



Breaking the Mold: Diversity Unleashed

Gender, Sexuality, and Relationship Diversity (GSRD)

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MA Humanistic
Counselling and
Psychotherapy



Learning Objectives

Understand the current societal norms surrounding gender, sexuality, and relationships in British culture.

Explore case studies and theoretical perspectives challenging these norms.

Analyze how cultural assumptions affect marginalized groups and their representation.

Introduce key concepts such as hermeneutical injustice and queer theory.



Encourage students to reflect critically on how these norms influence their professional practice.

Theory

A **theory** is a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural or social world, based on a body of evidence, observation, and reasoning. Theories are used to explain phenomena, predict outcomes, and generate new knowledge. In science, for example, theories are developed from hypotheses that have been repeatedly tested and confirmed.

Limitations:

Subject to Change: Theories are not absolute truths. They evolve over time as new evidence emerges or as better explanations are developed.

Complexity and Uncertainty: Some theories may be too complex to fully understand or predict every outcome, especially in social sciences or fields involving human behaviour.

Scope: A theory is often limited by the scope of the observations or data used to develop it. It may not apply universally to all situations.

Interpretation: Different people may interpret the same theory differently, leading to varying conclusions or applications.



Fact

A **fact** is an objective and verifiable observation that is universally accepted as true. Facts are concrete pieces of information that have been confirmed through evidence and do not change based on opinions or beliefs. For example, "water boils at 100°C at sea level" is a fact.

Limitations:

Context Dependence: Facts can sometimes be dependent on context. For example, the boiling point of water changes with altitude, so while it's factual that water boils at 100°C, this fact is only true under specific conditions.

Interpretation: Facts alone may not provide meaning or understanding. They require interpretation within a theoretical framework to explain **why** something happens or what it means.

Incomplete Information: New facts can emerge that challenge or refine previous understandings. For example, historical facts may change as new evidence or documents are discovered.

Lack of Explanation: Facts describe "what" is happening, but they do not explain "why" it happens. Theories are needed to interpret and make sense of facts.





A fact is something that can be directly observed or measured, like 'the sun helps your body produce vitamin D.' A theory, on the other hand, is an idea that helps us explain a set of facts, like 'the theory that sunlight exposure boosts mood and reduces the risk of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).' Facts are the building blocks of knowledge, while theories are the frameworks we use to make sense of them.

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat. From the center of the book, a brilliant, ethereal light emanates, creating a vertical column of white and yellow light that expands upwards. This light column is surrounded by a vast, dark space filled with swirling, colorful nebulae in shades of blue, purple, and pink. Numerous small, bright stars and larger, glowing celestial bodies are scattered throughout the scene. The overall atmosphere is one of cosmic wonder and magic. In the bottom left corner, a small, translucent butterfly with orange and black wings is visible, appearing to be part of the magical scene. The text "Facts are cool, but theories are where the magic happens." is overlaid in the center of the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

Facts are cool, but theories are
where the magic happens.

How to be 'normal'

Gender

Male/Female/Trans

Binary

Choosing a restroom

Announcing baby's
gender

Sexuality

Gay/Straight/Bi

Asking about
relationships (e.g., "met
a nice boy/girl?")

Relationships

A person must have romantic
attractions; it is not possible to be a
person without them.

Pressuring to conform (e.g.,
marriage/children expectations)

It is normal and healthy to form a
long-term monogamous relationship
Deviations from this are seen as less
healthy or even abnormal.

'Infidelity, cheating and affairs' are
negative and the negative emotions
that surround them need to be
shown by the 'cheated on' partner.

One true love and soul mate
Commitment, is sexual fidelity.
There are clear distinctions between
'friend' and 'lover'

Having sex with more than one
person shows you are not serious
about those people

Current British 'Norms' GRSD

NOTE: Our current understanding
is not universal or timeless.

Gender, sexuality, and relationship
norms have shifted over time.

Variations exist across different
cultures and historical periods

Group Question?

What challenges might individuals face when their gender, sexuality, or relationship choices fall outside of traditional norms?





Relationship, gender and sexuality norms are deeply embedded in our British society and culture, but they do not reflect the lived experiences of many individuals.

As counsellors and therapists, students need to embrace the complexity and diversity of relationships, gender and sexuality, to offer affirming and non-judgmental support.

