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Heterosexuality

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Introduction

Heterosexuality is both pervasive and normative in the current sociocultural milieu. Due to its privileged societal status, heterosexuality is also (ironically) quite elusive. Within the social science literature, heterosexuality is generally defined as a sexual or relational identity (belonging to individuals or groups) and also as a social institution (which structures daily life). Historically, heterosexuality has largely been ignored in psychological theory and research as a topic of, or for, analysis. Psychological theory has assumed that heterosexuality is a 'given' and 'normal', and focused its research on sexualities that sit outside this supposed norm (e.g. homosexuality, lesbianism). Such research has functioned to further normalise heterosexuality, while pathologising other ways of being sexual, without taking into account the historical conditions that have produced heterosexuality as the 'norm'. Psychological research on heterosexual men and women has typically been carried out in a completely taken-for-granted manner, with heterosexuality being overlooked as a category of analysis and as a factor contributing to individual psychologies and behaviours.

In this chapter, a brief history of the lack of psychological work on heterosexuality is initially provided, followed by a comprehensive review of the literature in the area of psychology (drawing also on materials from disciplines such as sociology, gender studies, history, and biology). Next, the current debates in the field of psychology when it comes to theorising heterosexuality are covered. This discussion encompasses mainstream and critical approaches to understanding heterosexuality and delves into biological and social explanations. Implications of these approaches are then discussed in terms of their applicability to the wider world (e.g. social context, daily lives, daily practices, and social and relational identities/desires). Lastly, future directions for research are highlighted, with an emphasis on approaches that (among other

factors) take into consideration the social context for shaping something like 'heterosexuality'.

History

Historically, heterosexuality as an object of analysis, in its own right, has not been on psychology's radar. There is a lack of research and theorising when it comes to heterosexuality (as an institution, a sexual or relational identity, or an everyday practice), within the history of psychology. Heterosexuality has typically been approached as a natural 'given' and therefore largely escaped analysis. What have been extensively investigated are non-heterosexualities, which ostensibly violate the heterosexual norm. For example, homosexuality remained in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1973 (see Riggs, *Gay Men*, this volume), indicating that it was firmly grounded as a non-normative and pathological sexual orientation, even into the latter part of the twentieth century. Heterosexuality has typically entered psychological discourse only when describing the 'other' (e.g. in psychological research comparing 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals'); however, the term 'heterosexuality', the idea of heterosexuality, and related heterosexual constructs, do have a history, even if this is outside psychology.

History of the term 'heterosexuality'

The term 'heterosexuality' was first used in the late 1800s, with varying meanings. For example, James G. Kiernan used the term 'heterosexual' in 1892 to denote anything but normality (Katz, 2007), and the term 'heterosexual' was used to signal varied 'feelings' for both sexes by an individual (what we might refer to as bisexuality today). This tendency was described as a perversion and associated with a psychological condition called 'psychical hermaphroditism' (Katz, 2007, p. 20). The well-known sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing used the term 'heterosexuality' in *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886) quite differently. For him, heterosexuality signified a procreative, sex-differentiated, and erotic 'sexual instinct' that did not necessarily always have procreation at the fore, but was instinctually driven by it. Heterosexuality, in this context, was sex with the 'opposite sex', and (confusingly) was a 'normal' sex that was still associated with fetishism and non-procreative perversion (Katz, 2007).

Reproduction was so tightly bound with sex for so many centuries that to have sex for pleasure was considered lustful, if not always sinful. In this period, heterosexuality was not deemed normal but seen as a perversion: an idea that lasted until the 1920s (Katz, 2007), when heterosexuality came to occupy a different meaning of being a normal sexuality that involved sex with someone of the 'opposite sex', without any ties to reproduction.

Creating the heterosexual

While Krafft-Ebing saw heterosexuality as tied up with the reproductive instinct (although not only about reproduction), it was Sigmund Freud (2000 [1905]) who popularised the idea that heterosexuality was biologically determined and that people had an internal sexual libido from infancy. Freud was one of the first in modernity to theorise that sex was pleasure-driven, developmental, and intra-psychic, rather than merely about procreation. He also firmly positioned his ideas as scientific versus morally bound or religious. His thoughts were tied to, reflected, and partly created the shift from the later-Victorian procreation ethic to the modern 'pleasure principle' (Katz, 2007). In a context where same-sex sexuality was increasingly pathologised and male-female relations normalised, Freud initiated a discussion of heterosexuality and homosexuality as based on *feelings* versus sexual acts. This indicated a shift from acts of procreation (and non-procreation) to emotions that dictated erotic drive, instinct, desire, and love, which has become a modern-day norm (Katz, 2007).

