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Heterosexuality, Sexuality and Gender Re-thinking the Intersections

Stevi Jackson

For most feminist, lesbian, gay, queer and other critical thinkers, it has become axiomatic that gender and sexuality are social rather than natural phenomena and that the relationship between them is a matter for analysis and investigation. Yet in wider social arenas the idea that both gender difference and the realm of sexuality are ordained by nature still has considerable purchase on commonsense reasoning. Indeed its hold may be increasing. While queer theorists were busy troubling heterosexuality, deconstructing the hetero-homo binary and emphasising the fluidity and instability of sexuality, biological determinism was gaining ground – even within gay communities and among campaigners for homosexual rights (see Whisman, 1996; Rahman and Jackson, 1997). In the form of its latest, most fashionable incarnation, evolutionary psychology, it has become ubiquitous in popular representations of science.¹ We have also seen theories of female and male brains (see Fausto-Sterling, 2002), gay brains (LeVay, 1993) and the increasing medicalisation of sexuality (Marshall, 2002; Moynihan, 2003). The effect of this trend is to locate gender and sexuality ever more firmly in biology, in the realm of the natural sciences, and to sideline the social and the cultural as mere modifiers of pre-given evolutionary, genetic, neurological or physiological patterns and processes.

Reclaiming the ground for social and cultural theorists entails not only direct critique of biological determinism, but also unpicking the commonsense assumptions at the heart of what passes for scientific fact. What particularly concerns me here is the assumed immutable link between gender and (hetero)sexuality, which is deeply embedded in our

culture, indeed in the very language with which we think about gender and sexuality. This is most evident in the relationship of gender and sexuality to a third term: 'sex'. That the words 'sex' and 'sexual' can denote both the distinction between women and men ('the two sexes', the 'sexual division of labour') and erotic activity ('having sex', 'sexual fantasies') is no chance effect. 'Sex' is what makes women and men different and it is what that difference is *for*; reproductive, heterosexual sex (*the sex act*) is thought of as the mythic origin and purpose of sex differences. Thus 'normal' masculinity and femininity and 'normal' sexual desire find their expression through heterosexuality.

A social understanding of gender and sexuality does more than merely revealing that the 'normal' is normative rather than natural; it can also demonstrate that gender and sexuality are themselves constructions and are each far too complex for so neat a functional integration between them. One of the great strengths of social and cultural analysis is that it can tease apart the ties that connect gender and sexuality and reveal the multiplicity of strands from which they are woven and which, in turn, weave gendered and sexual relations into the wider social fabric. Queer theory has, of course, contributed to this project; some of its canonical texts sought to disentangle sexuality from gender and reveal the contingency of their interrelationship (e.g. Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1991). I would argue, however, that to understand more fully how the interconnections between gender, sexuality and heterosexuality come to be naturalised as taken for granted features of social life, attention needs to be paid to aspects of the social that are rarely addressed by queer theorists. For while queer theorists seek to denaturalise heterosexuality, to reveal that it depends for its definition and privilege on its excluded 'other' (Fuss, 1991b; Sedgwick, 1991) they are relatively unconcerned about what goes on *within* heterosexual relations, with the everyday practices and institutional structures that sustain a heterosexual and gendered social order.² These issues have more often been addressed by feminists working within the social sciences (see, e.g. Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993; Richardson, 1996; Holland *et al.*, 1998; Jackson, 1999b).

Informed by a feminist sociological perspective, this chapter re-examines the intersections between gender, sexuality in general and heterosexuality in particular. Any analysis of these linkages will depend upon how we define gender, sexuality and heterosexuality and the sense in which we understand them as socially constructed. Hence conceptual clarification constitutes an essential first stage of my argument. Moreover, it is also necessary to acknowledge that contemporary debates have a history, which I will briefly survey, and that this history informs my own

feminist and sociological perspective. In the final section of the paper, building upon an earlier version of these arguments (Jackson, 2005) I begin to explore some ways of tackling the complexity of the interconnections I am addressing. I am not proposing solutions to the problems I identify, but hope to setting an open agenda for future debate and investigation.

Priorities and definitions: gender, sexuality and heterosexuality

I have, in the past, argued for the logical priority of gender over sexuality in shaping their interrelationship (see Jackson, 1999b; 2005). There were two main reasons for this. Initially I wished to challenge the undue emphasis given to sexuality by feminists and non-feminists alike within Western culture. I therefore contested those psychoanalytic arguments that reduce gender difference to the direction of sexual desire (e.g. Mitchell, 1982) as well as forms of feminism that reduce male domination to men's appropriation of women's sexuality (e.g. MacKinnon, 1982; Jeffreys, 1990). Second I have suggested that without gender categories we could not categorise sexual desires and identities along the axis of same-gender or other-gender relationships, as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual/lesbian. I would still defend these positions, but a few caveats are needed. In the first place, these two arguments by no means exhaust all the ways in which gender and sexuality are interrelated. Furthermore, even where I do accord priority to gender, I nonetheless see gender and sexuality as *inter*-related, thus accepting that sexuality has effects on and implications for gender as well as vice-versa. Finally, and crucially for the discussion I will pursue here, the picture shifts when it comes to considering gender's relationship with heterosexuality rather than sexuality in general, not only because heterosexuality is a privileged, institutionalised form of sexuality but because institutionalised heterosexuality encompasses more than erotic sexuality. What I am suggesting, then, is the relationship between gender and heterosexuality is of a different order from that between gender and sexuality.