Gender verse Genitals

Gender and genitals are often combined, but they represent distinct aspects of human identity. While genitals are biological and relate to a person's physical anatomy, gender is a complex social, psychological, and personal experience.

Gender encompasses how individuals identify themselves, express their identity, and interact with societal norms, which may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Understanding the difference between gender and genitals is crucial for respecting and affirming diverse gender identities, breaking free from limiting assumptions that biology alone determines who we are.



Gender Schema Theory and Roles in Culture

What is Gender Schema Theory?

- ❖ Introduced by **Sandra Bem** in 1981.
- ❖ Proposes that children learn gender roles from their cultural environment.

Cultural Influence on Gender Roles:

- ❖ **Traditional cultures:** Rigid gender roles (e.g., women in caregiving roles, men in work roles).
- ❖ **Progressive cultures:** More flexible roles (e.g., women pursuing careers, men in nurturing roles).
- ❖ **Overt and subtle influences:** Gender norms can be obvious or hidden in everyday language and behavior.

Consequences of Nonconformity:

- ❖ Cultural pressure for people to stick to gender norms.
- ❖ Nonconforming individuals may face judgment or disapproval.



Judith Butler and Performative gender roles

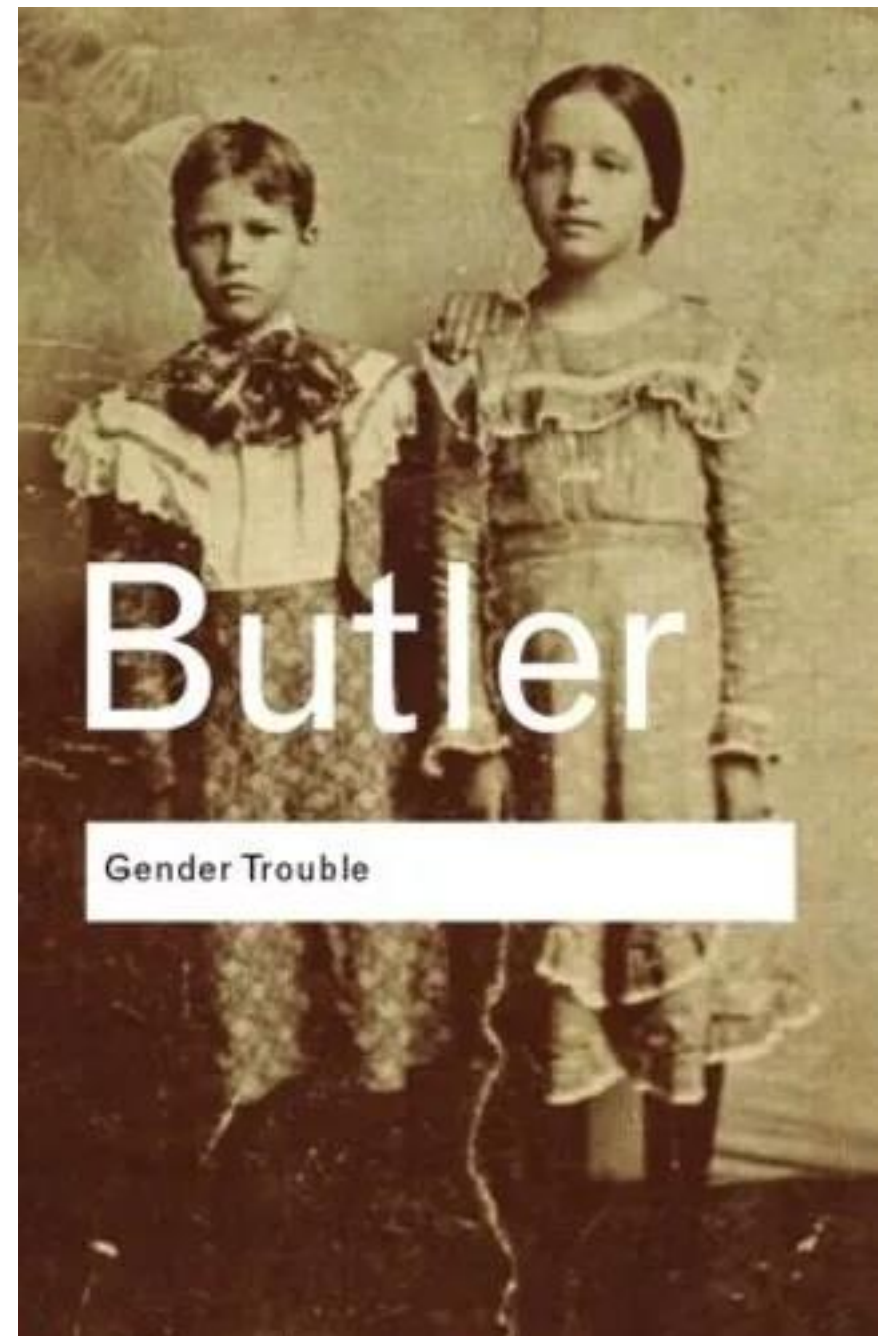
Judith Butler's Main Idea: Gender is performed, not innate. We act out behaviours society defines as masculine or feminine.

