

Sex, Power, and Intimacy

Sexuality is a topic of great interest to most people. It entertains and intrigues and is a source of both personal happiness and frustration. Over the centuries men have struggled to control women's sexuality through a variety of physical and emotional means; controlling a woman's sexuality has often meant controlling her life. The flipside of this is that sexuality has the potential to be a liberating force in women's lives. To enjoy and be in control of one's sexuality and to be able to seek a mutually fulfilling sexual relationship can be an empowering experience. Note that sexuality broadly understood should not be conflated with sex as any specific activity. The term *erotic* is a more holistic concept that takes into account the range of feelings and behaviors associated with any notion of sexuality. This chapter begins with a discussion of the social construction of sexuality and provides definitions for key terms. Following is a focus on two themes associated with sexuality: first, the politics of sexuality, and second, intimacy, romance, and interpersonal communication.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY

Human sexuality involves erotic attractions, identity, and practices, and it is constructed by and through societal sexual scripts. *Sexual scripts* are guidelines for how we are supposed to feel and act as sexual persons. They are shaped by the communities and societies in which we participate and therefore are socially constructed (they emerge from communities and societies). In this way social scripts can be said to reflect social norms and practices accepted in particular social contexts. They provide frameworks and guidelines for sexual feelings and behaviors. Sometimes there is embarrassment, shame, and confusion associated with these sexual scripts, and they easily become fraught with potential misunderstandings. As Jessica Valenti explains in "The Cult of Virginity," an excerpt from her book *The Purity Myth*, the contemporary focus on virginity as an indicator of female moral worth (the "good girl") is both problematic and confusing in an era when girls and young women are increasingly sexualized and yet simultaneously faced with abstinence movements aiming to control sexual activity. A 2008 federal survey revealed

that more than half of participating teens in “virginity pledges” became sexually active anyway and the percentage who took precautions against pregnancy and STIs (sexually transmitted infections) was significantly lower than non-pledgers. The 2010 health-insurance reform legislation allowed revival of abstinence-only education funding (\$250 million between 2010 and 2015) that President Obama had originally defunded, although the health care package also included \$375 million over the same time span for comprehensive sex-education programs based on scientific evidence.

Sexual scripts, contextualized in specific communities and nations, shape how individuals come to develop a sense of their own sexual lives. We learn these subjective understandings by assimilating, rejecting, and ultimately negotiating the sexual scripts available to us. These subjective understandings are called *sexual self-schemas*. They can be defined as ideas and beliefs about sexual aspects of the self that are established from past and present experiences and which act to guide sexual feelings and behavior. What is desirable or acceptable to one person may be unacceptable or even disgusting to another. Note that sexual scripts are societal-level guidelines for human sexuality, whereas sexual self-schemas are individual-level (or micro) understandings of the self associated with sexual feelings and behaviors.

Sexual identity is one aspect of sexual self-schemas that can be defined as a person’s attraction to, or preference for, people of a certain gender. It is an individual’s romantic and/or sexual (also called erotic) identity and behavior toward other people. Note that sexual identity does not necessarily require sexual experience. *Heterosexuality* is a sexual identity where romantic and/or sexual attachments are between people of the opposite gender (popularly termed *straight*). *Homosexuality* is a sexual identity where romantic and/or sexual attachments are between people of the same gender. Because the term *homosexual* is stigmatized and because the term seems to emphasize sexual behavior, homosexual communities have preferred the term *gay*. *Gay* and *homosexual* are terms inclusive of women, although they are used mainly to describe men. The term *lesbian* means the romantic and/or sexual attachment and identification between women, specifically. *Bisexuality* implies a sexual identification with both women and men. There are derogatory social connotations of bisexuality as hypersexualized that not only do these people have sex all the time, but they are doing it with both women and with men, simultaneously. Of course, to be bisexual does not imply this at all; it just means the choice of lover can be either a woman or a man. Nonetheless, these connotations reflect the fact that there are many stigmas associated with bisexuality from both the straight and the lesbian and gay communities. Jennifer Baumgardner answers the question “What is bisexuality?” in the reading with the same name.

The word *queer*, traditionally meaning out of the ordinary or unusual, and historically an insult when used in the context of sexualities (most often as a derogatory term for effeminate and/or gay boys and men), has in recent times taken on new meaning. It has been reclaimed as a source of self-empowerment by those who reject the distinct categories of straight, gay, lesbian, and bisexual, and who seek to live alternative sexual identities. As discussed in Chapter 3, *genderqueer* also challenges the rules associated with sex and gender, as transgender individuals of any sexual identity may claim this term irrespective of the sexual identity (for example, lesbian, straight, queer, etc.) they may claim. You might also hear the terms *dyke*, *butch*, and *femme*. *Dyke* is synonymous with *lesbian*, although it connotes a masculine or mannish lesbian. Like *queer*, *dyke* is a word that is used against lesbians as an insult and has been appropriated or reclaimed by lesbians with

pride. This means that if you are not a member of the lesbian, gay, or queer communities, you should use these terms with care. *Butch* and *femme* are roles associated with gender that have been adopted by some lesbians, especially in the past. Butch means acting as the masculine partner, and femme means acting in a feminine role. Although today many lesbians avoid these role types because there is little incentive to mimic traditional heterosexual relationships, others enjoy these identities and appropriate them to suit themselves.