Part of the problem we have in thinking through the connections between gender, sexuality in general and heterosexuality in particular is that we do not all mean the same thing by these terms and are often talking about different objects at different levels of analysis. The language we use is imprecise, slippery and its meaning shifts with context. For example, the term 'heterosexuality' can denote a mode of erotic attraction or an institution involving wider social relations between

women and men. 'Sexuality' itself is sometimes understood primarily in terms of the hetero-homo binary, or the straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual identities deriving from it, while others take it to encompass a fuller range of desires, practices and identities. 'Gender' can mean the division or distinction between women or men, whether this is seen as primarily a bodily difference or a social hierarchy, but also refers to the content of gender categories, conventionally defined as femininity or masculinity.

I tend to opt for the broader senses of these terms because to narrow them down risks losing sight of significant portions of social life – although keeping them broad causes other problems, in that a great deal of sociocultural complexity is thereby collapsed into a single concept. I use the term gender to cover both the division itself and the social, subjective and embodied differences that give it everyday substance. What is absolutely fundamental to gender if we are to see it as fully social (rather than as founded on a pre-existing natural difference) is the fact of gender division itself and the categories it produces. I define gender as a hierarchical social division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices. Gender is thus part of the social order, but this is not all it is. It is also a cultural distinction, largely taken for granted, but given meaning and lived out by embodied individuals who 'do gender' in their daily lives, constantly producing and reproducing it through habitual, everyday interaction (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; West and Zimmerman, 1987).³ There is another curious feature of gender, of course: the binary division of gender is a persistent and resilient feature of social and cultural life, incredibly difficult to shift, yet it co-exists with a considerable degree of latitude regarding lived masculinities and femininities, even increasing tolerance (slight, but discernible) towards those who cross the divide. So while gender is a binary division, the categories it produces are not homogeneous. This heterogeneity is in part attributable to other social divisions or distinctions – of class, ethnicity, nationality and so on – which intersect with gender, but this is not the whole story. It may be, as Delphy (1993) suggests, that one of the defining features of gender is the co-existence of variability in its content with the intractability of gender categories themselves.

It should be clear from the above that I see gender as an entirely social and cultural phenomenon, in no way resting on a pre-existing biological base. So-called 'biological sex differences' cannot be taken for granted as given, since the recognition and classification of them are themselves social acts (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Delphy, 1993). If gender is used to denote all aspects of the distinction and division

between women and men (and boys and girls) then some of the ambiguities of the term 'sex' can be avoided. 'Sex' can then be reserved to denote carnal or erotic acts, with 'sexuality' as a broader term referring to all erotically significant aspects of social life and social being. Sexuality is not, therefore, reducible to the heterosexual-homosexual binary – although this is an important aspect of its social organization – but of the multitude of desires and practices that exist across that divide.

I am thus making an analytical distinction between sex and sexuality on the one hand and gender on the other. While some make the case for the irreducibility of the former to the latter in order to create a space for the theorisation of sexuality *per se* (Rubin, 1984; Sedgwick, 1991), I do so in order more effectively to theorise their interrelationship. Without an analytical distinction between them, we cannot effectively explore the ways in which they intersect; if we conflate them, we are in danger of deciding the form of their interrelationship in advance. Yet, while analytically separable, gender and sexuality are empirically interconnected (Gagnon and Simon, 1974). If we ignore the empirical linkage between them there is a danger of abstracting sexuality from the social. Sexual practices, desires and identities are embedded within complex webs of non-sexual social relations (Gagnon, 2004), most, if not all, of which are gendered.

It is here that one of the biggest difficulties confronts us: sexuality and gender may be interrelated but they are rather different and not directly comparable social phenomena. Sedgwick argues that 'the whole realm of what modern culture refers to as "sexuality" ... is virtually impossible to situate on a map delimited by the feminist defined sex/gender distinction' (1991: 29). I am in agreement with Sedgwick's queer project in that sexuality, as she says, exceeds male-female difference and 'the choreography of procreation' (1991: 29). My position, however, is that sexuality and gender differ because the former is a sphere or realm of social life while the latter is a fundamental social division. While my view of sexuality is not dissimilar to Sedgwick's my understanding of gender differs.

In the broad sense in which I am using the term sexuality it encompasses all erotically significant aspects of life – for example, desires, practices, relationships and identities. The concept of 'sexuality' thus refers to a rather fluid field since what is sexual in the sense of erotic is not fixed but depends on what is defined as such. Biological determinists of course do not have this problem – they know what is sexual. For those of us interested in the social construction and implications of sexuality, however, it is necessary to take seriously the idea that what

makes an act, a desire or a relationship sexual are the meanings invested in it (see Gagnon and Simon, 1974). These meanings are contextual and variable and hence sexuality has no clear definitional boundaries – what is sexual to one person in one context may not be to someone else or somewhere else.

It could be objected that gender is a matter of social definition too – and so, in a sense, it is. As social division, however, it is also a ubiquitous feature of social life. Gender is taken by Sedgwick to define ‘the space of differences between men and women’ (1991: 29). As she points out (1991: 28), gender categories are generally understood as co-constructed and relational. Seen more sociologically, as categories produced by social division rather than ‘difference’ they are more: they are hierarchical categories associated with inequalities of labour and resources; they pervade all aspects of sociality, locating men and women differently in virtually all spheres of life. Social divisions are not always binary, and not always sharply defined, but these are particular features of gender, dividing members of society into two discrete categories. Many aspects of gender may be more fluid and variable, less definable, but the division itself has a certain incorrigible facticity that is difficult to elude.