One of the most important ideas Freud relayed was that sexuality developed in stages and that both heterosexuality and homosexuality could be the outcome of such development (even though heterosexuality was the preferred and 'normal' path). Through the 1920s and 1930s, the concept of heterosexuality entered public consciousness in the West, and by World War II heterosexuality was solidified in the sexual landscape (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Katz, 2007), in a way which was very much predicated on a two-sex binary model of masculinity and femininity (Fausto-Sterling, 2000).

Early theorising of (hetero)sexuality

Freud and Krafft-Ebing (and another of their contemporaries, Havelock Ellis, 1859–1939) saw heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as the 'inversion' of this. Therefore, heterosexuality was good and normal, whereas homosexuality was abnormal and bad: a division which would come to dominate twentieth-century visions of sexuality (Katz, 2007). Having a differing sexual orientation according to whether you were male or female was seen as part of an individual's overall sex role identity development. Here, attraction towards women was associated with a masculine identity and attraction towards men with a feminine identity (Storms, 1980). According to Freud (1959 [1922]), an unresolved Oedipal complex would compel a boy to identify with his mother sexually and to "transform himself into her" (p. 40) and become feminine – in that he would be attracted to males, whereas unresolved penis envy would lead a girl to "manifest homosexuality and exhibit markedly masculine traits" (p. 50).

Freud's binary model of sexuality was addressed by Alfred Kinsey in the mid-twentieth century when Kinsey and his colleagues examined a wide range of sexual behaviours within the United States (Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953). Based on

these observations, Kinsey devised a heterosexuality/homosexuality rating scale with exclusively heterosexual at one end and exclusively same-sex attracted (what Kinsey called homosexual) at the other. It was Kinsey's assertion that, although most individuals reported being heterosexual and a minority reported being gay, almost all reported feelings, thoughts, or behaviours that were somewhere in between. Kinsey (1953) critiqued the notion that "behaviour is either normal or abnormal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, heterosexual or homosexual [sic]" as "many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme" (p. 639). Kinsey saw erotic orientation as shaping sexual orientation based on an individually learned erotic responsiveness to either men or women (Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953; see also Bows-Catton & Hayfield, *Bisexuality*, this volume).

Kinsey's model was revised to a two-dimensional model in the 1970s under the assumption that heterosexuality and homosexuality could be "separate, orthogonal erotic dimensions rather than opposite extremes of a single, bipolar dimension" (Storms, 1980, p. 785). This theory argued that individuals can have independent homoerotic or heteroerotic orientations, rather than a uni-dimensional model in which it is an either/or situation (Storms, 1978, 1980). Therefore, in this model, one may be highly attracted to men and women, or not feel great attraction to men or women, with one orientation or attraction not affecting the other. The preference for this interpretation can be contextualised in terms of the gay rights movements, which closely followed Kinsey's work in terms of chronology. Such groups were invested in positioning themselves as a separate category from heterosexuals but as deserving of equal rights (Bernstein, 2002).

In the 1970s, postmodern theories of sexuality departed from the view that sexuality was inborn, natural, and inevitable. Sexual script theory asserted that sexuality was shaped by already available and socially produced sexual scripts on which people could draw on, to make sense of and enact their sexuality (Byrne, 1977; Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Foucault's (1978) revolutionary work on the history of sexuality was seminal in future thinking on the social construction of heterosexuality. It asserted that sexuality was not an internal biological drive (or libido) but a product of complex power systems that produced particular ways of being sexual (with some versions privileged over others).

