



Facilitator Notes

Sex, Sexuality and Gender: Basic Concepts

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This module was developed as part of 'Introduction to Advancing Sexuality Studies: a short course on sexuality theory and research methodologies'. The short course was developed by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, *and* the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society.

Funded by the Ford Foundation

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This module was created by Dr Deb Dempsey and Mr William Leonard, with supporting material from Professor Gary W. Dowsett, 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

What does it mean to be a 'woman' or a 'man' and how can we tell the difference?

What does it mean to speak of 'sex', 'sexuality' and 'gender', and how do these concepts interrelate? This module explores the social relationship between sex, sexuality and gender. Drawing on a range of theoretical approaches from sociology, feminism and queer theory, the module argues that it is impossible to understand any one of these three terms without reference to the other two.

The module describes in a critical fashion the ways in which hierarchies of sex, sexuality and gender are implicated in all areas of social life. In both Western and non-Western societies, what a woman and a man *should* be has relied on a narrow understanding of sex, gender and sexuality and *the relationship between* these three. This understanding is reproduced, reinforced and enforced by a range of social institutions, from the state to religious organisations and the media, and has been used to marginalise alternative gender and sexual identities.

The material in this module provides a foundation for other modules that look at how hierarchies of sex, sexuality and gender intersect with other social differences including race, socio-economic status, ethnicity and location.

The aims of this module are:

- To introduce and critique biologically determinist understandings of sex, gender and sexuality
- To introduce Critical Sexuality Studies definitions of sex, sexuality and gender and examine the history of the construction of sexuality
- To examine the interrelationship between sex, sexuality and gender through consideration of heteronormativity and sexual/gendered inequity

Participants will:

- Critique biologically determinist constructions of sex and sexuality
- Identify key theorists and concepts in the study of sexual inequality
- Think critically about the interrelationship between sex, sexuality and gender
- Reflect on the effects of normative constructions of sex, sexuality and gender as these are relevant to their own sociocultural and research settings

Module approach

While the module does contain lecture material, the overall aim is that participants should be involved in active learning. Group work will be undertaken in all sessions and, where information is provided in lecture form, we have striven to ensure that this is linked to group work and debate. The short course team advises that any review or amendment of the module maintains a focus on active learning wherever possible.

Overview

Introduction

The module aims, anticipated outcomes for participants and module schedule will be introduced.

Session 1. Questioning biologically determinist perspectives and defining sex, sexuality and gender

This session provides a critique of biologically determinist understandings of sex and sexuality, and introduces working definitions of sex, sexuality and gender as these concepts are understood in the Critical Sexuality Studies field. It also begins to explore the interrelationship between sex, sexuality and gender in socio-historical context.

Session 2. Heteronormativity and sexual stratification

This session defines heteronormativity, a concept central to exploring the interrelationship between sexuality and gender, and the marginalisation of non-normative sexualities and genders. Several theories of sexual stratification are then discussed through the work of Adrienne Rich and Gayle Rubin.

Session 3.

Option 1. Understanding sexuality as historically and socially constructed

This option for Session 3 includes a guided reading of the historical work of Jeffrey Weeks, providing an opportunity to consider in more detail the idea that sexuality can be considered an 'invention'. Participants will be able to compare and contrast historical case studies that demonstrate how understandings of sexuality have changed over time.

Option 2. Transgender issues in cross-cultural perspective

In this option for Session 3, participants will be guided through readings by Megan Sinnott and Serena Nanda on transgender identities in Thailand and India. Participants will be encouraged to reflect upon how heteronormativity differs cross-culturally and has implications for the expression of non-normative gender and sexual identities.

Conclusion

The module will conclude with a brief summary of the main themes and concepts by the facilitator. Participants will be given time to reflect on the relative merits of the module's themes and concepts in the context of their local cultures and research interests.

Required pre-reading

Connell, R.W. (2002) Differences and bodies. In *Gender* (Cambridge, Polity Press), p28-47.

Hawkes, G. & Scott, J. (2005) Sex and society. In G. Hawkes & J. Scott (Eds) *Perspectives in Human Sexuality* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press), p3-19.

Optional pre-reading

Weeks, J. (2003 [1986]) The languages of sex. In *Sexuality* (London, Routledge), p1-10.

Preparatory facilitation work

Session 3 of this module offers two options: Understanding sexuality as historically and socially constructed, or Transgender issues in cross-cultural perspective. The facilitator should decide in advance whether she/he will offer the choice to participants once Session 3 is reached, or whether she/he will make an advance decision on which option to follow. In the latter instance, the facilitator would need to amend the PowerPoint accordingly (schedule slide and Session 3 slides). She/he would also need to amend the Module Outline for Course Participants.

Materials required

Flipchart paper and marker pens

For Session 2:

Handout 1: inducements and punishments within ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich, 1980) (in Resources folder)

Handout 2: Gayle Rubin’s ‘charmed circle’ diagram (in Resources folder)

For Session 3:

Copies of the following readings (not provided for reasons of copyright).

Nanda, S. ([1985] 2007) The Hijras of India: Cultural and individual dimensions of an institutionalized third gender role. In Parker, R. and Aggleton, P. (eds.) *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader* (2nd ed.).

Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, p237-249.

Sinnott, M. (2008) Romancing the queer. In Martin, F, Jackson, P,
McLelland, A and Yue, A. (Eds.) *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and
Sexualities*. Illinois, University of Illinois Press.

