



NEW
APPROACHES TO
SOCIOLOGY

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Anya Ahmed,
Lorna Chesterton
& Deirdre Duffy

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SEXUALITY

Lee Gregory

Learning objectives

- To discuss key theories explaining homosexuality in contemporary society
 - To investigate the impact of heteronormativity on the development of welfare systems
 - To outline ongoing discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ people
 - To illustrate the relevance of intersectionality to LGBTQ+ identities
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Framing questions

- What factors have created a heteronormative society?
 - Has full equality been attained for LGBTQ+ citizens?
 - How does queer theory challenge assumptions regarding welfare provision?
-

Introduction

At the time of writing there is considerable global debate around issues of sexuality which remain prominent in political debates. While nations, such as Canada, have banned conversion therapy, a pseudoscientific practice of attempting to change an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual, other nations, such as the UK, have delayed their public consultation on the topic. High profile debates around trans identities and rights have dominated in the global West with celebrities and a range of academics coming out against trans recognition (attracting the acronym TERF – trans-exclusionary radical feminist). This is within a global context death penalty remains in effect within 6 countries and possible within 5 for same sex sexual acts and can result in 8–10 years to life in prison within a further 57 countries. In contrast 81 countries offer employment protection, 57 offer broad protection and 11 constitutional protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation. In the UK, after the referendum to leave the European Union, there was a reported 147% increase in homophobic hate crimes in the three months that followed the result. As illustrated in Figure 5.1 there has been an increase in hate crimes against people in relation to their sexual orientation and for being transgender (the data also show increases in hate crimes towards BAME and

Numbers and percentages						England and Wales % change 2019/20 to 2020/21
Hate crime strand	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	
Race	58,294	64,829	72,051	76,158	85,268	12
Religion	5,184	7,103	7,202	6,856	5,627	-18
Sexual orientation	8,569	10,670	13,311	15,972	17,135	7
Disability	5,254	6,787	7,786	8,465	9,208	9
Transgender	1,195	1,615	2,185	2,542	2,630	3
Total number of motivating factors	78,496	91,004	102,535	109,993	119,868	9
Total number of offences	74,967	86,254	97,474	105,362	114,958	9

Figure 5.1 Hate Crimes Recorded by the Police

Source: Home Office (2021) – emphasis added.

disabled people, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 7 of this book). Additionally, trans people are experiencing higher levels of hate crime and discrimination, with some of the findings from the Trans Lives Survey (TransActual, 2021) indicating that 40% of respondents experienced transphobia when seeking housing, 27% experienced homelessness, 63% experienced transphobia and 85% of trans women reported transphobic harassment from strangers in the street (71% for trans men and 73% for non-binary people). Despite a broader context of equality, there are significant challenges to address to ensure LGBTQ+ citizens are able to live safe, harassment-free lives.

This chapter examines the emergence of the term homosexuality and how it was established as a ‘deviant other’ against the heterosexual lifestyles. Providing insight into the power of discourse and social construction theory this leads into a discussion of homophobia and heterosexism and how discourses of homosexuality come to be reinforced through the wider structure of, and institutions within, societies: using the example of welfare provision to illustrate these points. The final parts of the chapter broaden out the discussion to consider intersectionality with class and race/ethnicity prior to a brief consideration of the critique of the equality agenda for adopting an assimilationist approach.

The Social Construction of ‘Homosexuality’

Developing from feminist analysis, theoretical work stated to suggest that sexuality plays an integral part in everyone’s life, from heterosexual, homosexual, asexual and all other varieties of sexuality. Although this chapter is focused upon LGBTQ+ citizens,

experiences and debates, we must recognise that sexuality is much broader and resides in a variety of forms across *all* citizens. Consequently, calls to rethink citizenship to incorporate the intimate aspects of our lives draw attention to how we live our intimate lives in terms of rights, obligations, recognitions and respect and the choices we make about our intimate lives (Plummer, 2003). Carabine (2004) adds that sexuality is not just who or what we desire, it is also what we do and how we practise our sexuality combined with cultural meaning. Labels used are mediated through cultural understandings which have naturalised heterosexuality and presented homosexuality as a deviation from the 'norm' (see discussion below).