Precisely because gender pervades all aspects of social life, sexuality is no exception. Thus while, as Sedgwick claims, we cannot map sexuality directly onto gender, we can and should explore the variety of ways in which sexual desires, activities and relationships are gendered. In so doing, however, the distinction between sexuality as a sphere of social life and gender as a social division should be kept in mind. If we compare sexuality and gender with work and social class perhaps this will be clearer. Work is a sphere of life and not in itself a social division, yet its social organisation gives rise to class, which is a social division. Sexuality is a sphere of life, which need not necessarily be associated with social division, but as currently socially ordered, it is associated with both gender and the social division between homosexuality and heterosexuality.

What is more comparable with gender in this sense, then, is the binary divide and social division between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Thus we produce greater conceptual congruence with gender by pluralising sexuality – speaking of ‘sexualities’ rather than ‘sexuality’. This move, however, is not usually made with that intent, but rather with the aim of recognising diversity in sexual identities and practices within as well as between heterosexuality and homosexuality (see, e.g. Plummer, 1985). Moreover, while it might offer us a set of categories relatable to gender categories it produces other problems. In the first

place it directs attention away from the broader scope of sexuality (singular) as a field of study and sphere of life and limits explorations of the gender–sexuality linkage to the ways in which gender is related to sexual ‘identities’. Secondly, and importantly, if heterosexuality becomes conceived as simply one of a number of sexualities, albeit a hegemonic one, this might prevent us from seeing that heterosexuality in its institutionalised form entails more than sexuality.

Heterosexuality is a key site of intersection between gender and sexuality, and one that reveals the interconnections between sexual and non-sexual aspects of social life. As an institution heterosexuality is, by definition, a gender relationship, governing relations between women and men, ordering not only sexual life but also domestic and extra-domestic divisions of labour and resources. As I have noted elsewhere (Jackson, 1999b), it entails who washes the sheets and whose wage pays for them as well as what goes on between them. Thus heterosexuality is not precisely coterminous with heterosexual sexuality, even though it serves to marginalise other sexualities as abnormal and deviant. Indeed compulsory heterosexuality is so effective precisely because of its institutionalisation as more than merely a sexual relation. Yet it is not a monolithic entity: it is both sexual and asexual, publicly institutionalised yet often experienced as private and intimate, maintained through everyday practices yet so taken for granted that it appears unremarkable. Thus while heterosexuality is thoroughly gendered, conceptualising how it is gendered as a complex of institution, ideology, practice and experience is far from straightforward.

So where does all this leave us? If, as I have argued, sexuality as a field of enquiry and a sphere of social life entails more than the homo–hetero binary, then it is crucial to retain a means of analysing the ways in which all facets of sexuality and all sexualities may be gendered. Since all aspects of social life, sexual and non-sexual, are also gendered, then we need to be able to think about how this gendering process is related to heterosexuality without deciding the issue in advance. If heterosexuality as an institution entails more than specifically sexual relations, we should consider whether the term should be confined to the actualities of social relations between heterosexual couples (in and out of marital and monogamous relations) or should be extended to cover wider aspects of social life (cf. Ingraham, 1996). The ways in which we define gender, sexuality and heterosexuality thus have implications for the ways in which we theorise their intersections and the comparative weight given to each. Before considering these further, however, there is another source of potential disagreement and confusion in play here

that requires further exploration – differences in the ways in which the social or cultural construction of gender and sexuality are understood.

The complexity of social construction

‘Social constructionism’ is a rather clumsy term, perhaps because there is no single perspective laying claim to it, but rather a cluster of differing approaches deriving from varied theoretical roots.⁴ These focus on different aspects of gender and sexuality informed by differing conceptualisations of social processes – hence there are differences in both what is seen as socially constituted and how that social constitution is envisaged, in both the object of analysis and the appropriate methodology brought to bear on it. If we are to avoid narrowing our field of vision and the risk of missing some of the multiple strands linking gender, sexuality and heterosexuality we cannot afford to be too theoretically purist. Rather we should appreciate, albeit critically, the diverse insights that competing perspectives have to offer and build upon these. It is not merely that ‘social constructionism’ comprises multiple perspectives but that social construction itself is a multi-layered, multi-faceted process, requiring attention to a number of levels of social analysis.

In my recent work I have been thinking in terms of four intersecting levels or facets of social construction (Jackson, 1999a; 2000; 2001): the structural, at which gender is constructed as a hierarchical social division and heterosexuality institutionalised, for example, by marriage, the law and the state; the level of meaning, encompassing the discursive construction of gender and sexuality and the meanings negotiated in everyday social interaction; the level of routine, everyday social practices through which gender and sexuality are constantly constituted and reconstituted within localised contexts and relationships; and finally, at the level of subjectivity through which we experience desires and emotions and make sense of ourselves as embodied gendered and sexual beings.

I am not, however, proposing a total theory of social construction wherein all these levels are welded together as a seamless whole. Such an endeavour would be ill advised and likely to produce another form of reductionism. Moreover, it is difficult, if not impossible, to focus on all these levels at once. We do, however, need to be aware that when we concentrate on one facet of social construction we have only a partial view of a multi-faceted process. It is this framework that informs what follows, and I will return to a more detailed consideration of how it might be applied to the interconnections between gender, sexuality and heterosexuality once

I have placed current debates in historical context. This history is primarily a feminist one, since it is feminists for whom there is most at stake in emphasising the connections between gender and sexuality.

