

reading 10

Sexuality and Social Theorizing

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Introduction

Many of us don't think of sexuality and theorizing as two things that go together, but theories can be very useful in helping us understand sexuality. Theories are simply ways of viewing and organizing the world and of making sense of what happens. Sociologists use theories to understand, explain, predict, question, or change social behaviors and trends. Theories about sex vary dramatically across time and place, and reflect the social and moral thinking of the day.

In addition to helping us understand the history and context of sexuality, theories also provide explanations for sexual attitudes and behavior: why there are differences in how people think about sex or how people behave sexually, how societal norms and laws regarding sex arise and are enforced, and how and why change takes place. Sexuality is important in most of our lives, yet many people don't understand it, are uncomfortable talking about it, and don't know where to go to get their questions answered. Sexuality theories can provide explanations and answers, but no one theory is appropriate for addressing all questions and concerns about sexuality. Thus, we are especially interested in the ways in which sociological theories help us understand the social construction and social control of sexuality.²

We'll begin by reviewing what some early thinkers (called sexologists) had to say about sexuality. Then, we'll examine the utility of sociological theory for studying sex, and end with some current theories, questions, and challenges. As you'll see, theories about sexuality are constantly offered, challenged, revised, and rejected. Throughout the

reading, we'll be asking "What relevance does theory have for helping us understand the social construction and control of sexuality?"

Laying the Groundwork: The Sexologists

We're probably all familiar with Sigmund Freud, sometimes called "The Father of Modern Psychoanalysis," who felt that sexuality was a driving force in human behavior (Freud [1938] 1995), but there were other important early thinkers as well. For example, at the end of the nineteenth century (prior to most of Freud's work), Richard von Krafft-Ebing ([1871] 1965) cataloged types of sexual deviance, and later on, Havelock Ellis (1942) pondered the differences between normal and abnormal sexuality and appealed for tolerance of a wide array of sexual behaviors.³

Freud, the most theoretical of the early sexologists, based his observations on the people he treated, who were mainly wealthy Victorians. Freud believed that sex was a basic drive that motivated most people, and that sexuality was formed early in life. He theorized that, as toddlers, young boys fell in love with their mothers (the "Oedipus complex") and that young girls fell in love with their fathers (the "Electra complex"). He suggested that each wanted the same-sex parent out of the way. He introduced the terms "penis envy" and "castration anxiety," arguing that young girls envied boys' penises, and that young boys were anxious about keeping theirs, for they feared that their fathers would castrate them to win the rivalry over their mothers. According to Freud, in order to resolve these issues and become

healthy heterosexual adults, children had to learn to identify with their same-sex parents. Freud also made many controversial statements about women's sexuality, including his supposition that women have two types of orgasms (clitoral and vaginal), with the vaginal being superior, and that recollections of sexual abuse are simply the fantasies of neurotic young women who fantasize about their fathers and crave excitement in their lives.⁴

Some of the ideas of Freud and his contemporaries may seem very outdated by today's standards, but these sexologists still influence the ways in which scholars think about sexuality and the ways therapists treat sexual problems. The work of these early sexologists resisted the social control of sexuality by challenging state and religious definitions of normal and abnormal sexual practices and contributed to the social construction of sexuality by openly discussing sexual variability, the origins of homosexuality, and the relation of women to sexuality. While their perspectives may lack the social and historical sophistication of later theories, their ideas have persisted through the years.