Gender as Performance: Gender roles are repeated actions and behaviours. These performances are based on societal expectations.

Breaking the Norms: Since gender is a performance, it can be challenged or subverted.

Gender fluidity: We have the power to redefine gender through our actions.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc>



“I am constantly negotiating between my multiple gender identities, and that is not a contradiction, it is my complexity.”

— Travis Alabanza

“Genderqueer is not about creating a third space in which you live and let the rest of the world continue with its gender binary—it’s about rejecting that binary altogether.”

— Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*



Intersex:

People who are intersex have genitals, chromosomes or reproductive organs that don't fit into a male/female sex binary. Their genitals might not match their reproductive organs, or they may have traits of both. Being intersex may be evident at birth, childhood, later in adulthood or never. Being intersex isn't a disorder, disease or condition.

What does it mean to be intersex?

People who are intersex have reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit into an exclusively male or female (binary) sex classification. Intersex traits might be apparent when a person's born, but they might not appear until later (during puberty, adulthood or when trying to conceive a child). A person may never notice their intersex traits externally and never find out, or they might only find out about themselves after a surgery or imaging test.

In the past, being intersex was known as having a disorder of sex development (DSD), and you might see it referred to this way in some places. But being intersex isn't a disorder, disease or condition. Being intersex doesn't mean you need any special treatments or care. But some people who are intersex choose gender affirmation options if their gender doesn't match the one they were assigned at birth.

Being intersex may affect your: Genitals. Chromosomes. Hormones. Reproductive system.
Gonads (ovaries or testicles).



How common is being intersex?

An estimated 1 in 100 people is intersex. Around 2% of people worldwide have intersex traits.

What does being intersex mean in my body?

Being intersex can present in about 40 different ways.

The most common intersex traits include:

Combination of chromosomes: Everyone inherits sex-linked chromosomes from their parents. People who are male have XY chromosomes. People who are females have XX chromosomes. People who are intersex may have a mix of chromosomes, such as XXY. Or they may have some cells that are XY and some cells that are XX. Or they may have just one X chromosome (XO). Other combinations can occur too.

Mixed genitals and sex organs: A person who is intersex may have ovarian and testicular tissue (ovotestes). For example, you may have genitals that are associated with being assigned male at birth (AMAB), like a penis. At the same time, you may have internal reproductive anatomy or hormone levels more closely associated with being assigned female at birth (AFAB), like oestrogen.



Intersexed Activists and Bodies

Sex Assignment at Birth

Current Legal Landscape

Body Development

Physical Interventions

Unintended Changes

Activist Efforts



Genitals fact check

"Guevedoces"

BBC The Extraordinary making of me (Micheal Mosley)

Community in the Dominican Republic

"Guevedoces", which effectively translates as "penis at twelve".

1 in 9 girls

Ambiguous genitalia

(now known as atypical genitalia)

Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS)

Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH)

5-Alpha-Reductase Deficiency

Ovotesticular Disorder

Mixed Gonadal Dysgenesis

Cloacal Exstrophy

46 XX DSD

46 XY DSD

Disorders of gonadal differentiation

Ovotesticular DSD



Humans have 46 chromosomes? Fact check

Down syndrome: People with Down syndrome typically have 47 chromosomes because they have an extra copy of chromosome 21 (trisomy 21).

Turner Syndrome (45, X)

Chromosome configuration: One X chromosome is missing, so the individual has 45 chromosomes in total (45, X).

