



Module Outline for Course Participants

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.

Abstract

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.

Module aims

- 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 socio-cultural and research settings

Required pre-reading (to be discussed in module group work)

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.

Overview of module

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.

Session 3, 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.

Further reading

(including lecture bibliography)

- (1981) *Macquarie Dictionary* (St Leonards, NSW, Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd.).
- Berlant, L. & Warner, M. (2000) Sex in public. In L. Berlant (Ed) *Intimacy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1991) Imitation and gender insubordination. In D. Fuss (Ed) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London, Routledge).
- Butler, J. (1994) Introduction: against proper objects, *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6(2-3), 1-26.
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Hamer, D.H., Hu, S., Magnuson, V., Hu, N. & Pattatucci, A.M. (1993) A linkage between DNA markers on the X chromosome and male sexual orientation, *Science*, 261(5119), 321-327.
- Hemmings, C. (2002) Representing the middle ground. In *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender* (London, Routledge).
- Jagose, A. (1996) *Queer Theory*. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
- Johnson, K. (2007) Transsexualism: diagnostic dilemmas, transgender politics and the future of transgender care. In V. Clarke & E. Peel (Eds) *Out in Psychology: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Perspectives* (Boulder, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd.).
- Johnson, M. (1997) *Beauty and Power: Transgendering and Cultural Transformation in the Southern Philippines*. New York, Berg.
- Leonard, W. (2005) Queer occupations: development of Victoria's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex health and well being action plan, *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*, 1(3), 92-97.
- LeVay, S. (1991) A difference in hypothalamic structure between heterosexual and homosexual men, *Science*, 253(5023), 1034-1037.
- Nanda, S. (2007 [1985]) The Hijras of India: cultural and individual dimensions of an institutionalized third gender role. In R. Parker & P. Aggleton (Eds) *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader* (Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge).
- Richardson, D. (2007) Patterned fluidities: (re)imagining the relationship between gender and sexuality, *Sociology*, 41(3), 457-474.
- Sedgwick, E. (1993) How to bring your kids up gay: the war on effeminate boys. In *Tendencies* (Durham, Duke University Press).
- Sinnott, M. (2008) The romance of the queer: the sexual and gender norms of the *Tom* and *Dee* in Thailand. In F. Martin, P. Jackson, A. McLelland & A. Yue (Eds) *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities* (Illinois, University of Illinois Press).