

HPHP4014 GENDER, SEX, AND SEXUALITY

Dr Angus M Slater

INTRODUCTION

This module functions one of the thematic lvl4 modules you are undertaking, incorporating key shared theoretical insights and subject specific content.

It aims to provide you with the core material and skills needed to excel in your studies this year and to allow for your progression through your undergraduate studies as a whole.

INITIAL ADMIN

AIMS OF THE MODULE

This module aims to engage you in:

1. critically examining key texts in the study of Gender, Sex, and Sexuality
2. critically assessing the main classical and contemporary methods and approaches in studying gender and sex
3. exploring theories and debates about historical and contemporary forms of gender, performance, sex, and sexualities.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the module, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the differences between gender and sex
2. Evaluate different approaches to matters of gender and sex within different historical and cultural contexts
3. Describe the social and historical implications of presentations of gender and / or sex within specific historical and cultural contexts



STRUCTURE

In order to equip you with these skills, the module takes a journey through a number of critical conceptual areas and methods in gender, sex, and sexuality.

We aim to examine the historical and cultural range of gender expression, the differing ways in which gender and sex relate, and the performance of sexualities.

This means we end up covering quite a lot of material, some of which may be of greater or lesser interest to you – but all of which is important!



STYLE

This module will discuss topics like sex, gender identity, sexuality, and other potentially emotive topics.

This means that students may find some of the discussion topics difficult to engage with and uncomfortable to discuss.

The value of education is learning more about things that make us uncomfortable and learning about the reasons for our discomfort.

I hope this means that we can be respectful of each others difficulty with some subjects, respectful of other people's pain, and vulnerable about our own.

This module aims to be exploratory, loosely structured, and a place for personal reflection.

If there are areas of particular difficulty for you as an individual, please let me know so they can be suitably addressed.

ASSESSMENTS

As part of this module, you will also complete two assessments.

These assessments have been kept deliberately open in nature in order to allow the student multiple potential approaches to the question.

Do seek out the advice and guidance of the appropriate tutor before engaging in the assessments.



ASSESSMENT 1

Assessment 1 – 25% (1000 words)

Students will be provided with a selection of textual or physical pieces for analysis, ranging from selections from theoretical approaches to gender / sex / sexuality to contemporary discussions in the media. Students will be able to self-select within this variety according to their subject specific interests and chronological interests.

Student will be expected to analyse and describe the theoretical connections between their chosen gobblet of text and the work that has been discussed theretofore in class. This will be assisted by a subject specific assessment tutorial on the preceding Friday.

Expected deadline: Monday 5PM, Week 3.



ASSESSMENT 2

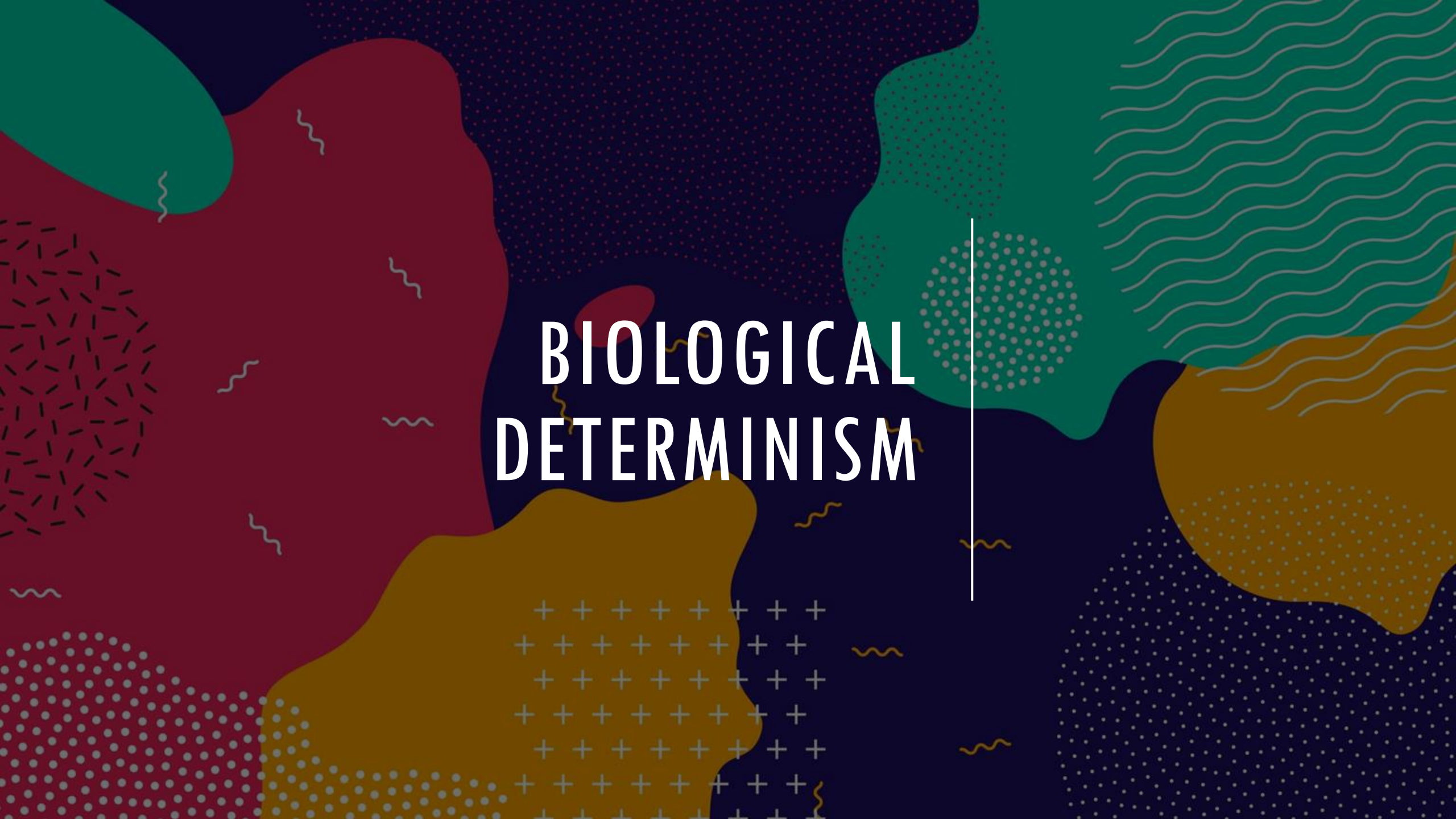
Assessment 2 – 75% (3000 words)

Students will be provided with a selection of subject specific essay titles, covering the historical and thematic approaches delivered in the module. Students will be able to self-select within this selection according to their subject specific interests and chronological interests.

Student will be expected to showcase essay writing skills developed in the previous common modules and show an awareness of how the conceptual material covered in the module connects to their specific area of study. This connection will be assisted through a subject specific assessment tutorial on the preceding Friday.

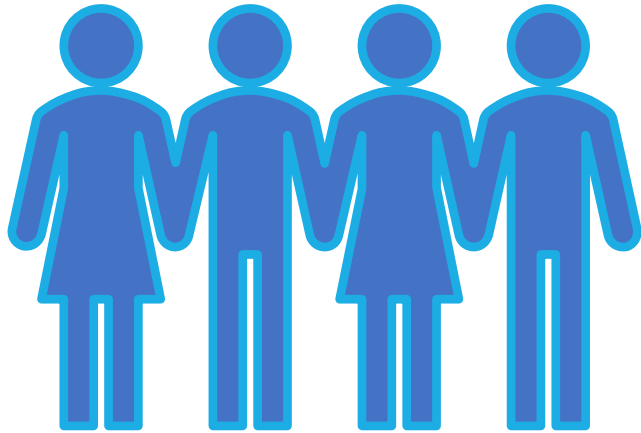
Expected Deadline: Tuesday 5PM, Week 4



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BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

GROUP WORK



Divide into two groups

Group 1 - List differences between women and men and consider:

On what are these differences based? (e.g. biological, social, cultural or religious beliefs)

Group 2 - List similarities between women and men and consider:

On what are these similarities based? (e.g. biological, social, cultural or religious beliefs)

DISCUSSION



All participants to consider together:

What are the effects of highlighting differences rather than similarities between men and women?