Klinefelter Syndrome (47, XXY)

Chromosome configuration: Males have an extra X chromosome, resulting in 47 chromosomes (47, XXY).

Triple X Syndrome (47, XXX)

Chromosome configuration: Females have an extra X chromosome, resulting in 47 chromosomes (47, XXX).

XYY Syndrome (47, XYY)

Chromosome configuration: Males have an extra Y chromosome, resulting in 47 chromosomes (47, XYY).

Mosaicism

Chromosome configuration: Mosaicism refers to having two or more different sets of chromosomes in different cells of the body. For example, some cells may have 46 XX, while others have 47 XXY.

48, XXXX (Tetrasomy X)

Chromosome configuration: Females have two extra X chromosomes, resulting in 48 chromosomes (48, XXXX).

48, XXYY Syndrome

Chromosome configuration: Males have an extra X and Y chromosome, resulting in 48 chromosomes (48, XXYY).

49, XXXXY Syndrome

Chromosome configuration: Males have three extra X chromosomes, resulting in 49 chromosomes (49, XXXXY).

46, XX/46, XY (Chimerism or Mixed Gonadal Dysgenesis)

Chromosome configuration: This involves having both XX and XY cell lines, where different parts of the body may have different genetic makeup.



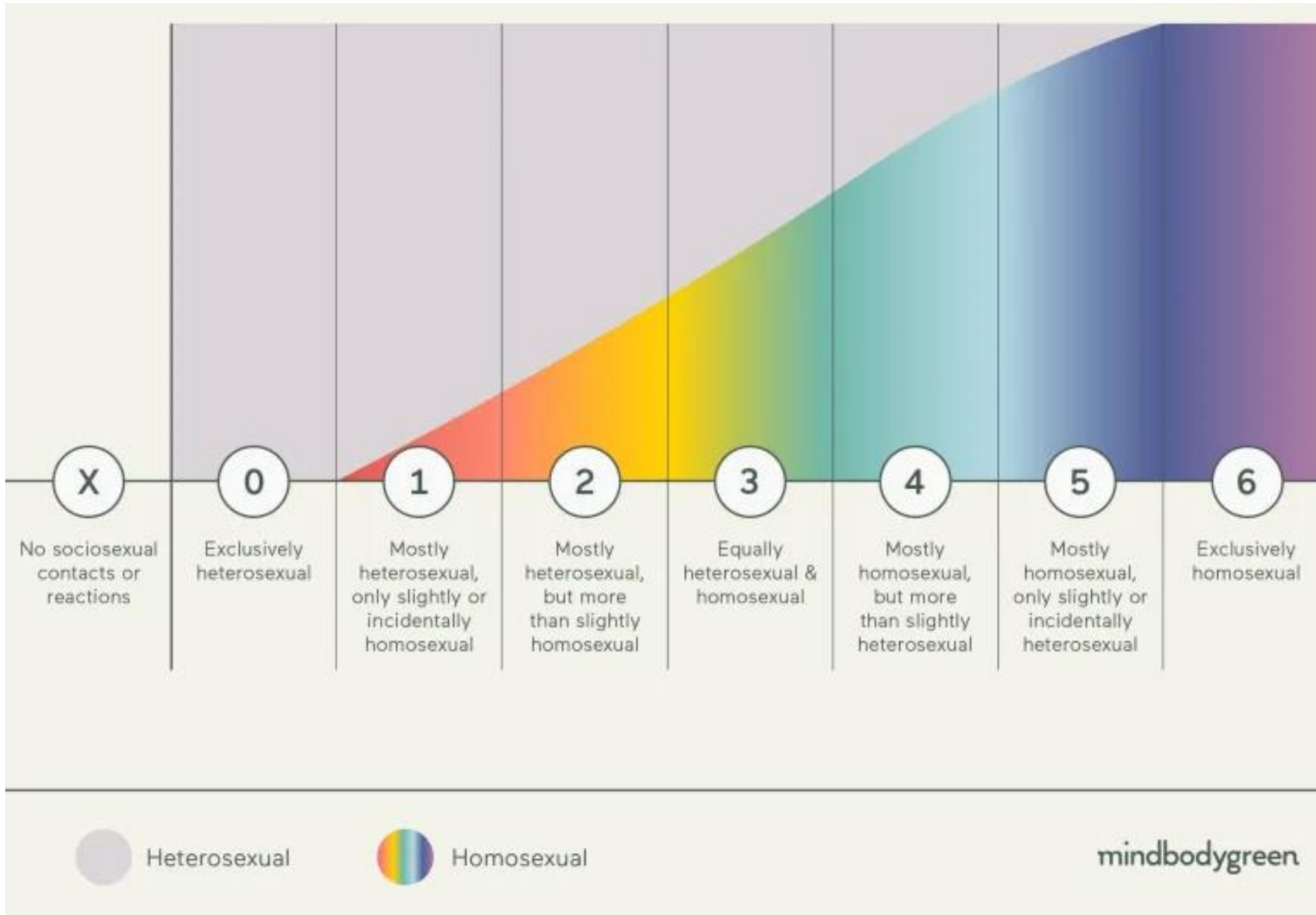
Group Question

If binary genders had never been established or ceased to exist this moment, would the concept of 'transgender' still be relevant or necessary?

Sexuality and sexual Diversity



Kinsey scale – Alfred Kinsey "the father of the sexual revolution."



Creator of The
Heterosexual–
Homosexual Rating Scale,
which is used in research
to describe a person's
sexual orientation **based
on one's experience or
response at a given
time.**

Queer Theory and Sexuality

Queer theory, focuses on deconstructing normative ideas about gender and sexuality. It offers a powerful framework for understanding the complexities of human identity. It resists fixed categories and embraces fluidity, intersectionality, and the diversity of sexual and gender experiences. By challenging deeply embedded cultural norms, queer theory opens up space for broader, more inclusive discussions about identity, desire, and power.



“Queer sexuality can be named as a holistic, social-cultural construct, and worked through in this way, but what is special about it is, unerringly, individual desire and personal expression”

(Gossl, 2024, p.68)

Key ideas of **queer theory** and its relationship to **sexuality**:

Rejection of Normativity: Queer theory critiques societal norms that establish heterosexuality as the default or "normal" sexual orientation. It challenges the idea that gender and sexuality are binary, stable, and biologically determined. Instead, it posits that these identities are socially constructed, fluid, and subject to change over time.