Scott and Jackson (2020) provide a useful starting set of definitions:

- Gender: referring to a specific culturally informed social division between groups of people within society, for example men and women, which now captures a broader range of genders with increasing recognition of trans and non-binary as well as gender fluid identities.
- Sex: erotic activity.
- Sexuality – a broader concept encompassing erotic desire and identities as well as practices.

While in terms of policy debates a definition of *sexual orientation* is utilised, with the World Health Organization incorporating into this term physical, emotional and romantic attraction towards other people (WHO, 2021), this does not reflect broader queer scholarship that has sought to disrupt and complicate such simplistic definitions. Alternatively, the term sexual identity is often used to highlight how labels relating to non-normative sexual identities (homosexuality) are imbued with meaning within society and shape how those labelled view themselves and are viewed. This is an important starting point in the discussion here, for queer theory has sought to illustrate and challenge the normative status of homosexuality in modern society and the way this generates social ordering of both gender and sexuality.

Sullivan (2003, p. 1) has suggested 'sexuality ... is constructed, experienced and understood in culturally and historically specific ways'. Yet early attempts to understand sexualities started with the belief that (hetero)sexuality was a 'pre-social' fact, something given and regulated by social institutions. Significant medical, legal and religious discourse presented non-heterosexuality as a deviation from the norm and, often a condition that could be 'treated'. But it was the development of such thinking that drew a spotlight onto non-heterosexuals explicitly in legal frameworks. Initially the illegality was focused on *acts* rather than people: such as the pre-late 1880s death penalty attached for 'the abominable vice of buggery'. While the pre-1880s was focused on illegality of acts, as noted, there was a shift towards illegality of certain people because of these medical discourses making same-sex relationships illegal. These were about male, same sex relationships as sex was legally defined in relation to penetration. Consequently, female homosexuality 'took much longer than male homosexuality to constitute the basis of a communal, subcultural identity' (Jagose, 1996, p. 13) and later faced increased

persecution in Western culture from the 20th century, which Faderman (1985) argues was partly a backlash to the growing Feminist movement. However, these medical assumptions around sexuality were eventually challenged.

Psychological thinking started to challenge the assumptions that non-heterosexual sexualities were a deviation from the norm, such as Hirschfield's suggestion that sexual variability was akin to fingerprints and so could not have a 'normal' and 'abnormal' division in sexuality. The work of Kinsey, and the subsequent Kinsey Scale, demonstrated diversity in sexual activity and how some heterosexual identifying individuals engaged in same sex acts. Problematically this analysis only looked at data from white men and women and did not, until later analysis, start to draw attention to social factors informing sexuality and sexual practices. Yet it is within such research that a challenge to the assumption that sex was simply about procreation was possible, highlighting the importance of pleasure through sex. Importantly, this facilitates recognition of same-sex relations as valid. Weeks (1989), summarising the work of Freud, illustrates that there was a growing suggestion that heterosexuality was *culturally* necessary but not naturally preordained.

Social theorists working within the social constructivist tradition further illustrated the culturally constructed nature of sexuality. The rise in new theories of deviance suggested that 'deviance' was a matter of social definition providing a powerful challenge to earlier biological determinism. Through a series of *sexual scripts* (Gagnon and Simon, cited in Jackson & Scott, 2010) we construct our biographies to align with current identities, roles, situations, and vocabularies. These sexual scripts exist at three levels, although Gagnon and Simon were not necessarily clear from where these scripts came:

- 1 Cultural scenarios – the cultural narratives around sexuality and institutional guides for sexual conduct;
- 2 Interpersonal scripting – our everyday interactions negotiating sexual activity;
- 3 Intrapsychic scripting – the level of individual desires and thoughts, the internal reflexive process of the self.

Such theories influenced wider social thinking, and eventually the *genealogical* approach adopted by Foucault (1990) in his work mapping the history of sexuality shaped wider social thinking, especially later queer theory. Exploring the power of discourse Foucault demonstrated that homosexuality was constructed a distinct identity and a medical defect in the 1870s creating a clear distinction to such acts within societies across the globe and human history. For Foucault, this reflected a concern with maintaining male primogeniture (Foucault, 1990). Further, Sullivan (2003, p. 14) suggests that medical writers and social commentators sought to maintain existing cultural hierarchies in relation to class and race differences to maintain the privileged position of white, middle/upper-class heterosexual masculinity. This intentionally obscured any other views and interpretations of social life that challenged the status quo.