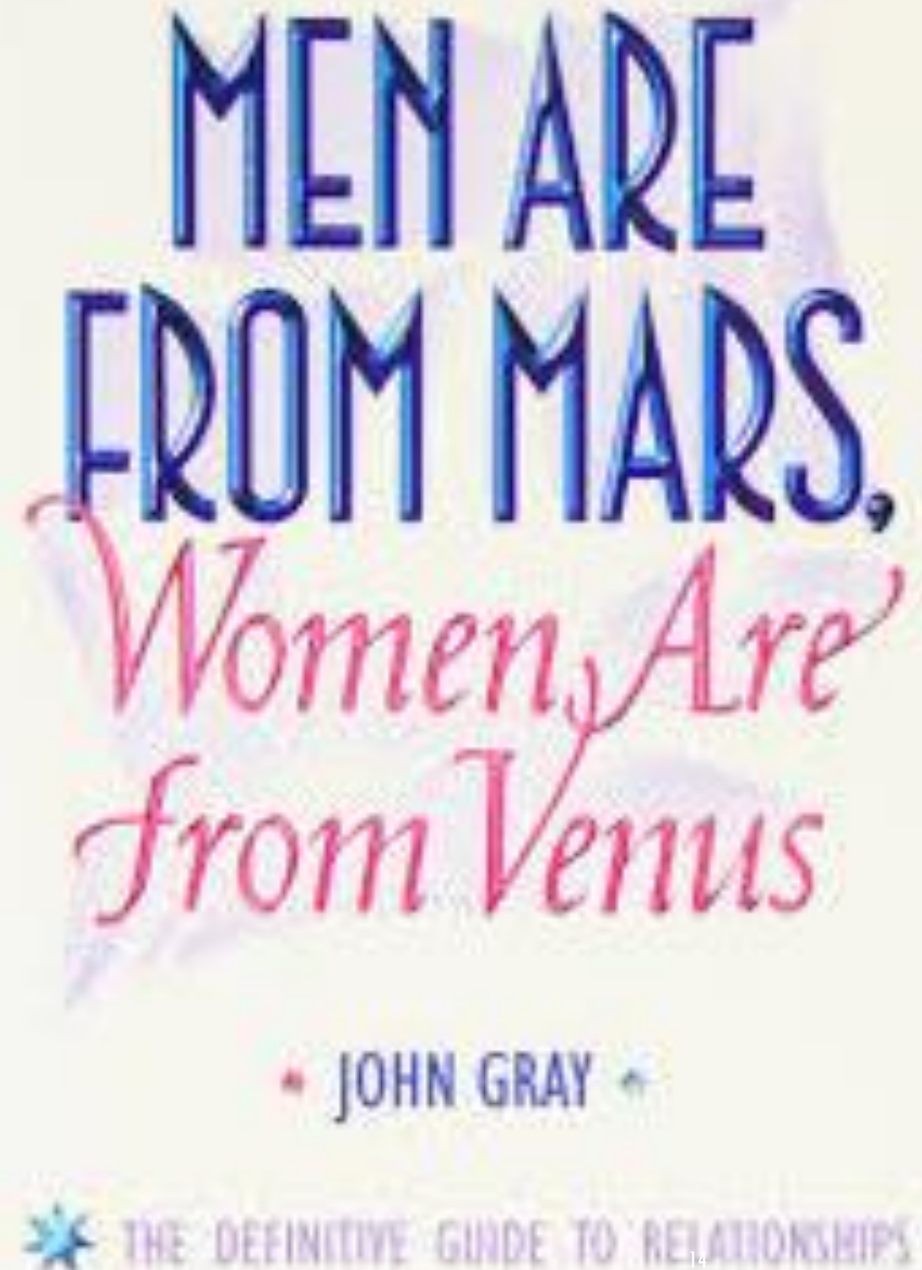
To what extent do assumptions about biologically determined sex differences between women and men influence popular culture, sayings or beliefs in our society?

BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM, SEX AND SEXUALITY

Biologically determinist theories of various kinds reduce social organisation and social complexity to an effect of biology or nature

Biological determinists include sociobiologists, some geneticists, psychologists and 'pop psychology' writers

Complex, socially embedded behaviours have all been explained as an effect of evolutionary reproductive strategies

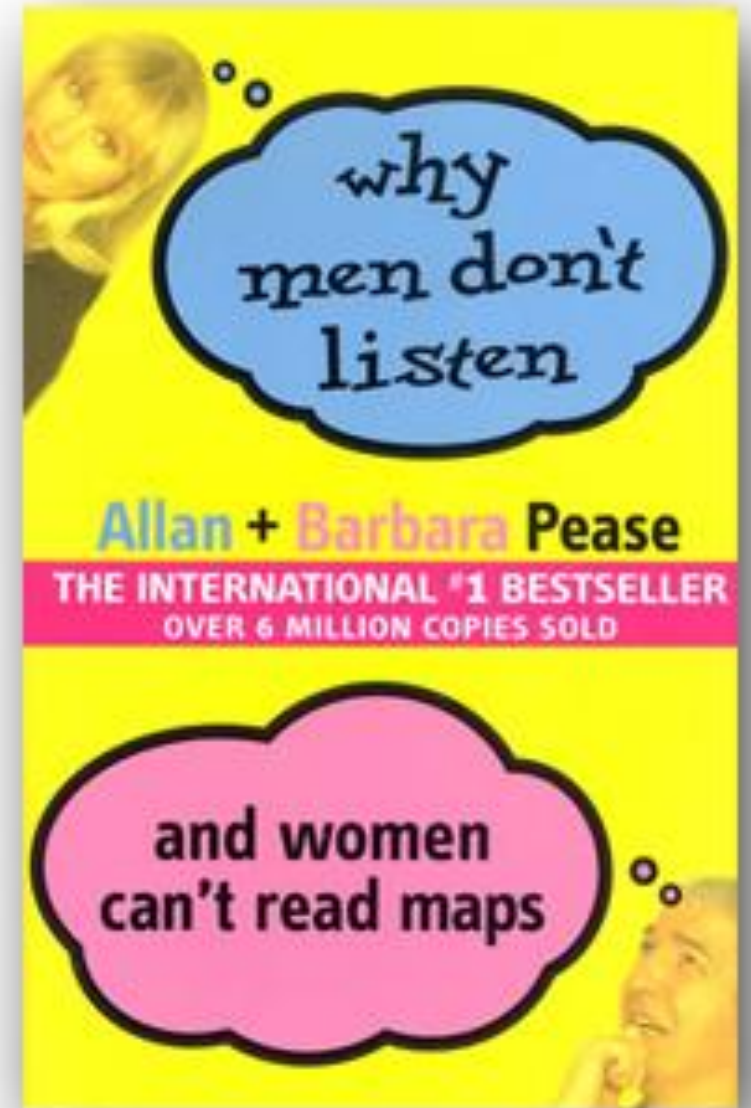


SEX AND SEXUALITY

In the biologically determinist school of thought:

Biological facts of sex are thought to constitute natural differences between men and women

Heterosexuality is considered a “natural” outcome of this sex difference due to the drive to reproduce the species



SEX AND SEXUALITY

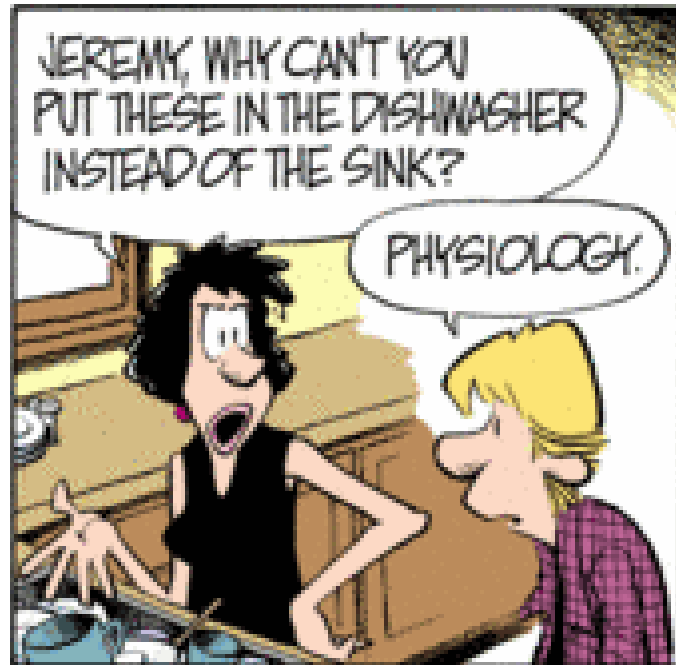
Key assumption driving biological determinism:

The primary function and goal of all human sexual activity is the reproduction of the species

Humans have sex because we must reproduce

Homosexuality becomes explained as an “unnatural” genetic deviation





‘THE GAY GENE’ — AN EXAMPLE

An example of the impact of a biologically determinist frame is that geneticists search for a ‘gay gene’ to prove there is a biological basis for, and explanation of, male homosexuality

Some examples of this include:

- Small differences found between the post-mortem brains of heterosexual and homosexual young men (LeVay, 1991)
- Research on pairs of homosexual brothers found that some had similar markers on the X chromosome, indicating a genetic basis for sexuality (Hamer et al. 1993)

Yet, LeVay’s work proved difficult to replicate and Hamer et al.’s work has been refuted.

Recent work (Ganna, 2019) on 500,000 genomes, suggests genetic markers may only have an impact on around 25% of human sexual behaviour.

BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

The research evidence for many biologically determinist claims simply does not hold up:

- Sex “difference” research may be popular, but it masks a great deal of evidence for sex *similarities*
- Differences are often context-specific
- Most sex is not reproductive
- Human sexuality more complicated than ‘survival of the species’ or of one’s gene pool
- ‘Biological drive’ arguments are political
- Often used to resist social change and legitimate an unequal, gendered and sexualised social order
- Institutionalised power relations affect understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality

DISCUSSION



If reproductive differences between the sexes “naturally” drive individual behaviour, why do we need social institutions that police and set moral guidelines for sexual behaviour?

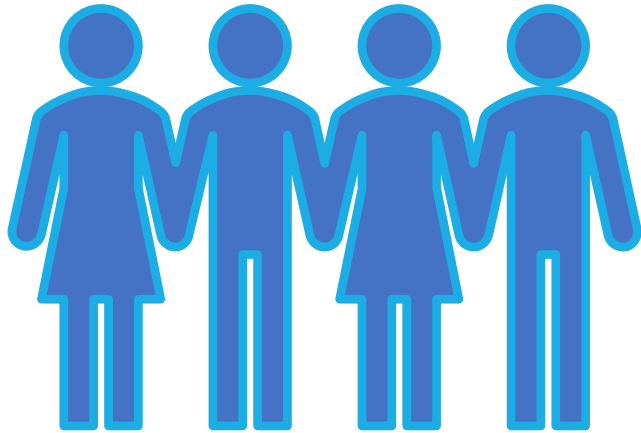
What institutions in our societies play this role of policing sexual behaviour?

How do they do this? What are the repercussions for breaking this policing?



DEFINING SEX AND GENDER

GROUP WORK



Divide into two groups.