Fluidity of Identity: A core principle of queer theory is the idea that sexual and gender identities are not fixed. Judith Butler's concept of *gender performativity* suggests that gender is not something inherent, but rather something we "perform" based on societal expectations. This means that identities, whether related to gender or sexuality, are fluid and can be transformed.

Critique of Binary Categories: Queer theory challenges binary categories such as male/female and gay/straight, arguing that these categories oversimplify the complexities of human identity and desire. It seeks to explore the vast spectrum of identities and experiences that exist outside these binaries, including bisexuality, pansexuality, non-binary, and asexuality.

Decentralizing Heteronormativity: Heteronormativity refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural or default sexual orientation, and that other forms of sexual expression are deviant. Queer theory actively works to dismantle this assumption by questioning the social, political, and cultural systems that privilege heterosexuality.

Queer as Resistance: The term "queer" has been reclaimed from its historical use as a derogatory term for non-heteronormative sexualities. Today, it is used affirmatively to resist labels and embrace fluid, non-normative ways of being. By identifying as queer, individuals reject fixed categories of identity and resist societal pressures to conform to rigid definitions of gender and sexuality.



Intersectionality

Queer theory emphasizes that sexuality and gender cannot be understood in isolation from other aspects of identity, such as race, class, disability, and nationality. This intersectional approach highlights how experiences of marginalization or privilege vary depending on how these identities intersect. Theorists like Audre Lorde and Kimberlé Crenshaw have greatly influenced this aspect of queer thought, arguing that systems of oppression are interconnected.

Michel Foucault and the History of Sexuality

Foucault's work, particularly *The History of Sexuality*, is foundational to queer theory. He argued that sexuality is not a natural, biologically determined aspect of human life, but a social construct shaped by power relations and discourse. Foucault demonstrated how the classification of sexualities—such as "homosexual" and "heterosexual"—emerged in the 19th century as part of a broader strategy of social control.

Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

Butler's notion of *gender performativity* suggests that gender is not an inherent characteristic but a series of repeated acts that society expects individuals to perform. For example, behaviours like wearing certain clothes, speaking in a particular way, or adopting specific roles are seen as ways of performing gender. Queer theory uses this concept to show that gender is not tied to biological sex but is instead a social and cultural performance.



Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Homosocial Desire

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her work *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, explored the concept of homosociality—the social bonds between people of the same sex—and its relationship to desire. She argued that homosocial relationships in patriarchal societies often exist alongside or are intertwined with homophobia, creating a complex dynamic between same-sex bonding and sexual desire. Her work challenged the strict division between homosexual and heterosexual behaviours.

Queer Temporality and Space

Queer theory also examines how queer individuals experience time and space differently from those adhering to heteronormative life scripts, such as getting married, having children, and following a linear career trajectory. Queer theorists like José Esteban Muñoz explore concepts of *queer temporality*, which focus on non-linear, non-reproductive ways of living and experiencing time, outside the confines of normative societal expectations.

Queer Activism

Beyond academia, queer theory has had a profound influence on activism, particularly in movements for LGBTQ+ rights. It advocates for a world where diverse expressions of gender and sexuality are accepted and celebrated, not merely tolerated. This activism also includes questioning the traditional structures of marriage, family, and reproduction, proposing more inclusive and fluid forms of kinship and relationships.



Inclusivity and expansion: a new century

Respecting Individual Sexual Expression

Sexual expression is diverse and includes a wide range of activities, desires, and preferences.

People may derive positive experiences from different types of sexual relationships, including:

Monogamous or polyamorous relationships

BDSM practices, Prostitution,

Same-sex or mixed-gender partnerships

Aromantic connections

Solo sexual experiences or masturbation

Asexual spectrum identities, consensual nonmonogamies, kink identities, 'sexpreneur', sex worker identities



- Empowerment Through Sexual Agency
- Challenging Normative Assumptions
- Supporting Queer Sexualities
- Addressing Sexual Health
- Normalizing Conversations About Sexuality
- Recognizing Trauma and Healing
- Intersectionality and Inclusivity
- Positive Aging and Sexuality
- Strengthening Emotional and Relational Bonds

Queer sexuality—it's more than just a personal experience. It can be understood as a holistic, social-cultural construct, something shaped by society. But at its core, what makes it unique is the undeniable truth of individual desire and personal expression.

"Queer sex, often labeled as 'worse,' more dirty, more chaotic, or unconventional, remains a risky choice—especially when it's brought into the public eye."

Society pushes these labels onto it—these judgements. And for those who engage in sex that doesn't fit the norm, the message is clear: if you do it, you're guilty. You should feel shame. Even if it happens in private, in the dark, in secret.



"Whoever doesn't fit into these societal molds? Well, they're expected to hide."

If you don't "function" the way society expects, the advice is simple: stay silent. Stay hidden. Because the moment you break out of your assigned niche in the queer world, society sanctions you with taboos, with stigma.

"Public displays of queer sexuality are often met with harsh judgement, pushing people back into silence, into the shadows."

And that's the reality. This is the world queer sexuality must navigate, caught between personal truth and public condemnation.

Case Study Scenarios: 4 groups: 10 minutes



What was challenging about the scenario?

How did it might feel to either present or counsel a person in a relationship structure that might be unfamiliar?

What biases or assumptions did you notice coming up in your group or personally?

How can counsellors ensure they are affirming and inclusive of all types of gender, sexualities and relationships, including those outside of normative frameworks?



Relationships



Relationships in Queer theory

In queer theory, relationship diversity is seen as a challenge to the heteronormative structures that define what kinds of relationships are considered "normal" or acceptable.

Queer theory rejects the idea that romantic and sexual relationships should fit into a rigid, binary framework—like monogamous, heterosexual marriages. Instead, it celebrates the fluidity of relationships, identities, and desires, encouraging people to think beyond traditional models. This includes non-monogamous relationships, polyamory, open relationships, and partnerships that might not involve sex or romantic love at all.

Queer theorists argue that by questioning and deconstructing these norms, we can create more inclusive spaces where all forms of love and connection are valued. It's not just about sexual or gender identity, but about breaking down the societal expectations that limit how people experience intimacy and community. Queer theory invites us to rethink the possibilities of how we relate to each other, moving toward a world where relationships are defined by the people in them, rather than by external pressures.