Introduction structure, materials and timing

Session & approach		PowerPoint	Other materials (provided or required)	Est. timing
Introduction				
Introduction, schedule and aims		Facilitator delivery	1-4	10 mins
Session 1. Challenging biological determinism and defining sex, sexuality and gender				
Men and women: similar or different?		Group work	6-7	30 mins
Lecture		Facilitator delivery	8-12	30 mins
Defining sex, gender and sexuality		Group work	13	30 mins
Lecture		Facilitator delivery	14-22	40 mins
Reading images		Pairs work	23	15 mins
Session wrap-up			24	10 mins
Session 2. Heteronormativity and sexual stratification				
			25	100 mins

Session introduction	Facilitator delivery	26		5 mins
Lecture	Facilitator delivery, brainstorm	27-29	Lecture provided in Facilitator Notes	25 mins
Inducements and punishments	Group work	30-31	Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens	20 mins
Lecture (cont.)	Facilitator delivery	32	Lecture provided in Facilitator Notes	10 mins
Rubin's 'charmed circle'	Group work & summary	33-34	Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens	40 mins
Session 3. Two options:		35		80 mins
Option 1. Understanding sexuality as historically and socially constructed		36-40		
Option 2. Transgender issues in cross-cultural perspective				
	Guided reading & discussion	36-40		80 mins
Conclusion				45 mins
Module summary	Facilitator delivery	41-42		15 mins
Personal reflection	Pairs and individual work	43		30 mins
Total				390 mins (6.5 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

(10 mins)

⇒ Tell participants (read, or amend as required):

|| This module describes in a critical fashion the ways in which hierarchies of sex, sexuality and gender are implicated in all areas of social life. In both Western and non-Western societies, what a woman and a man *should* be has relied on a narrow understanding of sex, gender and sexuality and the relationship *between* these three. This understanding is reproduced, reinforced and enforced by a range of social institutions, from the state to religious organisations and the media, and has been used to marginalise alternative gender and sexual identities. ||

SLIDE 2

Schedule

NB: The schedule currently does not contain any tea, coffee or lunch breaks. Add as required.

SLIDE 3

Module aims

⇒ Read (on slide):

|| This module aims to:

- Introduce and critique biologically determinist understandings of sex, gender and sexuality
- Introduce Critical Sexuality Studies definitions of sex, sexuality and gender and examine the history of the construction of sexuality
- Examine the interrelationship between sex, sexuality and gender through consideration of heteronormativity and sexual/gendered inequity

SLIDE 4

Participants will:

- Critique biologically determinist constructions of sex and sexuality
- Identify key theorists and concepts in the study of sexual inequality
- Think critically about the interrelationship between sex, sexuality and gender
- Reflect on the effects of normative constructions of sex, sexuality and gender as these are relevant to their own sociocultural and research settings ||

SLIDE 5

Session 1. Challenging biological determinism and defining sex, sexuality and gender (115 mins)

⇒ Tell participants that this session will introduce and critique biologically determinist understandings of sex, gender and sexuality, as well as introducing definitions of sex, sexuality and gender from a Critical Sexuality Studies perspective.

- The session mixes lecture material with group work.

SLIDE 6

Group work: similarities and differences (30 mins)

⇒ Divide participants into two groups and provide each group with flipchart paper.

⇒ Ask one group to list differences between women and men on the flipchart paper, and the other to list similarities. (10 mins)

⇒ Ask each group to provide feedback. (10 mins)

SLIDE 7

⇒ Bring the whole group together to discuss the following questions (on slide):

- What are the effects of highlighting differences rather than similarities between men and women?
- To what extent do you think assumptions about biologically determined sex differences between women and men influence popular culture, sayings or beliefs in your cultural setting? (10 mins)

⇒ Look for opportunities in the discussion to point out that:

- The variation *within* each sex is often as significant as the variation *between* the sexes
- Men and women are more like each other than they are like rocks, water, trees, or most animals

- Often, characteristics deemed traditionally ‘male’ are given more value within society than characteristics deemed ‘female’, e.g. strength vs. sensitivity. There is a socially constructed hierarchy within sexual difference.

SLIDE 8

Lecture

(30 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend as desired):

|| Biologically-determinist theories of sex and sexuality reduce it to an effect of biology or nature. Connell (2002) calls this the ‘body as machine’ approach. These theories have drawn heavily on science, from physiology in the 19th century to neurobiology and genetics in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the 19th century, commentators and theorists often relied on physiology and medicine to argue that the differences between men’s and women’s reproductive systems and capacities meant that women were biologically suited to bearing and raising children and, therefore, staying at home, while men were biologically suited to work and providing material support for their families. Many biologically determinist theories are Eurocentric in origin, while a number draw on studies of non-European societies, particularly from anthropology in the 19th and 20th centuries. Nonetheless, their supporters claim that they are applicable across cultures.

Biological determinists include sociobiologists, psychologists, some geneticists and ‘pop psychology’ writers. Sociobiology argues that there is continuity between human behaviour and social organisation and the

behaviour and organisation of other animals and insects. For example mid-20th century biologist E.O. Wilson used studies of the social organisation of ants as a model of human societies. Some psychologists have adopted Wilson's ideas and call their approach 'evolutionary psychology'. Using Darwin's evolutionary theories about survival of the fittest, they propose that natural selection will favour behaviours that further survival of an individual's genes into the next generation. Behaviours as complex as family loyalties, mother/child bonds and men's infidelity to their wives have all been explained as an effect of evolutionary reproductive strategies. For instance, in a 1988 book entitled *Male Female*, David Geary argues that individuals make sexual choices that will support the advancement of their genes into the next generation, and proposes that males are in constant competition with each other for the reproductive resources (and females) that will enable them to do this.

SLIDE 9

Sociobiology also draws on neuroscience to make its case. One best-selling book in Australia and the US was written by Allan and Barbara Pease who claim (among other things) that the structure of our brains can explain why women 'have vastly inferior' spatial skills to men, and why men are 'incapable' of listening properly to conversations.