Again, as emphasized in Chapter 3 and mentioned above, it is important to understand both the ways gender (the focus of Chapter 3) and sexuality (the focus of this chapter) are simultaneously both conceptually distinct and intertwined. Lella Rupp's reading "A World of Difference" that discusses love and desire within the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality worldwide illustrates this point. She describes how some individuals who have been assigned female at birth cross the gender line and live as men who marry women. This occurs in societies where living as a lesbian in public is possible as well as in those where to do so is illegal. She writes that sometimes "biologically female transmen" married women and identified as lesbians and other times their desire to live as men in sexual relationships with women meant that they identified as heterosexuals. We know this is terribly confusing, but try to remember that gender is about femininity and masculinity, and sexual identity is about sexual desire and behaviors. It is possible to have multiple combinations of gendered individuals identifying with varying sexual scripts.

Finally, the term *coming out* refers to someone adopting a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer identity. Coming out is a psychological process that tends to involve two aspects: first, recognizing and identifying this to oneself, and second, declaring oneself in a "public" (broadly defined) way. In terms of this second aspect, individuals usually come out to affirming members in their own community before they (if ever) face a general public. Some never come out to families or coworkers for fear of rejection, reprisals, and retaliation. For some, coming out means becoming part of an identifiable political community; for others, it means functioning for the most part as something of an outsider in a straight world. The phrase *in the closet* means not being out at all. In the closet can imply that a person understands her-/himself to be lesbian or gay but is not out to others. It can also imply that a person is in denial about her/his own sexuality and is not comfortable claiming a nonheterosexual identity. It is important to emphasize that homophobia (fear or hatred of homosexuals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and/or queer people) can be especially hurtful to young people identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer. Indeed, gay youth are especially at risk for suicide and data show a relatively higher rate of suicides among these teens. Data show a higher rate of attempted suicides among girls and a higher rate of suicide deaths among boys. Suicidal behavior can be understood, in part, by examining risk factors—the conditions or experiences that increase the likelihood of suicide. Overall, risk factors are greater and more severe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer youth. They experience higher rates of depression and substance abuse; factors associated with increased risk of suicide. They also are more likely than teens overall to lack family and community support. Homophobia and institutionalized heterosexism lead gay youth to kill themselves.

A focus on sexual scripts highlights the ways they vary across cultures and through time and always concerns issues of power and resources (such as which groups get the authority to define "appropriate" sexual activity). *Compulsory heterosexuality*, the expectation that

Rainbow History

1. At what New York bar did the modern gay liberation movement begin?
 - a. Studio 54
 - b. Stonewall
 - c. Club 57
 - d. Scandals
2. What were homosexuals required to wear to identify them in concentration camps during World War II?
 - a. A yellow star
 - b. A lavender H
 - c. A pink star
 - d. A pink triangle
3. What Greek letter symbolizes queer activism?
 - a. Lambda
 - b. Alpha
 - c. Delta
 - d. Sigma
4. What is the name of the religious organization that supports queer Catholics?
 - a. Spirit
 - b. Celebration
 - c. Dignity
 - d. Affirmation
5. What is the country's largest political organization working specifically for queer rights?
 - a. Human Rights Campaign
 - b. ACT-UP
 - c. NOW
 - d. Christian Coalition
6. In what year did the U.S. Congress vote to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the military policy that prohibited gay and lesbian service members from being open about their sexual identity?
 - a. 1968
 - b. 1993
 - c. 2001
 - d. 2010
7. What show made television history by having the first gay lead character?
 - a. *Soap*
 - b. *Roseanne*
 - c. *Ellen*
 - d. *All in the Family*
8. Who was the first openly gay man elected in California (to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977)?
 - a. Harvey Milk
 - b. Barney Frank
 - c. Allen Ginsburg
 - d. Elton John

9. What was the first openly black lesbian novel published in the United States (1974)?

- Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*
- Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her*
- Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*
- Ntozake Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo*

10. In 2004, which became the first state to legalize gay marriage?

- Iowa
- California
- Vermont
- Massachusetts

Answers: 1. b 2. d 3. a 4. c 5. a 6. d 7. c 8. a 9. b 10. d

everyone should be heterosexual, is a central component of the sexual scripts of most communities and societies. Also implicit in this script is the notion of *heteronormativity* or the assumption of heterosexuality as the norm or normative behavior in any given setting. Social norms contained in sexual scripts may become institutionalized into policy regulating the sexual behavior of certain groups of people. Historically in the United States, anti-miscegenation laws prevented people from different races from engaging in sexual relationships and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law prevented gays and lesbians from openly serving in the military. Current marriage laws in many states also provide examples of the institutionalization of sexual scripts endorsing compulsory heterosexuality into social policy.

In this age of globalization, women's bodies and sexuality are increasingly becoming arenas of intense conflict as the control of female sexuality continues to carry symbolic value in many societies, both in the United States and worldwide. Efforts to control women's sexual lives by religiously inspired fundamentalist social groups like the Taliban of Afghanistan or the Religious Right in the U.S. are cases in point. Sometimes female sexuality is seen as important to national interests by portraying women as "mothers" of the nation or as sexual possessions to be protected. In addition, occupation of territories has sometimes been justified on the basis that "modernization" associated with imperialism is liberating because it brings greater sexual freedom for women. Certainly analyses of sexuality focusing on the United States must be contextualized in a global perspective and the struggle for sexual freedom must be understood within a broader struggle for social justice. This is a key point in Andrea Smith's reading "Disrupting Hierarchy, Queering Society." She emphasizes that any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot challenge imperialism and white supremacy. This relationship between imperialism and sexuality is also a focus of Paula Gunn Allen's poem "Some Like Indians Endure." In this reading she makes connections between racism against native people and heterosexism. Both Indians and lesbians have endured and survived oppression, emphasizing the needs for social justice among these communities. Similarly, in the reading "A World of Difference," Leila Rupp writes that the multiple and diverse ways that women are able to love women worldwide concern women's rights to social justice. The right of subjects to control their sexual lives is a central component of liberation movements.

