



Module Outline for Course Participants

Kinship and Sexuality

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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 Tine Gammeltoft 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

In many cultures, kinship and sexuality are perceived as intimately interconnected issues and dominant sexual moralities often frame heterosexual relations within the union of marriage as the only 'natural' basis for family formation. Breaches of these moral expectations through premarital, extramarital, or lesbian/gay sexual relations are often heavily sanctioned.

Conventional cultural perceptions of the linkages between kinship and sexuality are, however, challenged in multiple ways in the contemporary world. New technologies for assisted reproduction de-link sexuality from parenthood, sowing cultural doubts about what mother- and fatherhood mean and bringing into question whether sex is always the 'natural' basis for family formation. In the case of surrogacy, for instance, is the 'real' mother the woman gestating the child or the woman providing the egg and thus the child's genetic make-up? In case of in-vitro fertilisation with donor sperm, is the father the man who provided the sperm or the man who brings up the child? The advent of gay and lesbian families also contributes to questioning conventional ideas about kinship: these new ways of forming families suggest that kinship may be constituted in ways other than through biological relations.

This module examines relations between kinship and sexuality, exploring particularly how social and technological challenges to conventional family arrangements may confront dominant ethics of sexual propriety in different ways across different cultures.

Module aims

- To challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about what kinship means, questioning particularly the emphasis placed in many cultures on ‘biological’ relationships grounded in sexual intercourse
- To encourage participants to reflect upon dominant notions of sexual morality in people’s reactions to ‘alternative’ forms of kinship such as those established through gay marriage or assisted reproduction
- To explore how ‘critical sexuality scholars’ may support and strengthen attempts in their societies to enhance innovation and creativity in kinship practices

Participants will:

- Develop an understanding of how dominant sexual moralities often frame heterosexual relations within the union of marriage as the only ‘natural’ basis for family formation
- Explore how social and technological challenges to conventional family arrangements may confront dominant cultural values on sexual propriety
- Develop a critical understanding of how ‘critical sexuality scholars’ may negotiate ‘traditional’ kinship values and support innovative kinship practices

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

Edwards, J. (2007) ‘Marriage is sacred’: The religious right's arguments against ‘gay marriage’ in Australia. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 9, 247-261.

Inhorn, M. C. (2006) ‘He Won’t Be My Son’: Middle Eastern Muslim Men’s Discourses of Adoption and Gamete Donation. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 20, 94-120.

Schneider, D. & Leach, E. R. (1968) Virgin Birth. *Man, New Series*, 3, 126-129.

Schneider, D. M. (1968) Relatives. *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

Optional pre-reading

- Carsten, J. (2004) Introduction: After Kinship? *After Kinship*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, M. (2008) New kinship, Islam, and the Liberal tradition: sexual morality and new reproductive technology in Lebanon, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*, 14, 153-169.
- Franklin, S. (1997) Conception Among the Anthropologists. *Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception*. London, Routledge.
- Weston, K. (1998) Forever is a Long Time. *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science*. New York, Routledge.

Overview of module

Session 1. What does kinship have to do with sexuality?

In this session we will question whether sexuality is always and necessarily the 'natural' basis for kinship. The session draws on David Schneider's work on American kinship (see pre-readings) and uses this as a starting point for a plenary discussion of the linkages between sexuality and kinship.

Session 2. 'New kinship': challenges to conventional kinship thinking

Session 2 familiarises participants with the alternative forms of kinship practices that have emerged with the advent of new medical technologies for assisted reproduction and with the legalisation of gay marriage in many countries.

Session 3. 'New kinship' and sexual morality

Session 3 aims to bring into discussion how people in some settings may feel that 'new kinship' practices violate norms of sexual propriety. The session includes a short lecture based on the pre-readings, and group discussions.

Session 4. Engaging with political tensions and sensitivities: the role of critical sexuality scholars

Session 4 emphasises that kinship is a political terrain and challenges course participants to reflect on their own roles as critical sexuality scholars within this field. Through a plenary discussion participants will consider how to engage with 'conservative' forces in their own society and how to support local social initiatives that seek to broaden practices and understandings of kinship.

Conclusion

The module ends with an overview of the concepts and themes addressed, and links these with other modules in the short course.

Further reading

(includes lecture bibliography)

- Becker, G. (2000) *The Elusive Embryo: How Women and Men Approach New Reproductive Technologies*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Blackwood, E. (2005) Wedding bell blues: marriage, missing men, and matrifocal follies, *American Ethnologist*, 32, 3-19.
- Carsten, J. (Ed.) (2000) *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Carsten, J. (2004) *After Kinship*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Collier, J. F. & Yanagisako, S. J. (Eds.) (1987) *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- Edwards, J., Franklin, S., Hirsch, E., Price, F. & Strathern, M. (Eds.) (1993) *Technologies of Procreation: Kinship in the Age of Assisted Conception*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Franklin, S. (1997) *Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception*. London, Routledge.
- Franklin, S. & McKinnon, S. (Eds.) (2001) *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Handwerker, L. (2002) The Politics of Making Modern Babies in China: Reproductive Technologies in the 'New' Eugenics. In Inhorn, M. C. & Van Balen, F. (Eds.) *Infertility Around the Globe: New Thinking on Childlessness, Gender, and Reproductive Technologies*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Hayden, C. P. (1995) Gender, genetics and generation: reformulating biology in lesbian kinship, *Cultural Anthropology*, 10, 41-63.
- Inhorn, M. C. (2003) *Local Babies, Global Science: Gender, Religion, and In Vitro Fertilization in Egypt*. New York, Routledge.
- Inhorn, M. C. & Van Balen, F. (Eds.) (2002) *Infertility Around the Globe: New Thinking on Childlessness, Gender, and Reproductive Technologies*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Kahn, S. M. (2000) *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Levine, N. E. (2008) Alternative kinship, marriage, and reproduction, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37, 375-389.
- Markens, S. (2007) *Surrogate Motherhood and the Politics of Reproduction*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Parkin, R. & Stone, L. (Eds.) (2004) *Kinship and Family: An Anthropological Reader*. Malden, Blackwell Publishing.
- Pashigian, M. J. (2002) Conceiving the Happy Family: Infertility and Marital Politics in Northern Vietnam. In Inhorn, M. C. & Van Balen, F. (Eds.) *Infertility Around the Globe: New Thinking on Childlessness, Gender, and Reproductive Technologies*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Ragoné, H. (1994) *Surrogate Motherhood: Conception in the Heart*. Boulder, Westview Press.
- Stone, L. (Ed.) (2001) *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Stone, L. (Ed.) (2009) *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction*. Boulder, Westview Press.
- Strathern, M. (1992) *Reproducing the Future: Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

- Teman, E. (2003) The medicalization of 'nature' in the artificial body: surrogate motherhood in Israel, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 17, 78-98.
- Weston, K. (1991) *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Yanagisako, S. & Delaney, C. (Eds.) (1995) *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*. New York, Routledge.