In the United States during the mid-twentieth century, the study of sexuality shifted from theorizing to research. Using models drawn from the biomedical sciences, researchers such as Alfred Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard 1953) and William Masters and Virginia Johnson (1966; 1970), provided an empirical base for testing the ideas and theories of earlier scholars. Although they were primarily researchers, their findings have influenced the ways in which Americans think about sexuality today.⁵

The Contributions of Twentieth-Century Sex Researchers to Sexual Theorizing

Alfred Kinsey is probably the best known of the twentieth-century sex researchers. His curiosity about human sexuality led him and his team

to survey 12,000 Americans and to write *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). His books created a huge controversy and were even banned in some areas. This negative publicity increased the visibility of his work, exposing his ideas on sexuality to hundreds of thousands of average Americans. He challenged the conservative ways in which sexuality was constructed by documenting the range of sexual practices among Americans and discussing numerous taboo topics including female orgasm, masturbation, and homosexuality. Moreover, Kinsey argued that "normal and abnormal" and "good and bad" were labels created to control sexuality. He illustrated the wide diversity in sexual expression in the United States and noted the discrepancies between public standards for sex and private expressions of sexuality. The research of Kinsey and his peers raised questions about the theories of Freud and the early sexologists, and laid the groundwork for more recent theories such as postmodernism and queer theory, which we discuss later.⁶

From the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties, Masters and Johnson (1966; 1970) further challenged social constructions of sexuality by observing volunteers engaging in masturbation and coitus in their labs, while hooked up to monitors. Although their samples were not representative, their data and theories on human sexual response are still used by clinicians today.⁷ For example, they demonstrated that the clitoris is the seat of the orgasm (in direct contradiction to Freud's earlier theorizing) and documented similarities and differences in male and female sexual response. Masters and Johnson also argued that couples' sexual problems were not caused by neuroses or disorders, but instead resulted from poor communication, marital conflict, or a lack of information. Their findings greatly influence the ways in which both scholars and the general public think about and theorize sexuality today by questioning prior theories and providing an empirical basis for many of our later theories.

Sociological Theories and Sexuality

Our discussion of theorizing about sexuality will focus on differences between "traditional" sociological theories and those—such as feminism and postmodernism—that emerged in reaction to these perspectives. Traditional sociological theories include structural functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and exchange theory. Although most classical sociological theory (written in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) did not explicitly address issues of sexuality, those who wrote on the subject usually did so within the context of marriage, emphasizing the social control of intimate relations. For instance, Marx ([1888] 1978) and Durkheim ([1897] 1979) analyzed the regulatory practices of marriage, while Max Weber called sexual love "the greatest irrational force of life" ([1915] 1958: 343). Weber saw religious forces as seeking to diminish love's power through regulation—again, referring to marriage. Other lesser-known theorists of this era, such as Marianne Weber, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Anna Julia Cooper, examined marriage as a gendered form of social control over sexuality.

Structural-functionalism, or systems theory,⁸ strongly influenced social thought and policy in the post-World War II years. According to structural functionalists, society was organized into parts (or structures), each of which had a specific function to fill. When each was performing its function, the system would run smoothly. In families, for example, men were supposed to be wage earners and administrators, while women were supposed to be housewives, mothers, and caretakers. The structural functionalists argued that things worked best when each person knew her or his role and stuck to it (Parsons and Bales 1955). Regarding sexuality, they argued that men were "naturally" the aggressors, and were always ready and willing to have sex, while women were "naturally" more reticent and submissive, and

had to be coaxed into sexual situations. Men continually pushed the boundaries, while women constantly enforced them. Women had "pure" natures, while men were more experienced sexually, and expected to be "worldly." According to structural functionalism, the system functioned best only when heterosexuals married, had children together, and raised them in two-parent families. From this traditional perspective, sociologists viewed homosexuals and others who did not fit into the nuclear family model as "dysfunctional" or "deviant." Examples include Albert J. Reiss's writing on street hustlers (1961), and Laud Humphreys's ethnographic exploration of sex in public restrooms (1970).

Structural-functionalism and deviance theories dominated sociology and influenced the social construction and control of sexuality into the 1970s. Social movements—for civil rights, sexual rights, women's rights, and gay/lesbian rights—led to questioning of the status quo, and eventually raised questions that led to theoretical change. What about men who weren't sexually aggressive or promiscuous, and women who were? Were they really "dysfunctional" as the theory suggested, or were they simply part of a normal range of behaviors (as Kinsey's analysis indicated)? Was the system really running smoothly, or was it simply supporting the largely white, male, middle-class status quo? Where did single mothers, people of color, gays and lesbians, and those who enjoyed nonmarital sex fit in? Because of these questions, sociological theorizing about sexuality took several turns.

