while the technology and the quality of the graphics have moved on since the incident that Dibbell wrote about, the issues remain current.
 - Dibbell wrote about a case of ‘virtual’ abuse that caused major controversy on an internet role play site in the 1990s.
 - An online character called ‘Mr Bungle’ entered the virtual living room of the LambdaMOO site.
 - According to Dibbell, ‘Mr Bungle’s’ operator used ‘a voodoo doll’ that ‘attribut[ed] actions to other characters that their users did not actually write’.
 - The online room’s other occupants were forced to sexually service ‘Mr Bungle’ and to abuse themselves in violent and sexual ways.

SLIDE 35

- A character called ‘Iegba’ was raped in the virtual living room by ‘Mr Bungle’.
- Dibbell reported that ‘Iegba’s’ operator suffered real-world trauma, with ‘posttraumatic tears...streaming down her face’.
- Dibbell concluded: ‘What happens inside a...made-up world is neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally meaningful’.

SLIDE 36

Group discussion

(40 mins)

- ⇒ Divide participants into 2 or 4 groups, preferably of 6-10 participants per group.
 - Designate groups as either Group A or Group B.
- ⇒ Ask all Group As to discuss the following question (on slide):
 - Many sexual practices are strictly regulated in the real world (e.g. paedophilia, bestiality, rape and, in many countries, homosexuality). Should there be moral and ethical issues around virtual world practices?
- ⇒ Ask all Group Bs to discuss the following question (on slide):
 - Are there comparisons and differences between the ‘Mr Bungle’ incident and Helliwell’s article ‘It’s only a penis’ from the beginning of the module? Think about these comparisons and differences in terms of the body, personhood and sexuality.
- ⇒ Encourage all participants to relate the questions to the case study and to what they saw in the documentary. **(20 mins)**
- ⇒ Ask for feedback from Group A, and ask in particular for details of any in-group disagreements. What alternate points of view were expressed? How forceful were people in their opinions? **(10 mins)**

- ⇒ Ask for feedback from Group Bs. List all comparisons noted on one side of a piece of flipchart paper (or on the whiteboard) and all differences on the other side.
- Encourage people to try and identify those comparisons and differences that relate most closely to ideas of the body, and those that relate most closely to ideas of personhood. **(10 mins)**
- ⇒ Wrap up the discussions with reference back to the readings and the film.

SLIDE 37

Conclusion

(5 Mins)

⇒ Read (or amend / re-write):

|| The body is intimately related to questions of sex and sexuality. Bodies are both material *and* social; understandings of the body do not exist outside of societies and cultures.

Further, personhood is related to bodies in complex ways that are culturally and historically contingent. There is no such thing as a normal or a natural body, nor a normal or natural personhood—once we realise this many possibilities open up for thinking about sex and sexuality. ||

⇒ Check: Any remaining questions?

SLIDE 38

Short course acknowledgements.

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(including lecture bibliography)

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