Individually, write down your own definitions of the terms sex, sexuality, and gender

Compare your definitions with those of the rest of the group

Feedback

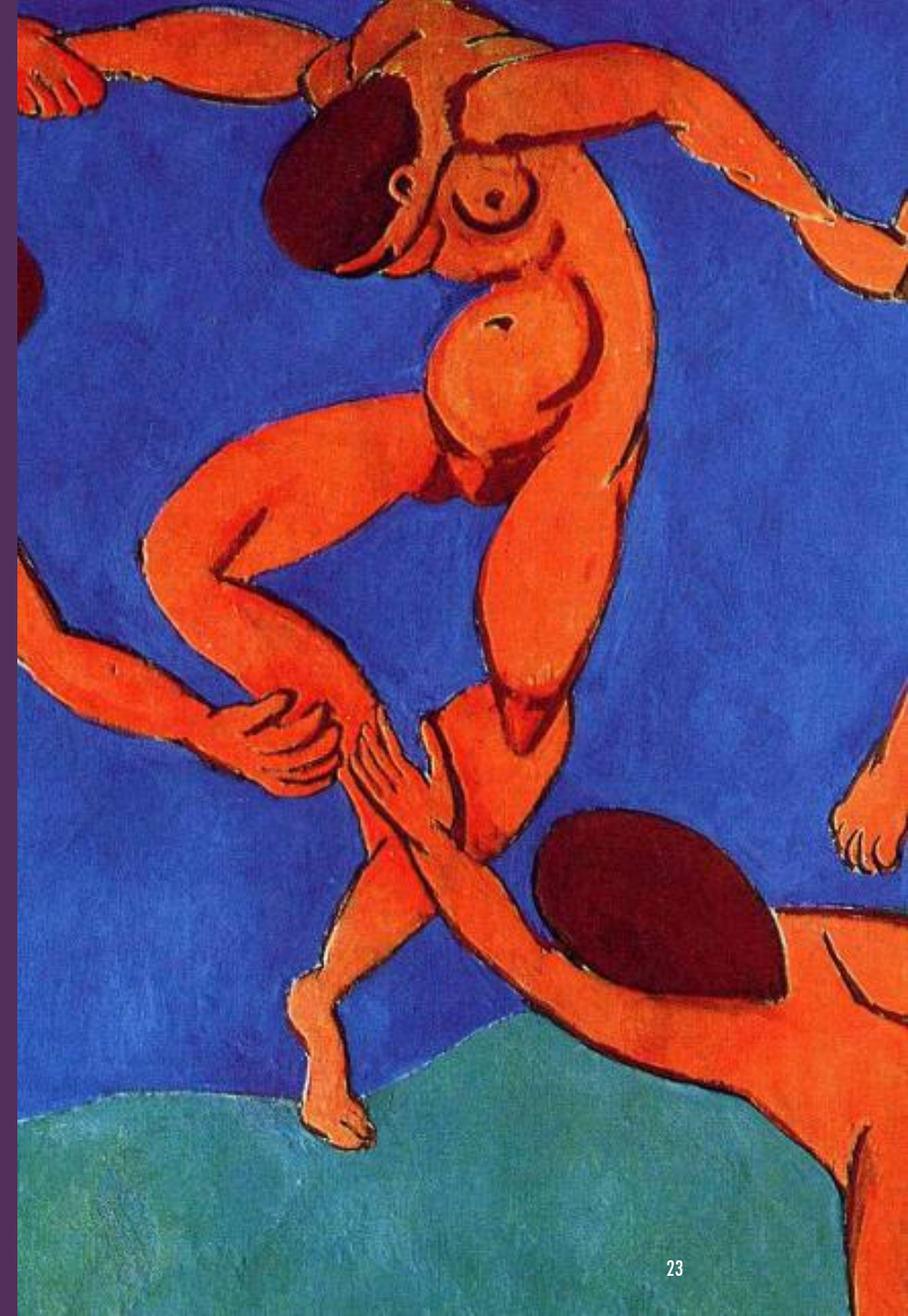
COMPLEXITIES OF SEX & GENDER

Is there a difference? Yes, on one level

Sex is biological – male, female, also intersex (reproductive differences based on genitalia, chromosomes, hormones) - also refers to sexual acts, as in 'having sex'!

Gender is '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)

Gender underlies assumptions regarding 'masculine' or 'feminine' behaviour



COMPLEXITIES OF SEX & GENDER

There is undoubtedly a temptation to make an absolute distinction between sex and gender:

‘Nature vs nurture’

‘essentialism vs social constructionism’

We need to understand that thinking of the sexed body as ‘natural’ can sustain social inequity between men and women

Butler (1990) argued that gender determines sex - even sex is not ‘natural’ but a social construction

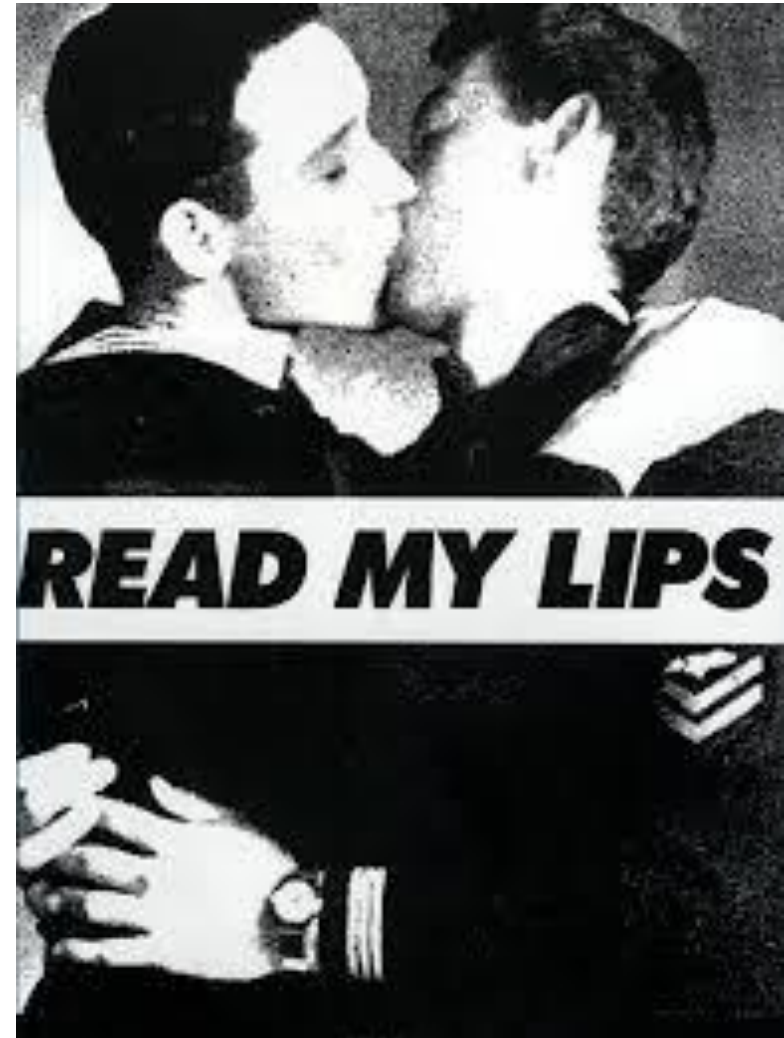


COMPLEXITIES OF SEX & GENDER

We cannot neatly separate the sexed body from the gendered body, as they are mutually constituted by socio-political processes – this means it is difficult to talk **only** of sex, or **only** of gender.

As you will come to see throughout this module, the 'natural' body is intensely political – who is it that gets to define and police the naturalness of human behaviour?

Even our systems of knowledge, whether scientific or sociological, struggle to escape the gendered and value-laden expressions of our language.



SOCIAL EMBODIMENT

However, bodies don't just exist apart from their agency (their doing things). We must remember that bodies are not just physical realities, but also engage in performances and practices, and are understood and experienced as such – this is called 'social embodiment'.

The scholar, RW Connell notes:

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, p.21

SOCIAL EMBODIMENT

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 we think of sex, sexuality and gender as necessarily involving themselves with each other and playing an active role in producing each other.

Some illustrative examples of sex as a social construct might include the increasing use of cosmetic surgery to enhance or change the appearance of breasts or genitals, or doctors' decision-making about assigning male or female sex to children with indeterminate genitals at birth.

In each case, the definition of sex is intimately bound up with concerns about gender.

FEMINISM, SEX, & GENDER



SO, WHAT IS FEMINISM?

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes.

Generally the history of feminism is divided into three / four 'waves' which occur in historically defined times and generally have different goals in addressing forms of gender imbalance.



1ST WAVE

First wave feminism was a wave of social and political activism that occurred across the western world in the late 19th / early 20th century.

Its focus was largely on the establishment of legal equality between genders, such as the right to vote or property ownership, and access to equal educational opportunities.

In the UK, it focused on the work of the Suffragettes, Bessie Rayner Parkes and Mary Stopes.

This form of feminism aimed to address structural and legal inequality between genders which privileged males to the disadvantage of females.

It was driven largely by independently wealthy individual white women from the upper and middle classes and, while aiming to expand opportunity for all women, was largely focused only on those areas of concern to the type of women involved – education and politics.

2ND WAVE

Second-wave feminism is a period of feminist activity and thought that first began in the early 1960s in the United States, and eventually spread throughout the Western world and beyond.

Whereas first-wave feminism focused mainly on voting rights and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality, second-wave feminism broadened the debate to a wide range of issues:

e.g. sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities

Second-wave feminism also drew attention to domestic violence and marital rape issues.