Sexual scripts vary across intersecting differences like gender, race, class, age, ability, and so forth. This means that while gender is a significant dimension of sexual scripts, it must be understood as intersecting with other identities. Women with physical disabilities, for example, are often faced with stigma that asexualizes them and refuses to represent them as sexual beings. Kimberly Springer discusses intersections in her essay on the racialized constructions of heterosexuality for black women ("Queering Black Female Heterosexuality"). Gendered and racialized double standards of sexual conduct have condoned certain activities for men as opposed to women and for white women as opposed to black women and white men compared to black men. She suggests how the history of segregation and lynching and of caricaturing black women as asexual mammies and promiscuous "jezebels" is reproduced today as the "black woman-as-whore image in a new mass-media age." These examples emphasize how sexual scripts are heavily informed by multifaceted notions of gender.

As discussed in Chapter 3, feminine sexual scripts have often involved a double bind: To want sex is to risk being labeled promiscuous and to not want sex means potentially being labeled frigid and a prude. For many women, sexuality is shrouded in shame and fear, and, rather than seeing themselves as subjects in their own erotic lives, women may understand themselves as objects, seen through the eyes of others. Valenti makes this point in "The Cult of Virginity" when she writes about the "ethics of passivity" that defines subjects by what they do not do. This can be compared to an ethics of autonomy or self-actualization involving the ability to initiate and enjoy being the center of one's

World Report 2010: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights

Although the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people throughout the world continued to rise in 2010, their increased visibility was accompanied by attacks based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Human rights activists who sought to use the human rights framework to call to account states that participated in these rights abuses or condoned them also came under attack. In virtually every country in the world people suffered from de jure and de facto discrimination based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation. In some countries, sexual minorities lived with the very real threat of being deprived of their right to life and security of person. A small number of countries continued to impose the death penalty for private sexual acts between consenting adults. In several others, sexual minorities were targeted for extrajudicial executions. In many countries, police or other members of the security forces actively participated in the persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, including their arbitrary detention and torture. Pervasive bias within the criminal justice system in many countries effectively precluded members of sexual minorities from seeking redress.

The following examples from the Human Rights Watch's 2010 Report suggest the enormity of discrimination faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people worldwide, and highlight some of the progress made toward LGBT rights:

China: Shanghai saw the country's first gay pride festival in June 2009, followed by a seven-day LGBT-themed film festival. Though homosexual conduct is no longer criminalized in China, the police shut down two film screenings and a play.

After a series of police raids on gay men's meeting places in public parks, about 100 gay men held a protest in People's Park in Guangzhou on August 25, 2009. Police questioned protest leaders for several hours in the park's public security house. This protest in defense of gay rights has been hailed as a milestone in LGBT rights organizing in China.

Serbia: The cancellation of the Gay Pride Parade in Belgrade illustrated continuing intolerance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. In a positive move, the Serbian parliament in March approved an anti-discrimination law, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, despite opposition to the inclusion of protection for LGBT people from a coalition of churches led by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Egypt: Men arrested on suspicion of engaging in homosexual activity in violation of that country's legal codes banning "debauchery" are subject to forcible anal exams by physicians. Exams involve anal probing, dilating, and penetration. While prosecutors describe the exams as integral to establishing criminality, examining physicians have admitted that the exams do not determine whether sexual activity took place.

Nigeria: Nigeria's federal criminal code punishes consensual homosexual conduct with up to 14 years in prison. In the states applying Shari'a, consensual homosexual conduct among men is punishable by death by stoning, and by flogging in the case of women. Draft federal legislation that would criminalize anyone who enters into or assists a "same gender" marriage was introduced in the House of Representatives in December 2008.

Bangladesh: Section 377 of Bangladesh's criminal code, an inheritance of British colonial rule, punishes consensual homosexual conduct with up to life imprisonment.

India: In a positive development, the Delhi High Court in July ruled that section 377 of the Indian Penal Code can no longer be used to treat consensual homosexual conduct between adults as a criminal offense. While the ruling was challenged in the Supreme Court by a few groups and individuals, the Indian government decided not to oppose the verdict.

Iraq: In early 2009 a killing campaign against men suspected of being gay, or of not being sufficiently "masculine," erupted. Armed gangs kidnapped men and dumped their mutilated bodies in the garbage or in front of mosques. Men interviewed by Human Rights Watch in April recounted death threats, blackmail, midnight raids by masked men on private homes, and abductions from the streets. The campaign was most intense in Baghdad, but extended to other cities including Kirkuk, Najaf, and Basra.

South Africa: Although South Africa's constitution outlaws discrimination based on sexual orientation, and same-sex marriage has been legalized, gay and lesbian people remain vulnerable. In particular, incidents of violence against black lesbian women, and "corrective rape" in particular, continue to be reported with growing frequency.

Honduras: In May 2009 Human Rights Watch issued a report detailing a surge in rape, beatings, extortion, and arbitrary detention of transgender persons in Honduras by law enforcement officials. At least 17 transsexuals (as many transgender people are called) were killed in public places in Honduras between 2004 and early 2009, including leading transgender rights activist Cynthia Nicole on January 9, 2009. None of these killings were subject to an effective investigation which would have resulted in prosecution or conviction of the perpetrators. The situation only worsened after the coup with non-governmental organizations in Honduras reporting that six transgender people were killed between July and mid-November. They also reported having discovered a clandestine prison used by municipal police to "disappear" individuals; detainees and transgender persons among them were held, beaten, and released without any official record of their ever having been arrested or detained.