Such views have influenced not only social theory but social actions, liberation campaigns to change the law and ensure equal rights for LGBTQ+ people. Despite slow progress these efforts have accumulated in contemporary laws such as equal marriage and

sexual orientation being a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. However, many of these earlier discourses still dominate: such as the ongoing debate around trans identities and rights, debates about ‘conversation therapy’ facilitating a continued narrative in some parts of society that homosexuality is ‘curable’ to continued efforts to tackle discrimination despite the existence of the 2010 Act.

Heteronormative Assumptions and Welfare Provision

Within society heterosexuality is presented as an unproblematic state, privileging this one sexuality over all others, and creating a context of heterosexism – the establishment of prejudice and discriminating attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people by homosexuals. Historic processes have created a context heteronormativity (Jackson, 2007): the privileging of heterosexual identities and lives and an implicit assumption that all people are heterosexual. Heteronormativity flows through every day social life. It captures all social practices and forms of social regulation which equates ‘normal’ sexuality with heterosexuality and establishes a form of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ to suggest that heterosexuality is imposed on us rather than being freely chosen.

However, it was these same processes of urbanisation and industrial capitalism facilitated greater ability to live as an individual and independently of wider kinship networks via wage labour. People no longer relied on the family unit (D’Emilio, 1992), allowing homosexual desire to become a central aspect of identity in a way that was not previously possible. Katz (1983) suggests that this historic emergence implied heterosexuality is somehow more natural and implicit within social life, when in fact the term heterosexuality emerges only because of the concept of homosexuality was established first.

This heteronormative assumption extends into the development of welfare systems and institutions as these emerge with industrialisation. With industrialisation there was a growing concern with ‘social issues’. Emerging from this concern was social science investigation which identified structural causes of poverty and social problems, an approach which became associated with a group called the Fabians. This sets a tradition for what would later become Social Policy conducting research into and policy suggestion for the development of welfare systems. Yet this Fabian tradition embedded the assumed heterosexuality of the time (see Gregory and Matthews, forthcoming) and will present heteronormative assumption of family and intimate lives. Furthermore, Weeks (1989) has suggested that Fabian thinking retained eugenicist ideas which sought to promote policy which produced the ‘right sort’ of people. State intervention, therefore, explicitly sought to promote appropriate forms of motherhood, family, citizen conduct and implicit assumptions about the nation. Thus, while sexuality was at the heart of much policy intervention and the regulatory activity of the state, it was heteronormative in its intent. As Richardson (2017) noted, Social Policy has developed limited theorising about the relationship between sexuality and social policy with Gregory and Matthews (forthcoming) suggesting that the discipline fails to appreciate the broader experience of non-heterosexuals and non-cisgender people.

It is important to also recognise the significance of gender in many of these debates. Cisgender, a term in academic usage since the 1990s, is used to refer to people whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned at birth. Thus, it is possible to be a cis-heterosexual, a cis-gay man, cis-lesbian, etc. The alternative to a cis identity is a *trans* identity, referring to a gender that is different to that which was assigned at birth. As such, it is possible to be assigned male at birth and identify as heterosexual but to transition to become a trans-woman who is still sexually attracted to women. As noted earlier there is also greater diversity of gender identities to include non-binary and fluid identities, none of which would conform to the assumed cisgender identities that dominate in society. Heteronormative assumptions will also assume cis identities, which is another implicit assumption within welfare state development.

Recent debate therefore critiques the collectivist endeavour of welfare systems as being built upon ‘false universalism’. Welfare systems have perpetuated a white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual image of a citizenship and failed to recognise the diversity and difference that exists across citizens within any given society (Lister, 1998). An early attempt to illustrate the tension between citizenship and LGBTQ+ people, utilised the concept of social exclusion to argue for a new model of social welfare provision which engages and responds more clearly to the needs of LGBTQ+ people and communities (Concannon, 2008). In just over a decade since this argument, however, a range of policy changes has occurred in the UK (equal marriage rights, the Equality Act 2010 and the rise in prominence of trans debates) and have superseded much of this analysis, but the broader point and some of the wider challenges remain.