Generally second wave feminism was driven by largely white middle class women in the developed world in reaction to the increased domesticity of feminine roles post WW2.

Significant legal victories of the movement in the US were extending full affirmative action rights to women, the Women's Educational Equity Act, the outlawing of marital rape, and Supreme Court cases such as *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

3RD WAVE

Many historians view the second-wave feminist era in America as ending in the early 1980s with the intra-feminism disputes of the feminist sex wars over issues such as sexuality and pornography, which ushered in the era of third-wave feminism in the early 1990s

Born in the 1960s and 1970s as members of Generation X, and grounded in the civil-rights advances of the second wave, third-wave feminists embraced individualism and diversity and sought to redefine what it meant to be a feminist

This focus on the individuality of women, as opposed to the binarism of male / female, drove an increasing focus on issues of race and gender and the intersection between them.

While second wave feminism is largely seen as being driven by white middle class concerns, third wave feminism is seen as focused on matter of race and class.

It also paid attention to matters of equal outcome and equal opportunity, seeking to challenge underlying male domination of public spaces and professional zones.

4TH WAVE

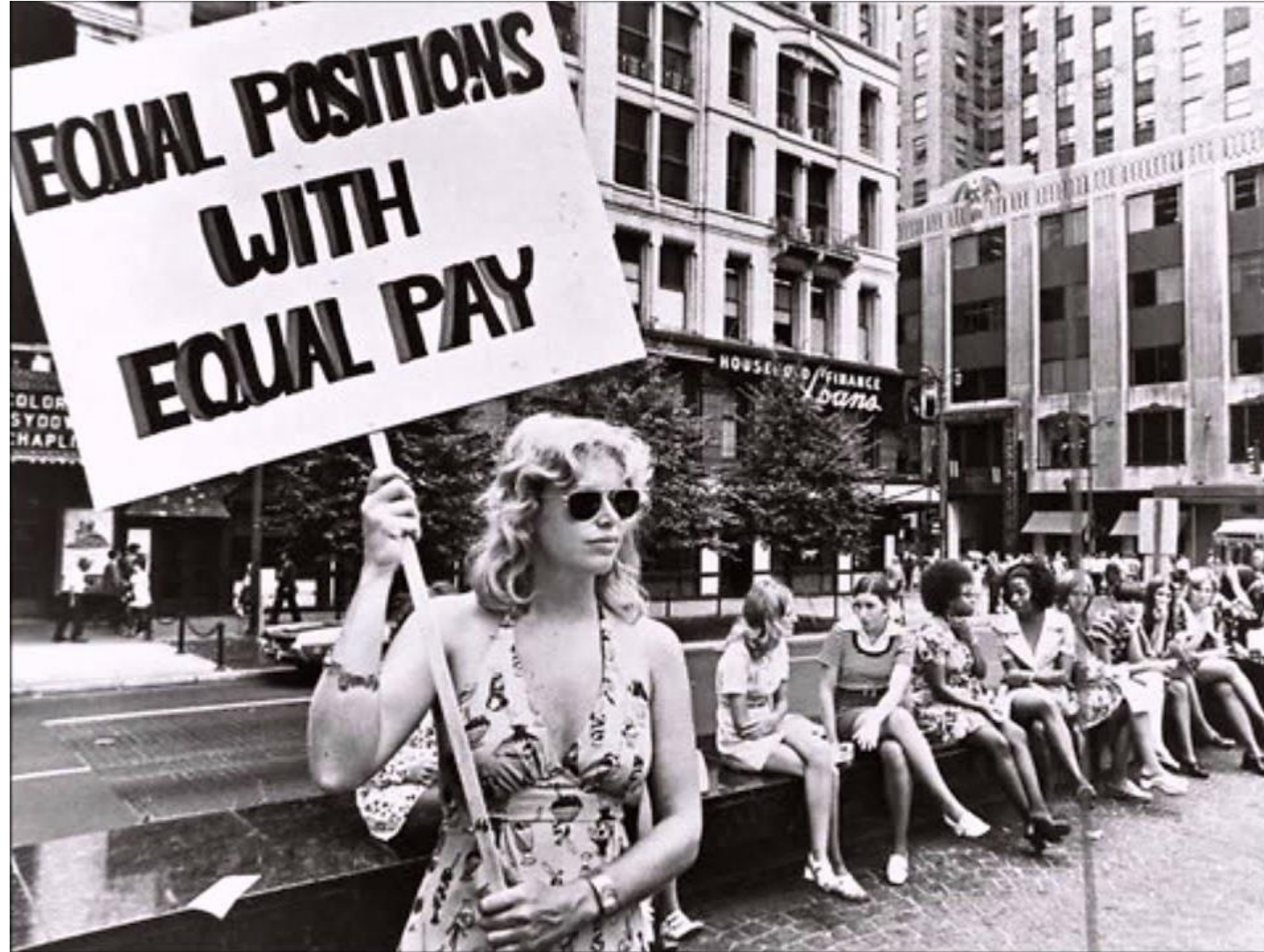
Fourth-wave feminism is "defined by technology" and is characterized particularly by the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs.

Cochrane describes the fourth wave as focusing on sexual harassment (including street harassment), workplace discrimination, body shaming, sexist imagery in the media, online misogyny, assault on public transport, and intersectionality, relying on social media for communication and online petitioning for organizing.

Criticisms include its reliance on technology (which involves issues of class, access, and ableism), its focus on individuality and individualism drawing focus away from shared experiences that define social categories of gender, its limited political and social activism beyond cyberspace, and the factionality seen in contemporary divisions within 4th wave feminism.

Contemporary forms of feminism are often in conflict with earlier forms – see TERF's and transgenderism, or clashes over sex work – just as earlier forms of feminism critiqued those going before.









I need feminism because
society teaches us
“DON'T GET RAPED”
rather than
“DON'T RAPE”

FEMINIST VIEWS OF GENDER

Traditionally, feminism has had a nuanced view of the relationship between sex (male / female) and gender (masculine / feminine), drawing attention to the way in which male society codes certain things as female in a way that is not **necessary**.

This has allowed feminism to articulate an equal position within society based on a freeing of biological sex from the necessity of male-constructed gender roles like motherhood.

However, largely, feminism has done so from a belief in the shared, essential, natures of two sexes, male and female.

By this, feminism argues that all women share in some form the experience of womanhood and that this experience is connected innately to their sex. So, too, men's experiences of manhood are formed by their location on a sexual binary.

This has formed a dynamic that supposed a gender and sexual binary, with the discourse aiming to loosen the gendered restrictions on women.

GAYLE RUBIN — “THE TRAFFIC IN WOMEN”

Gayle Rubin (for instance) uses the phrase ‘sex/gender system’ in order to describe “a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention” (1975, 165).

Rubin describes gender as the “socially imposed division of the sexes” (1975, 179).

Rubin's thought was that although biological differences are fixed, gender differences are the oppressive results of social interventions that dictate how women and men should behave.

Women are oppressed *as women* and “by having to *be women*” (Rubin 1975, 204).

However, since gender is social, it is thought to be mutable and alterable by political and social reform that would ultimately bring an end to women's subordination.

Feminism should aim to create a “genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love” (Rubin 1975, 204).

FEMINIST VIEWS OF GENDER

Under the influence of post-modern critical theory (and Foucault!) much recent feminism (3rd wave onwards) has been much more careful about articulating two things:

- 1) a universal account of “woman’s experience” as a basis for feminist politics
- 2) a direct gender / sex correlation between male / female and masculinity / femininity that presupposes a dependant binary.



DEFINING SEXUALITY



DEFINING SEXUALITY

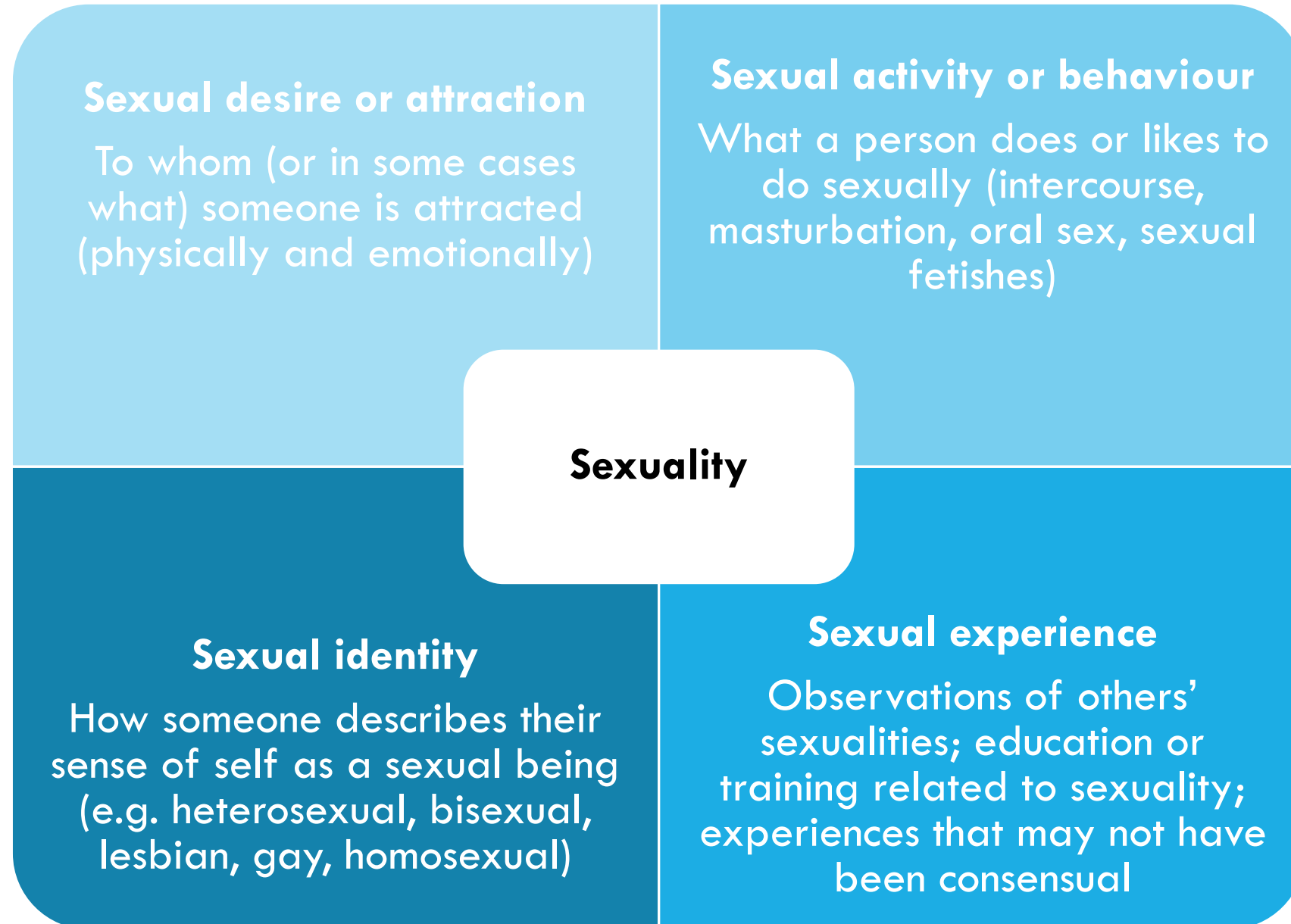
The term 'sexuality' is one that is both relatively recent in usage and complicated in its application to many various things.