Source: Excerpted from The Human Rights Watch World Report 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010>.

erotic experience. Springer also advocates such autonomy and suggests black heterosexual women adopt the language of queer rights and make the case for enjoying sex “on our own terms.” She advocates straight black women’s refusal to acquiesce to sexist and racist representations. In addition, the relentless youth-oriented culture of contemporary U.S. society also sees “older” (“older than whom?” you may ask—note how this term encourages a mythical norm associated with young adulthood) people as less sexual, or interprets their sexuality as humorous or out of place. Much of these social scripts are learned from the media and enacted in peer groups. Indeed, the increasing sexualization of young girls in media normalizes men’s demands for younger sexual partners, teaches girls that to be acceptable they must be sexual, and robs children of their childhoods.

THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY

The term *politics* used here implies issues associated with the distribution of power in sexual relationships. There are politics in sexual relationships because they occur in the context of a society that assigns power based on gender and other systems of inequality and privilege. As Andrea Smith emphasizes in the reading “Dismantling Hierarchy, Queering Society,” the interconnections of systems are reflected in the concept of *heteropatriarchy*: the dominance associated with a gender binary system that presumes heterosexuality as a social norm. As mentioned above, this presumption is also called *heteronormativity*. Smith makes the case that heteropatriarchy “is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural.” Her integration of queer politics into the analysis highlights the role of binary systems (such as straight versus gay or lesbian) in maintaining hierarchies and advocates a breaking down of these polarized categories. Smith’s goal in her writing and activism is social transformation.

When people get together romantically, what results is more than the mingling of two idiosyncratic individuals. The politics of this relationship implies that people bring the baggage of their gendered lives into relationships. We negotiate gender and intersecting identities associated with systems of inequality and privilege that inform sexual scripts and shape our lives through internalized self-schemas. Although much of this is so familiar that it is thoroughly normalized and seen as completely natural, the experiences of differently gendered lives implies power. Elisa Albert was aware of this even as a young Jewish girl in elementary school. In the reading “I’m Gonna Wash That King Right Out of My Hair,” Albert shares her personal story of recognizing power associated with sexual authority in her role in a musical put on by her school in celebration of the Jewish holiday Purim. Albert performed as Vashti, the wife of King Ahasuerus, who refuses to obey her misogynous husband, the King. She created a feminist Vashti who declared “Women, Unite!” on stage. Even at this tender age before she had developed a feminist consciousness, she recognized the gendered aspect of sexual lives in the musical.

As many feminists have pointed out, heterosexuality is organized in such a way that the power men have in society gets carried into relationships and can encourage women’s subservience, sexually and emotionally. Practically, this might mean that a woman sees herself through the eyes of men, or a particular man, and strives to live up to his image of who she should be. It might mean that a woman feels that men, or again, a particular man, owns or has the right to control her body or sexuality, or that she should be the one to ease the emotional transitions of the household or tend to a man’s daily needs—

According to J. Edgar Hoover, she was one of the most dangerous women in America in the early twentieth century. Emma Goldman came to the United States from Russia as a teenager in 1885, but for a Jewish immigrant, America was not the land of opportunity she had envisioned. Rather, she found herself in slums and sweatshops, eking out a living. Goldman had witnessed the slaughter of idealist political anarchists in Russia, and in 1886 she saw the hangings of four Haymarket anarchists who had opposed Chicago's power elite. As a result of these experiences, Goldman was drawn to anarchism and became a revolutionary.

Goldman moved to New York, where she met anarchist Johann Most, who advocated the overthrow of capitalism. Most encouraged Goldman's public speaking, although she eventually began to distance herself from him, recognizing the need to work for practical and specific improvements such as higher wages and shorter working hours. In 1893 she was arrested and imprisoned for encouraging a crowd of unemployed men to take bread if they were starving.

In New York, Goldman also worked as a practical nurse in New York's ghettos where she witnessed the effects of lack of birth control and no access to abortion. She began a campaign to address this problem, and her views eventually influenced Margaret Sanger and Sanger's work to make contraception accessible. Goldman was even arrested for distributing birth control literature. Goldman was particularly concerned about sexual politics within anarchism. She recognized that a political solution alone would not rectify the unequal relations between the sexes. Rather, she called for a transformation of values, particularly by women themselves—by asserting themselves as persons and not sex commodities, by refusing to give the right over her body to anyone, by refusing to have children unless she wants them.

Her involvement in no-conscription leagues and rallies against World War I led to her imprisonment and subsequent deportation to Russia. There she witnessed the Russian Revolution and then saw the corruption of the Bolsheviks as they amassed power. Her experience led her to reassess her earlier approval of violence as a means to social justice. Instead, she argued that violence begets counterrevolution.

Goldman remained active in Europe and continued to exercise influence in the United States. In 1922 *Nation* magazine named her one of the 12 greatest living women. In 1934 she was allowed to lecture in the United States, and in 1936 she went to Spain to participate in the Spanish Revolution. Goldman died in 1940 and was buried in Chicago near the Haymarket martyrs.



preparing his meals, cleaning his home, washing his clothes, raising his children—while still working outside the home. Even though a woman might choose this life and enjoy the role she has, feminists would argue that this is still an example of male domination in the private sphere where individual men benefit. They have their emotional and domestic needs filled by women and are left free to work or play at what they want. Of course, their part of the bargain for these services is the expectation (whether it is fulfilled or not) that men should provide for women economically. This is an arrangement many women choose rationally.