Yet a persisting challenge of heteronormative assumptions has disrupted social science investigations. We have limited data on LGBTQ+ citizens, as survey tools have only recently been modified to start ‘counting’ variety in sexuality and gender. Thus we have a longer trend of data around LGB people, but trans identities are a recent inclusion. However, there remains critique that the terminology used is often imposed by wider heterosexual society, and for some there are active efforts to lobby against the inclusion of such questions so that LGBTQ+ are *not* counted (Guyan, 2021). Furthermore, despite significant advances in equality legislation a complex picture of discrimination persists. Research suggests that while lesbians are likely to earn more than heterosexual women they have greater incidence of work-based anxiety. Gay men, however, do not seem to have an earning impact because of their sexual identity while bisexuals have lower wellbeing compared to other groups. LGB people are less likely to be homeowners compared to heterosexuals and often have higher rates of poor health. Matthews and Besemer (2015) also demonstrate that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to live in deprived communities compared to heterosexuals. LGBTQ+ people tend to have higher levels of homelessness, and these can quite often impact on younger people because of ‘coming out’ to family (Valentine, Skelton, & Butler, 2003). Generally, we see a complex picture for non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals suggesting a wider interplay of intersectional disadvantages (and at times advantages) in relation to welfare support and interventions.

Despite advances, recent history also contains examples where policy activity, or inactivity, has been intentionally pursued causing subsequent harm to LGBTQ+ communities. For example, in relation to education policy the introduction of section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which prohibited the intentional promotion or teaching of homosexuality in schools. The legislation referred to homosexuality as a 'pretend family relationship' and was not repealed until 2000 (in Scotland) and 2003 (in England and Wales). The legislation prevented many LGBTQ+ teaching from 'being out', prohibited teaching of LGBTQ+ relationships and sexual health and even prevented schools from tackling homophobic bullying. Quite often the fear of prosecution under the law dissuaded many teachers from offering support and counselling to students. Similarly, under the same government, the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic resulted in homophobic attitudes within government resisting efforts to develop education and public health campaigns for 'fear' of the message this would be sending and a 'concern' that this would expose children and young people to inappropriate message around sex (despite the need for safe sex message).

It might be easy to assume that since the Equality Act 2010 and a more progressive shift in public attitudes would prevent such policy practices from occurring. But one need only look at the delay in banning conversion therapy and the culture war around trans identities to see that many of these discriminatory attitudes persist. But it need not always manifest so boldly as the examples above. While the assumptions around compulsory heterosexuality are normalised into service delivery this also occurs at the local level, where services are delivered. Such developments potentially reflect a form of everyday homophobia. For example, within homelessness legislation in England local authorities must support families and households who are experiencing unintentional homelessness. But this provision is based upon a concept of 'priority need', and this is often a category that does not include single-person households. As such there is potential for indirect discrimination against LGBTQ+ people who are more likely to be single and thus a bureaucratic barrier develops which can be used to limit the support given to LGBTQ+ people. Additionally, as Matthews and Poyner (2020) illustrate how housing associations reinforced heterosexuality through their equality and diversity tools because they did not offer tenants an opportunity to declare that their sexual and gender identity was not heterosexual and cisgendered. The key point here is that even when progressive policies are established, implementation will not always result in intended outcomes. For example, Brown (2011) analysis of benefit claiming applications processes after the Civil Partnership Act.

Browne maps the various ways local authorities in England did, and did not, modify their application forms to recognise civil partnerships. While some authorities did integrate options to inform agencies of being in a civil partnership while other local authorities did not. Some provided information and guidance around how to apply for benefits when in a civil partnership, others had no information about civil partnerships on their websites at all. Consequently, across England, there was an initial variety in practice in which depending on where one lived it was possible to declare you were in a civil partnership, or you had no option to do so. For claimants there was the risk of

making fraudulent claims because they did not declare their civil partnership (couples have a reduced claim to benefit) but also, as Brown (2011) notes, the heterosexual structure of the benefits system puts certain, heterosexual family types, under scrutiny and potentially impacts on the value of benefits, and tax exemptions, they can claim. This contrasts to those who are defined as 'single' who experience no reduction in what they can claim despite the potential of being in a same-sex relationship. In being unrecognised and ignored through the heterosexual lens LGBTQ+ claimants, assessed as a single person, may benefit from a higher level of benefit income. Such advantages are rarely just beneficial, however. As noted, this not only generates a risk of being accused of fraud, but LGBTQ+ partners may need to continue to live outside the boundaries of a 'couple' to retain their incomes, homes and other provisions which have been a key part to securing their wellbeing, but might otherwise be at risk from couple status.