Relationships Queer Paradigm

A queer paradigm seeks to dismantle the normative assumptions by questioning long-held beliefs about gender, sexuality, and intimacy. It argues for a broader understanding of human connection, one that recognizes relationships across a spectrum of gender identities, sexual orientations, and relationship structures. This includes polyamory, consensual non-monogamy, asexual and aromantic experiences, and chosen families, among others.

The framework also challenges the binary understanding of gender and static nature of sexual desire, proposing that intimacy and identity are fluid and can evolve throughout a person's life. It promotes the idea that relationships do not have to fit into traditional moulds of romantic or sexual involvement and that intimacy can exist in many forms, including platonic, familial, or within chosen communities.

By moving away from rigid norms, the queer paradigm embraces open possibilities for the emergence of new forms of intimacy and relationships, acknowledging that these are always historically and culturally situated. Ultimately, this paradigm reframes how we understand and study relationships, pushing against the limitations of normative, heteronormative perspectives and emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and representation in relationship science.

Hermeneutical injustice

Hermeneutical injustice, a concept developed by philosopher Miranda Fricker, occurs when individuals or marginalized groups cannot properly articulate or understand their social experiences due to a lack of necessary interpretive frameworks in the dominant culture. This form of epistemic injustice arises when society's conceptual resources are underdeveloped or absent, limiting people's ability to express or make sense of their experiences.

A clear example of hermeneutical injustice is seen in the context of gender and sexual diversity. Before terms like "non-binary," "genderqueer," or "transgender" became recognized, many individuals from LGBTQ+ communities struggled to communicate their gender identities. This lack of linguistic and conceptual recognition led to experiences of alienation and misunderstanding, as their lived realities could not be fully grasped or validated by society.

In essence, hermeneutical injustice involves societal ignorance or a lack of conceptual tools that prevent certain groups from understanding or conveying their experiences. This not only hinders public discourse but also contributes to the continued marginalization and disadvantage of those groups in both social and institutional contexts.



Examples though history

Mental Health and PTSD (Pre-World War I)

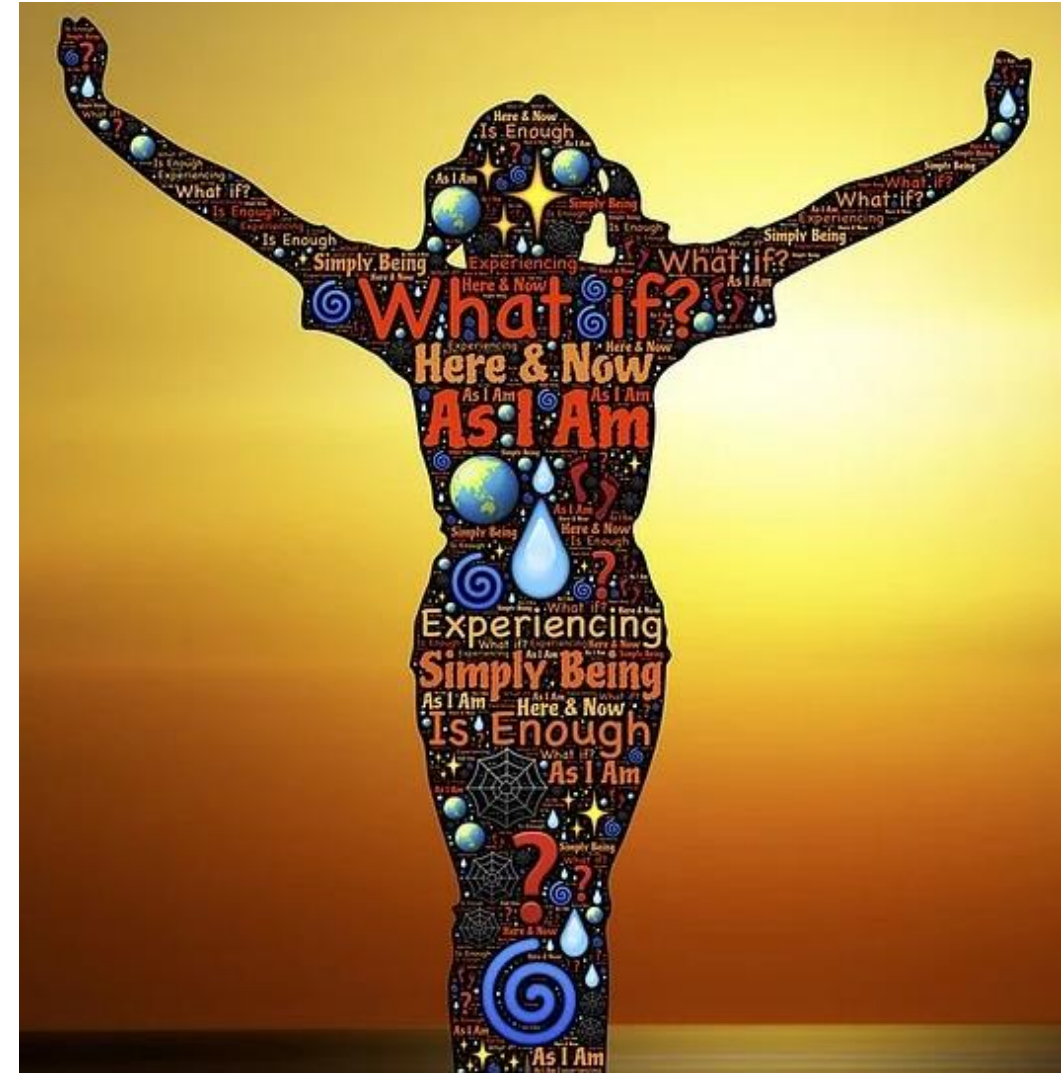
Before the concept of **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** was developed in the aftermath of World War I, soldiers returning from combat were often described as suffering from "shell shock" or labelled as cowardly. The lack of a developed psychological understanding of trauma meant that many veterans' experiences were misunderstood and dismissed. They were stigmatized or even punished for their symptoms, reflecting a hermeneutical gap in the understanding of mental health at the time.