In the biologically determinist school of thought, the biological facts of sex are believed to result from 'natural' differences between men and

women. Heterosexuality is a natural outcome of this sex difference, due to the drive to reproduce the species. Thus society is understood as developing first from the primal division between the sexes, with the *inevitable attraction* between male and female then becoming a driver for creation of society. One of the key assumptions behind biological determinism is the idea that the primary function and goal of all human sexual activity is the reproduction of the species. Biological determinists argue that humans have sex because we must reproduce. Sexuality becomes the enactment of a 'natural' attraction between male and female. One consequence of this construction of heterosexuality as the natural outcome of an evolutionary drive to reproduce is that homosexuality can only be explained as unnatural, or as a biological aberration from the norm.

SLIDE 10

In recent years, a number of geneticists such as Simon LeVay and Dean Hamer in the US have endeavoured to find a 'gay gene' in order to prove there is a biological basis for, and explanation of, male homosexuality. In 1991 LeVay found small differences in the post-mortem brains of heterosexual and homosexual young men. A cluster of neurons in the hypothalamus were found to be reduced in size in homosexual men and this area of the brain is thought to be involved in 'the regulation of male-typical sexual behaviour' (LeVay 1991). Subsequent to this, Dr. Dean Hamer and his colleagues reported that a gene for homosexuality seemed to be maternally linked on the X chromosome. Hamer's

research was based on pairs of homosexual brothers and found that some of them had similar markers on the X chromosome and indicated a genetic basis for sexuality (Hamer et al. 1993). Although other scientists have had difficulty replicating LeVay's work, and Hamer's theory about the X chromosome was later refuted, this has done little to curb enthusiasm among some scientists to continue the attempt to find a gay gene.

SLIDE 11

Biological determinism renders invisible the hard work undertaken within social activity to *create* understandings of sex, sexuality and gender, and there are a number of points to be made that question the validity of biological determinist ideas.

First, biological determinism cannot account for the ways in which, or the reasons why, powerful social institutions such as the military, religion, government, or family structures police and control the expression of sexuality in most cultures. As Connell (2002) points out, sociobiological accounts of sex difference and sexuality often portray society as comprised only of individuals (largely men) in one-to-one competition with each other. If reproductive differences between the sexes *naturally* drive individual behaviour in a manner that fosters the survival of the species, why did these social institutions come into being or why have they been deemed necessary agents to police and set moral guidelines for sexual behaviour?

Second, however popular sex ‘difference’ research may be, it masks a great deal of evidence for sex similarities (cf. Connell 2002 pre-reading). The research evidence for many biologically determinist claims simply does not hold up. Sophisticated statistical analyses of hundreds of studies that attempt to measure sex differences between men and women based on tendencies to aggression, language abilities, infidelity or intelligence have challenged the extent to which reproductive differences cause other kinds of differences between women and men. Many differences are context-specific rather than sex-specific.

SLIDE 12

Third, despite continuing interest in a genetic basis for sexuality, a gay or heterosexual gene has yet to be found. Last, but by no means least, we need to recognise that biological determinists often conveniently ignore the fact that *most* sex is, in fact, not reproductive. As Jeffrey Weeks (2003) points out in your optional pre-reading, most heterosexual erotic encounters do not lead to procreation and only some lead to orgasm. Throughout history and across cultures, homosexual acts are well documented among men and women. Some activities that could be viewed as sex-related such as cross-dressing may not lead to orgasm. Masturbation and some sexual fetishes do not necessarily involve contact with another person. This suggests that human sexuality is rather more complicated than a question of ensuring the survival of the species or of one’s gene pool.

What must be recognised is that biological ‘drive’ arguments are political. They are often used to resist social change and legitimate an unequal gendered and sexualised social order (e.g. find a biological basis for why men rape). As many feminists have pointed out, sociobiological arguments often legitimate a non-egalitarian social order in which male dominance is taken for granted, and violence or sexual exploitation of women is explained as a mechanism of evolutionary advantage. Furthermore, these arguments support the idea of normal and abnormal sexualities, in which heterosexuality is the only normal possibility.

Biological determinism thus veils the power relations involved in maintaining the social dominance of men and heterosexuality. Power is exercised in sex and sexuality in a number of institutional and interpersonal ways. There are competing interests involved and diversity in the forms sex and sexuality may take that are not compatible with the idea of a universally, biologically expressed ‘nature’. || **(25 mins)**

⇒ Check to see if participants have any questions or comments at this point.

(5 mins)

⇒ Tell participants they will now be considering the different ways in which the interrelationship between sex and sexuality can be considered. The module’s third core concept, gender, will also be introduced.

SLIDE 13

Group work: defining sex, gender and sexuality (30 mins)

- ⇒ Ask each participant to write down her or his own working definitions of the terms sex, sexuality, and gender. (5 mins)
- ⇒ Combine participants into pairs to compare their definitions and develop definitions on which they both agree. (5 mins)
- ⇒ Make three columns, either on a whiteboard or flipchart paper, and head the columns Sex, Sexuality and Gender respectively.
- Ask one pair to volunteer to report back on their definition of the term sex to the whole group. Note key aspects of the definition on your whiteboard or flipchart paper under the relevant heading.
 - Ask for a second pair to volunteer to report back on their definition of the term sexuality and, again, note key terms.
 - Ask for a third pair to volunteer to report back on their definition of the term gender and, again, note key terms.
- ⇒ Ask the remaining groups to call out any additional key terms they may have. (10 mins)
- ⇒ Facilitate a brief group discussion on the definitions, paying particular attention to any inconsistencies or overlap between the definitions. (10 mins)
- ⇒ If possible, leave the definitions where they can be seen throughout the rest of the module.