Homophobia, Transphobia and the 21st Century

The gradual fight for LGBTQ+ equality has seen a gradual and incomplete move from illegality and punishment by death to one of growing acceptance and recognition of rights. This does not, however, suggest that discrimination and hate attacks against LGBTQ+ people have vanished. In fact, the move from a denial of civil and social rights has not easily removed the stigmatised treatment and assumptions around LGBTQ+ people, perhaps most clearly illustrated in the contemporary UK context, at the time of writing, whereby trans people have also become the focus of contemporary 'culture wars', resulting in societal abjection and rising moral panics, putting them in an even more invidious position.

The analysis published in 2018 of a UK government survey exploring the lives of LGBT people provides some insight into the experience of LGBTQ+ people in the 21st century.

- Two in five respondents had experienced verbal harassment or physical violence because of their sexuality.
- More than nine in ten of the most serious incidents went unreported.
- 20% had accessed mental health services and this figure varied across respondents (30% for trans women, 40% for trans men, 37% for non-binary people and 29% for cisgender bisexual people).
- 77% of respondents indicated that the sexuality and gender orientation had never been discussed in school although there was an age influence here as this figure was 54% for 16–17-year-olds.
- 21% experienced disclosure of the LGBT status without permission.
- 21% had experienced verbal harassment.
- 6% had faced exclusion from events/activities.
- Sexual and physical harassment had been experienced by 2% and 2% respectively.
- 46% of cisgender respondents never discussed their sexual orientation with health professionals, as they felt it was irrelevant – this figure was 67% for bisexual people compared to 36% for lesbian/gay respondents (GEO, 2018).

Around the same time as the government analysis the LGBT rights campaign organisation, Stonewall (2018) had its own data showing that 14% of LGBT people avoid seeking treatment for fear of discrimination while 5% reported they had felt pressure to question/change their sexual orientation when accessing health services.

The subsequent development of the LGBT Action Plan by the UK government was applauded as the first, comprehensive, cross-departmental plan to address LGBTQ+ inequality. Yet, the discourse of the plan continues to reflect heteronormative ideology. As Lawrence and Taylor (2020) outline, the use of language continues to portray LGBTQ+ people as the 'other' which implicitly reinforces heteronormative and cis-normative assumptions and social practices. The Action Plan appears to accept LGB lives when presented within a socially conservative and neoliberal framework (furthering the concerns of some around assimilationist attitudes) while offering opaque support for trans* and gender-non-confirming citizens. Acceptance and recognition of queer lives remain, at best, marginal.

Assimilation through Equality?

This Action Plan is part of an ongoing history of LGBTQ+ rights and equality which has seen a very gradual move from illegality punishable by death to the eventual decriminalisation and moves to provide equal marriage more recently. Some of the key legal and equality debates in UK history include the following:

- The Buggery Act of 1533 made anal sex an offence punishable by hanging.
- Offences Against the Person Act 1861 removed the death penalty but male homosexual acts remained illegal.
- In 1885, the law was extended to include any kind of sexual activity between males, illustrated by the high-profile case of Oscar Wilde.
- During the 1950s, the police actively pursued and prosecuted gay men, illustrated again by another high-profile case of Alan Turing (a famous mathematician and war-time code breaker), who was chemically castrated as an alternative to prison (he later committed suicide).
- The Wolfenden Committee was set up in 1950 to consider UK law relating to 'homosexual offences', ultimately suggesting homosexual behaviour between consenting adults should not be considered a criminal offence. It should be noted that lesbians were largely ignored under these legislations and would not feature in legislation until much later.
- After several attempts, the Sexual Offences Act 1967 eventually secured royal assent, decriminalising homosexual acts where these were consensual, had taken place in private, and involved people aged 21 and above (a higher age of consent than that set for heterosexuals).
- The Sexual Offences Act 1967 however only covered England and Wales and Scotland did not align its laws until the 1980s and Northern Ireland in 1982.