We know that heterosexual relationships are a source of support and strength for many women; it is not heterosexuality that is faulted here but the context in which heterosexual coupling takes place. When heterosexual intimacies are grounded in unequal power relationships, it becomes more and more difficult for women and men to love in healthy ways. The politics of sexuality also come into play in lesbian and bisexual relationships. Women come together with the baggage of femininity to work out and often internalized homophobia as well. These relationships also have fewer clear models for successful partnering. An example of this is the “Are we on a date?” syndrome that occurs as two women attempt to deal with the boundaries between being platonic girlfriends and being romantically interested in each other. These relationships also occur in the context of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. For example, various institutions support and encourage heterosexual coupling and dating. Schools offer dances and proms, the entertainment industry generally assumes heterosexual dating, and there is a public holiday (Valentine’s Day) that celebrates it. Public displays of heterosexual intimacy are seen on the Internet, on billboards, magazine covers, television shows and in the movies.

Finally, there is marriage, an institution that historically has recognized two committed people only if one is a woman and the other a man. Currently, there are six U.S. states plus the District of Columbia which issue marriage licenses to lesbian and gay couples: Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire and New York. In addition, although the California Supreme Court ruled in 2008 that “same-sex” couples have the right to marry in California, Proposition 8, which amended the California state constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman, was subsequently passed. In 2010, however, after a federal district judge ruled that the same-sex marriage ban in Proposition 8 violated the equal protection provisions of the U.S. Constitution, enforcement has been stayed pending appeal (and remains so as of this writing). California does

LEARNING ACTIVITY **Reality TV**

Tune into some reality TV shows for the next week or two. As you watch, record observations about the behaviors, roles, and interactions of women and men. If all anyone knew about gender and heterosexual relationships was what she or he saw on reality TV, what would this person believe?

Work with one or two other people in your class to devise an episode of a feminist reality TV show. What would the premise be? Into what situation would you place participants? What would the rules be? Would you have a winner? What would you call your show? Is feminist reality TV possible? Would anyone watch?

not currently allow same-sex marriages to be performed, but those performed before Proposition 8 passed remain valid. In addition, Rhode Island, New York, and Maryland recognize same-sex marriages from other states. Finally, state-level spousal rights to unmarried couples, including gay men and lesbians, occurs through domestic partnership statutes in California, Oregon, Nevada, and Washington, and some state-level spousal rights are accorded to those in Hawaii, Maine, District of Columbia, and Wisconsin. Under domestic partnership laws couples usually sign a registry at the secretary of state's office and pay a fee for a domestic partnership contract that gives them similar legal rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples. Private employers are not required to offer health care and other benefits to domestic-partner couples, although state employees are usually covered in some form under this mandate.

Nonheterosexual couples often encounter obstacles when adopting children and gaining custody of and raising their biological children (products of previous heterosexual relationships, planned heterosexual encounters with the goal of conception, or artificial insemination). This is because these sexual identities are often constructed by society as an immoral and abnormal "choice" that could have negative consequences for children. It has generally been assumed by the dominant culture that children of homosexual parents will grow up to be homosexual, although all the evidence shows that this is indeed not the case. Despite research that suggests that lesbians make fine mothers and lesbian couples fine parents, there are strong social imperatives against lesbian child rearing. A related prejudice is the notion that gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and queer-identified people abuse or recruit children. These negative and misinformed stereotypes reinforce homophobia and help maintain heterosexism. Research shows overwhelmingly that it is heterosexual males who are the major predators of children. Nonetheless, because of this

LEARNING ACTIVITY **Heteronormativity: It's Everywhere**

- Heterosexism is maintained by the illusion that heterosexuality is the norm. This illusion is partly kept in place by the visibility of heterosexuality and the invisibility of other forms of sexuality. To begin to think about the pervasiveness of heterosexuality, grab a clipboard, pen, and paper and keep a tally.
- Go to a card store and peruse the cards in the "love" and "anniversary" sections. How many depict heterosexual couples? How many depict same-sex couples? What options are there for customers who wish to buy a card for a same-sex partner?
- Look at the advertisements in one of your favorite magazines. How many pictures of heterosexual couples do you find? How many pictures of same-sex couples? If a photo is of a man or woman alone, do you automatically assume the person is heterosexual? Or is that assumption so deep-seated that you don't even think about it at all?
- Watch the commercials during your favorite hour of television. How many images of heterosexual couples do you see? Of same-sex couples?
- Go to the mall or a park and people-watch for an hour. How many heterosexual couples holding hands do you see? How many same-sex couples?

societal stigmas LBGQT parents encounter obstacles concerning voluntary parenting, and, in addition, are often not welcome in occupations involving children.

In this way, sexual self-schemas develop in a social context and are framed by the various workings of power in society. This section has emphasized how politics—the distribution of power—influence and shape every aspect of sexual relationships. On the macro (societal) level these politics are often represented in the forms of public debates about sexuality (like gay marriage, reproductive rights, sex education, interpersonal violence) that are also experienced on the individual level. This micro (individual-level) analysis is the topic of the next section of this chapter.