Conflict theorists (Buss and Malamuth 1996; Eisenstein 1978) argued that the systems surrounding marriage, family, and sexuality were not running smoothly at all, and that the norms of the day were oppressive to many people. Anyone who fell outside a very narrow range of behaviors was penalized and often ostracized as well. At best, these nonconformists were considered deviants, and punished with social stigma. At worst, they were arrested, jailed, institutionalized, or even

killed because of their sexuality. In many states, this social control extended to laws against having sex with someone of the same sex, someone of a different racial or ethnic group, or someone to whom you were not married (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997).

Conflict theorists also asked questions about sexual rights and freedoms and examined how arrangements of the day (such as marriage) were benefiting some people (men), while hurting others (women) (Eisenstein 1978). They questioned the status quo and pushed for social change, arguing that as long as sexual practices were conducted between consenting adults, they shouldn't be considered dysfunctional, abnormal, or illegal; and that current sexual arrangements were in need of examination and, potentially, elimination. Contemporary applications of conflict theory are also evident in global and political economy approaches to sexuality (Altman 2001) that examine "how economic and political transformations have shaped sexual experiences, identities, politics, and desires" (Gamson and Moon 2004: 56).⁹

While conflict theorists challenged norms, systems, and stability, they often neglected any examination of the interpersonal level. Indeed, not all people wanted to be "freed" from conformity and stability, and some stayed in sexual relationships because of love and commitment, despite elements of institutional oppression (Simmel 1964). And while the conflict theorists explained change very well, they sometimes lacked explanations for stability. On the whole, conflict theories did a better job of explaining structural and systematic sexual oppression than they did of explaining individual behaviors. In contrast, symbolic-interaction and exchange theories—which we review next—emphasized the individual level of analysis.

Symbolic interaction theorists were less concerned with social structures and institutions, and more concerned with how individuals interacted sexually (Plummer 2003). These theorists examined the meanings attached to sexual behaviors and how behavior changes based on interactions with others (Goffman 1959). Symbolic interac-

tion helps explain the social construction of sexuality—why people interpret others as they do, why misunderstandings occur, and how individuals form opinions about themselves as sexual beings. However, because the symbolic interaction theorists focus on microlevel interactions (between dyads or small groups), they tend to underestimate the role of social institutions and structures in controlling sexual behavior.

One theory that emerged from the symbolic interactionist perspective was social constructionist theory (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Proponents of this perspective argued that through interaction, individuals create shared meanings that are reinforced by norms, laws, and social institutions. Social construction theory helps us understand why people label some components of sexuality "right" and others "wrong," and why there is so much pressure to conform to sexual norms (Plummer 2003).

Another direction taken by symbolic interaction theory was sexual scripting theory (Gagnon and Simon 1973; 1987). These theories, based on an acting analogy (Goffman 1959), suggest that humans have scripts for sexual behavior that tell us who to be attracted to, how to behave sexually, and even how to feel about our sexual experiences. Sexual scripts exist on the social level, the interpersonal level, and the individual level. Cultural scripts are contained in the broader norms of a society and define what is legal or illegal, permissible or not permissible. Interpersonal scripts tell us how to act with partners and how to respond to certain situations, while individual (or intrapsychic) scripts influence how we view ourselves and evaluate our sexuality.

Taking a slightly different perspective, exchange theorists argued that sexuality was in many ways a transaction or trade. Unlike the structural functionalists who focused on maintaining stability, the exchange theorists posited that relationships are only stable so long as people feel they are getting a fair deal (Thibault and Kelly 1967). If the balance tilts too far in their partner's favor, they may withhold sex, have an affair, begin using por-

nography, or even withdraw from the relationship entirely in an attempt to tip the balance of power back in their own favor (Donnelly and Burgess 2006). One early exchange theorist was Waller (1938), who suggested that in a heterosexual relationship, women exchange their looks, youth, and sexuality for a man's status, money, and security. The couple bargain with each other—and the one who has the least interest in continuing the relationship has the upper hand. Much popular wisdom contained in “self-help” books (such as Robin Norwood's 1990 book, *Women Who Love Too Much*) is still based on these notions.

Critics of exchange theory point out that like conflict theory, it strips the role of love, emotion, and sacrifice from understanding romantic and sexual relationships. Exchange theorists assume that individuals act in rational, utilitarian ways (attempting to maximize rewards and minimize costs), and that they are always motivated by self-interest. Moreover, they assume that value can be attached to all aspects of a relationship, and that people actually measure the quantity and quality of sexual interactions. A final critique of this theory is that, like symbolic interaction, it pays little attention to the larger social context in which exchanges take place.

In sum, traditional sociological theories tended not to place sexuality at the center of their theorizing, but rather addressed sexuality within the context of families, couples, relationships, and deviance. While these theories may help us understand the social control and construction of sexuality, they tend to describe, rather than question, existing social arrangements. Challenges to these ways of thinking about sex often came from other disciplines and from countries outside the United States.

Challenges and Alternatives to Traditional Sociological Theorizing

With the emerging sexual freedom of the 1970s, sexual research and theorizing became less taboo.

Although it was still marginal to most of mainstream sociology, some theorists began to place sexuality at the center of their inquiries. These new perspectives challenged sociologists' silence with regard to issues of sex and sexuality and pushed the boundaries of traditional social sciences. Although they posed a wide variety of questions, we focus on those asked by three groups: feminists, postmodernists, and queer theorists. These theorists draw on ideas and explanations from a variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. While it is impossible to address all the contributions of these three theoretical perspectives, we will introduce a few of the key themes for understanding the social construction and control of sexuality. First, we'll examine the challenges posed by feminist theories.

By feminist theory, we mean a variety of (often competing) perspectives, or feminisms.¹⁰ At the heart of these perspectives is the idea that patriarchal (male-run) societies are oppressive to women, and that women must have both freedom and choice if they are to contribute to society and become fully participatory adults. Feminists identify “the personal as political,” meaning that the troubles women face as a result of sexism are not simply individual private issues (such as an abusive male partner), but rather part of a larger public problem (domestic violence) best solved through political change (Weedon 1999). Three key contributions of feminist theory include feminist discussions of the gendered nature of sexuality; heterosexuality as a form of social control; and the notion of intersectionality.

First, feminists question the ways in which sexuality has been constructed, and note that these constructions favor men in a variety of ways. At the intersection of gender and sexuality, for example, they point out that men control women's sexuality by defining it in masculine and heterosexual terms (Rich 1980). All women are presumed to be heterosexual, men are presumed to be the initiators of sex, and the sex act itself is defined in terms of male performance (Tiefer 1995). Traditionally, “sex” meant that a man inserted

his penis into a woman's vagina, and other forms of sexuality were seen as "not quite sex." When the man ejaculated, "sex" was over. Moreover, feminists questioned the usefulness of the very categories we use for sex and gender, illustrating that gender itself is a social construction and that using biological essentialist arguments¹¹ about "women's natural place" is also a means of social control (Elshtain 1981; Epstein 1988).

Feminist theory about sexual violence, such as rape and sexual harassment, explored how violence is a tool of social control by men, and pointed out that restrictions on abortion, birth control, and sexual expression were oppressive to women and denied them choice (Brownmiller 1976; Kelly 1988; Russell 1998). Some feminists (Dworkin 1987; 1989; MacKinnon 1989) theorized that because of the power differentials between men and women, all heterosexual sex had an element of force behind it. They saw heterosexual sex and rape as existing on a continuum, with the common element being male control of female sexuality. In contrast, a coalition of sex-positive feminist theorists campaigned for the recognition of women's agency in sexuality, and began to organize groups such as dancers and prostitutes into professional unions and organizations (see Nagle 1997).

A second strand of theory emerged from the work of lesbian feminists who theorized that the institution of heterosexuality and restrictive notions about "normal" sexuality limit what counts as sexual. Adrienne Rich (1980) argued that heterosexuality is central to patriarchy and, thus, not a choice but rather a form of social control of women. Moreover, she theorized that there is not a clear distinction between lesbians and heterosexual women but instead argued women's experiences can be understood on a lesbian continuum. This continuum describes the range of women's experiences with other women, including identifying with them, bonding with them, and sharing sexual experiences.

As feminism promised to give "voice" to women, many asked "whose voice?" For exam-

ple, Gayle S. Rubin (1984) argued that feminist theories of sex must account for the oppression of all sexual minorities, not just women. She posited that the state and other social institutions reinforce an erotic hierarchy that defines "normal" sexual behavior, emphasizing heterosexual, marital, monogamous, vanilla sex,¹² and demonizing other sexual practices. Not always popular with mainstream feminists, these theories drew on many of the same ideas as postmodern and queer theories that we discuss later.

Marginalized groups of women, such as women of color, poor women, women with little or no formal education, and women from non-Western nations, argued that the majority of feminist theorizing ignored their standpoints and assumed that white middle class women's experiences represented everyone (hooks 1981; 1984; Lorde 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991). For example, African American feminist theorists (sometimes called "womanists") argued that while white women may suffer because of their gender status, the color of their skin gives them privilege to be protected sexually and depicted as virginal or pure. In contrast, black women have been seen as sexually accessible and their history has been one of rape and exploitation by both white and black men (Davis 1983; Hill Collins 2004; hooks 1984; Wyatt 1997).

Initially, critics of white feminist thought focused primarily on racial differences, arguing that the standpoint of African American women was ignored in feminist theorizing, but eventually sociologists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1991; 2004) pointed out that intersectionality—the ways in which a *variety* of statuses and characteristics intersect—needed to be taken into account when thinking about female sexuality. Intersectionality theory contended that not only does one's race affect the ways sexuality is experienced and perceived, but so does one's class, age, ability, sexual orientation, and nation. Essentially, there can be no single perspective on black women's sexuality, poor women's sexual-

ity, or the sexuality of women in non-Western nations.

While feminists critiqued the gender order, postmodernists questioned the usefulness of grand theories to explain the social world and wondered whether it was meaningful to search for universal, all-encompassing truths about society.¹³ They argued that there was no "right" way of seeing or describing the world, and that no two people shared the same reality. They posited that ideas about right and wrong and good and bad had no inherent meanings, but were simply social constructions that had emerged from modern society. They questioned the concept of modernity itself, and wondered if modern society, with its emphasis on science, positivism, and progress, was really beneficial to humanity.

Moreover, the postmodernists recommended that we not take the social order at face value, but instead work to deconstruct existing structures (such as language, law, or sexuality) by examining their various components (such as history, discourse, and interaction). In contrast to earlier theorists, postmodernists emphasized that the power to control and construct sexuality does not lie with one central entity (such as government), but is constantly negotiated by a variety of ways of talking or thinking about a topic, coming from a variety of groups (such as religion, activist movements, or the legal system).

Applying these ideas to sexuality, postmodern theorists argued that sexuality has been produced in socially and culturally specific ways. Michel Foucault (1978) examined the construction of sexuality by analyzing a variety of discourses and sexual practices. In the *History of Sexuality*, he rejected "the repressive hypothesis" that blamed the Victorians for the shame and guilt that people in many Western societies felt about sexuality, and instead examined the influence of the scientific discourse on these constructions of sexuality. He rejected the dominant belief that modern industrial societies, such as the Victorians, "ushered in an age of increased sexual repression" (49). Rather, he argued that multiple sources of power

(for instance, religion, medicine, education, law) dominated our understandings of sexuality and sought to manipulate sexual attitudes and practices according to their own (often very profitable) agendas. He went on to say that scientific disciplines, such as psychology and medicine, control sexualities, but while they inform us, they also dominate us. Individuals internalize the norms set by scientists, and monitor their own behavior in an effort to conform to the scientific constructions of sexuality.