Second-wave feminist critiques of heterosexuality

The first historic break (in modernity) from the assumption of heterosexuality as normal and biologically determined came from second-wave feminists within the West. Betty Friedan (1963) was one of the first to note that heterosexuality did not seem to treat men and women equally, but heavily disadvantaged women. Others explicitly critiqued male supremacy under patriarchy and the heterosexual 'caste system' wherein women were positioned as

inferior to men (Millett, 1970). Biological sex was increasingly differentiated from culturally mediated *gender*, which was identified as a psychological and cultural construct that was mainly transmitted via socialisation (Oakley, 1972; Wittig, 1993): where femininity (and women) were subordinate to men (and masculinity) (Millett, 1970). Gayle Rubin (1975) coined the term 'sex/gender system' to denote the obligatory heterosexuality which positioned men and women in different ways: "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (p. 159). From this perspective, women and men were ascribed differing gender roles that supported a heterosexual system, under patriarchy, which subjugated women and benefited men.

The ideology of heterosexuality was theorised to promote a heterosexual hegemony (based on Gramsci's work) that limited the possibility for alternative ways of being (Small, 1975). Heterosexuality started being theorised by feminists as not being given or inborn, but as part of a social system that required urgent analysis and critique (Wittig, 1992). Much like the pre-1900s distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, Wittig noted that "straight society is based on the necessity of the different/other" (1992, pp. 28–29). This flourishing feminist work focused specifically on heterosexuality as an institution and sought to problematise the taken-for-granted nature by which heterosexuality was normalised. It was theorised that heterosexuality was problematic due to its integral ties to patriarchal social and economic systems, and that this system, and participation in heterosexuality, greatly disadvantaged women.

The most explicit critical analysis of heterosexuality came in 1980 with the work of Adrienne Rich (1929–2012), who highlighted the pressure on women to be heterosexual. She argued that women were not born heterosexual, nor did they freely choose to become heterosexual, but that they were coerced into heterosexuality by a social system that required 'compulsory heterosexuality' from them. Rich (1980), like others, criticised biological approaches to understanding heterosexuality, asserting that this 'sexual orientation' was not innate or predetermined, but socially and culturally produced as naturalised.

Such interrogations of heterosexuality by feminist theorists, combined with postmodern theories of sexuality, paved the way for contemporary critical research and theorising regarding heterosexuality. Much of mainstream psychological research has largely ignored such interrogations of heterosexuality and tends to hold more biological, essentialist views, or models that combine a biological and a developmental/social approach (Barker, 2007).

Key theory and research

Given the history of feminist and other discussions about heterosexuality, it is surprising that in the majority of social science literature it is rare for

heterosexuality to be acknowledged, and even more so for it to be criticised (Richardson, 1996, 2004). As Seidman (2005) has noted, the impact of the "regimes of normative heterosexuality" on heterosexuality have largely been ignored (p. 40). Even within some critical and queer theorising, analysis of heterosexuality has focused typically on the regulation of homosexuality or the necessity of homosexuality to give heterosexuality meaning rather than explicitly theorising heterosexuality (Weeks, 1996). The only work that has been conducted about what heterosexuality is, or means, has emerged from other critical and feminist perspectives (within and outside psychology). Feminist psychology in particular has devoted scholarly attention to examining the nature and manifestations of heterosexuality as an institution, as a sexual and relational identity, and as an everyday practice. Other mainstream approaches to psychology tend to only examine heterosexuality in the context of its sexual 'others' that ostensibly defy the heterosexual norm (Richardson, 1996).

Theorising heterosexuality

The second-wave feminist critique of heterosexuality has led to in-depth theorising around the institution of heterosexuality in the contemporary context by some critical and feminist work. Building on the work of Rich (1980) and others (e.g. de Beauvoir, 1953 [1949]; Millett, 1970; Oakley, 1972; Rubin, 1975), feminist scholars have argued that heterosexuality needs greater analytic attention within psychology (Kitzinger et al., 1992; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993) to remedy the heterocentrism evident in the discipline, even among feminists (Kitzinger, 1994). Those in disciplines such as sociology have also given analytic attention to the topic (Herek, 1998; Ingraham, 2008, 2005; Jackson, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1999; Richardson, 1996).

Contemporary work has also critiqued the myth that heterosexuality is a given, natural, and biologically determined (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993; Seidman, 2010; Tiefer, 2004). What gives heterosexuality its power and privilege is the taken-for-granted idea that it is a natural occurrence based upon biological sex, as well as its links to procreation (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Heterosexuality has been theorised as a privileged and invisible category, akin to being white, able-bodied, and middle-class (Braun, 2000; Jackson, 2006), unless in the presence of the 'other' (non-heterosexuals) (Butler, 1990). Heterosexuality is an institution which one does not see, and we, as social actors, participate in an unacknowledged heterosexual world (Ingraham, 2005). For example, no one has to come out as 'heterosexual' – the only time one's sexuality or sexual orientation is made relevant is when it deviates from the norm (of heterosexuality). To be heterosexual is to be privileged over other sexualities, as heterosexuality does not require 'accounting for' in the way other sexualities/sexual orientations do. In addition, although heterosexuality is not a monolithic entity, most heterosexuals do not typically experience some of the

daily difficulties or prejudice, that people of other non-heterosexualities might, for violating deeply entrenched norms and social values about how social and sexual relations should manifest.

Heteronormativity

The normative function of heterosexuality within daily life has been termed heteronormativity (a term coined by Warner, 1991). As the successor to Rich's (1980) concept of compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity refers to the "suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are: only two genders; that gender reflects biological sex and that only sexual attraction between these 'opposite' genders is natural or acceptable" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 441). Heteronormativity structures social beliefs, organisations, policies, and institutional practices (Hubbard, 2008; Seidman, 2009), as well as extending to the mundane everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged and taken-for-granted as normal and natural (Martin, 2009). Heteronormativity regulates those within and outside it (Jackson, 2006), holding a cultural hegemony that reproduces the heterosexual/gay binary and positions gay as its subordinate, at the same time as it institutionalises heterosexuality as the norm (Hubbard, 2008).

Linked to heteronormativity is the concept of heterosexism (Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993), which promotes "heterosexuality as the sole, legitimate expression of sexuality and affection" (Bohan, 1996, p. 39). Heterosexism occurs at different levels – the everyday and the structural. Everyday heterosexism denotes daily practices by which assumptions of heterosexuality govern the thought and actions of individuals (Braun, 2000). For example, research has documented how heterosexist assumptions reproduce heteronormativity in after-hours medical calls (Kitzinger, 2005) as well as the depictions we see on anniversary greeting cards (Clarke et al., 2010). Structural or cultural heterosexism "includes the tacit communication of these ideas via society's norms, institutions, laws, cultural forms, and even scientific practices" (Bohan, 1996, p. 39). Heterosexist assumptions not only marginalise those who are non-heterosexual, in a number of ways, but perpetuate and maintain heterosexuality as the norm.

Researching heteronormativity

Based on such theorising and insights, a string of research has examined how heterosexuality is naturalised and organised institutionally (Ingraham, 1996), via social and cultural practices and representations (Ingraham, 2008) and in the mundane everyday (Martin, 2009). These investigations are based on the assertion that heteronormativity structures daily life on many levels, above and beyond sexuality and sexual attraction (Jackson, 2011). On a structural level, there are numerous policies and government-sanctioned activities that protect

and promote heterosexuality, such as legal benefits for married couples, marriage promotion workshops (Heath, 2009), tax breaks for families with children, and other social and economic policies that protect monogamous, lifelong, and procreative relations between men and women.

The knowledge that is produced via scientific research and taught at schools and universities tends to perpetuate heteronormative assumptions. University textbooks have been analysed for the way they enact institutional heterosexual hegemony (often in their depiction/representation of the other/gay) (Barker, 2007; Phillips, 1991). Phillips (1991) identified how introductory sociological texts from the 1940s to the 1980s moved from depicting heterosexist ideas in blatant ways (homosexuality as deviance) to more subtle ways, with homosexuality as inadequate/inaccurate and heterosexuality as the norm (Phillips, 1991). Similar depictions have occurred in psychology texts – although psychology texts tend to draw on more reductionist and biological approaches to sexuality. Introductory psychology texts in the 1980s either excluded Lesbian/Gay psychology or depicted it in chapters covering abnormal psychology or psychopathology (King, 1988). Research on textbooks post-2000 indicated that there have been improvements in the way that lesbian and gay heterosexualities are presented (Barker, 2007), but there tended to be excessive focus on the origins of homosexuality, and discussion about intimate relationships and sexuality across this lifespan were largely heteronormative (Barker, 2007). Barker (2007) also noted how discussions of sexual orientation were based on biological essentialism, as fixed and dichotomous (with topics such as bisexuality rarely covered adequately). Men and women were portrayed as 'opposites' and there was a lack of discussion when it came to sex/gender diversity outside pathologising language that drew on the two-gender model. Classrooms have also been identified as heterosexist, with challenges to this heterosexism attracting great opposition from students and creating concerns regarding job security for instructors (Eyre, 1993).

Beyond the structural, heteronormativity is actively (re)produced in social and cultural contexts (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). This includes representational norms and tropes within the media (Farvid & Braun, 2006, 2013, 2014; Gill, 2008, 2009; Kolehmainen, 2012) that promote heterosexuality and the heterosexual couple as the idealised norm (Dean, 2011). There are multitudes of organised and ritualistic practices, such as weddings, baby showers, hen/stag dos, high school balls/proms, and dating, that are normalised within heteronormativity (Dean, 2011; Ingraham, 2008). Even with the increasingly common and visible diverse family structures, such as adopted, gay/lesbian/bisexual, surrogates, step-families, blended families, and extended families, "only a [...] specific order based on the heterosexual couple and the nuclear family around it continues to be [...] privileged and naturalised" (Rossi, 2011, p. 19).

Broader social representations and cultural practices aside, heterosexuality is something that is performed and achieved in the everyday (Coates, 2013; Gough & Edwards, 1998). Language and social interactions are very much involved in reproducing the heteronormative order where heterosexuality is naturalised, but also remains invisible (Kitzinger, 2005). For example, research has examined the way mothers' talk with their children promotes heteronormativity by assuming (and promoting) future heterosexual love relationships (like heterosexual marriage), while rendering invisible gay and lesbianism (Martin, 2009).

The norms discussed above have implications for individual psychologies, identity constructions and social/relational activities. Heteronormativity shapes who we are and can be, and, for those who do not fit in, it can create stigmatisation and difficulty. The masculine and feminine subjects created by contemporary heteronormative discourse are multiple and complex, but still tend to reify aspects of traditional and sexist identities, and these have implications for the options available to individuals in terms of practice. It is important to remember that such subjectivities are not unitary, and are experienced and enacted differently by different people (Martin, 2009).

Aside from critical approaches to understanding heterosexuality, there is a plethora of biological research that seeks to account for differing sexual orientations – without delving specifically into what heterosexuality is or means. From this perspective, heterosexuality is the assumed norm and seemingly does not warrant analysis, although this is, of course, a massive oversight.

Biological explanations

Biological approaches (within and outside psychology) presume "that heterosexuality is so well understood, so obviously the 'natural' evolutionary consequence of reproductive advantage, that only deviations from it are theoretically problematic and need investigation" (Bem, 1996, p. 320). Such research typically comes from the viewpoint that "whatever cues attract men and women to each other, it is hard to escape the conclusion that they are more or less wired in, the product of an evolutionary history parallel to that of sexual reproduction itself" (Pillard & Bailey, 1998, p. 348). Hence, inquiries into heterosexuality are not common from this perspective – heterosexuality and homosexuality are merely seen as sexual orientations, and the main topic of study is the cause and characteristics of non-heterosexualities.

Five dimensions of sexuality are often said to interact, from this biological perspective, to create different ways of being sexual. These are: genetic aspects (in terms of chromosomes); human genitals (internal and external structures and reproduction); non-genital morphological characteristics (e.g. changes that occur at puberty); neurological dimension (brain structures); and behavioural dimension (sexual orientation and sex-typical behaviour) (Ellis & Ames, 1987).

When it comes to biological research and heterosexuality, only the differences between sexual orientations have been investigated. Over several decades, research has examined the 'cause' or characteristics of homosexuality. This includes research on the neuroanatomical differences between straight and gay people (Allen & Gorski, 1992; Byne et al., 2001; LeVay, 1991; Swaab et al., 1997), bodily shape and size (Bogaert & Blanchard, 1996; Bogaert & Friesen, 2002; Martin et al., 2008), prenatal androgens in animals (Domínguez-Salazar et al., 2002; Roselli & Stormshak, 2009; Stockman et al., 1985) and humans (Hickey et al., 2010; Hines et al., 2004), and genetic factors (Hamer et al., 1993; Pillard & Bailey, 1998). Most of this research has been controversial and inconclusive.

For example, one of the first well-known and controversial studies in this area was the work of Simon LeVay (1991), who examined the variations in hypothalamus structure between heterosexual and gay men. A cohort of 41 cadavers were autopsied (19 were those of gay men who died of AIDS, 16 were presumed to be heterosexual, and six were presumed heterosexual women). One part of the hypothalamic structure was found to be twice as large in heterosexual men versus gay men, leading the author to suggest that sexual orientation may be testable at a biological level, involving neurotransmitters. Although his work has not been successfully replicated (e.g. Byne, 2001), the study gained huge media attention, as well as major critiques regarding the sample, procedure, and assumptions imbedded within the work. The work was highly popular in scientific and legal accounts, as it cited and reiterated a number of heterosexist, sexist, and culturally imperialist norms, confirming assumptions about a sexual dichotomy, and the idea that gay men and women are the same (Hegarty, 1997).

The assumption at the core of such studies is that biological variation between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals dictates bodily or physiological differences (even if the direction of the relationship is not always clear). Such work has been critiqued for promoting the ideal of two discrete sexualities (see Bowers-Catton & Hayfield, this volume); that gay men are more feminine than straight men, and that lesbian women are more masculine in a variety of ways than heterosexual women. Another issue with these works is not so much whether they find significant differences between heterosexual people and same-sex attracted people, or the 'causes' of varying sexual orientations, but the question of 'so what?' about their findings. What is the use and purpose of such research? What norms and ideals do they draw on and maintain? Could such 'etioloical' work (scarily) lead to attempts of remedying or curbing non-heterosexualities?

Mainstream psychology

When it comes to heterosexuality/sexual orientation research, personality, clinical and developmental psychological theories are less common (Bem,

1996). There is, however, a plethora of research in psychology examining various aspects of sexual orientation and its links to psychosocial well-being (Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012). This research typically involves mapping out the experiences and identity development of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans individuals, particularly with regard to prejudice and discrimination (Herek, 1998), without necessarily examining the nature, structure, and foundations of heterosexuality. One of the best-known developmental theories of sexual orientation argues that children who do not conform to gender roles in childhood feel different from same-sex children, and ultimately eroticise them, becoming attracted to them sexually and/or romantically in later life (Bem, 1996). This theory, known as the 'exotic becomes erotic' phenomenon, is a staged model that includes genetic and biological factors as well as social and developmental ones (Bailey et al., 2000). More recent developmental research has continued to examine heterosexuality and heterosexual identity development during adolescent years, mapping the various pathways that can impact sexual identity development (Morgan, 2012; Tolman et al., 2003; Worthington et al., 2002).

Current debates and implications for applied psychology and the wider world

Considering that heterosexuality is not typically approached as a topic of analysis in its own right by most of mainstream psychology (and other 'scientific' disciplines), the debates about heterosexuality happen at two levels. One level is more implicit and relates to the paradigms or epistemological understandings of the different approaches (covered above) when it comes to the origins and nature of sexuality. There tends to be a split between researchers. Some approach heterosexuality from an essentialist or biological standpoint – assuming that is it normal, natural, and biologically determined (Pillard & Bailey, 1998). From this perspective, it is often asserted, "there is no evidence that one's postnatal social environment plays a crucial role in gender identity or sexual orientation" (Bao & Swaab, 2011, p. 214; Swaab, 2007). Then there are theorists who approach this topic from a constructionist viewpoint – asserting that what we consider normal and natural sexuality is a socially and culturally produced artefact (Tiefer, 2004). There are also researchers who fall somewhere in between – noting that biology and/or hormones must have some impact on our sexual preferences and sexuality, but that these are also somehow socially or culturally mediated (Barker, 2007).