Feminism, gender and (hetero)sexuality

In the 1970s feminists began to challenge the male privilege encoded into conventional heterosexual relations, attacking double standards of morality, questioning masculine definitions of sex and exposing sexual coercion and violence. Underpinning most feminist arguments was a commitment to challenging the idea of 'natural' differences between women and men in their sexual as well as their wider social lives. This work laid the foundations for a radical critique of heterosexuality, which was to emerge at the end of the decade, but at this stage heterosexuality was rarely identified as the specific object of analysis.⁵ In consequence some connections were not always thought through so, for example, work on housework was seldom related to that on specifically sexual hetero-relations (see Jackson, 1999b).⁶ The connections between different elements of heterosexuality were later made explicit by, among others, Adrienne Rich (1980), for whom compulsory heterosexuality both kept women *in* (within its confines) and kept them *down*, subordinated. Yet Rich did not offer an entirely convincing account of the construction of gender and sexuality. Although 'women' can be understood in her account as a socially constituted subordinate group, traces of essentialism remain in her assumption of a common womanliness uniting us all on the 'lesbian continuum'. While she exposed heterosexuality as a coercive imposition, she thereby seemed to imply that lesbianism was an innate propensity common to all women.

Other early accounts posed a far more direct, indeed causal, connection between the social construction of gender and sexuality. Catherine MacKinnon (1982), for example, argued that sexuality should occupy the same place in feminism that labour does in Marxism. Thus just as the social organisation of capital and labour produces economic class, so gender is a product of men's appropriation of women's sexuality. While this argument had the virtue of establishing gender as a product of the social rather than a natural order, it over-privileged sexuality as the ultimate origin of women's oppression. Other aspects of gender inequality, including those implicated in the social organisation of heterosexuality, disappear from view or are rendered secondary.

At the other end of the spectrum were those who dissociated the study of sexuality from the study of gender, such as Gayle Rubin (1984), whose

perspective had more in common with what would later be defined as queer. Explicitly constructed against McKinnon's and others' emphasis on sexuality as a site of women's oppression – which she saw as 'sex negative' – Rubin's account focused on the oppression of sexual 'minorities', their exclusion from the 'charmed circle' of normative, monogamous heterosexuality. This analysis should be read in the context of her earlier work, which tied gender very closely to reproductive sexuality through the idea that every society 'has a sex/gender system – a set of arrangements through which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human social intervention' (Rubin, 1975: 165). While Rubin's move away from biological foundationalism and her analytic uncoupling of gender from sexuality represent positive shifts, she went too far in denying the empirical connections between gender and sexuality. She leaves us with no means of analysing the hierarchical social division between women and men and the institutionalisation and practice of heterosexuality (other than as privileged norm), or of exploring the gendering of the various desires and practices she defends (see Jackson, 1996a). In replacing 'sex-negativity' with a pro-sex or pro-pleasure position she is in danger of putting much of sex and sexuality beyond the reach of social analysis and critique; it becomes re-naturalised as a good thing in itself.

More promising accounts of gender and sexuality were produced by French materialist feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These feminists saw the social division between women and men as analogous to a class relationship: just as there can be no bourgeoisie without the proletariat, conceptually and empirically there could be no 'women' without the opposing category, 'men'. As Wittig puts it: 'there are no slaves without masters' (1992: 15). Gender or 'social sex' is the product of a hierarchical social relationship and heterosexuality entails the appropriation of women's labour as well as their sexuality (see, for example, Delphy, 1984; Wittig, 1992; Guillaumin, 1995; Leonard and Adkins, 1995).⁷ Here gender and sexuality are related in that gender division gives rise to the homosexual–heterosexual divide as well as the categories 'women and men' (Questions féministes collective, 1981), but neither women's subordination nor heterosexuality as an institution are reduced to sexuality *per se*.

Materialist feminists, however, subsequently became irreconcilably divided over the issue of political lesbianism, to which Monique Wittig's analysis of heterosexuality was central (see Wittig, 1992; Jackson, 1995; 1996a). For Wittig, the heterosexual contract founded the category 'woman', leading her to argue that lesbians, as fugitives from that

contract were 'not women' (1992: 32). Wittig became a standard bearer for those who saw lesbianism as the only truly radical source of opposition to male domination. France was not an isolated case. In Britain, opinions polarised around a paper produced by Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, 'Political lesbianism: the case against heterosexuality', in which heterosexual feminists were denounced as 'collaborators' engaged in 'counter-revolutionary activity' (1981: 6–7). Moreover the British political lesbians, unlike their French equivalents, focused on heterosex *per se* rather than heterosexuality as an institution entailing the appropriation of women's bodies *and* labour. In according sexuality a privileged place in accounting for women's subordination they were closer to theorists like MacKinnon than the French materialists – hence the continued focus of some of their number, particularly Sheila Jeffreys (1990; 2002), on the sexual exploitation of women.

The furore surrounding political lesbianism effectively derailed debate on heterosexuality. In the 1980s, on both sides of the Atlantic, the terrain of disputes over sexuality shifted to the so-called 'sex wars' between libertarian and anti-libertarian feminists, centring on such issues as pornography and prostitution. As a result, there was something of a hiatus in debates on heterosexuality itself until the 1990s, with the resurgence of feminist debate and the emergence of queer theory. The former continued to emphasise male dominance in hetero-relations, as well as the privileging and institutionalisation of heterosexuality, but in the context of the 1990s the debate was less acrimonious and more productive, with the critique of institutionalised heterosexuality kept distinct from the condemnation of heterosexual feminists and greater attention given to disentangling the relationship between heterosexuality as institution, practice and identity (see Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1994; Richardson, 1996). Many feminists were also engaging with queer theory, including its critical stance on sexual and gendered identities and its emphasis on destabilising the binary divisions between women and men and hetero and homosexualities.