The term emerges towards the end of the 18th century in English / French / German, largely through usages in a medical context and in line with the emergence of a focus on homo-sexuality as an identity.

But what does it mean?

That depends on who you ask and the context given – a dictionary might state “the quality of being sexual” for example, but there are many different ways we use the word to describe identity, behaviour, attraction, and experience





DISCUSSION



1 – How do we commonly use and define “sexuality” as a term?

2 – What does this definition depend on – is it physical, cultural, social?

3 – How do each of the four types identified interact with each other? Must they act in concert? Can they ‘contradict’?

SUMMARY & READING

Today, we have explored notions of biological determinism, the definitions of sex and gender, and begun to examine the nature of sexuality.

Over the course, you will explore these key debates across different historical and cultural differences, expanding your knowledge of the kaleidoscopic variety of sex, sexuality, and gender.

Your reading for today is: “What’s in a Name? Meanings and Usages of Gender” in Bradley. (2013). *Gender* (2nd ed.). Polity.



HPHP4014 GENDER, SEX, AND SEXUALITY

Dr Angus M Slater

INTRODUCTION

In this section we begin by looking at the notion of heteronormativity, or the cultural and social power of heterosexuality as the default form of sexuality in society.

From this we then move to examining different performances of gender that knowingly or unknowingly heighten expected gender norms, producing hyper- forms of them.

In this case, we examine the role of hyper-femininity.

HETERONORMATIVITY

HETERONORMATIVITY

As Gayle Rubin, a key theorist in gender and sexuality studies, states, the way in which gender, sex, and sexuality inter-relate and are seen to inter-relate in society always have political consequences – whether in the form of social privileging, exclusion, or physical violence.

We begin this session by examining some of the ways in which the association of sexuality, with norms of gender and sex, develop in this way.



HETERONORMATIVITY

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

Gayle Rubin (1984: 309)



DISEMBODIEDBEARD.NET

HETERONORMATIVITY

One of the easiest ways of examining the way that society connects issues of sex, sexuality, and gender is through the concept of heteronormativity.

This is because the concept of heteronormativity can assist us in understanding the political nature of the inter-relationship between these things and how this inter-relationship is upheld by social patterns which are regulated in a meaningful way.

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**.

HETERONORMATIVITY

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

(Berlant and Warner 2000: 312)

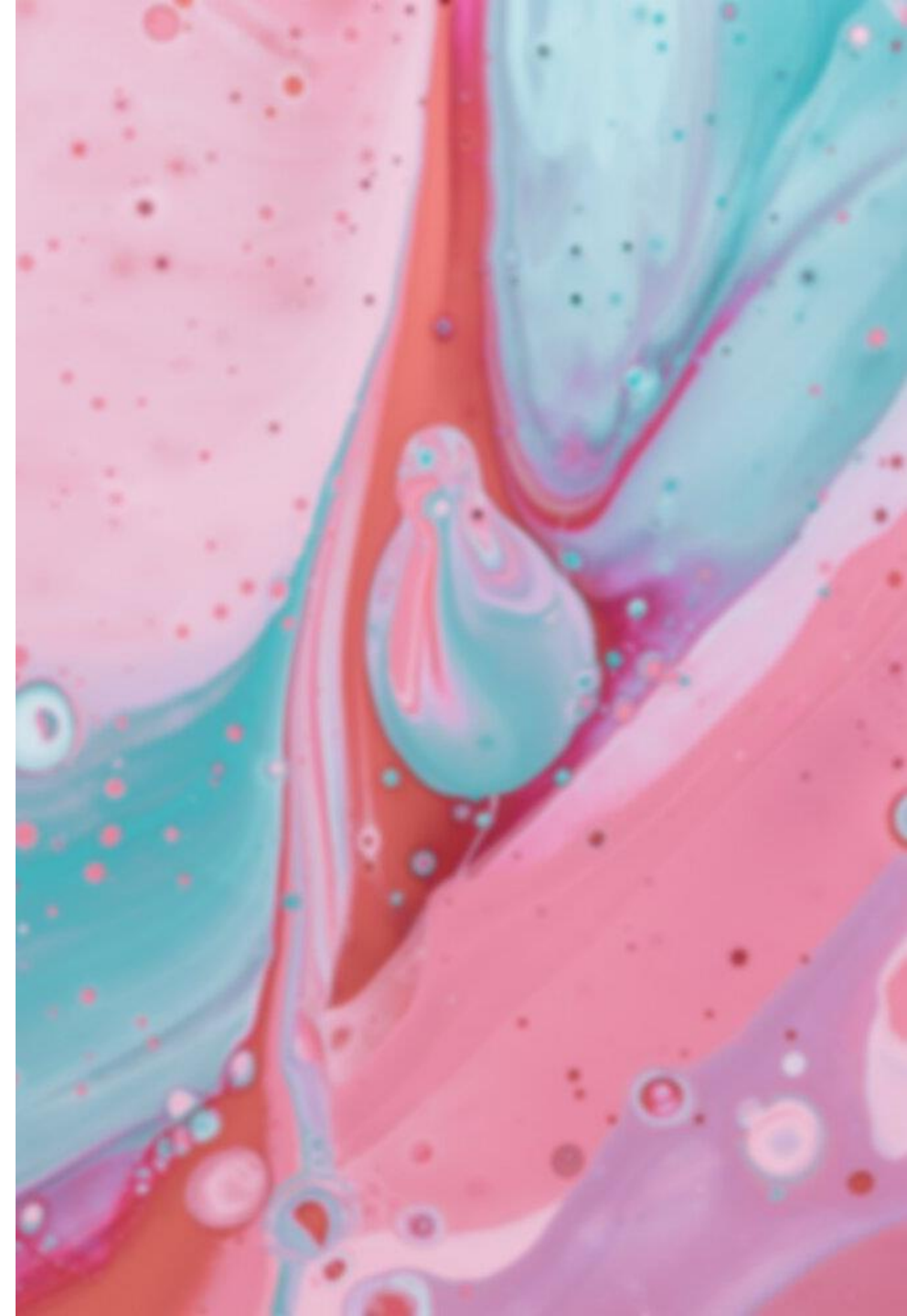
HETERONORMATIVITY

The concept of heteronormativity identifies and names a wide range of social processes which work to tie aspects of gender, sex, and sexuality together in a way that constitutes heterosexuality as both normal and natural – implicitly or explicitly constructing non-heterosexual forms of sexuality as both abnormal and unnatural.

Where do we see these social processes operating?

They often occur in forms of social institutions or community settings, such as through the media, in education, the law, or religious organisations.

This exclusion and marginalisation of non-heterosexual sexualities, often results in overt conflict and violence, but can also often take the form of social and cultural alienation.



DISCUSSION



All participants to consider together:

What do these process of regulation have to do with heterosexuality?