- In 1979, there were recommendations to further lower the age of consent to 18 – although the age of consent was eventually changed in the mid-1990s.
- In 1999, the age of consent equalised to 16 despite continued protests by some policy makers that such changes posed health risks to young people.
- In 2000 – the Scottish Parliament repelled section 28, the Westminster government attempt was blocked by the House of Lords and would not be repelled until 2003.
- In 2005, the Civil Partnership Act offered legal recognition to same sex relationships and granted most (but not all) the same rights and responsibilities as civil marriage.
- In 2010, the Equality Act made sexual identity and gender reassignment protected characteristics.
- In 2013 – Equal Marriage in England and Wales.
- In 2014 – Equal Marriage in Scotland.
- In 2019 – Equal Marriage in Northern Ireland was granted. This legislation took five votes to finally secure a slim majority only to be vetoed by the Democratic Unionist Party. It later became legal for same sex couples in Northern Ireland to marry in 2020 only after an indecisive election in 2017 resulting in no formation of a Northern Ireland Executive. In 2019, triggered by a return to power of the UK Parliament, same sex marriage regulations were then signed off by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The development of these rights however did not just emerge organically, creating a greater context of equality. They have been hard fought for by LGBTQ+ activists, organisations and their allies. Essentially however a tension has arisen within the LGBTQ+ community as to the purpose of this campaign activity. For many, the move towards liberation has been a key part in securing social rights and protecting LGB people – it is still debateable to extent to which trans people are afforded protections. But a counter narrative has developed which suggest that this is equality through ‘assimilation’. For some this equality reflects the privilege of cis-gendered, wealthy middle and upper class LGB people and marginalises the broader diversity of the LGBTQ+ community. Broadly, assimilationist approaches to equality reframe LGBT people in a heteronormative way to secure protection, rather than seeking equality demonstrating sameness and hiding the difference, rather than securing equality which recognises and protects the diversity of the community.

Despite the progress however there remain issues to be resolved. Especially in relation to trans rights we see not only resistance within governments to granting and supporting the rights of these individuals/groups, but also parts of the LGB community also voicing opposition to the inclusion of trans identities and community. Even some of the campaign organisations have been called out for failing to be as vocal on trans issues. Many of these debates however echo the attitudes towards and claims about LGB people several decades ago. Additionally, as mentioned above, the slow response by the UK government to ban conversion therapy indicates a reluctance to fully support LGBTQ+ rights. To illustrate the point, governments would in no way support efforts to ‘convert’ straight people to different sexualities but seems willing at present to let this

pseudoscientific practice continue when targeted at non-heterosexuals. It cannot yet be assumed that a context of equality has been attained with regards the wider LGBTQ+ community. There are ongoing debates and challenges which have yet to be resolved.

Intersectionality With Class and Race

A concern with diversity of citizens, as discussed above, has been further illustrated through the work regarding intersectionality. Crenshaw (1989) writing from a critical race legal perspective argued for the need to identify the overlapping identities that people hold. Fundamentally, everyone has unique experiences of discrimination and oppression which vary by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability etc. More broadly we can consider a whole series of factors which can be a source of marginalisation for people, not just the characteristics linked above but a whole range of other religious, cultural, age, language and other aspects of human nature which can confer advantage on some but discriminate/oppress others. Fundamentally, it offers a framework for revealing the intersections to challenge unidimensional and exclusionary analysis of oppression and discrimination. Thus, while this chapter is about LGBTQ+ sexuality, these sexualities are just one of several intersectional identities that people will hold.

Subsequently consideration of the intersectional lives of LGBTQ+ people will illustrate some of the themes we have already examined and how they are patterned across many aspects of social life. Here the hegemonic nature of heterosexuality which prescribes certain gender roles will likely be reinforced across several intersectional identities (gender, class, ethnicity, religion to name a few). For example, Jewell and Morrison (2012) illustrate how the perception of gay men breaking 'traditional' male roles creates unfavourable views of gay men. Combined with discomfort that some men take the 'women's position' in a relationship establishes a firmer negative view held by both men and women. Such views in turn reinforce hegemonic masculinity and the higher status given to heterosexuality over homosexuality and establish a social expectation for all men to act in heterosexual, masculine ways. The source of these social expectations is varied and generated by the wider pervasive heteronormativity that exists throughout society and how it will cut through in notions of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, language and so many other constituent parts of social life.

