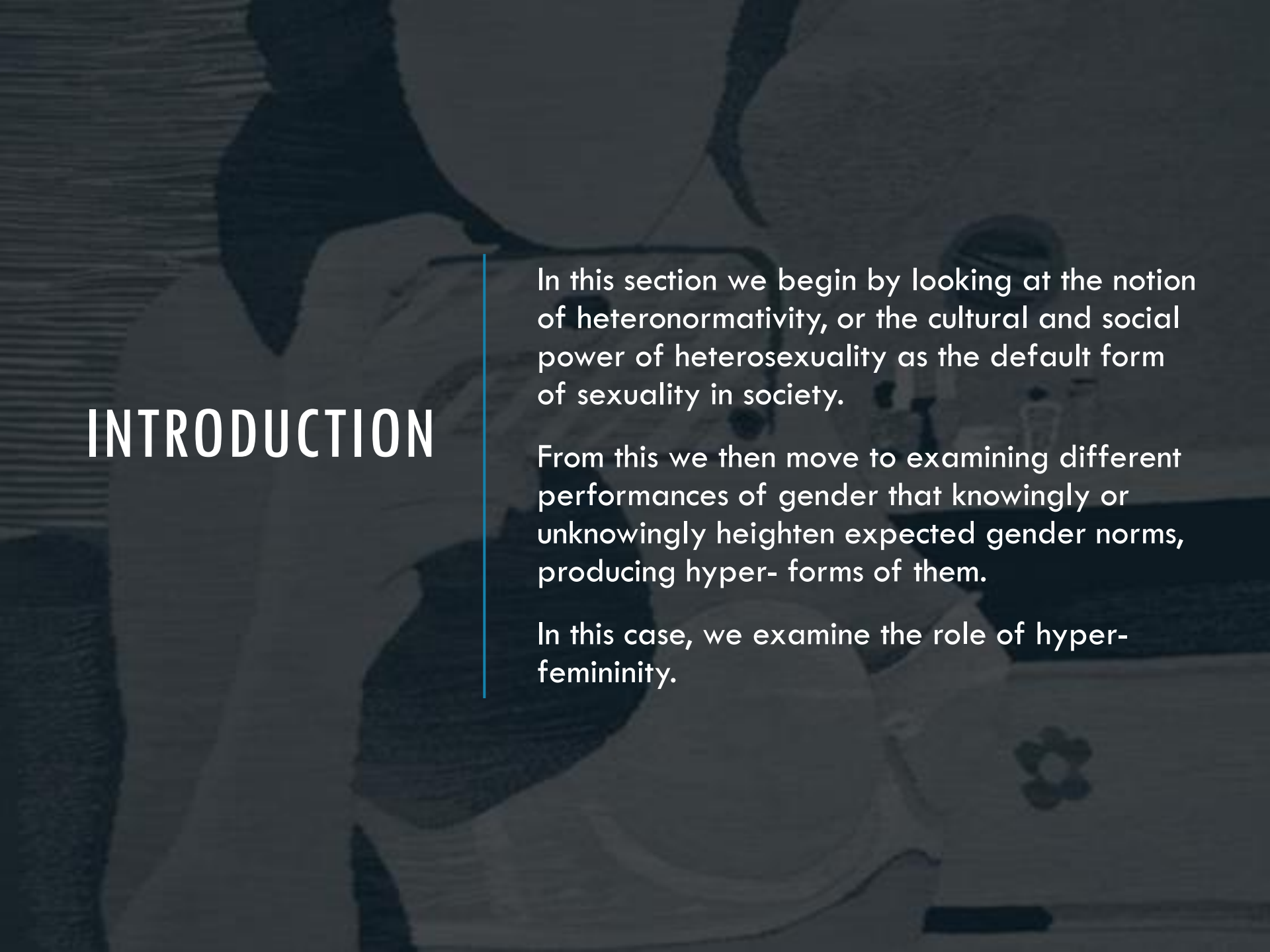


HPHP4014

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)

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**.



