



Module Outline for Course Participants

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.

Abstract

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.

Module aims

- 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 the cases of disability and virtual technologies

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.

Overview of module

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

Participants will be introduced to the 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. Particular attention will be paid to the role that cultural understandings play in shaping and controlling these relationships. 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.

Further reading

(includes lecture bibliography)

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- Nisha (2006) Regulation of disabled women's sexuality. *InfoChange*.
- Pitts, R. (2007) Sociolotron: How the Other Half Plays. *The Escapist*.
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