While there are considerable differences within and between feminism and queer, both contributed to a renewed questioning of the ways in which heterosexuality, gender and the heterosexual/homosexual divide are routinely normalised. One of the key texts in orienting debate in the 1990s was, of course, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), which can be seen as both feminist and queer and which helped set the queer agenda. Butler put the interrelationship between gender and heterosexuality firmly back on the political the map through the idea of the heterosexual matrix within which sex, gender and sexuality were caught up

together.⁸ Her interest, however, was primarily in gender difference and sexuality in the sense of the direction of desire. Hence heterosexuality was explored primarily in terms of its normativity, and only this aspect of its institutionalisation received much attention. While recognising that gender was both regulatory and coercive in its imposition, she did not attend to gender as a hierarchy or the way in which heterosexuality is implicated in the maintenance of that hierarchy, despite her debt to Monique Wittig. Wittig's materialism disappears in Butler's queer reading of her.

My argument is that an effective critique of heterosexuality must include both heteronormativity and gender hierarchy (see Jackson, 1999b), since both are intrinsic to heterosexuality and the latter is essential to a feminist analysis of it. Moreover, such a critique needs to be broad enough in its scope to include those aspects of the social often absent from theoretical analysis of gender and sexuality: social structures; the socially situated contexts of everyday gendered and sexual lives and the material conditions under which our sexualities are lived. I therefore want to turn my attention to an analysis of heterosexuality that does attend to these questions and one which, for me, remains one of the most significant contributions to be made in the 1990s: Chrys Ingraham's discussion of 'the heterosexual imaginary' (1996).

Heterosexuality, gender, heterogender

Ingraham's thesis is that heterosexuality should displace gender as the central category of feminist analysis and is the most persuasive and consistent challenge to the primacy of gender that I have encountered. Ingraham, like Butler, is influenced by Wittig's analysis of heterosexuality, but from a less queer, more sociological perspective and with a stronger purchase on French materialist feminism. She therefore defines heterosexuality as an institution that regulates far more than our erotic lives. The object of her analysis is the 'heterosexual imaginary',⁹ which masks the ways in which gender has consistently been defined from a heteronormative perspective. Drawing attention to the construction of 'women' and 'men' as mutually attracted 'opposite sexes', she argues that sociologists (including feminists) have failed to see the heterosexual ends to which this gender divide is directed.

As Ingraham points out, the definitions of gender employed by feminist sociologists indicate that it is a binary 'organizing relations *between* the sexes' (1996: 186; her emphasis). She goes on to suggest that heterosexuality 'serves as the organizing institution and ideology ... for gender'

(1996: 187) and is implicated in the operation of all social institutions at all levels of society, from family to workplace to the state. She asks,

Without institutionalized heterosexuality – that is, the ideological and organizational regulation of relations between men and women – would gender even exist? If we make sense of gender and sex as historically and institutionally bound to heterosexuality, then we shift gender studies from localized examinations of individual behaviours and group practices to critical analyses of heterosexuality as an organizing institution. (Ingraham, 1996: 187)

The question posed here cannot be conclusively answered, but personally I find it easier to imagine gender without institutionalised heterosexuality than vice versa. Yet I take Ingraham's point that heterosexuality is *an* organising principle of many aspects of social structure and social life, and an important one. For example, it is possible to relate all gendered aspects of work and employment to heterosexuality. But does this give heterosexuality primacy? Are gendered labour markets and wage differentials heterosexual in themselves or are they simply related to the social organisation of heterosexual family life? Is it heterosexuality that orders, even constructs, gender rather than the other way around? The problem here is that it is possible to argue links from either direction and that causal or logical priority is difficult to determine. Defining heterosexuality so broadly that it encompasses all aspects of gendered relations, and then collapsing heterosexuality and gender into one term – heterogender – does not, for me, represent an adequate solution to the problem of conceptualising their interrelationship. While gender and heterosexuality are so closely entwined that it is not easy to unravel their intersections, we need to retain the capacity to do so. Hence it seems necessary to maintain an analytical distinction between gender, as the hierarchical relation between women and men, and heterosexuality, as a specific institutionalised form of that relation.

Thus despite my sympathy with Ingraham's perspective I am uneasy with her conclusions. This in part reflects the object of her polemic, clear in the quotation above: studies of gender concerned only with 'localized examinations of individual behaviours and group practices'. This may reflect the US context in which she is working – for while it is the case that British and European sociologists sometimes study gender only in such local settings or treat it simply as a variable, there is a strong tradition on this side of the Atlantic of analysing gender as a major social division (see, for example, Delphy, 1993; Walby, 1997). Thus

when we talk of gender in terms of relations between women and men, we do not generally mean only local, personal, or face to face, relations but wider social relations – as we might talk of class relations. It is therefore not absolutely necessary for heterosexuality to displace gender in order to see that both are institutionalised, structural features of our society and that, as such, they are closely connected.

Ingraham's argument certainly provokes us to think about the ways in which heterosexuality may order gender relations – as well as vice-versa. However, something has slipped out of our grasp in this analysis: sexuality in the wider sense of erotically significant desires, practices, relationships and identities. It is left floating somehow separate from the gender–heterosexuality relation although clearly in some way implicated in it.