Women and Domestic Abuse (Pre-1970s)

Before the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a lack of societal understanding around **domestic abuse**. Many women experienced physical and emotional abuse in their homes, but there was no widely accepted language or framework to discuss this issue. Without the concept of domestic violence as we understand it today, women struggled to articulate their experiences or seek help, leading to the marginalization of their suffering. Society often dismissed abuse as a private, family matter.

Gas Lighting

Gaslighting refers to a situation where one person causes another to doubt their reality, making them question their perceptions, memory, or even their sanity. However, before the concept and language of gaslighting existed, victims had no recognized framework or vocabulary to describe or understand what was happening to them. This lack of terminology rendered their experiences invisible to both themselves and society, preventing them from effectively communicating or seeking help.



Current Hermeneutical injustice for Gender, relationships and Sexual Diversity; example now

Case Study 1: Polyamory and Parenting

Jade and Alex are in a polyamorous relationship and have two children. Jade has another partner, Sam, who is not a co-parent but spends time with the children.

Case Study 2: Queerplatonic Partnership

Lee and Jordan have a deeply emotional, non-romantic partnership where they live together and prioritize each other's well-being, but neither of them engages in romantic or sexual relationships

Case Study 3: Gender Non-Conformity in Relationships

Taylor and Morgan are in a relationship where neither of them identifies with binary gender categories. They challenge traditional gender roles in relationships and often face confusion or misgendering from family and friends.

Case Study 4: Open Relationship

Chris and Jamie have an open relationship, where they each have other romantic partners but remain committed to each other. They are open about this with their friends, but Chris's family struggles to accept the relationship.



Shrekual- Shrekuality



“It’s a similar feeling to holding out in a bus shelter in rainy weather:

Some manage to get on and ride in a full bus, even when there’s no seat free. If that’s the case, then there will definitely be at least one place free in the shelter for that person who had been standing in the rain until now, and who was ignored toughly by those who had been staying in the dry. It remains unclear, however, who now gets to move into the dry.” (Göessl, 2024)

Group Question

How could
relationship
diversity help
'the unhappy
partner'?

Scenario



Journal Homework

Personal Reflection

When home, please write in your reflective journal. Write down any belief, bias, or assumption you had before this session. Reflect on any beliefs you can now question or challenge.

Discuss how confronting personal biases is key to offering non-judgmental support as future therapists or practitioners.



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Books of the Week

Learn more

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3i-8JEWSk8&t=365s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bkFUfxyF0>

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge

