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Why "Heteronormativity" Is Not Enough

A Feminist Sociological Perspective on Heterosexuality

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Critical approaches to heterosexuality are often assumed to have originated with queer theory, but the concept of "queer," which has only been prominent since the 1990s, was a relative latecomer to sexuality studies. Sociological challenges to the "naturalness" of sexuality date back to the late 1960s and early 1970s (Simon and Gagnon 1969; Gagnon and Simon 1974), while the conceptualization of heterosexuality as a compulsory imposition began with the rise of the gay and women's liberation movements in the same period. The idea that sexuality was socially constructed derived from interpretive sociologies, with the emphasis on everyday meaning-making and practices, but most feminists and gay liberationists highlighted structural constraints and the links between gender division and the institution of heterosexuality (Seidman 2009); only a small minority concerned themselves with everyday gendered and sexual practices (e.g., Plummer 1975; Kessler and McKenna 1978; Stanley and Wise 1983). When, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, structural approaches were found wanting for their inability to deal with the complexity and diversity of gendered and sexual relations many scholars looked to poststructuralism and postmodernism for alternatives. The resultant shift in focus from social structures to culture and representation, or the "cultural turn," was the context in which queer theory emerged.

Raewyn Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987), published at the cusp of the cultural turn, made a highly significant and distinctively sociological intervention in arguing for the importance of structure *and* practice in the analysis of gender, in taking account of the subjective, emotional, and embodied aspects of gender, and in addressing both the persistence of gender inequality and variations within gender relations. Her advo-

cacy of "a form of theory that gives some grip on the interweaving of personal life and social structure" (1987, 61) is very much in keeping with the aim of this chapter: to outline a feminist and sociological approach to heterosexuality. Before explaining further, I will chart the development of critical thinking on heterosexuality and the questions it raises about structure and practice. I will then discuss my own approach, partly in dialogue with Connell's, before going on to apply it to a recent cross-cultural and collaborative study I conducted with Petula Sik Ying Ho (see Jackson, Ho, and Na 2013; Jackson and Ho 2014).

The Feminist and Sociological Critique of Heterosexuality

In the early years of second wave feminism, it was, unsurprisingly, lesbian feminists who made the connection between "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich 1980) and other manifestations of male domination. Monique Wittig arguably took this argument furthest, tying heterosexuality to the very existence of "women" and "men" as social categories and arguing that "the category of sex is the product of a heterosexual society in which men appropriate for themselves the reproduction and production of women and also their persons by means of . . . the marriage contract" (Wittig [1982] 1992, 7). In locating heterosexuality within wider gender relations, these analyses made it clear that heterosexuality involves far more than (erotic) sexuality. Subsequently, however, some radical lesbians accused heterosexual feminists of colluding in women's subordination (see, e.g., Leeds Revolutionary Feminists 1981). What had initially been a strength of lesbian feminist analyses, highlighting the institutional character of heterosexuality, became a weakness because of the failure to distinguish structure from practice, the critique of heterosexuality from criticism of heterosexual women. The effect of this divisive move was to close off debate for nearly a decade. However, the revival of feminist interest in heterosexuality in the 1990s, which occurred alongside the rise of queer theory, created space for a reworking of structural analysis that avoided structural determinism and attended to other aspects of sociality.

In order to argue for a feminist sociology of sexuality, it is first necessary to establish how it might both converge with and diverge from queer theory. Briefly, and at the risk of oversimplifying a complex body

of work, queer theory is concerned with destabilizing the binaries of gender and heterosexuality/homosexuality, with revealing them to be "regulatory fictions" (Butler 1990). Influenced by Foucault's (1981) analysis of the discursive constitution of diverse sexualities, queer theory represented a challenge to the older gay affirmative politics seen as resting on essentialist categories (as gay, lesbian, straight); to be queer was to "assume a de-essentialized identity that is purely positional in character" (Halperin 1995, 62). While oriented to the destabilization of gendered and sexual binaries, queer theory is also associated with analyzing how they are sustained. The main object of critique, therefore, is what has come to be called "heteronormativity."[1]

Neither everyday social interaction nor social structural arrangements fall within the scope of queer theory. Moreover, in queer critique of normative binaries, heterosexuality appears simply as the norm against which other sexualities are defined, thus working against exploration of heterosexuality itself. The same could be said of the concept of heteronormativity, though I would not wish to deny its analytic utility; it does serve as a convenient shorthand for the multitude of ways in which heterosexuality is sustained as the default form of sexual and personal life. My point, however, is that this is not enough. Focusing only or primarily on heteronormativity can lead to the neglect of what was central to the early lesbian feminist critiques: the link between institutionalized heterosexuality and gender hierarchy. It also leaves us without a means of exploring how gender hierarchy might be modified, negotiated, or challenged within everyday heterosexual lives. Paying attention to hierarchies suggests the need to return to issues of social structure and to broader definitions of heterosexuality as involving more than simply (erotic) sexuality, more than the identities built around the gendered objects of our desires and/or their destabilization.

While queer can be identified with the critique of heteronormativity and feminism with a focus on gender hierarchy, neither is a singular perspective. There are both differences within and overlaps between them. Feminists draw on queer theory and some queer theorists are also feminists; queer theorists are not entirely unconcerned with questions of social regulation and injustice, any more than feminists are indifferent to the privileging of heterosexuality (McLaughlin 2008). The differences are more a matter of emphasis and modes of theorizing. Nonetheless,

given the influence of queer and poststructuralist analysis in the 1990s, it was necessary to reassert the importance of material, structural inequalities (Ingraham 1996; Hennessy 2000). It is equally important, however, to recognize that heterosexuality is sustained not only structurally but also through the ways in which it is lived—the practices, meanings, and desires that are part and parcel of everyday heterosexual existence and that can also serve to perpetuate (and sometimes challenge) heteronormativity and gender hierarchy.

The necessity of taking account of the everyday was central to Connell's original argument on gender (1987), allowing for varied masculinities and femininities, for human agency and social change. Like gender, heterosexuality is not monolithic: there is considerable diversity in how it is practiced (Beasley et al. 2011). Heteronormativity, too, is not rigid and appears to accommodate to change; arguably the recent advances in rights granted to lesbian, gay, and transgendered individuals in many countries, mostly those of the "global North," have not deinstitutionalized heterosexuality but have merely shifted the boundaries of good sexual citizenship, assimilating those who live according to "responsible" neoliberal "family values," but excluding others (Seidman 2005; Richardson 2005). Moreover, changes in the state regulation of personal life (e.g., partnership and parenting rights) may reflect changing social attitudes, but have not effected a total social and cultural transformation. In the UK, for example, hostility and violence toward LGBT individuals is still widely reported, and among British schoolchildren the word "gay" has become a term of abuse. A sharper disjunction is evident in South Africa, where constitutional rights for sexual minorities coexist with the widespread practice of "corrective rape" of lesbians, reflecting complex issues of cultural beliefs and practices along with the legacies of colonialism and apartheid (Mkhize et al. 2010; Gunkel 2011).

Heterosexuality can be institutionalized in the presence and absence of laws against same-sex practices and relationships, in the presence and absence of rights to diverse sexual lifestyles. Among societies in which heterosexuality remains strongly institutionalized there is considerable variation in both its structural underpinnings and the social and cultural practices through which it is perpetuated, as well as the beliefs that sustain them. A critical sociological approach should,

therefore, be able to take account of both differing structural arrangements and other elements of the social.

The Multidimensional Social

These arguments are congruent with Connell's work. She has argued consistently against mono-causal, one-dimensional accounts of gender that do not take account of its complexity, of disjunctions and contradictions within the gender order (Connell 1987, 2002). In *Gender and Power* (1987) and in later work Connell has argued for a multidimensional approach to gender. In the most recent articulation of this argument, Connell and Pearse (2015) identify four dimensions of gender relations: power; "production, consumption and gendered accumulation"; emotions; and "symbolism, culture, discourse" (Connell and Pearse 2015). Just as there are "multiple dimensions in gender relations" (Connell 2002, 56), so, I would argue, there are in the ordering of heterosexuality.

Heterosexuality is multifaceted. It can be seen as a sexual preference or practice—an expression of desire and a set of sexual acts. As a social practice it involves far more than sexuality, including, for example, gendered divisions of labor in both domestic and market spheres. As an institution, it is structurally intertwined with gender hierarchy; bound up with marriage, family formation, and kinship ties; and subject to state regulation. It is also endowed with symbolic significance, with the meaning that heterosexual relations have for those living both within and outside them, with the binary cultural distinctions routinely made between women and men, between heterosexual and homosexual. It has subjective dimensions encompassing emotions and desires, feelings for and about others, which can range from love to loathing—including that manifested as homophobia. These various facets of heterosexuality could be accommodated within Connell's dimensions of gender relations. While I share her aim of allowing for complexity, variability, agency, and change, I have developed a slightly different approach.

Rather than thinking of heterosexuality or gender relations as being multidimensional, I see the social itself as multidimensional and the ordering of gender, sexuality and heterosexuality as reflecting this. This approach facilitates analysis of the intersections between gender and institutionalized heterosexuality and other social institutions, practices,

divisions, and differences. I have previously identified four dimensions of the social: social structure, practice (including interaction), meaning, and subjectivity/selfhood (Jackson 1999, 2006). These multiple dimensions of the social do not constitute an integrated unified whole. They cut across each other, sometimes reinforcing each other, sometimes producing disjunctions. Moreover, as I have previously argued (Jackson 2006), it is difficult, if not impossible, to "see" all dimensions at once—while we focus on one, others slip from view. So, for example, in analyzing the mechanisms whereby global capitalism produces huge gulfs between rich and poor we are not able to attend simultaneously to what cultural practices are meaningful to those living at any specific location within it. A perspective that illuminates one dimension may obscure another, suggesting the need for a degree of theoretical and methodological eclecticism in order to appreciate all aspects of the social. It is therefore necessary to bring together both structural and interpretive sociologies. While these have often been seen as incompatible, I suggest they enable us to attend to different, but equally verifiable, aspects of the social: the powerfully constraining effects of structures that preexist us, on the one hand, and, on the other, the meaningful interactions and practices of reflexive social actors through which everyday sociality goes on.

A multidimensional approach should enable us to take account of potential or actual variability and change and, just as important, of continuity, stability, and resistance to change—for example, the persistence of the gender divide despite diversity and change in what it means to be male or female, which is closely connected with the maintenance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Institutionalized heterosexuality is a key point of articulation between gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality are not, however, phenomena of the same order. "Gender," as I use the term, denotes the social division and cultural distinction between male and female, women and men. "Sexuality" encompasses all erotically significant aspects of social life including desires, practices, relationships, and identities. It is therefore more fluid and less objectively identifiable than gender since what is erotically significant is a matter of definition and shifts contextually as well as historically and cross-culturally. Gender is binary (the existence of third genders or gender-bending practices inevitably refer back to the binary); sexuality is not,

except in terms of the object of desire, as homo or hetero attraction. But sexuality is not reducible to this binary; it is not ordered only by the gender of the desired other but by numerous other potential preferences and practices that exist across the divides of gender and heterosexuality/ homosexuality (see, e.g., Whittier and Simon 2001). While there can, therefore, be many "sexualities," I use the singular term, "sexuality," to refer to the sphere of social life within which diverse forms of sexual life (sexualities) are pursued (just as there are varieties of jobs and tasks that take place within the sphere of work).

Sexuality as a sphere of life and gender as a social division are empirically interconnected in the institutionalization and practice of heterosexuality and the maintenance of heteronormativity. These interconnections are complex. Heterosexuality is implicated in the ordering of far more than sexuality, but it is, by definition, gendered; gender cannot be reduced to sexuality as it involves much wider social relations; sexuality cannot be reduced to gender or to the heterosexual/homosexual binary because it is about more than gendered desires or the gender of the object of desire. These interconnections are further complicated by the varied ways they operate within different dimensions of the social.

Heterosexuality within the Multidimensional Social

Structure, practice, meaning, and subjectivity/selfhood are all aspects of the social that interrelate in constituting heterosexuality and perpetuating heterosexual privilege. Social structure provides the constraining parameters within which we exist. Social reality, however, does not reside only in structures, but also in the everyday actions and interactions of individuals. These local and particular practices and the meanings associated with them are the stuff of everyday social life. It is in the space and context of the everyday that reflexive selfhood is both constituted and deployed, making sociality possible.

Structure

From a structural viewpoint gender is a hierarchical social division and heterosexuality is a social institution. Like Connell I see social structure in terms of "enduring or extensive patterns" of social relations and

as constraining on individuals (Connell 1987, 92; Connell and Pearse 2015, 73). This constraining effect is crucial; without it, social patterns cannot be considered structural. For example, eating is a social practice (Warde 2015) and is extensively patterned: there are particular, culturally specific ideas about what should be eaten, when, and how. I would not, however, see them as constraining in the same way as the inequalities that determine who has enough to eat. Similarly, sexual practices are patterned in specific and often predictable ways, but these are not structural in the same way as inequalities produced by gender and institutionalized heterosexuality. Social structure has a material facticity that exists independently of each of us—but since it is the product of a history of human relations and practices, it requires the continued compliance and reaffirmation of most of us to persist. Social-structural analyses give us purchase on the material inequalities and injustices that characterize our world.

I also concur with Connell's view of social structures as differentiated and subject to historical change and cross-national variability. The most pervasive structure of all, global capitalism, does not take identical forms even within the wealthy countries from which transnational capital is controlled. For example, Chang Kyung-Sup's (2010) analysis of South Korean modernity reveals how familialism remains exceptionally strong in the organization of Korea's capitalist economy and state institutions, resulting in a far less individualistic and far more male dominated society than in Europe or North America. It is also a society where heterosexuality is strongly institutionalized, despite the lack of laws against same-sex relations. Cross-national studies in capitalist East Asia highlight the differing ways in which gender relations can be ordered in societies with similar (post)industrial economies and a degree of shared cultural heritage and history (see, e.g., Sechiyama 2013). Patriarchal heterosexuality can coexist in diverse forms with a variety of local economic and social arrangements, and in both rich and poor countries within global divisions of labor and resources.

Structural factors order life within heterosexual relations and the options open to those who seek to live lesbian, gay, or queer lives. Most obviously choices are enabled and constrained by the regulative and coercive power of the state, which globally varies from jurisdictions that prescribe the death penalty for same-sex acts to those legislating for

near equality with heterosexuals (Itaborahy and Zhu 2015). The degree to which individuals can escape the constraints of institutionalized heterosexuality are also affected by other inequalities that intersect with those of gender and sexuality in relation to the wider capitalist order. Even before rights began to be extended to sexual minorities, consumer capitalism accommodated queer lifestyle choices within Western cultures (Evans 1993), but such choices are themselves the product of global and local inequalities. The queer lifestyles of the materially privileged rest upon the exploited labor of the underprivileged, often in poorer countries, who produce the commodities on which that lifestyle depends (Hennessy 2000). Within any given country lifestyle choices are not equally available to all. Throughout the world, for example, the constraints on working class lesbians, a consequence of both class and gender inequality, can limit access to everything from queer spaces to housing (Taylor 2004; Chao 2002).

Economic inequality also affects heterosexual lives in a variety of ways, influencing patterns of marriage and cohabitation and domestic divisions of labor (Irwin 2005). Innovations in heterosexual lifestyles often reflect class locations and their associated constraints and opportunities. To take one example, some of those heterosexual couples maintaining "distance" relationships or "living apart together" (Holmes 2004; Beasley, Brook, and Holmes 2011) find themselves in that situation because of the difficulties of pursuing two individual professional careers in the same geographic location, but who are also privileged by having the economic resources to maintain two households. Living apart together can, for others, be a result of financial constraint or care responsibilities (Duncan et al. 2013).

Personal and sexual life, then, is shaped by wider structural inequalities as well as being ordered by the intersection of heterosexuality and gender. While institutionalized heterosexuality and thus the heterosexual/homosexual binary can be considered structural, sexuality in general (including individual erotic desires, relationships, and practices) cannot. Nonetheless, since sexual relationships and practices are always embedded within wider, nonsexual relations, they are constrained and enabled by wider structural arrangements and individuals' locations within them, both locally and globally. Commercial sex illustrates this well. It has globalized along with other aspects of the capitalist economy,

resulting in the growth of sex tourism as well as the migration of sex workers, patterned in ways that often reflect inequalities between rich and poor nations and rich and poor within nations, as well as the intersections of these inequalities with gender and racialized hierarchies (Agustín 2007; Aoyama 2009; Kempadoo, Sanghera and Pattaniak 2012). Commercial sexual transactions, however, are also enacted within and through the localized practices of both sex workers and their clients and the meanings associated with them (see, e.g., O'Connell Davidson 2001; Ding and Ho 2008; Hoang 2015). Thus dimensions of the social other than the structural are in play here.

Practices

Gendered and sexual practices are both shaped by structures and can help to sustain them, but are also negotiated in everyday situations and can therefore sometimes contribute to challenge or change. Practices are closely connected with interaction—they are frequently effected in interaction with others, and, conversely, interaction involves locating ourselves within ongoing social activities. Through everyday interaction and practice we "do" gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality in two senses. First, in the ethnomethodological sense, this "doing" produces a socially intelligible "reality" as a "practical accomplishment" through everyday interpretive interaction, for example through the way we talk about men, women, and relationships. The second sense of "doing" is through actual practical activities, or "practices of intimacy" (Jamieson 2011), such as having sex, negotiating domestic chores, or organizing family parties.

The doing of heterosexuality is not just about its normativity but also, very centrally, about gender division and hierarchy. Heterosexual couples "do" heterosexuality and simultaneously do gender through divisions of labor and distributions of household resources—and often these practices become habitual and taken for granted. There are certainly normative ideas about who should do what in heterosexual households, and there is copious evidence internationally that women still do the bulk of domestic work, though to what degree varies from one country to another. To the extent that these gender-defined practices persist they contribute to upholding a male dominated heterosexual order, but they

are subject to change, negotiation, and, indeed, argument as each heterosexual couple goes on with their daily routines.

The practice of heterosexual sex is also patterned in particular ways. There are defining features (albeit historically and culturally variable) that determine what counts as (hetero) sex and the expected order of embodied procedures. There are notions of when and where it should occur and standards of both good and bad sex, elaborated in self-help manuals instructing couples in how to do it better (Jackson and Scott 2010). Gendered patterns of heterosexual sex are, in some ways and some places, changing. Active engagement in heterosex has become normalized among young women in many wealthier countries and there is evidence that, in the UK at least, they are becoming more sexually adventurous (Mercer et al. 2013). Yet double standards persist, as do sexual objectification, coercive sex, and sexual violence—all of which are global issues, occurring in societies where young women's sexual conduct is strictly controlled as well as those where it is not.

In some societies heteronormativity is less absolute than it was in the past, but even in the most liberal places much of everyday life still proceeds on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless known to be otherwise. Heteronormativity is mobilized and reproduced in everyday life through routine activities in which gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality interconnect. In daily interaction women's location within heterosexual relations, as wives and mothers, is often assumed. In Britain (still) adult women are routinely (much to my irritation) addressed as "Mrs.," a practice that positions them in terms of marital status, but to which men are not subjected. Women are still frequently evaluated in terms of their (hetero)sexual attractiveness. It has been suggested that "erotic capital" can aid women's career advancement (Hakim 2011), but if so it reinforces both gender division and heteronormativity—as well as being unequally available and dependant on age-related and culturally specific standards of beauty. Hence gendered assumptions are often informed by heterosexual ones. But this does not apply in the same way to heterosexual men. While womanliness is almost always equated with (hetero)sexual attractiveness and (heterosexual) domesticity, manliness can be validated in numerous nonsexual ways (Connell 1987, 2002). Where a man's or boy's heterosexuality is unquestioned, his gender is less bound to and defined by (hetero)sexuality than that of a woman, but

if his embodied practices are read as effeminate this can lead to imputations of homosexuality and undermine his claims to masculinity.

Embodied practices such as dress, posture, and demeanor are central to the performance of masculinity and femininity and are historically and culturally variable. These practices are sometimes conscious, as in choosing what to wear, albeit constrained by standards of what is acceptable in a given social setting and appropriate to our gender. Some are unconscious, not in a psychoanalytic sense, but as habitually embodied in our everyday doing of gender. These performances are available to be read by others and thus associated with the meanings of femininity and masculinity and their relationship with heterosexuality.

Heteronormative Gendered and Sexual Meanings

Meanings and practices often interlock so that it is often hard to tease them apart. Social practices are sustained by wider cultural mores, but also by the "sense-making" that goes on in everyday social interaction. Like practices, meanings can support the status quo—when they are normative or ideological—or they can be neutral or oppositional. The realm of meaning is close to Connell and Pearse's (2015) "symbolism, culture, discourse." It includes discourses, those meanings circulating within the wider culture, as well as those emergent from and enmeshed with everyday interaction—which can be very specific to a given setting and its participants. Meaning thus cuts across macro and micro aspects of social relations, although the two can intersect. For example, a couple might be influenced by cultural discourses of romantic love but might have their own idiosyncratic understanding of what, for them, is romantic. Some meanings, especially in the form of discourses, can be seen as both deriving from and helping to sustain given social structures, such as ideas about innate differences between men and women. These wider discourses also then operate within and guide routine social practices in the form of commonsense knowledge.

From a macro-social perspective, gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality are constituted as objects of discourse. The discourses in circulation at any historical moment within a given society serve to distinguish male from female, to define what is sexual and what is "normal." Such discourses can and do change: in many countries same-sex attraction

is no longer as deviant as it once was. Yet where there have been advances in the social inclusion of lesbians and gay men, these have been paralleled by the increasing acceptance of the idea that "sexual orientation" is innate; thus the normalization of gay and lesbian lifestyles does not appear to have unsettled the understanding of heterosexuality as a "natural" proclivity of the majority. The rights gained by transgendered people have made it possible to think of gender as mutable for some, but has not dislodged the assumption that we should all, by our natures, belong to one category or the other or that any observable or imagined differences in the aptitudes and temperament of women and men are "natural." In large swathes of the world heteronormative condemnation of sexual "others" remains entrenched. Ironically, there are numerous nations where taboos against same-sex practices derive from British colonial rule but where gay and lesbian sex is now understood as "un-Asian" or "un-African" (Johnson 2006; Gunkel 2011.

The shifts in and contestations of the meanings of normative and nonnormative sexualities in many parts of the world are inexplicable if norms are conceived simply as properties of a cultural order external to us. Any norm, Judith Butler contends, "renders the social field intelligible" (2004, 42). Such intelligibility, however, does not simply derive from external norms but is also negotiated in, and emergent from, the mundane social interaction through which each of us makes sense of our own and others' gendered and sexual lives. Creating a sense of an intelligibly gendered, heterosexually ordered world involves a variety of cultural competences and complex interpretational processes, evident even in the simple act of attributing gender to another person (Kessler and McKenna 1978; West and Zimmerman 1987). The interpretive work this involves goes unnoticed because it is so habitual that it is assumed that we are simply recognizing a natural fact. Thus, insofar as heteronormativity persists in everyday meaning-making, it is contingent upon being constantly reaffirmed; it can also, potentially at least, be unsettled or renegotiated.

The Social Self

To be active meaning-making subjects able to interact with others requires a self that is reflexive and relational. Selfhood is social: it

originates not inside ourselves, but through interactions with others and, through such interactions, is continually modified over time. These ideas derive from the work of George Herbert Mead (1934) for whom the self is not a fixed inner essence of the individual, but is always in process by virtue of its reflexivity. It is this reflexivity that makes the self part of the social rather than in some way outside or opposed to it. Reflexive selfhood is based on the human capacity to see ourselves as both subject and object, as "I" and "Me," and therefore to reflect back on ourselves and locate ourselves in relation to others. It makes sociality, and the interpretive processes on which it rests, possible. This conceptualization of the self allows for agency through the emphasis on interpretive processes, but agency here is not envisaged as existing in opposition to the social but as embedded *in* the social. Agency can exist even in conformity: we all reflexively understand our social worlds and act in accordance with that understanding even when we behave wholly conventionally.

This idea of the self fits with Gagnon and Simon's (1974, 2004) interactionist account of the social origins of sexuality. Gagnon and Simon argued for an analytical separation between the gendered and sexual aspects of the self, seeing them as empirically and contingently, rather than necessarily, interrelated. The forms that gendered and sexual selfhood take are culturally and historically specific; particular modes of self-construction become available at different historical moments in specific social locations. Moreover, gendered and sexual selves are reflexively renegotiated or reconfirmed throughout our lives, allowing for some fluidity. This does not mean that we are free to make and remake our sexual selves just as we please—we are constrained by the cultural and interpersonal resources available to us within the social milieu we inhabit, but because these are resources rather than determinants, variability and change are possible. We are not all sexually alike, nor are our sexualities fixed over our life span.

In most societies gender attribution is foundational to the self; the moment we are born, or even before, we are ascribed a gender. This significant act of social categorization profoundly affects our earliest and ongoing sense of who we are and our place in the world (both for those who accept their initial gender attribution and those who seek to change or transcend it). From this perspective, a gendered sense of self

precedes our awareness of ourselves as sexual. This does not mean that children are intrinsically asexual (or intrinsically sexual); rather, because access to crucial elements of adult sexual knowledge is restricted, children cannot make sense of themselves as sexual until they gain access to the relevant sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon 2004). While children in Western societies now become sexually knowing earlier than in the recent past, the pattern of gendered self-awareness preceding sexual self-awareness remains (see Jackson and Scott 2010). In relation to heterosexuality, however, the picture changes, because children come to understand nonsexual aspects of heterosexuality—families, mothers and fathers, for example—before they gain access to specifically sexual scripts. Such knowledge is a resource available for reconceptualization as sexually significant once children become sexually self-aware.

This approach assumes variable outcomes in the process of self-formation; there is no single way of being heterosexual—or homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, or queer—although gender remains significant. While there are multiple ways of being male or female, for young heterosexuals becoming sexual is profoundly gendered and so are sexual relations in later life. Becoming lesbian or gay does not mean a loss of gender since same-sex sexuality, as much as heterosexuality, is defined by gender—but it does require negotiating different ways of investing gender with erotic significance and different forms of gendered self-understanding. How this occurs varies historically depending on the kinds of stories of becoming that are culturally available in any given time or place. It is significant, however, that lesbians and gay men are often called on to account for their sexuality, while heterosexuals generally are not, which is indicative of the consequences of heteronormative and gendered assumptions for the ways we understand ourselves and others.

Applying the Framework: Heterosexuality in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom

If, as I have argued, the institutionalization, practice, and meaning of heterosexuality are historically and culturally variable, then a comparative study of two differing locations should cast some light on this. In our research on women's experience of social change in Hong Kong and Britain, the ordering of heterosexual relations and the consequences of

institutionalized heterosexuality have been key issues. We interviewed 14 university educated young women aged 20–26 and 12 of their mothers in Hong Kong and 13 similarly placed young women and 12 of their mothers in the UK and also conducted focus groups with young women. There were both similarities and differences between the Hong Kong and UK samples, as well as variations within them, but here I focus on some of the differences we found in "practices of intimacy" (Jamieson 2011), in particular mothers' attitudes to and regulation of their daughters' sexual lives (see Jackson and Ho 2014). The practices we identified were, of course, mediated through the accounts of our participants and therefore the way they reflexively make sense of them. Such qualitative data does not directly tell us about social structures, but in interpreting women's accounts it became clear that their lives were shaped by structural constraints as well as being imbued with meanings deriving from their specific cultural heritages and everyday interaction.

Although Hong Kong is now richer than the UK in terms of per capita GDP, an immense gulf between the rich and poor persists—one of the legacies of the colonial era in which the native population was largely left to fend for themselves, with very little welfare provision beyond (inadequate) public housing. The material consequences of this situation proved to be very important in understanding the lives of the women we interviewed. Partly as a result of this and partly as a legacy of different forms of family organization, the Hong Kong women relied far more on the wider family for economic and social support than the British women, and norms of filial obligation still affected how young Hong Kong women saw their responsibilities to their parents (see Jackson, Ho, and Na 2013). But how women practiced their intimate lives was not wholly determined by structural factors or cultural mores, nor were the meanings it had for them. It was clear that women were exercising considerable agency and reflexivity in negotiating their lives and relationships within given social structural and cultural contexts.

Generally, mothers exercised far stricter discipline over daughters in Hong Kong, in keeping with norms of filial piety but also because of the need to ensure their daughters' educational and future material success in the context of economic uncertainty, Hong Kong's fiercely competitive capitalist order, and their own likely dependence on their children in old age. This was reflected in their management of their daughters'

sexuality, in that they had encouraged their daughters to concentrate on educational and career advancement rather than romantic attachments until they were deemed of marriageable age (in their late twenties). While British mothers were also concerned about the consequences of the economic climate for their daughters' futures, they were far more relaxed about their career aspirations, summed up by a frequently uttered phrase, "as long as she's happy." The British young women grew up with greater freedom and were also able to develop more independence from their parents on reaching adulthood. Most left home for good once they began higher education, though a few had become "boomerang" children, returning home because of lack of a job or relationship failure. All the Hong Kong young women, however, still lived with their parents, not only due to the cultural expectation that they would do so until they married but also because of the acute shortage of affordable housing (in the most expensive housing market in the world). This meant that their mothers continued exercising surveillance over daughters' conduct, including sexual conduct, into adulthood.

British women in both generations, with the exception of one deeply religious mother-daughter pair, seemed to accept teenage sexual experimentation as a "normal" aspect of growing up and took nonmarital sexuality for granted as part of life. The British mothers typically had allowed their daughters to sleep with their (predominantly male) sexual partners at home, to stay with them on weekends, or go on holiday with them—and this had often begun before daughters left home to attend universities. They were concerned about the risk of early pregnancy and most ensured their daughters had access to contraception, but otherwise did not interfere in their sexual lives, though permitting them to use the parental home for sexual encounters could be seen as a means of ensuring they were safe. As one mother noted, it also made it possible for a daughter to return to live in the parental home without it unduly constraining her social life. Nonetheless, heteronormativity was reinforced through the expectation that daughters would have boyfriends and would engage in (hetero)sexual activity. One young woman commented that her parents would be worried if she ended up as a "35-old virgin."

In Hong Kong virginity prior to marriage remains normative and part of the gendered meaning and practice of heterosexuality. Since all the young Hong Kong women lived with their parents, this severely lim-

ited their sexual opportunities—sleeping with partners in the parental home was out of the question. Many mothers assiduously policed their daughters' virginity; one told us that "virginity is a gift to your lifelong partner," while her daughter complained that her mother was constantly checking her virginity status. Young women gave many examples of how their mothers sought to discourage sexual activity, from dire warnings against losing their virginity to, in one case, telling a daughter's boyfriend not to have sex with her. Whether or not daughters complied with their mothers' wishes (they were not all avowed virgins), they revealed a high degree of reflexivity in discussing these issues with us, particularly in the focus group discussion, often distancing themselves from their mothers through the use of humor. Through this strategy they demonstrated relational selfhood—locating themselves in relation to their mothers and in relation to the other young women in the group, creating a shared sense of "what mothers were like" and how daughters could deal with this.

Hong Kong also remains far more heteronormative than Britain (see Kong 2011; Tang 2011). Its colonial laws against homosexuality survived until 1991, and there is no protection against discrimination for lesbians and gay men. Hong Kong mothers frequently saw lesbianism as "abnormal," though the daughters were more accepting of sexual diversity. There were two young lesbians in our Hong Kong sample: the mother of one of them said that it took her two years (and the fear of losing her daughter altogether) to accept it; the other does not acknowledge her daughter's sexuality. Both British generations expressed liberal attitudes to lesbianism; for example, one mother said "the gender of the person that loves your child is less important than the quality of the love." The British mothers also often referred directly to changing structural circumstances—that living as a lesbian today in Britain has become much easier than in their own youth as a result of increased sexual rights.

Some of the differences discussed here are products of meanings and practices derived from cultural heritage, such as the continued importance of filial piety in Chinese societies; others are adaptations to historical, socioeconomic, and political conditions. But these are always negotiated by women possessed of the ability to be reflexive about the constraints on their lives.

Conclusion

This brief discussion of differences between two territories is indicative of the range of aspects of the social that need to be taken into account in any analysis of heterosexuality. A full picture can only emerge through consideration of the structures, practices, and meanings of heterosexuality and gender and of subjective gendered and sexual selfhood in any given society. This is probably more than can be achieved within any single study, but it can serve to sensitize us to the limits of what can be discovered and how. It is also crucial to take account of gender hierarchy as well as heteronormativity and the complex interconnections between gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality within each dimension of the social.

This is why I claim that a focus on heteronormativity is not enough and why queer theory, while offering some useful insights, can never do as much as a more sociological analysis because of its limited appreciation of how heterosexuality works. Queer theorists are simply not interested in what goes on, for example, within "normal" heterosexual families (or, for that matter, in those founded on same-sex partnerships). The idea of discursively (and sometimes psychoanalytically) constituted subjectivity, deriving from poststructuralist theory, also leaves little room for agency or reflexivity. Finally, queer theory, because of the avoidance of totalizing claims about the social world, cannot deal with structural issues of power and domination and how gender hierarchy figures in the maintenance of institutionalized heterosexuality.

I am therefore arguing that we do still need social structural analysis: it is not outmoded and is, if anything, even more vital to understanding the many inequalities and oppressions that exist globally. A structural analysis alone, however, is not enough to explore all the complexities of human gendered and sexual social relations and therefore has to be open to supplementation by other forms of analysis. I have suggested that the linkages between gender and heterosexuality are structurally particularly strong, but specific structural linkages between gender and heterosexuality cannot be assumed to *determine* other points of connection within other dimensions of the social. We cannot deduce from structural arrangements how individuals practice heterosexuality or other sexualities, their meanings, or how they contribute to shaping

the self even within one specific part of the world, let alone account for cross-national variations that might be affected by local cultures and practices as well as structural factors.
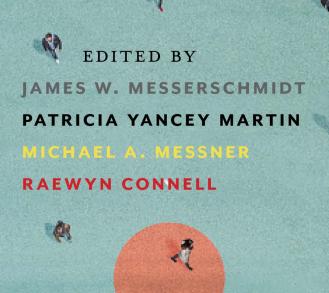
NOTE

1 The term "heteronormativity" refers to the taken for granted assumption that heterosexuality is the (only) natural form of sexuality and the (only) normal form of couple relationship and family formation. The term is generally extended to social institutions, practices, and laws or norms based on this assumption. Heteronormative ideas, practices, and institutions therefore serve to position anyone who is not 100 percent heterosexual as "other."

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GENDER
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