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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)

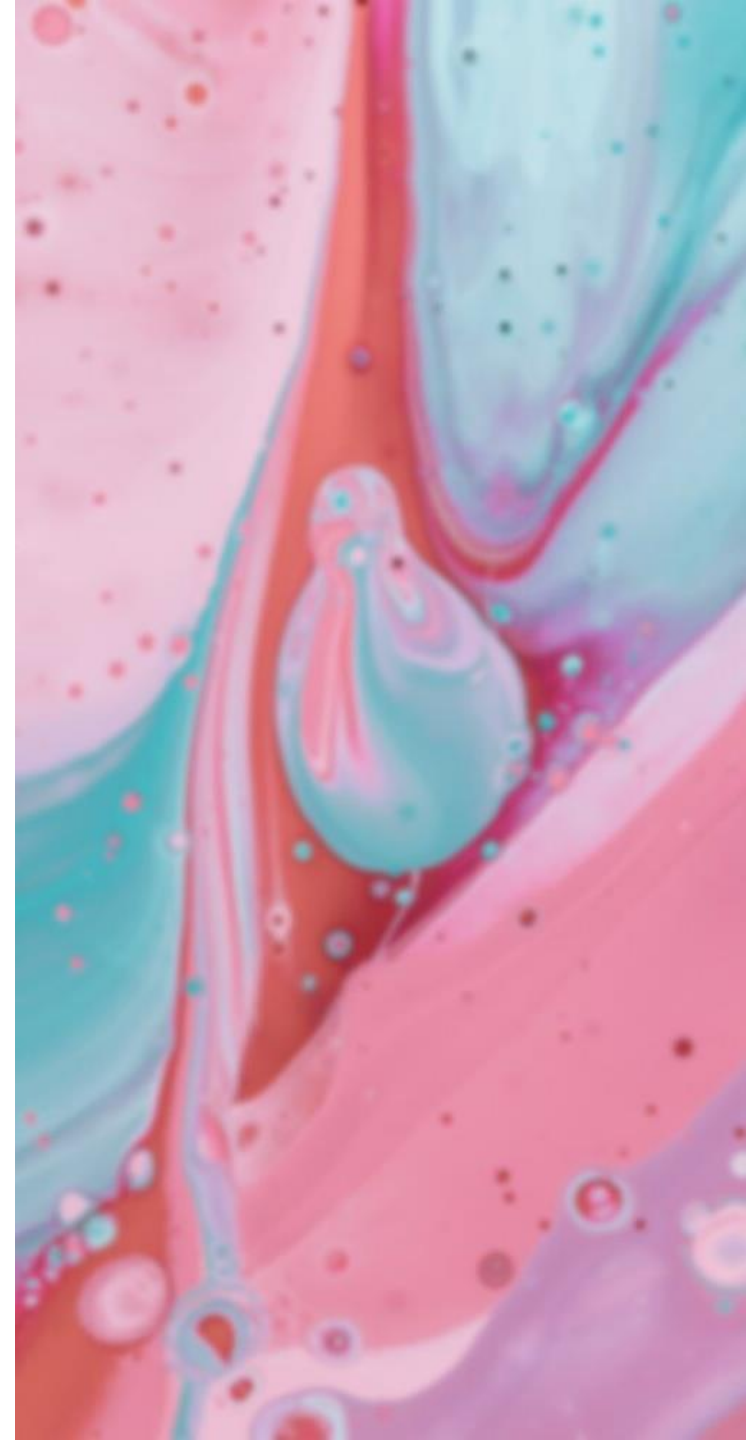
HETERONORMATIVITY

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.

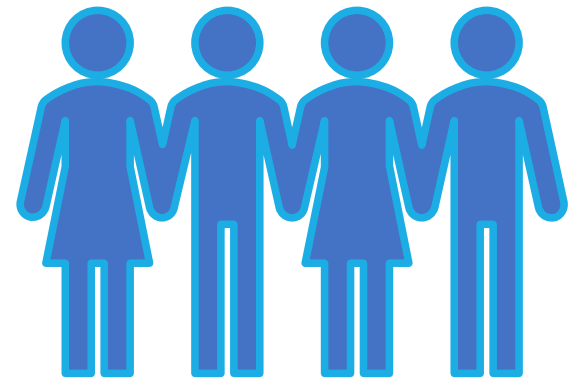


GROUP WORK

Divide into two groups

Group 1 – Identify some of the social processes by which our understandings of femininity are regulated

Group 2 - Identify some of the social processes by which our understandings of masculinity are regulated



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?