Postmodern perspectives have appealed to a wide variety of scholars, and some feminist postmodernists felt that feminism and postmodernism could be complementary. For example, both groups questioned concepts such as objectivity, universality, and reason, claiming that what is considered objective in a given culture at a particular time in history reflects the interests of those in power. Moreover, both feminists and postmodernists have worked to avoid the tendency to construct theories based on the experiences of privileged groups of women (Flax 1990; Nicholson 1990).

Although the deconstruction of modern ideas about sexuality is a useful theoretical exercise, critics maintain that it is more of an intellectual exercise than an explanatory framework. They note that while postmodernism critiques and deconstructs modernity and objectivity, it suggests no alternatives and provides no agenda for social change. While postmodern perspectives have gained some acceptance in sociology (Mirchandani 2005), the larger contribution of this perspective has likely been its influence on queer theory.

Drawing on the energy of the gay and AIDS movements of the 1980s and the academic perspectives of postmodernism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, queer theorists (Seidman 1996; Stein and Plummer 1996; Sullivan 2003) challenged the identities seen as normative and natural in our culture, insisting they were instead, "arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary" (Seidman 1996: 11).¹⁴ For example, queer theorists argued

that sexuality is structured as a “binary opposition” (meaning that our culture has constructed heterosexuality and homosexuality as opposites), with heterosexuality given the label of good and homosexuality the label of bad or immoral. These labels are then used for social control, as evidenced by the passage of laws against same-sex marriage and adoption. Additionally, focusing on some identities and not others silences or excludes the other experiences. Part of the queer theorists’ project is to continually question and deconstruct current beliefs about sexual, gender, and sex identities. By questioning binary social categories such as male or female, masculine or feminine, and heterosexual or homosexual, queer theorists demonstrate how these sexual categories and identities are actually fluid and not necessarily natural. Rather, they argue that current categorizations of sexuality, gender, and sex are tied to power, and that some institutions and groups have more power to define what is sexually acceptable than others do. Queer theorists believe transsexuals, the intersexed, and those immersed in drag culture are boundary crossers, challenging rigid categories of sex, gender, and sexual identity (c.f. Butler 1990; Currah 2001).

When they speak of “queering” sexuality, queer theorists are not talking about making everyone gay or lesbian. Instead, they are questioning (or “queering”) existing sexual arrangements that privilege heterosexual, coupled, monogamous adults. This queering reveals the biases our ideas are constructed on, and demonstrates how certain groups benefit from current constructions of sexual identities. In general, queer theorists argue that it is important to separate the sexual behaviors that people participate in from the moral judgments of those with power in a society.

For all its contributions to sexuality theory, queer theory does not appeal to everyone and some scholars question its usefulness for sociological inquiry. For instance, Namaste (1996) and Green (2002) question the explanatory power of queer theory and argue that their focus on the abstract ignores the social realities of real sexual

beings. Furthermore, Gamson and Moon (2004) debate the value of queer theory for addressing traditional sociological problems such as systems of oppression, and suggest that contributions of social theories, such as intersectionality and political economy, are more useful for sociological research.

Feminists, postmodernists, and queer theorists challenge the boundaries on which much of sexual theorizing takes place, while also building on some aspects of earlier theories and ideas. The common thread among the theories presented in this section is that current arrangements are socially constructed and must be questioned. They posit that old ideas about sexuality may not be useful or relevant, and indeed act as a form of social control—silencing, excluding, and even harming groups of people.