INTIMACIES

Courtship is an old-fashioned word, but it means that period when two people are attracted to each other, develop intimacy, enjoy each other's company, and identify as a couple. In contemporary U.S. society this period usually involves dating, although what "dating" means changes across time and place and is heavily influenced by popular culture and the technologies of the time. Cell phones and online dating sites, for example, have influenced communication in relationships, altering notions of public and private conversations, and encouraging the accessibility of individuals to each other. An essential aspect of courtship and dating is the development of romantic love: a mainstay of our culture and one of the most important mythologies of our time. *Romantic love* is about a couple coming together, sharing the excitement of an erotic relationship, and feeling united with the other in such a way that the other is unique and irreplaceable. The clichés of love abound: Love is blind; love is painful; love means never having to say you're sorry; love conquers all; and so forth. Bell hooks comments on this phenomenon in the reading "Romance: Sweet Love." "Gate C22," the poem by Ellen Bass, counters the idea that love happens only for young, "beautiful" people, and shows how expressions of love move us as humans.

Romantic love is a cultural phenomenon and not necessarily a basis for marriage. While of course romantic love and sexual attraction have always been present in marriage and other domestic relationships through time, its value as a prerequisite for most contemporary marriages in societies of the Global North is a relatively modern notion. Indeed, there is a tight relationship between romantic love as an ideology and consumer culture as an industrial development. Prior to the twentieth century, dating as we know it did not exist.

LEARNING ACTIVITY **It's in the Cards**

Go to a local card shop and browse through the cards in the "love" or "romance" sections. What are their messages about heterosexual relationships? How do cards targeted toward women differ from cards targeted toward men?

Now get creative. Design a feminist romance greeting card. How does it differ from the ones you saw at the card shop? How do you think the recipient will feel about this card? Now, if you're really brave, mail it to the one you love.

As dating developed after the turn of the twentieth century, it quickly became associated with consuming products and going places. The emerging movie industry glamorized romance and associated it with luxury products; the automobile industry provided those who could afford it with the allure of travel, getaways, and private intimacy; and dance halls allowed close contact between men and women in public. Romance became a commodity that could be purchased, and it made great promises. Women were (and still are) encouraged to purchase certain products with the promise of romantic love. Fashion and makeup industries began revolving around the prospect of romantic love, and the norms associated with feminine beauty became tied to glamorous, romantic images. Romantic love came to be seen as women's special domain; women were encouraged to spend enormous emotional energy, time, and money in the pursuit and maintenance of romantic love.

Romantic love is fun; it can be the spice of life and perhaps one of the most entertaining features of women's lives. In particular, it often contrasts starkly with our working lives because romance is associated with leisure, entertainment, and escape. At the same time, however, romantic love and its pursuit have become the means by which women are encouraged to form relationships and the justification for tolerating inequities in interpersonal relationships, both straight and lesbian/queer.

When it comes to sexuality, romantic love plays a large part in feminine sexual scripts. Research suggests that women as a social group seem to be more likely than men to make sense of sexual encounters in terms of the amount of intimacy experienced; so that love becomes a rationale for sex. If I am in love, women might reason, sex is okay. Men as a social group seem more easily to accept sex for its own sake, with no emotional strings necessarily attached. In this way, sexual scripts for men have involved more of an *instrumental* (sex for its own sake) approach, whereas for women it tends to be more *expressive* (sex involving emotional attachments). There is evidence to suggest that women are moving in the direction of sex as an end in itself without the normative constraints of an emotional relationship. By and large, however, women as a group are still more likely than men to engage in sex as an act of love. Many scholars suggest that romance is one of the key ways that sexism is maintained in society.

As romantic relationships develop, individuals may become physically intimate and sexually active. These sexual practices can include kissing, hugging, petting, snuggling, caressing, oral sex (oral stimulation of genital area), penis in vagina sex, and anal sex (sexual stimulation of the anus with fingers, penis, or other object). Note how "foreplay" (in this case meaning heterosexual behaviors before "the act" of vaginal penetration) is often not defined as "sex," although, ironically, "foreplay" often is expressed as the sexual activity heterosexual women most enjoy. Lesbians do many of the same things as straight couples, although there is no penis-vagina sex. Some women, straight and lesbian, use dildos (penis-shaped objects that can be inserted into a bodily opening) when they are having sex or during masturbation (sexual self-stimulation), and some straight women use dildos to penetrate male partners during sexual intercourse.

In heterosexual relationships, sexual scripts tend to encourage men to be sexual initiators and sexually more dominant. Although this is not always the case, women who do initiate sex often run the risk of being labeled with terms that are synonymous with "slut." Having one person in the relationship more sexually assertive and the other more passive is different from sado-masochistic sexual practices (S and M) where one person takes a dominating role and the other becomes dominated. There are both heterosexuals and

LEARNING ACTIVITY Cybersex

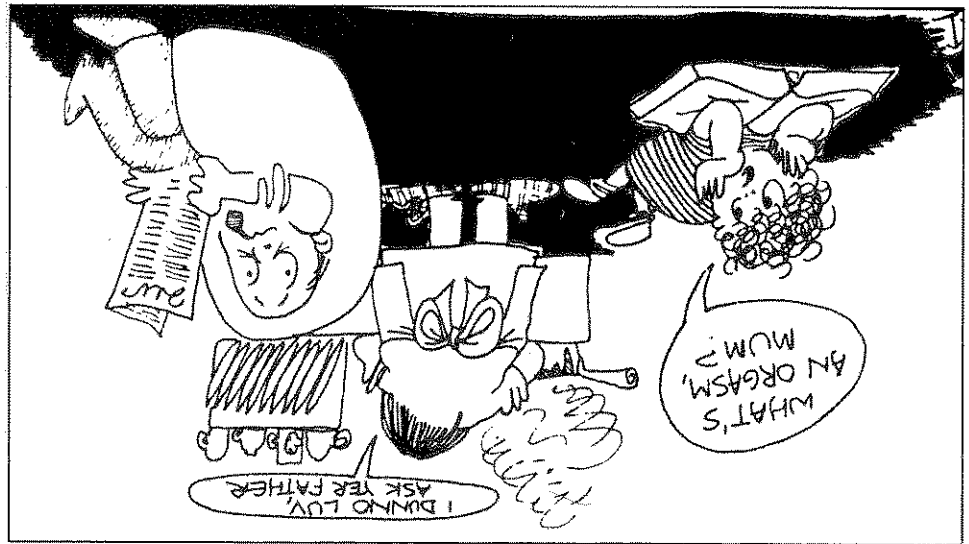
The growth of technology has created a new form for sexual expression: cybersex. You can create a persona, meet someone online, and have cybersex—with no risk of disease, no commitment, no regrets in the morning. Right? Maybe, but maybe not. On the one hand, cybersex does present an opportunity for a different kind of sexual exploration. On the other, cybersex may raise real problems of isolation, harassment, addiction, and infidelity. Spend a little time surfing the Web for information about cybersex. Then make a list of the pros and cons. How might cybersex be different for women and men? What role does gender play in cybersex? What role does race play? How does sexual identity come into play? How do you think feminists might evaluate cybersex? Would they see it as potentially liberating for women? Or might it reinforce male sexual dominance?