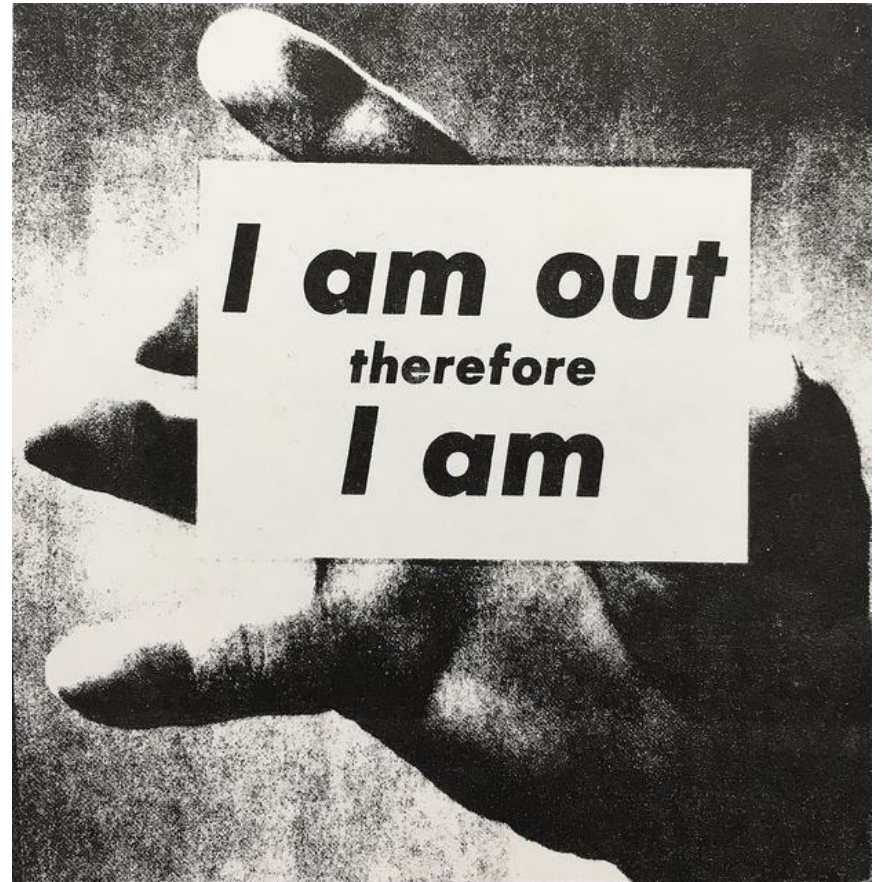
HETERONORMATIVITY

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).

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'.