SLIDE 14

Lecture, Q&A (40 mins)

- ⇒ Read (or amend as desired):

|| In research, we often see the terms 'sex' and 'gender' confused. 'Gender' often appears in questionnaires when what the researchers want to know is the biological sex of a respondent. The term 'sex' can

mean biologically male or female, but is also used to refer to sexual acts; for example sexual intercourse, anal sex, or oral sex. However one person's understanding of the acts encompassed under the term 'sex' is frequently different to another person's. If you ask people about 'sex' on a questionnaire, can you be sure that all participants will have a common understanding of the acts included under this term? Might they think you were only asking about vaginal intercourse?

To quote from Connell, *gender* should be understood as 'the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions into social processes' (Connell 2002: 10). It is gender that gives us normative assumptions regarding 'masculine' or 'feminine' behaviour.

Slide 15

Sex and gender are often thought of as binary categories; that is, we can be either male or female, or feminine or masculine. However, this is a false assumption. We know that some people are born intersexed, with combinations of genitals, chromosomes and sex hormones that do not fit neatly with binary constructions of sex. Although sex can be quantified by DNA and genetic testing, sometimes the results are difficult to make sense of with regard to their social implications. ||

⇒ **N.B.: The slide is animated.** Click once to bring up photographs of people who confound binary categories.

|| Intersex people such as South African athlete Caster Semenya, pictured centre, continue to reveal biological sex as more complex than ‘male’ and ‘female’.

Similarly, transgender people challenge the notion of two genders, or binary constructions of gender, as demonstrated by the Hijra in India—pictured left—or Tom and Dee in Thailand—pictured right—and the Fa’afafine in the Pacific. Gender categories found in non-Western cultural settings are often inconsistent with Western categories. ||

- ⇒ Ask participants if anyone can tell the rest of the group about Hijra, or Tom and Dee. (5 mins)
- ⇒ If no one volunteers, run briefly through the following case studies (remember: Session 3 provides an option for more thorough examination of these issues).
 - **Hijra:** The Hijra of India are biological males who wear women’s clothing and are usually referred to by the feminine pronoun ‘she’. According to Nanda (1985) the Hijra category encompasses many kinds of transgendered, sexual or intersex identities and characteristics that, in the West, might be differentiated by terms such as eunuch, homosexual, transsexual, transvestite and hermaphrodite (*check participants’ understanding of these terms*). Historically, Hijra have undergone castration and renounced sexual behaviour or desire through this process. Traditionally, they are imbued with ritual powers and may perform at weddings or preside over fertility ceremonies for newborn children and the newly married. Reddy (2005) notes many contemporary Hijra work as prostitutes and within their communities maintain complex systems of sexual classification based on castration status and the sexual practices in which they engage.
 - **Tom:** According to Sinnott (2008), Toms are masculine-identified women in Thailand who express their masculinity through the manner in which they dress, their personality, and by virtue of their sexual attraction to ‘Dees’,

women who are feminine in often very traditional ways and who may have sex with men or with Toms. The term 'Tom' comes from the English word 'tomboy'. Toms are typically known to be physically female and do not attempt to 'pass' as physically male. Generally speaking, Toms understand themselves and are understood within Thai culture as females who are born with a masculine soul.

⇒ Read:

|| These examples illustrate that it is important to see gender as more than the social expression of the biological difference between women and men. If we limit gender analysis to dynamics between the male and female sexes it means we can only see gender where we can see sex difference. Gender dynamics are also in play in same-sex relationships and environments. If we are studying bullying in all-girl schools or homosexual violence in all-male armies, attention to different patterns of masculinities and femininities in these environments may be of use. Same-sex couple relationships are also gendered, sometimes in deeply patterned ways, as the Tom and Dee example from Thailand indicates. Toms, for instance, do not choose other Toms as sexual partners. They choose women who are often feminine in traditional ways. This highlights the complexity of gendered identities.

SLIDE 16

Given what has been said so far, it might be tempting to make an absolute distinction between sex and gender based on the idea that 'sex' is a purely biological or 'natural' category and that gender is a social construction. Sometimes in the natural sciences the debate

about the difference between sex and gender is set up as ‘nature vs. nurture’, which is yet another binary opposition. A familiar social sciences binary opposition would be ‘essentialism vs. social constructionism’.

More recent thinking has tended towards more complex and interlinked understandings of sex and gender. Feminists have pointed out that the idea there are natural and innate sexed differences between men and women, which *precede* cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity, means that the sexed body is beyond critique. For instance, the notion that because women can give birth to children they are more suited to the domestic sphere could continue to be argued as legitimate on the basis of biological ‘fact’. Thus social inequality between men and women can be sustained, rather than challenged, through acceptance of the sexed body as ‘natural’.

Consistent with this idea, post-structural feminist Judith Butler cautions against defining sex as the natural, biological base and gender as social construction. Butler (1990) has argued that, rather than sex or biology determining gender, it is gender that determines sex. In other words, the very knowledge systems we use to describe and reinforce sex differences, through medical science or psychology for example, are already gendered by the language used to express ideas about the body.

SLIDE 17

We cannot neatly separate the sexed body from the gendered body. Both are mutually constituted through sociocultural processes. The *biological science* producing binary constructions of sex as male and female is *itself* a social construction. We can only know the biological facts of sex through language and metaphors that are already gendered, and already laden with social values. For instance, if we recall the earlier exercise where we tried to identify the differences and similarities between men and women—and discovered a great deal of complexity and ambiguity—the biological sciences exclude all that complexity and ambiguity and concentrate closely on the differences. But why should sexed difference be the basis to social organisation, reified through social processes and institutions? In Critical Sexuality Studies, the ‘natural’ body has come to be seen as political; caught up in systems of power, representation and understanding.