Consider organizing a faculty panel to talk about these issues on your campus. Be sure to include a variety of disciplinary perspectives—women's studies, sociology, psychology, ethnic studies, philosophy, communication, computer science, religion, anthropology, disability studies.

homosexuals who enjoy sado-masochistic practices. Although usually consensual, S and M can also be coercive, in which case it functions as a form of violence.

Emotional intimacy can be defined as sharing aspects of the self with others with the goal of mutual understanding. Intimacy can sometimes be a source of conflict in heterosexual relationships because women tend to be more skilled at intimacy than men. Traditionally, women have been socialized to be emotional and emotionally expressive, and men have been socialized to put their energy into shaping culture and society and to be more reserved about interpersonal emotional issues. As explained in Chapter 3, this does not mean, of course, that all women in sexual relationships demonstrate these traits or that all men do not. Instead these behaviors illustrate gendered sexual performances that we call "feminine" or "masculine" and which intersect with social learning associated with other identities. Although girls and women are more likely to be socialized to perform femininity, and boys and men masculinity (whatever that might mean in a given community), anyone can act in feminine ways and/or masculine ways in intimate relationships. We all know of boys or men who demonstrate more feminine traits and are more skilled at expressing emotions than some women even though this might not be the norm. Gender is a learned performance that shapes the experiences of intimacy in any given setting.

Some scholars have suggested that women are inherently better at connecting with others and that this skill is rooted in early childhood psychosexual development that reflects the fact that girls have a continuous relationship and identification with a maternal figure, unlike boys, who have to break from the mother to identify with the masculine. Others have focused on the social context of childhood skill acquisition. They suggest that the interpersonal skills girls learn at an early age are a result of social learning. Certainly these skills are useful for women in terms of intimacy generally, and in terms of their role as keepers of heterosexual relationships in particular. For example, girls are more



From "Venus Observed" by Ruth Davis in *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, 1972, Davis, CA.

In the early days of the second wave of the Women's Movement, women gathered in small consciousness-raising groups to talk about their experiences as women, and, of course, sooner or later, the conversation turned to sex. What surprised most women as they began to talk openly was that they were not the only ones ever to fake orgasm. While the sexual revolution was rolling on for men, opening greater and greater access to sexual exploits with lots of women, women were finding themselves continuing to fall into the role prescribed by their gender—pleasing men sexually even when they themselves were not being satisfied. But as the Women's Movement began to have an impact, women came to expect to be equal partners in the sexual revolution . . . and that meant no longer faking orgasms.

In 1968 Anne Koedt wrote "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," denouncing Freud's construction of the vaginal orgasm as the truly mature sexual response and denigrating the clitoral orgasm as "infantile." She argued that by marginalizing the clitoris, Freud and other doctors and scientists had controlled women's sexuality and had made women feel sexually inadequate for not achieving vaginal orgasm. Soon, the "faked orgasm" became a metaphor for women's sexual exploitation.

And feminists offered a variety of solutions, from sex toys to celibacy. In 1970, Shulamith Firestone argued that sex, not social class, was the root of all oppression. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, she argued that reproductive technologies should be pursued to deliver women from the tyranny of their biology. Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch*, contended that all women should become sexually liberated, and she advocated a strike, the withdrawal of women from sexual labor. She said that women should have the same sexual freedom as men and, if need be, should use men for sexual pleasure. The debate about sexuality swirled among feminists through the 70s, encompassing issues ranging from pornography to rape, abortion to prostitution. And while the question of the dangers and/or pleasures of sex remained an open one, the raising of the question itself had made an important mark on the consciousness of American women.

Source: Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open* (New York: Viking, 2000).

likely to play games that involve communication: talking and listening, as well as taking the role of the other through imaginary role-playing games. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to play rule-bound games where the “rights” and “wrongs” of the game are predetermined rather than negotiated. As a result, girls learn to notice and are trained to be perceptive. They learn to be sensitive of others’ feelings, and become more willing to do emotional work. Boys are often raised to repress and deny their inner thoughts and ignore their fears. Often they are taught that feelings are feminine or are for sissies. Girls become more comfortable with intimacy, and boys learn to shy away from it because intimacy is often seen as synonymous with weakness. Boys learn to camouflage feelings under a veneer of calm and rationality because fears are not manly. Importantly, as boys grow up they learn to rely on women to take care of their emotional needs, and girls learn that this request is part of being a woman.