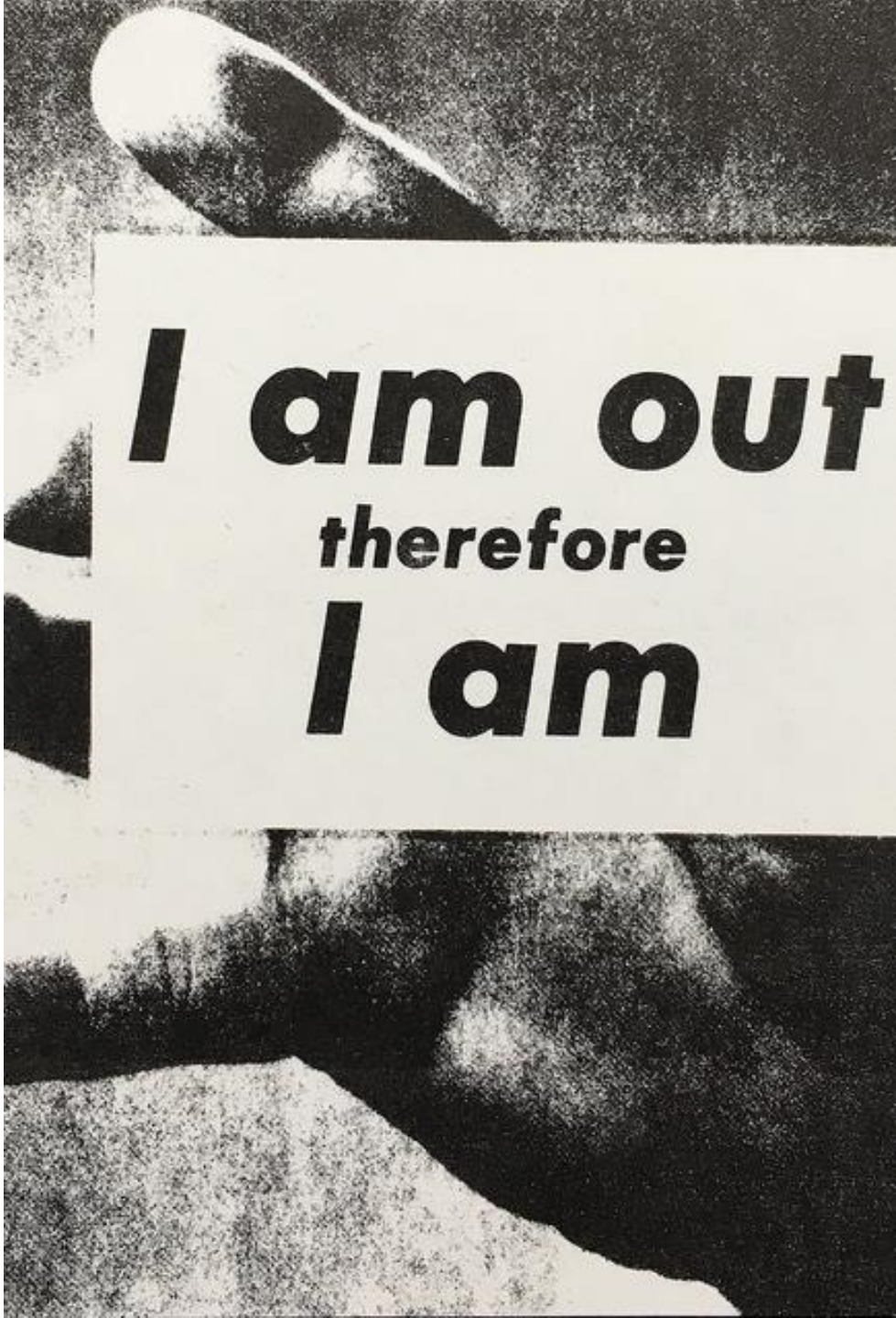
To what extent do these assumptions about gender / sex, have an impact on our understanding of sexuality?

What are examples of heteronormative assumptions in our contemporary society?

HETERONORMATIVITY

Heteronormativity operates as the 'fixed point' or 'default' against which sex, gender, and sexuality are understood and organised. This builds on the associations between sex and gender, and gender and social performance, you will have become familiar with throughout this module.

These associations, while perhaps functioning relatively well for the majority of people, become increasingly difficult to navigate for many who do not fit into their strictures as they become ever more closely identified with the only acceptable forms of expression. This operates not only on those outside of them (homosexuals for example) but also for those inside them (heterosexuals dealing with expectations).

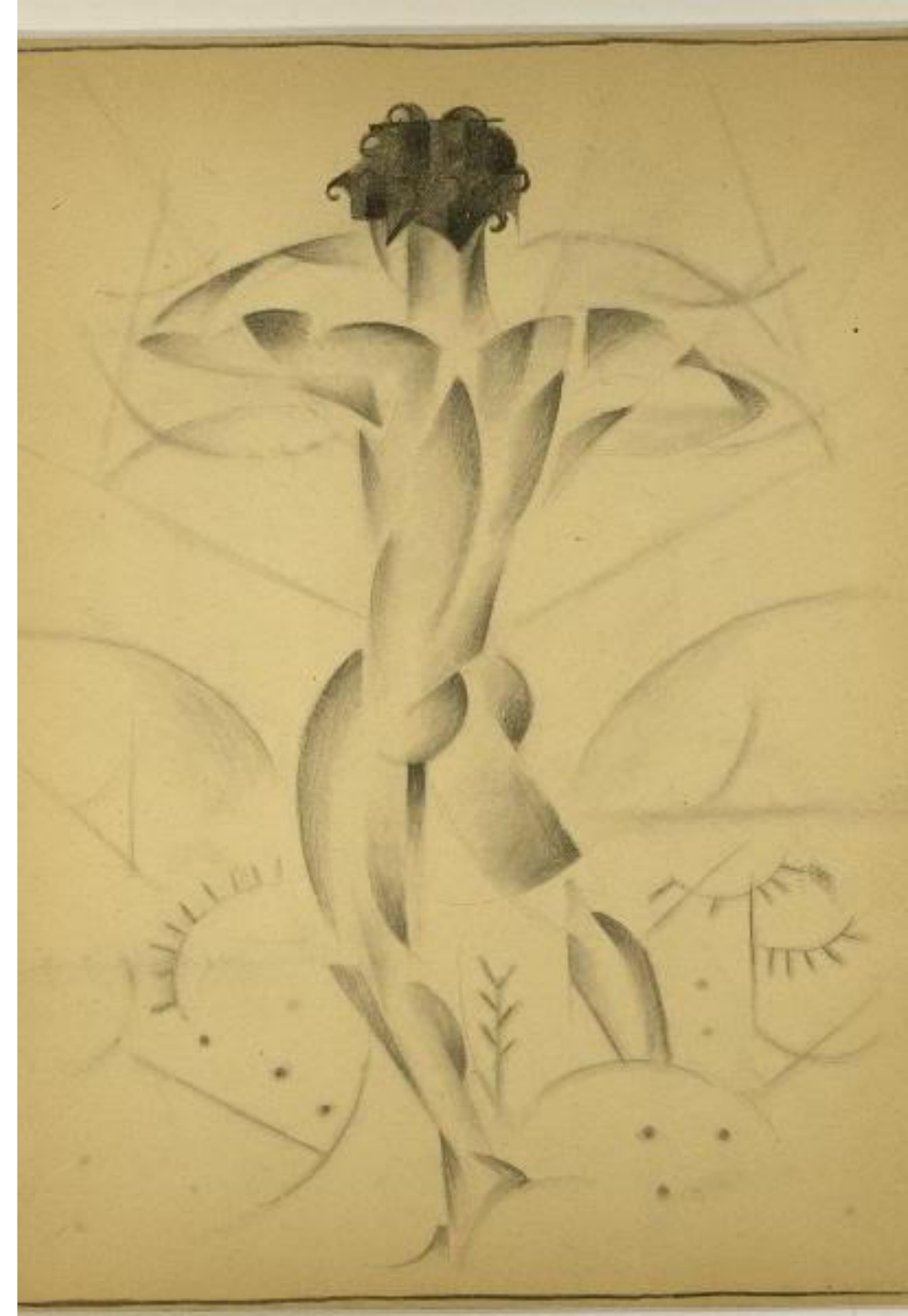


**I am out
therefore
I am**

HETERONORMATIVITY

Gayle Rubin (before) and Adrienne Rich (next) in their work showcase the way that heterosexuality operates as a social discourse and institution – and therefore as something that could be organised differently given different circumstances.

This is quite a departure from thinking about heterosexuality as a natural or biologically determined ‘drive’.



HETERONORMATIVITY

One of the ways we can think this through is in the context of Rich's theory of 'compulsory heterosexuality', which attempts to unpick the ways in which heteronormativity leads to sexual inequality for women.

Rich does this in her essay entitled 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980) – Rich describes compulsory heterosexuality as an oppressive social system that assumes that everyone is, and should be, heterosexual and that all other forms of sexuality and sexual expression are unnatural.

This understanding of nature, for Rich, is a political strategy that allows for the privileging of heterosexual over non-heterosexual forms of sexuality.

Further than this, it allows for the stratification of social rewards and punishments even within the performance of heterosexuality.

She also takes the position that heterosexuality is innately patriarchal.



Inducements	Material • The marriage contract (legalised sexual subordination of women) • Financial and material support (husband) • Sphere of influence (the domestic) • Stay-at home child allowance for women • Reduced earning capacity for women compared with their male partners Symbolic or ideological • Romance and love – made complete with a man (heterocoupling) • Female beauty as an ideal of female worth • Motherhood within marriage as female self-fulfilment • Women valued only insofar as they are valuable to men
Punishments	• Social ostracism for unmarried mothers, women who leave their husbands and financially independent women • Women who are sexually independent labelled as ‘loose,’ ‘skettels,’ sluts’ • Criminalisation, pathologisation and abuse of lesbians and women who are not exclusively heterosexual • A system of gendered sexual violence that keeps women (and their sexuality) in its proper place

HETERONORMATIVITY

Rubin extends and expands this notion in a famous essay entitled 'Thinking Sex' (1984) which argues that in our societies heteronormativity operates to produce a hierarchy of sexual acts, gender performances, and expressions of sexuality.

Rubin argues that those aspects which are higher up the hierarchy are rewarded and privileged in society, while those that fall low in the hierarchy are socially punished or excluded.

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**.

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, but is justified on the basis of their location outside the bounds of acceptable and natural heterosexuality.

This is not a call by Rubin for a total liberation of any forms of sexual practice, without limit. Rather, her point is the following question: what would a truly democratic and sexually moral society look like, if heteronormativity did not dictate the prevailing sexual morality?



HYPER-FEMININITY

HYPER-FEMININITY

Hyper-femininity is the idea that there are certain forms of gender performance which play, knowingly or unknowingly, with taking the expected norms of that gender to the extreme.