SLIDE 18

Bodies also have agency, or power, within these systems of power, representation and understanding. Connell’s concept of ‘social embodiment’ is relevant here, in which the meaning of the ‘body’ is expanded beyond dominant understandings of the physical form to include what bodies *do*, and how they are socially experienced and understood.

Connell summarises social embodiment thus:

Bodies cannot be understood as just the objects of social process ...they are active participants in social process ... They participate through their capacities, development and needs ... through the direction set by their pleasures and skills. Bodies must be seen as sharing social agency. (Connell 2002: 40)

SLIDE 19

This is quite a hard concept to grasp, so what does it mean in real terms? One implication is that we need to think of bodies as having physical capacities and limitations that influence how they can be socially experienced or intervened with. If we think of a professional footballer's body, we must consider his body as an active component in the gendered social process that surrounds it. The kinds of masculinity seen within professional football are interrelated with the footballer's physical strength, resilience and sporting prowess, and vice versa. It is important not to lose sight of how the body's capacities and limitations powerfully shape expressions of gender.

These are very complex ideas so don't worry if you do not fully understand them at this early stage of the course. At this point, it is important to be aware that in the Critical Sexuality Studies field we think of sex, sexuality and gender as necessarily involving various dimensions of bodily and social capacities and phenomena, and these will be expressed differently in different sociocultural settings. ||

⇒ Ask participants: Do any examples come to mind that illustrate for you how we can think of sex as a social construction? **(5 mins)**

- For example: increasing use of cosmetic surgery to enhance or change the appearance of breasts or genitals, doctors' decision-making about assigning male or female sex to children with indeterminate genitals, medications such as Viagra that enable men to have erections well into old age.

SLIDE 20

⇒ Continue the lecture by reading (or amend as desired):

|| It is important now to consider definitions of sexuality before we move on to thinking more deeply about how sex, sexuality and gender interrelate. Remember the definitions we came up with earlier (*recap the definitions here*).

Although it is almost impossible to think about sexuality without some reference to sex and gender, it is a different term and a relatively recent one in English and other Western languages. It came into English, French and German usage at the end of the 18th century, but usually meant reproduction through sexual activity among plants and animals. It came to be used in relation to love and sex matters in European discourse in the 1830s.

So what does sexuality mean now, according to the dictionary? It depends on which dictionary you read as to whether the definition fits more with a biologically determinist view, or a Critical Sexuality Studies

view. The definition offered in The Macquarie Dictionary (1981) is more consistent with a Critical Sexuality Studies approach, because it suggests the socially and culturally variable possibilities in defining what is sexual. According to The Macquarie Dictionary, sexuality can mean:

The recognition or emphasising of sexual matters

Macquarie Dictionary (1981: 1579)

Perhaps this is a little bit too vague to be really useful to us.

SLIDE 21

One way of beginning to define sexuality can be through thinking about what is encompassed within the word. A common Critical Sexuality Studies approach is to think of sexuality as comprising three, closely intertwined strands:

- Sexual desire or attraction, or in other words to whom (or in some cases what) someone is attracted (physically and emotionally);
- Sexual activity or behaviour, or what a person does or likes to do sexually (intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, sexual fetishes);
- Sexual identity, or how someone describes their sense of self as a sexual being (e.g. heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, homosexual).

It is well known from social research conducted around the world that sometimes there are not clear boundaries between what people feel sexually, what they do sexually and how they identify sexually. For example men who fall within the category known internationally as 'MSM'—men who have sex with men—may well not see other men's bodies as objects of sexual desire, but rather as sites of sexual practice. Further, such men often do not identify as gay or homosexual. This is just one example of how sexual desires, sexual practices and the notion of sexual identity do not necessarily line up neatly.

SLIDE 22

Jeffrey Weeks, prominent English historian of sexuality and author of your optional pre-reading, offers an even more complex definition of sexuality that includes within it reference to sex and gender. Weeks states:

I am suggesting that what we define as 'sexuality' is an historical construction, which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities, and cultural forms—gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires, fantasies, erotic practices, institutions and values—which need not be linked together and in other cultures have not been.
(Weeks, 2003: 7)

In Weeks' definition we see not only individuals who possess desires, feelings, identities, but a social and historical context in which these necessarily occur. So the social forces that shape the expression of sexuality beyond the individual and interpersonal are very much in evidence in this definition. It is a definition that indicates sexuality *exists* through its social forms and social organisation, and that these change over time and from place to place.

We will now 'read' a pair of images for sex, gender and sexuality, as a way of grounding Weeks' definition. ||

SLIDE 23

Reading images (15 mins)

⇒ Ask participants to divide into pairs, and to consider two focus questions in relation to the images shown (images and questions on slide):

- Are these images of sex, sexuality or gender?
- What would we need to know in order to make sense of this question?

(5 mins)

⇒ Bring everyone back together and run a feedback session.

- During the feedback, be sure to emphasise that there is no one definitive answer to the question regarding whether these are images of sex, sexuality or gender.
- Make sure that the participants consider the issue of the reading of the images changing dependent on who looks at them, and in what context.

(10 mins)

⇒ At the end of the exercise, you can tell participants:

|| These are present-day images from Yađlý Gûre° (yaw-luh gresh), or Turkish oil wrestling, a revered national sport in Turkey. In a cultural or institutional sense this is not a sexual performance or ritual although it may appear so to outsiders. Some Internet sources state that oil wrestling has become a popular spectator sport with Western male tourists who identify as gay. The sport dates back hundreds of years. In one of the nations biggest oil wrestling tournaments that has taken place every year since 1640, Turkey's best wrestlers gather at a field near Edirne, which was the capitol of the old Ottoman Empire. About 1,000 barefoot men and boys compete, oiled and stripped to the waist. The oiled leather pants they wear (kisbet) are similar to those originally worn by the bodyguards to the imperial Sultans. Oil wrestling matches can be won by achieving an effective hold of an opponent's kisbet, which is the move you see depicted in the second picture.