The biological essentialist view positions heterosexuality as normal, natural, and the inevitable outcome for reproductive success. From this perspective, non-heterosexuality has been investigated due to its otherness and the causes of varying sexual orientations linked to genes, prenatal hormones, and brain neuroanatomy. Critical and feminist research specifically examining the

institution, daily manifestations, and politics of heterosexuality has debated various aspects of how heterosexuality plays out and what it means for us. For example, the power relations imbued within heterosexuality have been identified as masking rape and sexual coercion (Gavey, 2005); media representations about casual sex continue to idealise heterosexual monogamy (Farvid & Braun, 2013, 2014); and heterosexual sexual practice continues to follow highly scripted and gendered norms (van Hoof, 2014), which can have negative implications for women's (and men's) health and well-being (Beres & Farvid, 2010). Consequently, queer, critical, postmodern, constructionist approaches do not seek to 'explain' same-sex attracted people – or champion the rights of such minority groups – but to move their focus on to questioning "The operation of the heterosexual/gay binary... and to focus on heterosexuality as a social and political organising principle, and [its] politics of knowledge and difference" (Seidman, 1996, p. 9).

There is an ongoing debate regarding the politics of the source of same-sex attraction/sexual desire. Arguments around whether sexualities, and in particular non-heterosexualities, are inborn or chosen create many tensions. Biological explanations are favoured by those who are liberally minded as a way of legitimising homosexuality, albeit promoting an essentialist view of heterosexuality that positions heterosexuality as the norm (Hegarty, 2002). The notion that homosexuality is 'chosen' is favoured by others who use this notion to condemn and seek to 'fix' this abnormality (Hegarty, 2002).

Future directions

Additional research is required to examine the nature and function of heteronormativity and how it shapes the daily lives of heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. We also need to interrogate the varieties and different manifestations of heterosexuality, as well as the hierarchies that exist within it. "There is clearly a strong case for opening up the 'black box' of heterosexuality to explore the many possible articulations of heterosexual desire that are included or excluded within a dominant construction of heteronormality" (Hubbard, 2008, p. 645). More direct conversations across the varying paradigms and approaches that study heterosexuality are needed to provide us with a more comprehensive psychological study and mapping of the phenomenon that is heterosexuality.

Summary

- Heterosexuality is normalised and pervasive.
- Most psychological research takes for granted that heterosexuality is 'normal'.

- Heterosexuality has a history and changes shape over time.
- Heterosexuality involves institutional, sexual identity, and everyday dimensions.
- We must consider biological, developmental, and social dimensions for a comprehensive understanding of heterosexuality.

Further reading

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7

Lesbian Psychology

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Introduction

Lesbian psychology is “psychology which is explicit about its relevance to lesbians [...] does not assume homosexual pathology, and seeks to counter discrimination and prejudice against lesbians” (Kitzinger, 1997, p. 203). Prior to the late 1970s, psychological theory and research on lesbians was uncommon. Where it did exist, it focused primarily on lesbianism as pathology, attributable to genetic predisposition and/or early socialisation (e.g. see Bene, 1965; Loney, 1973; Wittenberg, 1956). As a result, many lesbians were subjected to psychiatric ‘treatment’ with the aim of curing them of their lesbianism. Since the late 1970s – as a function of both the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973 and the rise of second-wave feminism – there has been a seismic shift in the emphasis of psychological theory and research towards the normalisation of lesbianism.

As part of this shift, psychology turned its focus away from lesbians (and gay men) as pathological, focusing instead on homophobia (Smith, 1971) as a pathological behaviour. While well established within the psychology of sexuality/ies today, work on homophobia focuses primarily on the attitudes of heterosexual persons towards lesbians and gay men (and others) as if the latter were a homogeneous group. The lesbian population in itself is very diverse (including, for example, non-Western, trans, and polyamorous lesbians) but, on the basis of gender alone (i.e. lesbians undoubtedly differ from gay men), this body of work is very limited in what it can tell us about lesbians’ experiences, and how – specifically – lesbians (as lesbians and as *women*) are affected by homophobia. It is, therefore, not explicit about its relevance to lesbians, and so does not form part of the field referred to in this chapter as ‘Lesbian psychology’. For similar reasons, work on heterosexism – the “ideological system that denies [...] and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (Herek, 1990, p. 316) – has also been excluded from this chapter.