Because emotional intimacy is about self-disclosure and revealing oneself to others, when people are intimate with each other, they open themselves to vulnerability. In the process of becoming intimate, one person shares feelings and information about her-/himself, and then the other person (if that person wants to maintain and develop intimacy) responds by sharing too. In turn each gives away little pieces of her-/himself, and, in return, mutual trust, understanding, and friendship develop. Given the baggage of gender, however, what can happen is that one person does more of the giving away, and the other reveals less; one opens up to being vulnerable, and the other maintains personal power. The first person also takes on the role of helping the other share, drawing that person out, translating ordinary messages for their hidden emotional meanings, and investing greater amounts of energy into interpersonal communication. The first person has taken the role prescribed by femininity and the latter the role that masculinity endorses. The important point here is that intimacy is about power. Men who take on masculine scripts tend to be less able to open themselves up because of anxiety associated with being vulnerable and potentially losing personal power. Again, anyone can take on masculine or feminine sexual scripts even though normatively men are more likely to learn the former and women the latter.

Central in understanding masculine sexual scripts and issues around emotional intimacy is the mandate against homosexuality. Because boys and men may play rough and work closely together—touching each other physically in sports and other masculine pursuits—there are lots of opportunities for *homoeroticism* (arousal of sexual feelings through contact with people of the same sex). In response to this, strong norms against homosexuality regulate masculine behavior—norms fed by homophobia and enforced by such institutions as education, sports, media, family, the military, and the state. These norms discourage men from showing affection with each other and thus discourage intimacy between men. They also encourage male bonding where women may function as objects in order for men to assert sexual potency as “real” heterosexuals. Examples of this include women as entertainment for various kinds of stag parties, women as pinups in places where men live and/or work together, and, in the extreme, gang rape. Homophobia serves to keep women apart too, of course. In particular, women are encouraged to give up the love of other women in order to gain the approval of men. However, compared with men, women in the United States tend to have more opportunities for intimacies between friends. This is also demonstrated in language about friendships: Women friends call each other “girlfriend” with no sexual innuendo, while men tend not to call their platonic male friends “boyfriend.”

Two People Who Are Asking for Trouble



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A key aspect of intimacy, and thus sexuality, is interpersonal communication. Again, the ways we communicate in relationships have a lot to do with gender, as well as membership in other communities with specific norms about social interaction, including verbal language spoken and nonverbal language expressed. Feminine and masculine speech varies in the following ways: First, in terms of speech patterns, feminine speech is more polite, less profane, and uses more standard forms. More fillers like "um," hedges like "sort of" and "I guess," and intensifiers like "really" and "very" are used. In addition, feminine speech involves tag questions on statements like "It's hot today, isn't it?" and often turns an imperative into a question: "Would you mind opening the door?" rather than "Open the door!" All these forms of speaking are less authoritative. Note again that although women in U.S. society are more likely to use feminine speech and men to use masculine speech, anyone can learn these speech patterns and they also vary by membership in other identities and communities. Indeed, women are often trained in masculine speech to function effectively in authority positions or careers in which an assertive communication style is necessary or most productive.

Second, feminine speech tends to use different intonations with a higher pitch that is recognized as less credible and assertive than a lower pitch. This speech has more emotional affect and is more likely to end with a raised pitch that sounds like a question and gives a hesitant quality to speaking.

Third, feminine speech differs from masculine speech in that the latter involves more direct interruptions of other speakers. Listening to real people talking, we find that although men and women interrupt at about the same rate in same-sex conversations (women interrupting women, and men interrupting men), in mixed groups men inter-

IDEAS FOR ACTIV

- Work with various women's groups on your campus to develop, publish, and distribute a "Check Up on Your Relationship" brochure. This brochure should contain a checklist of signs for emotional/physical/sexual abuse and resources to get help.
- Organize and present a forum on healthy dating practices.
- Organize a clothes drive for your local women's shelter.
- Research gay rights, such as protection against discrimination in employment or housing, domestic partner benefits, or hate crimes legislation in your city or state. If you find that gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people in your area do not enjoy full civil rights, write your government officials to encourage them to enact policies providing civil rights for queer people.
- Organize a National Coming Out Day celebration on your campus.
- Organize an event on your campus in recognition of World AIDS Day, which is December 1.
- Become a member of the Human Rights Campaign. For more information see www.hrc.org.

rupt other speakers more than women do, and men are more likely to change the subject in the process, whereas women tend to interrupt to add to the story with their own experiences and thoughts. Although there are cultural differences around interruptions, it is clear that who interrupts and who gets interrupted is about power.

Fourth, feminine speech patterns involve more confirmation and reinforcement, such as "Yes, go on" or "I hear you" or "uh-huh." Examples of nonverbal confirmation of the speaker might include leaning forward, eye contact, and nodding, although these behaviors may vary (as does all social interaction) across communities.

Finally, feminine speech and masculine speech fulfill different functions. Feminine speech tends to work toward maintaining relationships, developing rapport, avoiding conflict, and maintaining cooperation. Masculine speech, on the other hand, is more likely oriented toward attracting and maintaining an audience, asserting power and dominance, and giving information. Given these gendered differences in communication, it is easy to see how problems might arise in interpersonal interaction generally and in sexual relationships in particular, and how these issues are related to the give-and-take of interpersonal power.

In this way, sexual intimacy is as much about sexual scripts taught by society as it is about physiology. Sexuality is wound up with our understandings of gender as well as other intersecting identities that shape our sense of ourselves as sexual persons. These social constructs encourage us to feel desire and enjoy certain sexual practices and relationships, and they guide the meanings we associate with our experiences.