Rethinking the intersections

How, then, might we begin to explore in more detail the complex of intersections between gender, heterosexuality and the broader field of sexuality? I will sketch out possible approaches to this question by returning to the four interconnected levels of social construction I identified earlier. I offer here only a bare outline, and an evolving exploration, of how such an analysis might proceed (see also Jackson, 2005). The purpose of my approach is to highlight the complexity of the picture that emerges when different facts and levels of the social are taken into account. The ways in which the intersections between gender sexuality and heterosexuality are manifested vary within and between levels, are not always unidirectional and the linkages are stronger at some points than at others.

The impact of social structures in shaping our gendered and sexual being is frequently ignored – Ingraham's analysis of heterosexuality being one of the few notable exceptions. The concept of social structure is now out of favour with those who envisage the social in terms of fluidity and mobility (Urry, 2000; Adkins, 2002). Yet it should be evident that certain social patterns persist. Gender division has not gone away despite changes in the ways that gender is lived (Walby, 1997); heterosexuality remains effectively normative despite the increased visibility of alternative sexualities (Jackson and Scott, 2004); it remains enshrined in social policy (Carabine, 1996) despite the rights granted to non-heterosexual couples. Here we have one of the strongest connections within the web of gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: institutionalised heterosexuality is by definition gendered and the heterosexual

contract is a powerful mechanism whereby gender hierarchy is guaranteed. However, it is still wise to keep gender and heterosexuality analytically distinct, not only to facilitate further exploration of the ways in which they sustain each other but also because this specific linkage cannot be assumed to have a determining effect on all other points of connection at all other levels of the social. For example, we cannot deduce from it the ways in which a heterosexual couple negotiate gendered and sexual practices in their daily lives.

Structural constraints do, however, impinge on everyday life, enabling and/or constraining our patterns of existence. In this respect we should think about the ways in which sexual (erotic) practices, identities and desires are enmeshed with non-sexual aspects of social structure. For example, attention has been drawn to the ways in which a normatively heterosexual society accommodates queer practices as lifestyle choices within commodity capitalism (Evans, 1993; Hennessy, 2000) and to the ways in which heterosexual sex is also commodified as style (Jackson and Scott, 1997). The structural enabling of sexual lifestyle choices is certainly not equally available to all (Hennessy, 2000), but is facilitated or inhibited by class, ethnicity and gender. Forms of cultural capital may also mediate access to particular sexual spaces and as well as affecting perceptions of sexual conduct. For example, working class women who are too obviously sexual are more likely to provoke public distaste, even disgust, than middle class women with independent lifestyles (Skeggs, 2003). The forms of cultural capital available to us also provide resources for making sense of our sexual lives and for fashioning sexual selves (Skeggs, 2004), which may in turn impact upon other facets of social construction, on meanings, practices, and subjectively constructed identities.

Where questions of sexual and gendered meanings are concerned there are a variety of complex intersections to be teased out. At the level of society and culture as a whole, gender and sexuality are constituted as objects of discourse and through the specific discourses in circulation at any historical moment; these discourses serve to distinguish male from female, to define what is sexual, to differentiate the 'perverse' from the 'normal' and masculinity from femininity (cf. Foucault, 1979). Here there is room for, and evidence of, fluidity and change – yet this exists alongside the persistent naturalising of gender and sexuality. Meaning is also deployed within, and emergent from, the routine, everyday social interaction through which each of us makes sense of our own and others' gendered and sexual lives. Here we can see how certain of the discourses available within our culture become hegemonic, informing

the 'natural attitude' (Kessler and McKenna, 1978) whereby most of the population, most of the time, takes for granted the existence of 'men' and 'women' as given categories of people who 'naturally' form sexual liaisons with members of the 'opposite' gender. Here we are constantly 'doing gender' in the sense of attributing it to others, rarely noticing the variety of cultural competences and complex interpretational processes this entails (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Thus gender and normative heterosexuality are constantly reaffirmed, but it is also here that their meanings can be unsettled or renegotiated, although we need to be aware of how easily such challenges can be neutralised and accommodated back into the 'natural attitude'.

At the level of meaning we can see how gender and sexuality constantly intersect, where the construction of gender difference is bound up with the assumption of gender complementarity, the idea that women and men are 'made for each other'. Hence the boundaries of gender division and normative heterosexuality are mutually reinforced. However, as Kessler and McKenna (1978) suggest, the attribution of gender is the primary one, at least at the level of everyday interaction. That is to say, we 'do' gender first: we recognise someone as male or female before we make any assumptions about heterosexuality or homosexuality; we cannot logically do otherwise. Moreover, the homosexual-heterosexual distinction depends upon socially meaningful gender categories, on being able to see two men or two women as 'the same' and a man and a woman as 'different'.

The homo/hetero binary, however, by no means exhausts the gendered meanings of sexuality. The idea, still widely prevalent, that men and women are naturally different extends to their supposed sexual desires and proclivities – producing all the stereotypes with which we are so familiar. Even though these are changing, it is the degree of difference and the forms of difference that are changing – not the idea that there *is* a difference. Meanwhile, self-help manuals for heterosexual couples continue to promote the idea that male and female sexuality are naturally different and we must learn to live with it (see, for example, Gray, 1996). Interestingly ideas about difference can serve to justify heterosexual desire *and* homosexual or lesbian attraction – eschewing heterosex does not entail de-gendering sex, but negotiating different ways of eroticising gender.