[<http://www.allaboutturkey.com/yagligures.htm> and

<http://www.kirkpinar.com/home.php?link=edirne&dil=en>

There are also clips available on YouTube.]

SLIDE 24

Session wrap-up

(10 mins)

- ⇒ Ask participants to take five minutes to look back at the notes they made at the start of this session on definitions of sex, sexuality and gender and to consider:
- To what extent do these definitions equate with the work covered in the rest of the session? **(5 mins)**
- ⇒ Ask if anyone is willing to offer a few reflections on the definitions and the work done so far, then check to see if there are any questions or comments before moving on to the next session. **(5 mins)**

SLIDE 25

Session 2. Heteronormativity and sexual stratification (100 mins)

Session introduction (5 mins)

- ⇒ Check participants' understanding of the term 'stratification', as used here.
- N.B. While originally a geological term that describes the layering of rocks and soil, stratification as used here refers to the sociological concept of society as layered by differences such as those of sexuality, gender, race, class and so on.
- ⇒ Tell participants that this session aims to help them further unpack the relationship between sex, sexuality and gender through the concept of heteronormativity.
- Theories of sexual stratification (inequality) emerging from feminism and gay/ lesbian theory will be introduced, and participants will be encouraged to consider the usefulness of these theories in their own cultural contexts.

SLIDE 26

⇒ Read:

|| As Gayle Rubin, a key theorist in gender and sexuality studies, states:

Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organised into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others. (Rubin 1984: 309)

The ways that sex, gender and sexuality interrelate in a given cultural setting *always* have political consequences. That is what we will be considering in this session. || (5 mins)

SLIDE 27

Lecture & brainstorm (25 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend as desired):

|| We will begin this part of the session by examining the concept of heteronormativity, referred to in the session title. This is a concept that assists us in understanding the political nature of the interrelationship between sex, sexuality and gender, and in understanding how sexuality is socially organised and regulated in a meaningfully patterned way. The Hawkes and Scott (2005) pre-reading is relevant here.

Heteronormativity describes the assumption in most cultures that heterosexuality is normal, socially or biologically, in a manner that is taken for granted or needs no explanation. Berlant and Warner (2000: 312) define it as:

... the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged.

In this view, a range of powerful social processes work to constitute heterosexuality as normal and natural, implicitly constructing homosexuality as inferior or wrong. These processes often occur within and between social institutions such as the media, the education system, the law, families, religion and healthcare systems. Mostly, those who do not fit normative standards are excluded and marginalised rather than subject to overt conflict or violence. However there are notable examples across the world of people being executed or suffering other forms of state- and sometimes church-sanctioned violence because they are not heteronormative.

The dominant understandings of sexuality and gender that circulate within the public arena can both identify and reiterate what is heteronormative in a given culture. These understandings can appear in advice given by community authority figures such as parents, teachers, religious leaders, or doctors; in religious doctrine or teachings; via the media (for example in advice columns in so-called ‘women’s magazines’); within households and in educational institutions. || **(10 mins)**

SLIDE 28

⇒ Ask participants to brainstorm examples of heteronormative assumptions that dominate within their cultures (e.g. the expectation that everyone gets married, or the assumption that young girls will grow up to sexually desire young men).

(5 mins)

|| Heteronormativity is the perceived 'fixed point' against which sex, sexuality and gender are both defined and understood in relation to each other. For instance, in Western cultures a man or boy who is perceived to be too feminine (which is non-heteronormative) is often believed to be gay, irrespective of his sexual desires or behaviours.

Adrienne Rich's and Gayle Rubin's theories of sexual stratification enable us to think about heterosexuality as a social institution and, therefore, as something that could be organised *differently*. This is quite a departure from thinking about heterosexuality as a natural or biologically determined 'drive'.

SLIDE 29

Adrienne Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality is one way of thinking about how heteronormativity leads to sexual inequality for women. Rich was writing in the 1970s, in the US, at the height of the Women's Liberation Movement, and in a few minutes you will get a chance to think about whether you think her ideas could be relevant in a cross-cultural sense within the 21st century, and also whether they could be relevant to consideration of sexual inequality for men as well as women.

In an essay entitled 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' (Rich, 1980), Rich challenged the naturalness and inevitability of

heterosexuality. For Rich, compulsory heterosexuality described an oppressive social system that assumes everyone is, and *should* be, heterosexual, and that other types of sexuality are unnatural. Rich argued that understanding nature as perpetually *hetero*-sexual was a political strategy for securing heterosexual privilege at the expense of alternative or non-heterosexual sexualities and sexual identities. Rich asked the provocative question ‘What social forces *stop* women from expressing their sexual and emotional attraction to other women?’

SLIDE 30

Rich’s question not only unsettles the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality, it also suggests that heterosexuality is not secured unless it is ‘nailed’ in place by social forces that pathologise, punish and/or prevent other forms of sexual expression. Rich talked of compulsory heterosexuality as an institution in which heterosexual compliance and privilege was secured by a complex system of social inducements—to conform to sexual norms and punishments—for challenging or departing from these norms. || (10 mins)

- ⇒ Divide participants into small groups, and provide each group with Handout 1: inducements and punishments within ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich, 1980).
- ⇒ Emphasise that these were written in the context of the US in the late 20th century.