As you might imagine, these theories are confusing to many students, and aren’t necessarily that popular with “mainstream” society. Most people take existing structures (institutions, norms, and conventions) surrounding sexuality at face value, and rarely think to question (or deconstruct) them. People assume that existing patterns of behavior exist because that is what works best for society, and that to go against these rules, beliefs, and norms would be to invite chaos. Even when people violate these widely held prohibitions, such as the ones against premarital sex or adultery, they often still feel that as a whole, these rules benefit society. Moreover, these norms are upheld and enforced by social institutions such as religion, family, education, the legal system, and the economy. To question them feels—and may well be—dangerous.

Can Theory Help Us Understand Sexuality?

So, back to our original question—can social theories help us understand sexuality? We think so. Although each of the theories presented here is based on a different assumption and operates at a different level, they all provide us with ways

of understanding the sexual behavior of individuals and groups, the development of social norms, and the underpinnings of social policies regarding sexuality. These theories invite us to ask interesting questions and to push the boundaries of our knowledge. The most liberatory theories, in our view, are the ones that reject notions of normalcy, resist moralizing, and question biological or essentialistic views of sexual behavior. Rather than providing answers, such theories delight in muddying the waters and raising new questions. Will we ever have a theory that explains all aspects of sexuality? Probably not. But by theorizing about sex, we broaden our understandings of ourselves and of the world around us. And, it very well may be that the most interesting parts of sexuality are in the questions, not in the answers!

NOTES

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2. By social construction we mean the process by which people create ideas, meanings, categories, and values through interaction. Social control refers to a system of rewards and punishments intended to control or influence others' behavior.

3. The field of sexology and the scientific study of sexuality emerged in the late nineteenth century. Sigmund Freud, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and others were integral to the development of sex research and our understanding of sexuality. These scholars and others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were trained in the medical profession and, thus, approached issues of sexuality using a medical model. The ideas of these early sex researchers contributed to our theoretical understanding of sexuality in more ways than we can discuss in this essay. For more on the history of sex research see Bullough (1995), and for

classic writings of this era see Bland and Doan (1998) and Barreca (1995).

4. The latter was a revision to his earlier theory. Initially, he believed that sexual abuse was real, but because of his colleagues' disbelief, Freud revised his theory and marked his patient's recollections of child sexual abuse down to "fantasy."

5. For more on Kinsey, see Reading 7 in this book. For additional information on sex research during the twentieth century see Ericksen (1999) and Bullough (1995).

6. During the first half of the twentieth century several other researchers conducted sex surveys of specific populations, including Katherine Bement Davis's research on female sexuality (1929) and Evelyn Hooker's work on male sexuality (1956; 1957; 1958), and expanded our understanding of sexual variation and the social construction of sexual deviance.

7. Teifer (1995) provides a thorough critique of Masters and Johnson's sample and their findings about the human sexual response cycle.

8. For many scholars, the distinction between these theories is the level of analysis. Structural-functionalism addresses the structural or societal level of analysis and systems theory explores the microlevel issues of families and individuals.

9. See also Reading 53 in this book.

10. Additionally, the term *feminism* covers theory, belief systems, and political action. Many times it is difficult to distinguish among them because the boundaries between academic perspectives and practices are not always clear.

11. Biological essentialism argues that women are naturally different from men because of their ability to become mothers, and that these differences mean that women are better suited to certain roles and men to others.

12. *Vanilla sex* refers to standard heterosexual practices, and excludes such variations as sadomasochism (BDSM), fetish, and kink.

13. The ideas of postmodernism and poststructuralism are intertwined and trace their roots to French philosophers such as Foucault (1978) and Lyotard (1984). As with feminism, there are many variations and conflicting perspectives on these theories. In this article we are focusing on postmodernism.

14. Like the feminists and postmodernists, queer theorists do not always agree or even acknowledge the same texts. In addition to Foucault, discussed previously,

Judith Butler (1990; 1993) and Eve Sedgwick (1990) produced works widely acknowledged to be central to queer theory. In this article we emphasize sociological interpretations of queer theory.

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