Class is predominately a missing dynamic in many of these debates, becoming an under-investigated aspect in sexuality studies. In part this relates to Foucault's neglect of class and state power. Whereas Drucker (2014) argues that the importance of the power of capital and the state, of men over women and of white over non-white people cannot be underestimated. In accepting Foucault at the micro level, therefore, it is important to not forget the macro level of social structures. The slippage of account of class, however, cannot be laid solely at the feet of Foucault. As Richardson (2017) notes, the language of sexual citizenship is one of individual rights, citizenship, choice and privacy which do not align with the language of class. Thus, progress to create more equal contexts often disguises rather than challenges the role of social structures in sustaining inequalities as a focus on individual rather than collective rights comes to dominate.

This reflects developments in social theory. Debates in the late 20th century argue that Western society could no longer be adequately summed up with the label of modernity which characterised the early industrial period and subsequent social change. Suggestions that a period of late modernity had arrived through the process of globalisation were observed in the work of sociologists such as Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). This gave rise to individualisation theories which suggested that traditional class characteristics and influences no longer held sway over other people's lives. Rather, citizens had increased fluidity, choice and greater agency over their lives, including their intimate relationships. Class, in the words of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, had become a 'zombie category'. The phrasing of a zombie category suggesting that while the idea (in this case class identity) lives on, the reality to which this idea relates has died.

Such claims, however, have not gone unchallenged. A number of studies have sought to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of class. Often these studies indicate that class patterned inequalities continue to shape all aspects of life, including sexual life. One key issue to arise from efforts to examine the intersection of class and sexuality has been to question whose accounts of sexual and intimate life are being drawn upon to develop an understanding of sexuality. The significance of class is that it not only draws attention to differences in material wealth and economic security but because it also shapes social life in terms of the relationships, practices and experiences that we have and the value we attach to such aspects of social life. It also effects how others value us and respond to us, with significant research into issues of stigma and the harms of class identities demonstrating how working-class identities are often demonised and critiqued from within a dominant upper class value system. Combine this with the derogatory treatment of certain sexualities and we can see how the intersection of class and sexuality may create complex patterns of discrimination and stigmatisation. Furthermore, debates around social class and sexuality draw attention to how both culture and the economy play significant roles in social life and how patterns of economic inequality and exchange play out in cultural struggles (Skeggs, 2004).

Concerns about class do however encapsulate just one potential intersection within a range of possible intersectional identities, and as noted above we are likely discussing multiple intersectional characteristics held by any one individual. A focus on class should not dispense with additional attention to the dynamics of gender or race, for example, within these constellations of identity. As such the work of Maskovsky (2002) is useful in illustrating the material condition of poor, working class, African American queer people to critique the focus of sexuality studies on consumption spaces and for paying limited attention to labour practices within the commercial scene. Thus, studies obscure economic disadvantage and inequalities within the LGBTQ+ community.

A focus on ethnicity has also examined the intersections of LGBTQ+ identities with ethnicity and religion. Particular attention has been given to South Asian identities which successfully demonstrate the broader intersectional point established here. The research illustrates the challenges that face LGBTQ+ South Asian people as they often have competing pressures to navigate. On the one hand, the expectations of their ethnic

community, religion and the expectations and social norms this imbues. LGBTQ+ Muslims, for example, face negative perceptions of gay and lesbian sexualities reinforced through Islam which gives hegemonic status to heterosexuality (Yip, 2004; in Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012). Thus, the heteronormative pressures are experienced in a complex web of intersectional identities impacting on the wellbeing of these individuals.

Navigating these pressures often requires, in this example, British Muslims to modify existing social representations of homosexuality within ethno-religious contexts. As Adur and Purkayastha (2017) illustrate this often requires, on the one hand, utilising language and cultural symbols to open up discourse within ethnic communities about non-heteronormative identities. On the other, there is a need to draw upon these ethnic and religious traditions to challenge dominant Western values and representations of the LGBTQ+ community. But as Jaspal (2017) demonstrates the intersections can vary. Thus, for British Indian LGBTQ+ people the central aspects of their identity draw upon sexuality and ethnicity, while for British Pakistani LGBTQ+ people this is a mix of their sexuality and religion. For the former, Jaspal finds that it is primarily social obstacles for the development of interpersonal and intergroup relationships; while for the latter this can cause social and psychological challenges in securing their wellbeing. How intersectionality is experienced varies the social and individual consequences. Jaspal further illustrates this challenge with analysis demonstrating how British South Asian gay men experience multiple layers of rejection. Not only the ethno-religious homophobia of their own community but also the wider racism and homophobia of the general population *and* racism from White British gay men. Consequently LGBTQ+ people from ethnic minority groups may find that they have few sources of social support across various communities within wider society creating negative impacts on their social and psychological wellbeing and identity formation.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the ongoing challenges experienced by the LGBTQ+ community, and included the following:

- The social construction of homosexuality
 - Heteronormative assumptions and welfare provision
 - Homophobia, transphobia and the 21st century
 - Assimilation through equality
 - Key legal and equality debates in UK history
 - Intersectionality with class and race
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Conclusion

The key aims of this chapter have been to introduce some of the central debates in relation to sexuality, and specifically the sexuality of non-heterosexual people. Attention has been given to the discursive framing of gay and lesbian people a deviation from

the norm and the development of regulatory practices, both medical and legal, which have created a context of discrimination and disadvantage for LGBTQ+ people historically in the UK. The development of this heteronormative framework has informed a vast array of social norms, practices and institutions, including the development of the welfare state. Predominately, through the construction of citizenship, there is a limited awareness of diverse sexualities, and genders, within social policy and wider welfare provisions. Consequently, in most cases, this results in disadvantaging and discriminating LGBTQ+ people. More broadly, despite shifts in public attitudes and changes in the wider legal framework, LGBTQ+ people still have a varied experience of homophobia in a range of guises, from physical and verbal hate crimes to bureaucratic discrimination through welfare practices. The chapter has sought to provide some insight into the continued challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people despite an agenda for equality recognising some of the ongoing tensions between liberation and assimilationist debates with regards equality but also the complexity of intersectional identities which fracture and diversify experiences of social life and discrimination within the LGBTQ+ community.

Questions to Reflect Upon

- How might 'homosexuality' be presented as a deviation from the norm in your society?
- Do you think equality has been through assimilation with LGB people seeking to adopt 'heterosexual lifestyles'?
- In what ways might we claim the welfare state is a heteronormative institution?
- Can you list examples of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people might still experience?

Further Reading

- Carabine, J. (2004). Sexualities, personal lives and social policy. In J. Carabine (Ed.), *Sexualities: Personal lives and social policy* (pp. 2–48). Bristol: Policy Press. (This chapter provides an orientation to key issues and debates regarding LGBT+ personal lives and the interaction with welfare debates. It sets out a number of key issues and themes which have been explored in wider research and offers a useful orientation to key debates for those seeking to explore this topic in greater detail.)
- Gregory, L., & Matthews, P. (2022). Social policy and queer lives: Coming out of the closet?. *Journal of Social Policy*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–15. doi:10.1017/S0047279422000198. (This article suggests that the discipline of Social Policy needs to better engage with the experience of LGBT+ people in relation to welfare provision. It introduces the concept of 'cishet-izenship' as a way of illustrating how Social Policy debates maintain a heteronormative account of citizenship which fails to recognise LGBT+ as full citizens. Additionally, it critiques heteronormative assumptions which informs the development of welfare provision.)
- Richardson, D. (2017). Rethinking sexual citizenship. *Sociology*, 51(2), 208–24. (This article is an important contribution to citizenship and sexuality debates. It offers an updated

account of earlier worth by Richardson and others in the 1990s and suggests that we need to de-centre a ‘western-centric’ focus in sexuality debates to adopt theoretical frameworks that resonate with the global North and South.)

Weeks, J. (1989). *Sex, politics and society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800* (2nd ed.). London: Longman. (This book offers a useful historic analysis of social life in relation to sexuality and the intersection between personal life, politics and social life. It reviews a range of theoretical developments and policy/legal debates around sexual identity which are pertinent to understanding ongoing tensions and debates today.)

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