Hyper-femininity is therefore those gendered performances which exaggerate the expected feminine qualities of those who are female.

The specifics vary – but what qualities does society associate with femaleness?

We are going to have a look at this in the context of child beauty pageants.







HYPER-FEMININITY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1HQtUqpR-g>

BEAUTY PAGEANTS

Hyper- forms of gendered expression rely on the projection and idealisation of gender performances associated with different sexes of people.

One of the ways in which we see the idealisation of gender roles is in the projection of idealised gender roles onto others within our communities.

We encourage and elevate performances which re-inscribe group identity, and marginalise or exclude those which challenge it.

Over time, these recurring performances take on the status of unthinking and unchallengeable nature – as identified in the work of Butler and Rubin.



DISCUSSION

How do pageants choose to present gender?

What is it about 'child' pageants that makes us react more strongly?

What role does competition play in pageants?

What role does competition play in gender?



BEAUTY PAGEANTS

Much gender theory seeks to address the way that the expected gender roles we have served to sustain the current system of power as identified by Rubin.

How do our societies function to exclude those who do not, or cannot, conform to gendered expectations?

How do these systems overcome solidarity between men and / or women?



BEAUTY PAGEANTS

Anthropologists (Fisher & Cox, 2011) have tackled the various ways this works and divided responses into two different forms:

Self-promotion tactics

Competitor derogation tactics

These are the ways by which expected gender roles function to control the expression of individuals – either by rewarding those who conform in some way, or punishing those who do not.



BEAUTY PAGEANTS

Self-promotion tactics

Luxury Consumption – in order to complete within expected gender roles, outward presentation of status becomes important, usually physically, to better match a gender ideal

Cosmetic Surgery – this desire to match a gender ideal can extend to physical manipulation, the crafting of an outward model of perfection

Competitor derogation tactics

Female derogation – in order to promote their own conformance to a gender ideal, this behaviour is about highlighting the ways in which competition does not conform

Slut-shaming – an example of this is slut-shaming, where sexual activity is used as a symbol of non-femininity, and re-inscribes male desires for femaleness.



HYPER-FEMININITY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5B70NEq_fY

DISCUSSION

The performance of hyper-femininity as expressed in beauty pageants is often a hyperbolic representation of femininity, taking the traditional vision of femininity to an extreme, and then representing that competitively.

How do these performances of gender in beauty pageants connect to aspects of sex / sexuality?

How do they operate to uphold female norms / male norms?



HYPER-MASCULINITY



HYPER-MASCULINITY

In the last section we looked at the way in which performances of hyper-femininity serve to complicate and illuminate our understandings of gender – the heightened gender expression of certain forms often illuminates those aspects of gender performance we take for granted.

Today, I want us to approach the same issues through the prism of performances of hyper-masculinity – those performances which, deliberately or unwittingly, exaggerate and accentuate characteristics associated with masculinity and manliness.



HYPER-MASCULINITY

This is not usually just a case of opposition – hyper-masculinity being opposed to hyper-femininity – but operates differently in the different circumstances.

One of the interesting differences we often see between hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity is the extent to which their characteristics are related to the other gender, rather than drawing solely on characteristics associated with their own.

Hyper-femininity tends to draw more strongly on feminine identified traits, seeking to heighten characteristics constructed as already part of womanness, while hyper-masculinity often draws on being a contrast to femininity, seeking contrast through differentiation.

We can see this in the way that one becomes extra-masc by being very un-femme – whether this occurs in heterosexual or homosexual contexts.



DISCUSSION



All participants to consider together:

Identify some of the key characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity in contemporary society – where do these characteristics emerge from?

What are some examples of oppositional characteristics?

What are some examples of non-oppositional characteristics?

What does this tell us about who is impacted by these notions of gender / sex expressions?

HYPER-MASCULINITY

Another thematic difference to note between the social constructions of hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity is in the internal variety present and acceptable within it (remember the notion of Rich's charmed circle?).

Typically hyper-feminine roles have tended to be either maternal or virginal roles, either the maiden or the mother, with little possibility for feminine expression outside of these two.

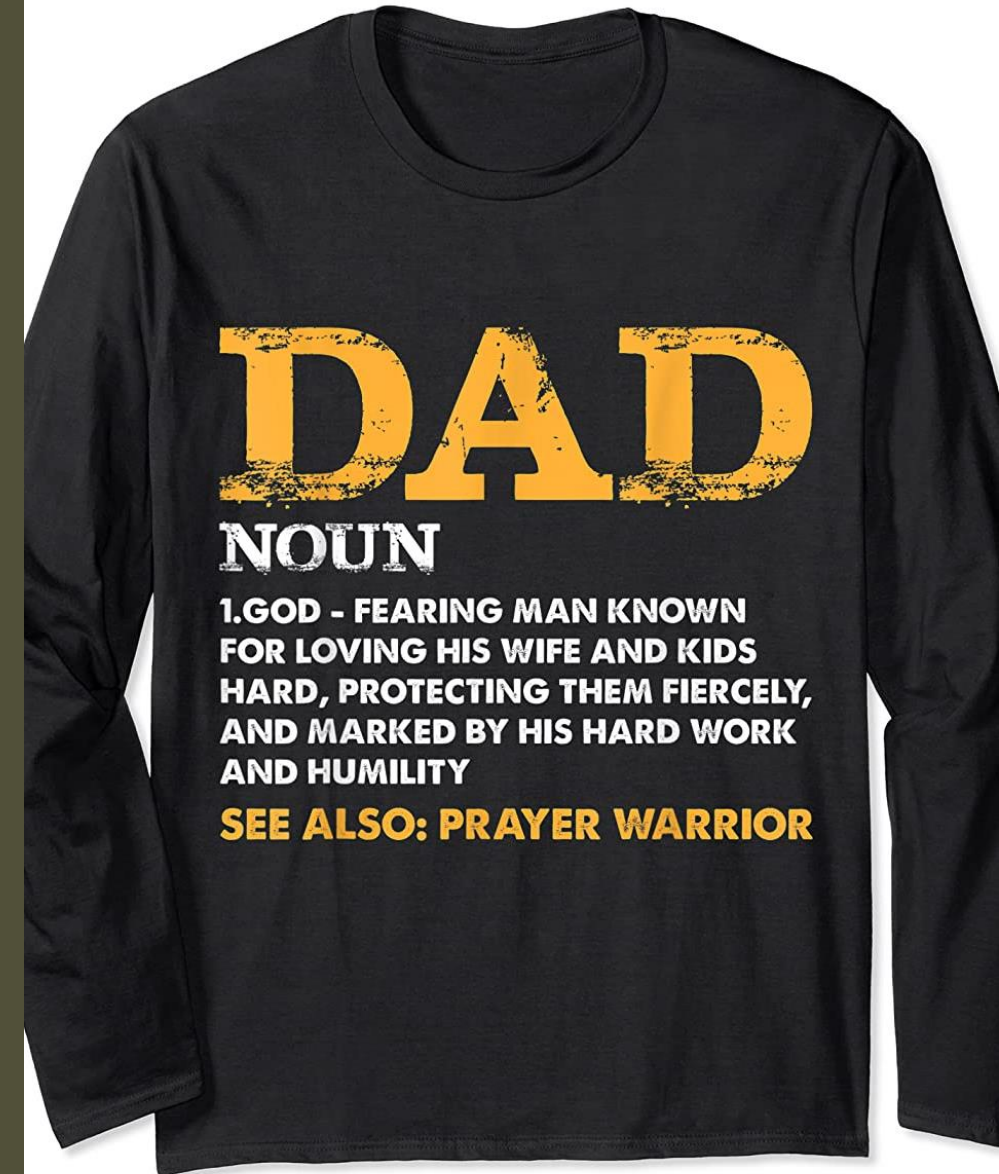
In contrast, masculine roles has tended to have greater potential variance in our culture:

Warrior

Father

Leader

Different roles identified as masculine draw on different characteristics associated with masculinity



HYPER-MASCULINITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

One of the most interesting areas to get a handle on matters of hyper-masculinity is in its relationship with homosexuality, as these two are often socially viewed as in opposition to one another – the acceptable heterosexual masculine vs. the unacceptable homosexual masculine.

This is complicated by some innately masculine qualities of male homosexuality (it involves lots of dudes...) and the varied way in which homosexuality seeks to reclaim or reject socially normative forms of masculinity.

Male homosexuality is both terribly masculine (lots of dudes), and terribly unmasculine (lots of dudes having sex with each other)...



DISCUSSION

All participants to consider together:

Given that homosexuality is often seen to be oppositional to masculinity, how and why is masculinity then deployed?

With what aspects does male homosexuality challenge within contemporary forms of masculinity?

Why is the sex bit of homosexuality such a difficult step here for masculinity?





HYPER-MASCULINITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

There are a whole variety of ways in which the identity and performances of homosexuality are impacted by the notion of masculinity – either as an opposition, a reclamation, or as a queering.

In this way, gay males often choose to play with masculinity, either amping up the divergence from gender norms, assimilating into established gender norms, or seeking to undercut the essential meaning of gender norms.



HYPER-MASCULINITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

I want to turn to looking at one particular expression of male homosexuality and hyper-masculinity which deliberately plays with these social difficulties over homosexuality and masculinity, seeking to deconstruct, illuminate, and challenge them.

These forms obviously have their counterparts in female homosexuality (eg leatherdykes, butch / femme etc) and within heterosexual cultures as well, but with critical variances of position etc.