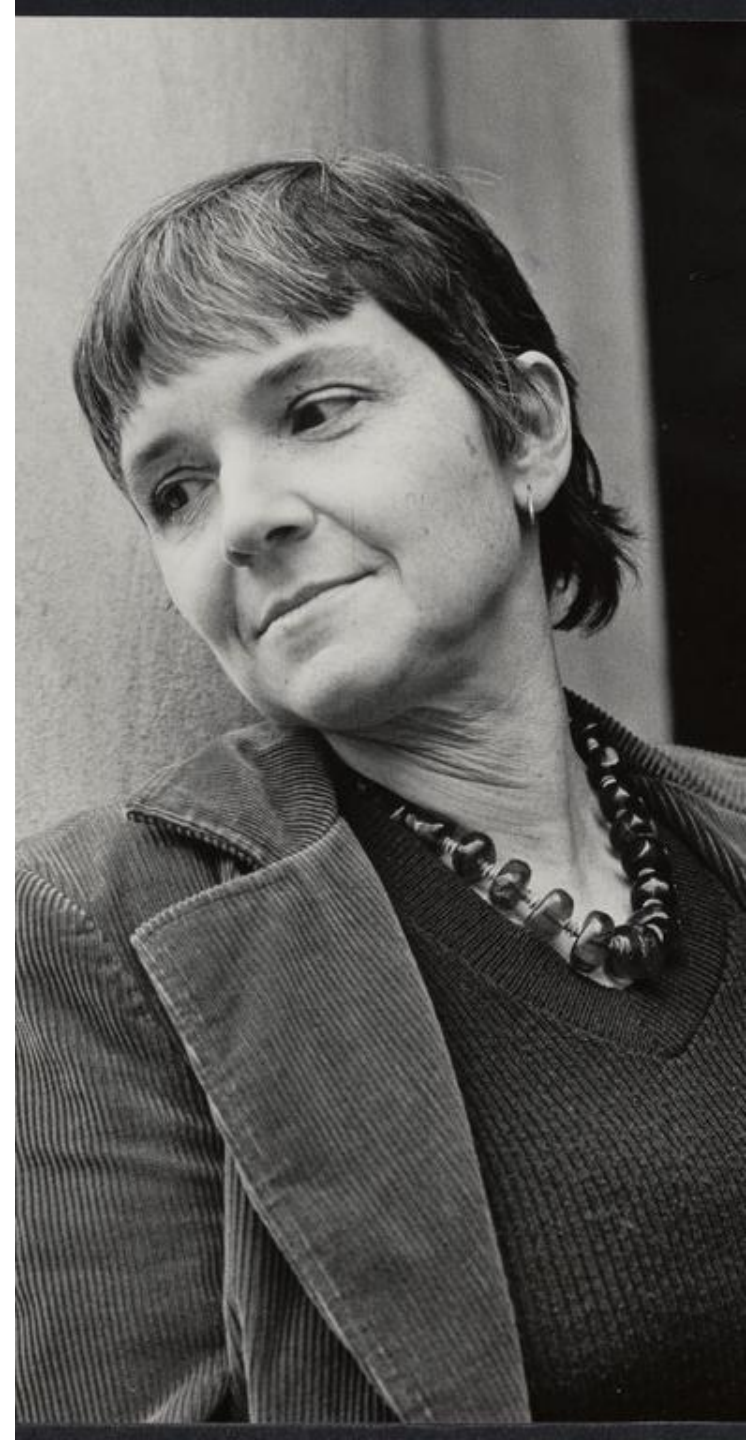


HETERONORMATIVITY

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.



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?



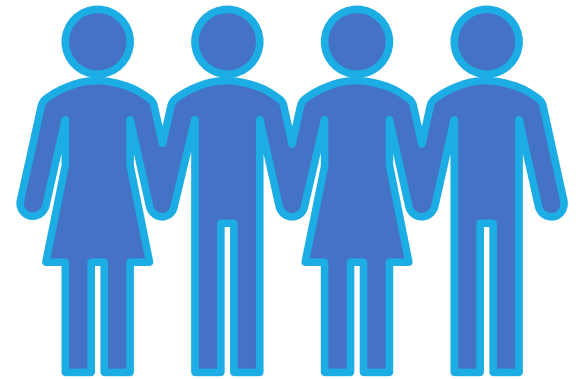
GROUP WORK

Divide into two groups

Group 1 – Attempt to answer Rubin's question in the context of heterosexuality

Group 2 - Attempt to answer Rubin's question in the context of homosexuality

What would a truly democratic and sexually moral society look like, if heteronormativity did not dictate the prevailing sexual morality?



DISCUSSION

All participants to consider together:

What definitions or principles did you come up with?

Do they differ between groups?

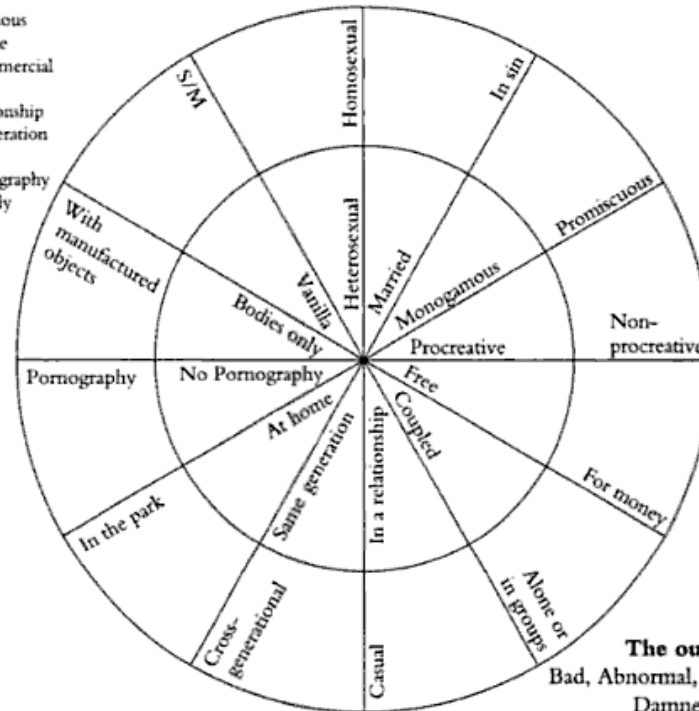
Are you familiar with notions of consent, risk-aware sexual practices, and personal autonomy?