SLIDE 31

Group work: inducements and punishments (20 mins)

- ⇒ Ask each group to consider the following focus questions (on slide):
- Is this model of inducements and punishments still relevant and appropriate in the 21st century? If not, can it be rewritten?
 - Is it relevant in and appropriate to your cultural setting? If not, can it be rewritten?
 - Can this table be rewritten to apply to men? **(10 mins)**
- ⇒ Run a brief feedback session, and conclude the exercise by summarising the points of departure or of agreement with Rich's work across cultures and across time.
- Reiterate the continued existence of gendered rewards and punishments intended to secure a normative construction of heterosexuality (reproductive, male-centred, monogamous, etc.). **(10 mins)**

SLIDE 32

Lecture (cont.) (10 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend as desired):

|| In the 1980s, American anthropologist Gayle Rubin extended and reworked Rich's analysis. In a very influential essay entitled '*Thinking Sex*', Rubin (1984) argues that, in Western societies, there exists a sexual hierarchy in which certain sexual interests are rewarded while others are punished. Certain sexual proclivities also fall outside the norm, argues Rubin; and this differentiation serves to foreground that which is considered acceptable and natural.

Rubin argues that people and practices high up in the sexual hierarchy fall within a 'charmed circle' and are rewarded, while those low in the hierarchy belong to 'the outer limits' and are punished or discriminated against. The sexual practices that Rubin argues are most valued and highly rewarded include a limited repertoire of sexual acts, reproductive in intent, undertaken by a monogamous, adult, heterosexual couple within the confines of the family home and sanctioned by the state, or religion, or both, through marriage. Rubin referred to this as the 'charmed circle' which is her way of thinking about heteronormativity.

Rubin's point is that those whose identity, practice or behaviour falls in 'the outer limits' rather than in the 'charmed circle' often receive treatment that can be viewed as morally reprehensible. She believes societies can be guilty of sexual chauvinism, just as practices such as racism and religious chauvinism are often widespread. However, it is important to emphasise here that Rubin's argument is not for complete sexual freedom or libertarianism. She is concerned about sexual power relations, but considered in a more ethical and democratic way than just outlawing non-heteronormative sexual practices. The social challenge she poses in her essay can be framed as the following question: what would a truly democratic and sexually moral society look like, if heteronormativity did not dictate the prevailing sexual morality?

For Rubin this would be a society in which how people treat each other, their level of mutual consideration in intimate relationships, and the presence or absence of harm and coercion is more relevant than the sexual categories they fit into or the kinds of sex they have. || (10 mins)

SLIDE 33

Group work: Rubin's 'charmed circle' (40 mins)

- ⇒ Provide participants with copies of *Handout 2: Gayle Rubin's 'charmed circle' (1984: 281)* (in Resources folder).
- ⇒ Check to see if participants understand the terms in each of the segments of the diagram. 'Vanilla', for instance, may be unfamiliar to them. It means sex that does not involve the use of objects such as dildos, whips or bondage equipment. It is contrasted in the diagram with 'S/M', or sado-masochistic sex.
- ⇒ Point out that in Rubin's diagram, heteronormativity does *not* equate with heterosexuality. Rather, 'the charmed circle' includes a small subset of appropriately coupled, reproductive, heterosexual sex acts and relations.
 - Unlike Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality, Rubin's sex hierarchy is about a particular construction of normative sexuality in which heterosexuality is *itself* split between the charmed and the marginalised. Charmed heterosexuals are those whose heterosexuality most closely conforms to a marriage-like relationship, while those heterosexuals who pay for sex, indulge in anal intercourse, have much younger partners or have multiple partners etc. occupy a marginal and subordinated space.
- ⇒ Ask participants to form small groups and to spend the first five minutes reading the handout provided, and sharing understandings. (5 mins)
- ⇒ Tell group members to discuss Rubin's diagram in relation to the sexual cultures, identities and practices relevant or currently topical in their own communities. Can they redraw the model to fit their local settings? (15 mins)

⇒ Ask each group to provide feedback, concentrating in particular on the similarities and differences between theirs and Rubin's versions of the charmed circle. **(15 mins)**

SLIDE 34

⇒ Wrap-up this activity by reading the following text (or amending as required):

|| This diagram was drawn by Rubin in the US in the 1980s and is not intended to be a fixed representation of how heteronormativity works at all times and in all places. The inner circle boundary line that separates the charmed circle from the outer limits (even as it links the two) can shift over time, and from place-to-place, so that practices that were once considered unacceptable become acceptable (and vice versa). For instance polygamy was once legal in the US but is not now, although it is still legal in some other countries. Also, homosexuality was never illegal in French colonies but was criminalised by the British in all of its colonies. Intergenerational sex was permitted in Ancient Greece between males and, though illegal in Greece now, is still common in South Asia and the Middle East. What is crucial to Rubin's argument is discovering the ways in which the boundary circle line is established and maintained in each society and over time. Whoever controls the boundary determines what is normal and abnormal, and with it controls the system of rewards and punishment on which the division rests. ||

⇒ Check to see if participants have any questions or comments before moving on to the third and final session. **(5 mins)**

SLIDE 35

Session 3.

(80 mins)

- ⇒ Tell participants that this session will consolidate the critique of biological determinism introduced in Session 1, and offer the opportunity to explore in more depth what it means to view sexuality as a social and historical construct, in cross-cultural perspective.
- ⇒ **N.B.** The facilitator should have decided in advance whether she/he is going to leave it to participants to select which option to follow, or whether she/he is going to decide in advance. If the latter, the facilitator should have amended the relevant PowerPoint slides accordingly.
 - The following notes are based on the assumption that the choice will be left to participants. This requires a greater amount of preparatory work on the part of the facilitator, but is more in keeping with the module's overall pedagogic approach.
- ⇒ Explain Option 1 and Option 2 to participants:
 - Option 1 will involve a guided reading of the historical work of Jeffrey Weeks. There will be opportunity to consider in more detail the idea that sexuality can be considered an 'invention', and to compare and contrast different historical case studies of how sexuality has changed over time.
 - Option 2 will involve guided readings of Megan Sinnott's and Serena Nanda's work on transgender identities in Thailand and India respectively. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on how heteronormativity differs cross-culturally, and the implications for expression of non-normative gender and sexual identities.
- ⇒ Ask participants to make their selection and then proceed accordingly.

SLIDE 36

Session 3, Option 1. Understanding sexuality as historically and socially constructed (80 mins)

SLIDE 37

- ⇒ Provide participants with Weeks, J. (2003) *Sexuality* (2nd edn). Routledge. London & NY. Chapter 2, The Invention of Sexuality.
- ⇒ Tell everyone they have 30 minutes in which to read the chapter for themselves and to make notes of what they consider to be the main points of the reading.
- ⇒ Ask everyone to keep the following focus questions in mind, while reading and making notes (on slide):
 - What does the title mean, in relation to the idea that sexuality has a history?
 - What are the cross-cultural *similarities*, and cross-cultural *differences*, identified by Weeks in the social organisation of sexuality? **(30 mins)**
 -
- ⇒ Ask participants to form small groups and to discuss their responses to the focus questions. Participants should also consider:
 - Can they add examples from their own culture to support the argument that sexuality is historically and culturally constructed? **(20 mins)**
- ⇒ Bring everyone back together and ask for volunteers to respond to each of the focus questions. Brainstorm any examples offered by participants in support of the argument that sexuality is historically and culturally constructed. **(30 mins)**

SLIDE 38

Session 3, Option 2. Transgender issues in cross-cultural perspective

(80 mins)

SLIDE 39

- ⇒ Explain that this option involves two pre-readings; one looking at Tom and Dee relationships between women in Thailand and one looking at the Hijras of India.
- ⇒ Ask participants to select the reading which interests them most, then to form small groups with others interested in the same reading.
- ⇒ **N.B.:** If everyone is interested in the *same* reading, the facilitator should prepare a short summary of the other reading for presentation to the group at the end of this session.
- ⇒ Tell everyone that they will have 30 minutes to read their chosen piece and make notes on what they consider to be the main points.

SLIDE 40

- ⇒ Ask everyone to keep the following focus questions in mind while they read (on screen):

Sinnott (2008)

- What is meant by the terms ‘gay’, ‘Kathoei’, ‘Tom’ and ‘Dee’?
- What differences does Sinnott identify between Thai and English-language sexuality/gender assumptions?
- What does this indicate about heteronormativity in Thai and English-speaking cultures?
- Do the categories Tom and Dee reinforce and/or challenge Thai heteronormativity?

Nanda (1985)

- How would you describe ‘Hijra’ to someone who did not know?
- How does Hijra equate to Western categories ‘eunuch’ or ‘transgender’?
- What challenges do Hijra present for biological determinists?

- What aspects of Indian culture enable the Hijra to have some status within Indian societies? **(30 mins)**

⇒ At the end of the reading time, ask participants to discuss their responses to the focus questions in small groups. **(20 mins)**

⇒ Bring everyone back together and ask for responses to and comments on the *first two* focus questions for each reading (assuming that participants did not all do the same reading). Then ask for responses to the *last two* focus questions for each reading. **(20 mins)**

⇒ Facilitate a discussion based around responses to the focus questions. **(10 mins)**

- N.B.: If the participants all wanted to focus on the same reading, take some of the 10 minutes allocated for the discussion to provide a précis of the other reading.

⇒ Check for any final questions or comments before moving on.

SLIDE 41

Conclusion

(15 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend as desired):

⇒ || As we have seen throughout this module, Critical Sexuality Studies is built upon an understanding of human sexuality as diverse, dynamic and, above all, deeply inventive. Fixed notions of sex, gender and sexuality are challenged, and the shifting meanings and interrelationships between these concepts are highlighted. In particular, Critical Sexuality Studies pays attention to the effects of specific social, historical and cultural contexts on these meanings and interrelationships.

SLIDE 42

Critical Sexuality Studies challenges the notion that sex and sexuality are biologically determined, and that sex and sexuality are preconditions for gender. Remember Butler's (1990) argument, that gender *predetermines* understanding of sex and sexuality. This does not mean that the body and its biological limitations and/or capacities are irrelevant; far from it, as Connell's (2002) notion of social embodiment shows.

For Critical Sexuality Study scholars, sexuality is invariably linked to institutional and interpersonal power relations, and to systems of regulation and reward. Across the world, these systems of regulation and reward are built on understandings of and institutional support for heteronormativity. We must remember here how Rubin's charmed circle (1984) demonstrates that heteronormativity is not synonymous with heterosexual; rather, it includes a small set of heterosexual relationships and practices. As we saw from our group work, while heteronormativity may exist across the world, it takes variable forms. The boundary between the outer limits and the charmed circle shifts over time and both within and across cultures. ||

⇒ Tell participants that the module will conclude with a short reflection exercise.

SLIDE 43

Personal reflection

(30 mins)

- ⇒ In pairs, ask participants to discuss the aspect of the module that they personally found to be most thought-provoking. **(5 mins)**

- ⇒ Ask participants to spend five minutes working individually, noting down ways in which this module might influence any future work they undertake on sexuality issues. **(5 mins)**

- ⇒ Re-form pairs of participants, and ask them to discuss together the notes that they have made on possible future influence of the module on their work. **(10 mins)**

- ⇒ Draw the module to a close by allowing participants to share their reflections on the most thought-provoking aspect of the module, and on the module's possible influences on their future work. **(10 mins)**

SLIDE 44

Module and short course acknowledgements.

Further reading

(including lecture bibliography)

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