Commonsense meanings of gender and sexuality reflexively order and are ordered by our quotidian routines. They are thus continually produced and reproduced at the third level of social construction, that of everyday practices. Here too gender, sexuality and heterosexuality

interconnect, but in complex and variable ways not easily reducible to simple causal connections. In their daily lives women are frequently identified and evaluated in terms of their sexual availability to men and their presumed 'place' within heterosexual relationships as wives and mothers – this is evident in everything from interaction on the street to the sexualisation of women's labour (Adkins, 1995) and men's resistance to equal opportunities policies (Cockburn, 1993). Hence gendered assumptions here seem to be informed by heterosexual ones. But this does not apply in the same way to men. The sexualisation and heterosexualisation of women is a means by which men habitually establish women as 'other' and themselves as simply the norm. Where manliness is specifically called for it can be demonstrated in relation to heterosexuality and a gay man may find his claims to masculinity imperilled by his sexuality. Yet this is only one among many means of validating masculinity. A man can be a man by virtue of physical or mental prowess, courage, leadership abilities and so on (Connell, 1995; 2000), whereas womanliness is almost always equated with (hetero)sexual attractiveness and (heterosexual) domesticity. Here then there is a marked asymmetry whereby women's gender is more tightly bound to and defined by sexuality than that of heterosexual men.¹⁰ When thinking specifically about how heterosexual sex confirms femininity and masculinity, gender asymmetry reappears in a different form. As Janet Holland and her colleagues found in investigating the experience of first heterosexual sex, having sex may make a boy a man, but it does not make a girl a woman (Holland *et al.*, 1996). What confirms masculinity is being (hetero)sexually *active*; what confirms femininity is being sexually *attractive* to men. As a result young women's desires remain more constrained than those of young men (Holland *et al.*, 1998; Tolman, 2002).

These asymmetries may be everyday reflections of the gender inequality that has historically been fundamental to institutionalised heterosexuality. Since heterosexuality entails not only sexuality, but also non-sexual gendered practices this will be evident in its everyday enactment. Each heterosexual couple 'does' heterosexuality as much through divisions of labour and distributions of household resources as through specifically sexual and reproductive practices. And here, of course, they are also doing gender since, despite the late modern emphasis on togetherness and equity in hetero-relations, the evidence suggests that it is still women who do most of the domestic work necessary to keep the household running and most of the emotional labour necessary to maintain the relationship itself (VanEvery, 1996). It is in the everyday

negotiation of housework and relationship work that the existing heterosexual and gendered order can either be reconfirmed or resisted – as well as in the more specifically sexual aspects of the couple relationship.

This raises the question of how we come to be the embodied gendered and sexual individuals who enact these practices, but who nonetheless have the capacity to renegotiate gender divisions and resist dominant constructions of sexuality. The theorising of subjectivity has been dominated by psychoanalytic approaches in which gender and sexuality are too closely entwined to be separated. I prefer a rather different approach, based on the concept of the social self, initially developed by G. H. Mead (1934) and underpinning the account of the social construction of sexuality later produced by Gagnon and Simon (1974). The self is not a fixed structure but is always 'in process' by virtue of its constant reflexivity. Such a perspective allows us to think of subjectivity as a product of socially located biographies in which our past and present lives are in dialogue; it is not only the past that shapes the present, but the present significantly re-shapes the past in the sense that we are constantly reconstructing our memories, our sense of who and what we are in relation to the sense we make of the present. The cultural resources we draw on in the process of making sense of ourselves are of course historically specific, enabling us to understand the ways in which particular modes of self-construction and self-narration become available at different historical moments in specific social locations (Plummer, 1995; Whisman, 1996).

How might we apply this to gender and sexuality? Here too, there are grounds for arguing for the primacy of gender attribution in that the moment we are born we are ascribed a gender (Kessler and McKenna, 1978). While heterosexual assumptions may play a part here, as is evident with those born intersexed, it is the difference itself that seems to matter here (see Kessler, 1998). It is this difference, one of the first social categories a child learns, that forms the foundation for the ways in which we locate ourselves within a gendered sexual order and make sense of ourselves as embodied, gendered and sexual beings. From this perspective, a gendered sense of self precedes awareness ourselves as sexual (see Gagnon and Simon, 1974; Jackson, 1999b).¹¹ As soon as we turn to heterosexuality, however, the picture becomes more complicated, because children come to understand non-sexual aspects of heterosexuality – families, mothers and fathers, for example – way before they gain access to specifically sexual scripts or discourses. This becomes 'everyday knowledge' available for reconceptualisation, as sexually significant once children become sexually aware. Gendered, sexual selves continue to be reflexively

renegotiated or reconfirmed throughout our lives and how they continue to interconnect as we go about our daily lives within a gendered, heterosexually ordered social world.

Conclusion

Attempts to counteract biological or evolutionary explanations of gender and sexuality tend, in popular understanding, to be cast in terms of a simplistic nature–nurture opposition. Clearly a social understanding involves a great deal more than mere ‘nurture’, and we need to make the most of what a more complex understanding of the social offers. While this complexity is possibly less immediately appealing to commonsense understanding than biological explanations, the perspectives I have drawn on do at least have more purchase on everyday social life than the more abstract, more culturally focused theorisations generally associated with queer.

In exploring the complexity of sexuality and gender, how we define our field of enquiry matters a great deal. In particular, I have argued that we cannot regard gender, sexuality and heterosexuality as phenomena of the same order, mapping easily on to each other. In particular, we cannot afford to reduce sexuality to the heterosexuality–homosexuality axis, or any other means of classifying sexualities, or reduce heterosexuality to sexuality alone, to one form of sexuality among others. In teasing apart these intersections I have drawn on some ideas from queer theory and insofar as I wish to challenge the connections that bind gender and sexuality into the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (Butler, 1990) my project converges with theirs. However, I have also argued the need to pay attention to aspects of the social that generally fall outside the scope of queer – particularly social structure and everyday social practices and have argued for a more sociologically grounded understanding of the self. Furthermore I have suggested that a more sociological understanding of the ways in which sexuality intersects with non-sexual social relations affords a fuller understanding of heterosexuality. On my definitions, some patterns or directions of intersection emerge.