The charmed circle:

Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed Sexuality

Heterosexual
Married
Monogamous
Procreative
Non-commercial
In pairs
In a relationship
Same generation
In private
No pornography
Bodies only
Vanilla



The outer limits:

Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural,
Damned Sexuality

Homosexual
Unmarried
Promiscuous
Non-procreative
Commercial
Alone or in groups
Casual
Cross-generational
In public
Pornography
With manufactured objects
Sadomasochistic

FIGURE 1. The sex hierarchy: the charmed circle vs. the outer limits

DISCUSSION

Examine and explore Rubin's 'charmed' circle of gender / sex / sexuality expressions.

Consider:

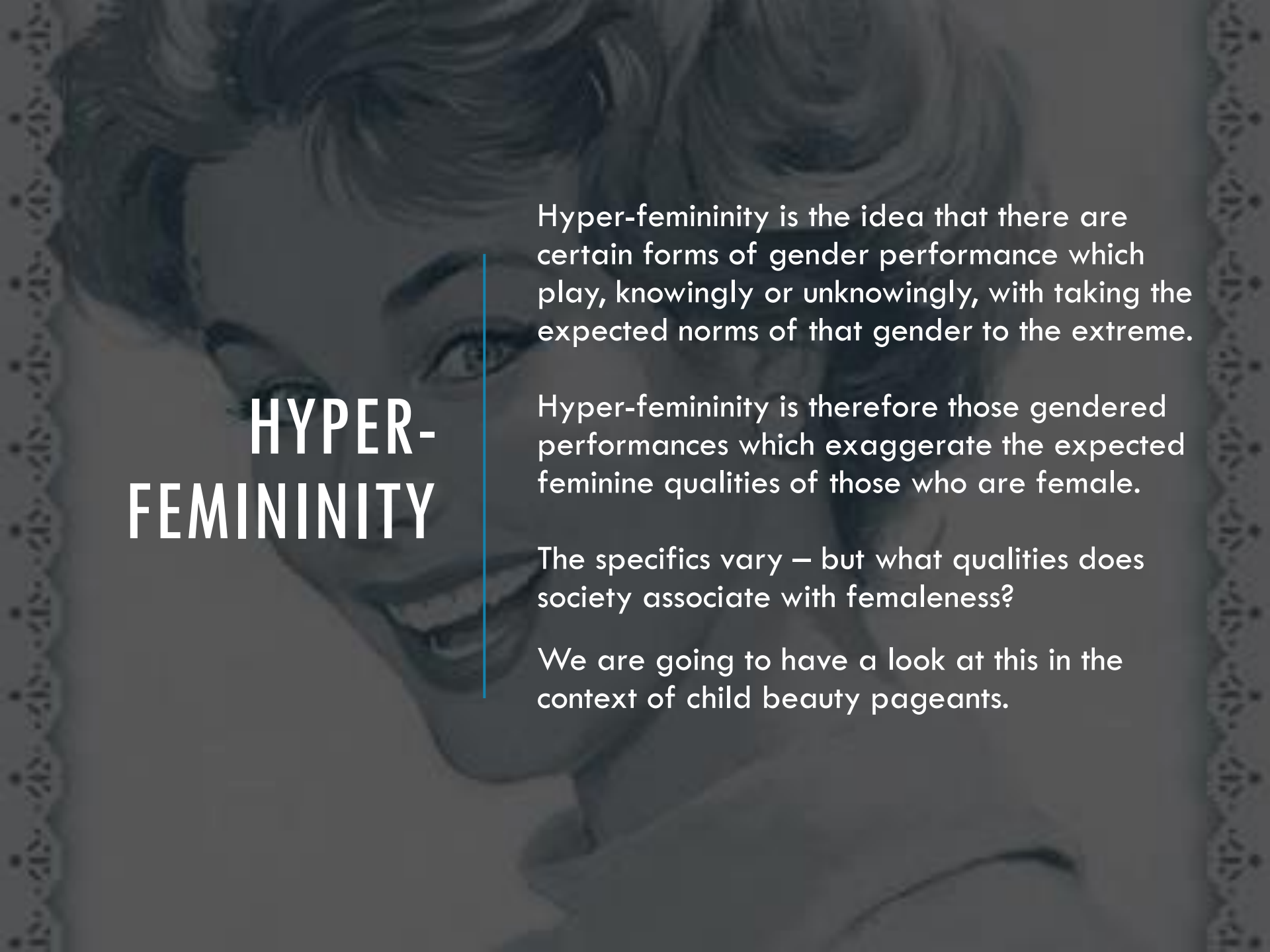
What informs the differentiations / distinctions made between acceptable and unacceptable forms?

Does the 'charmed circle' describe the reality of (heterosexual) sex?



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>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpAhciFyJh0>

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 session 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

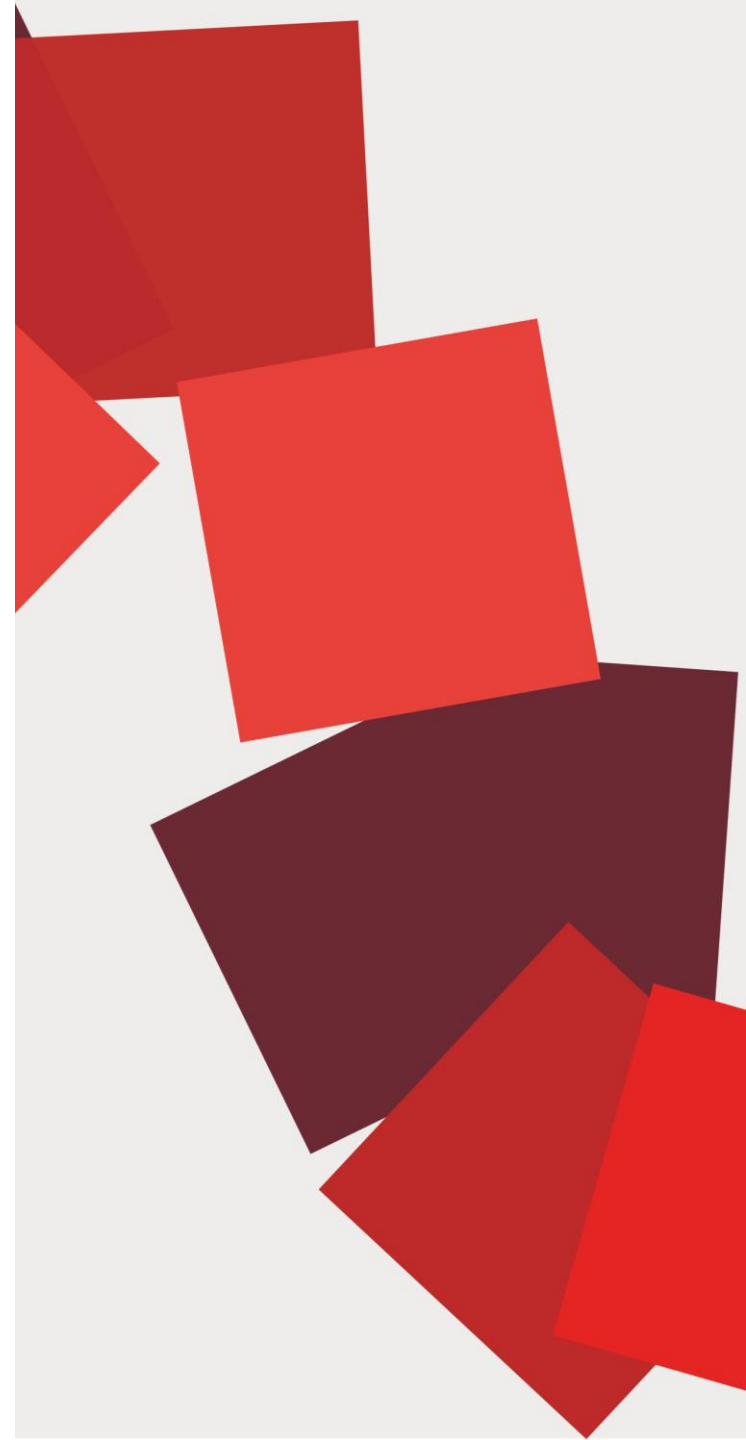
Different roles identified as masculine draw on different characteristics associated with masculinity

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)...



HYPER-MASCULINITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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).

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.


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?



SUMMARY & READING

In this session, we have examined the concept of heteronormativity and the way that sex, gender, and sexuality are often intimately connected by society.

In doing so, we have also explored the political dimension of these connections, the way they have an impact on the way we choose to express ourself.

These choices of expression are to understanding the nature of hyper-femininity and the different ways it operates in heterosexual and homosexual, male and female contexts.

Your reading today is “Thinking Sex” by Gayle Rubin.