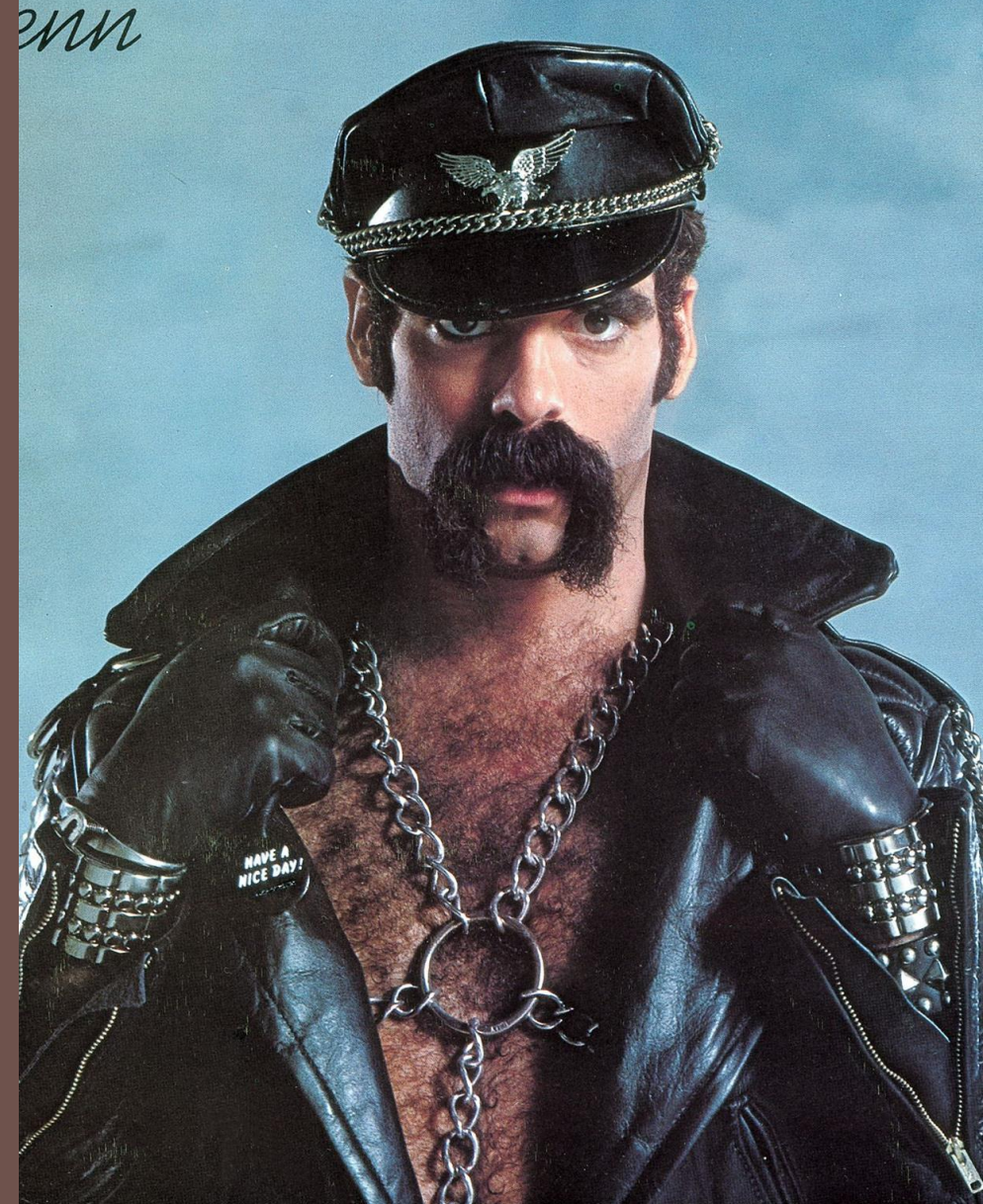


LEATHERMEN

Leathermen form a gay male subculture that eroticizes specific forms of dress and performance.

The reason this is interesting for us, is the relationship of participants' leather identity to their gender and sexual identities produces a complex overlay of sexual identity, gender association and performance, and the presentation of sexuality

Leathermen have developed a unique form of masculinity, that challenges socially expected norms of masculine behaviour – integrating care, vulnerability, and strong intra-community bonds with a reclamation of an aesthetic of heightened masculine appearance.



LEATHERMEN

This is a satirisation of masculinity – a deliberately over-the-top reclamation, by those generally excluded from it.

Flexible interactional scripts allow for gendered signs to be enacted, designating a social status that is not recognized by the mainstream gay community and that sits apart from heterosexual performances of masculinity.

Leather performance allows for individuals to play with their gender, whether male or female, in a heightened way – exposing the performative aspects of all of our gendered expressions.



DISCUSSION



All participants to consider together:

Why leather?

Why **gay** leather?

WHY LEATHER?

Masculinity

Military Associations

Brotherhood

Discipline

Rugged

Danger

Separation from the norm

Overtly Sexual

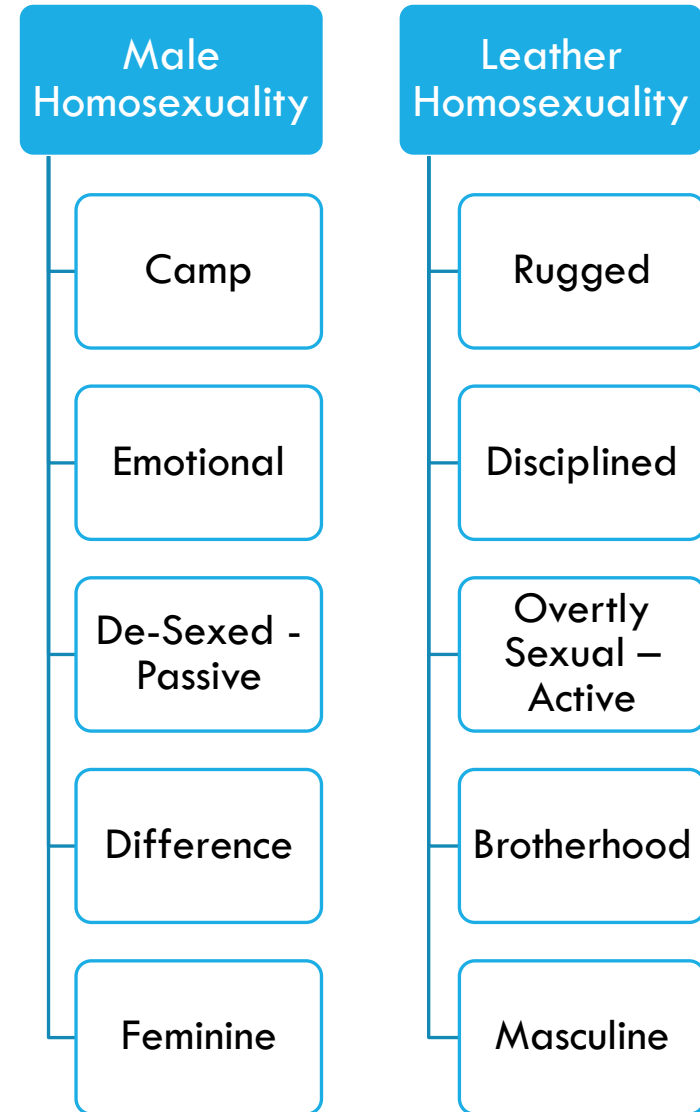
Tradition

LEATHERMEN

So why do we see a connection between male homosexuality and leather?

Think of the characteristics associated with leather above, and then think of the characteristics associated with male homosexuality in society – each is largely oppositional.

For example, the homosexual experience of being separate from the heterosexual norm, the feeling of dislocation from society and social expectations, can be seen to be addressed in Leather's stressing of group brotherhood between Leathermen.



LEATHERMEN

So what does this all this have to do with gender?

All of the characteristics mentioned before about leather itself, associate with the norms of masculinity – for example, brotherhood and discipline are traditionally associated with masculine activities.

“Leather became metaphoric for claiming masculinity...”

These guys were baby boomers who’d been told that being gay meant being a sweater queen or being fluffy or effeminate.”

Michael Bronski, “A Queer History of the United States”

LEATHERMEN

In historic and contemporary society, male homosexuality is traditionally associated with femininity.

By reclaiming characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, Leather is an example of deliberately gendered performance.

It takes the associated characteristics of a certain gender and re-performs them in a different way.

Greek historian Plutarch recounts that Periander, the tyrant of Ambracia, asked his "boy",

"Aren't you pregnant yet?"

in the presence of other people, causing the boy to kill him in revenge for being treated as if effeminate or a woman

(Amatorius 768F).

A dark, moody photograph of two men in leather subculture attire. They are wearing leather helmets and jackets, and are shown in profile, kissing. The image is dimly lit, with the leather showing some highlights.

LEATHERMEN

This re-performance works in multiple ways:

It queers homosexuality, by associating it with overt masculinity

It queers masculinity, by associating it with overt homosexuality

These days, leather is far more associated with gay men than straight men – a total gendered reversal of associations.



ALL EQUAL

DISCUSSION

All participants to consider together:

Does anyone know who the preceding group are and what they do?

What ways are they playing with gender?

What ways are they playing with sexuality?

What is the operation of their performance?



HYPER-FEMME AND HYPER-MASC

What we can hopefully see in the previous two examples are the ways in which concerns about gender, sex, and sexuality are intimately connected to each other, depend on each other for their intelligibility, and just how contextual this intelligibility is — our recognition of what femininity or masculinity mean depends on our own cultural, social, and historical imaginaries.

So too, hopefully we have become aware of the extent to which our sex / gender / sexuality presentation is a fluid and ongoing process, one open to change and re-working, and one which can be consciously deployed in a variety of forms, for a variety of objectives.



READING

Your reading is “Thinking Sex” by Gayle
Rubin