I am suggesting then, that we take as the defining feature of gender the fact of gender division itself as a social division and cultural distinction – although it can and does encompass more than this. As a social division, and a very fundamental one, gender infuses all spheres of social life. Sexuality is a sphere of social life, like any other (such as work, for example) and like any other it overlaps and interconnects with other areas of the social (including work) and like any other it is thoroughly

gendered. One of the ways in which it is gendered is through the heterosexual–homosexual binary and here it reacts back on gender, reinforcing gender divisions. But sexuality is gendered in a host of other ways and here the connections in each direction are more variable and difficult to map. Yet while there are certainly *interconnections* here, I would still maintain that gender, because it is a social division, shapes sexuality more profoundly than vice versa. So gender remains logically prior to sexuality in the broader sense of the term.

Heterosexuality presents a very different case, since it is pivotal to both gender and sexuality. It is impossible to conceive of an aspect of heterosexuality that is not gendered since it is defined by gender difference. Conversely, gender is ordered in terms of heterosexuality. Thus the connections between heterosexuality and gender are much tighter and much more reciprocal than the links between gender and sexuality, precisely because it is not only sexual, because there are aspects of institutionalised heterosexuality that are not sexual. Yet its sexual aspects are also important in defining what establishes and constitutes a viable heterosexual couple and the expectations/obligations that flow from this. It is in relation to the specifically sexual that other sexualities are defined as perverse or marginal and also, as queer theorists maintain, that the homosexual other in turn confirms heterosexuality's normative status (Fuss, 1991b).

There is clearly a great deal more work to be done in exploring these connections further and, since the connections I have drawn derive from particular definitions of the field they are contestable precisely at that point. Any alternative definitions of gender, sexuality and heterosexuality would yield rather different maps of their intersections.

Notes

1. This perspective underpins innumerable television programmes purporting to inform us of the 'scientific truth' of human sexuality as well as animal behaviour and is usually presented as uncontested fact rather than a highly controversial theory. Of particular relevance here is the way in which this approach links gender to the inevitability of heterosexuality, seeing a range of supposed differences between women and men as ultimately reducible to the reproductive imperative: the 'need' to pass on our genes to the next generation. For further discussion and critique see (Cameron, 1997/98, Segal, 1999, Rees, 2000 and Rose and Rose, 2000).
2. Since most of the founding statements of queer were produced not by sociologists but by philosophers (Butler, 1990) or literary scholars (Dollimore, 1991; Sedgwick, 1991) they cannot be expected to prioritise sociological analysis. Some queer theorists frame their arguments in terms of feminist

- debates (Butler, 1990), others, even some who define themselves as feminist such as Sedgwick (1991), do not focus on gender relations as a primary concern.
3. 'Doing gender' in the sense I mean it here owes less to Bulter's (1990; 1993) notion of performance and performativity than to the ethnomethodological and interactionist traditions (Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1976, 1977; Kessler and McKenna, 1978; West and Zimmerman, 1987).
 4. These include Marxism, phenomenological and interactionist sociology, post-structuralism and postmodernism, all of which have been engaged with and developed by feminist, lesbian, gay and queer theorists. For an earlier discussion of how these perspectives have informed feminist debates on heterosexuality see Jackson 1996a.
 5. I am aware that I am summarising a huge volume of work in a few sentences here. For a more detailed discussion of this early work see Jackson and Scott, 1996.
 6. There were some notable exceptions, for example Charlotte Bunch (1975a, cited in Ingraham, 1999).
 7. The works cited here are all collections including work that dates back to the late 1970s and are the best English language sources on this group of theorists. Earlier English translations of these writings are of variable quality, some were published in sources that are not now easy to find and do not always represent the most significant of these authors' contributions. Note also that Delphy was alone among the original materialist feminists to use the term 'gender' – the others talked of 'sex'; because they did not accept the sex–gender distinction, or the importation of an Anglophone concept. Delphy prefers 'gender' since it marks out a social rather than a natural category (see Delphy, 1993). The term 'genre', in the sense of 'gender' is now, however, becoming more common in France, especially among sociologists.
 8. I do not want to enter into an extended discussion of Butler here since I have done so elsewhere (Jackson, 1999b), but simply want to locate her early work as a key turning point in theorising the interrelationship between gender and sexuality and to acknowledge her contribution.
 9. As will probably be clear, the concept of the imaginary being deployed here derives from Althusser's analysis of ideology, particularly that ideology constitutes our imaginary relation to our real conditions of existence. While Ingraham's analysis borrows a vocabulary from structural Marxism, it is not, in my view, a wholly Althusserian argument.
 10. Men whose masculinity is in doubt may share the fate of women: gay men are susceptible to being defined by, reduced to, their sexuality and an 'effeminate' man may well find his sexuality in question.
 11. I am not suggesting that children are intrinsically asexual (or intrinsically sexual either). Rather, the distribution of sexual knowledge within our society and the definition of children as asexual innocents means that their access to crucial elements of adult sexual knowledge is restricted. While children now become sexually knowing earlier than in the recent past, the pattern remains and shapes the ways in which children become sexual and also contributes to the social construction of childhood (see Jackson and Scott, 2000, 2004 for further elaboration of these ideas).