

Sex, Gender and Development: Challenging Heteronormativity



Compiled by Shivananda Khan and Susie Jolly



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Introduction

If development really did justice to the diversity of people's social and sexual identities, livelihoods and living arrangements, how would it be different to the approaches we see today? What would be done differently? How can practitioners, activists, academics and policy actors concerned with challenging oppressive gender and sexuality norms work together to loosen development's "straightjacket"? This booklet offers insights on these questions with a range of quotes from activists, theorists, and international organisations. These include analyses of existing sex and gender norms, how the development industry colludes with these, and alternative ways of thinking and acting on these issues. This publication was inspired by the symposium 'Untying Development's Straightjacket: Masculinities, Sexualities and Social Change', held in Cape Town, 18-22 September, 2009, co-convened by the Institute of Development Studies, the Dissident Men Programme, UNDP and UNAIDS, with funding from DFID, SDC, Sida, UNDP, and UNAIDS.

Heterosexuality is a key site of intersection between gender and **sexuality**, and one that reveals the interconnections between sexual and non-sexual aspects of social life... it entails who washes the sheets and whose wage pays for them as well as what goes on between them.

Stevi Jackson 2005, The social complexity of heteronormativity: gender, sexuality and heterosexuality, Lecture at the international conference 'Heteronormativity – A Fruitful Concept?' Trondheim, June 2nd-4th 2005, p7



As a black African woman from a poor country, I have made a proactive decision to say that I am part of development. According to the development industry, women like me are all heterosexual, living in villages, married, pregnant, with children, and so on. So I think it's important for someone like me to say I'm part of development, in order to challenge those assumptions.

Stella Nyanzi, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, at IDS Workshop 'Sexuality and the Development Industry' April 2008



THE ORIGINAL DEFINITION OF HETERONORMATIVITY.....

By heteronormativity we mean the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations – often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions. Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense, while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might not be heteronormative.



We don't have heteronormativity in Bangladesh. We have marriage normativity. If a woman wants to have a heterosexual relationship before or outside of marriage, this is not socially acceptable. If a man wants to have relationships with other men, he can probably get away with it. But everyone has to get married.

A member of the audience responding to Susie Jolly's lecture on 'Sexual Rights', May 2006, at the Naripokkho NGO offices, Dhaka, Bangladesh

I understand heteronormativity to refer to those norms related to gender and sexuality which keep in place patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality as well as other systems and ideologies related to power such as religious fundamentalism, casteism, the class system and so on.

Jaya Sharma 2009 'Reflections on the Construction of Heteronormativity' in *Development*, 52(1), p53



The invisibility of male victims of sexual violence is very much part of heteronormativity. I would like us to confront that head on.

Chris Dolan, Makerere University, Uganda, at IDS Workshop 'Sexuality and the Development Industry' April 2008

The HIV/AIDS industry imagines not just a heteronormative world, but a world where women who sleep with women don't exist.

Andil Gosine, York University, Canada/Trinidad, at IDS Workshop
'Sexuality and the Development Industry' April 2008



Image source;
<http://www.mythinglinks.org/India~DancingWomen~R95~goldened~r90s1.jpg>

As a result of being marginalised and socially excluded... lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons are prevented from participating in society on equal terms, for example by having limited opportunities for earning a livelihood... This has led to a situation of widespread poverty among LGBT persons in many countries.

Action plan for Swedish international development agency work on sexual orientation and gender identity 2007-2009, p2



There is growing understanding that large numbers of very poor people are missing out on the benefits of growth and the wider achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Often, this is the result of people being socially excluded on the basis of their social identity (such as race, religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, caste, age and sexuality).

Web feature on 'Reducing Poverty by Tackling Social Exclusion - A DFID policy paper' 6 September 2005, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/social-exclusion-intro.asp>



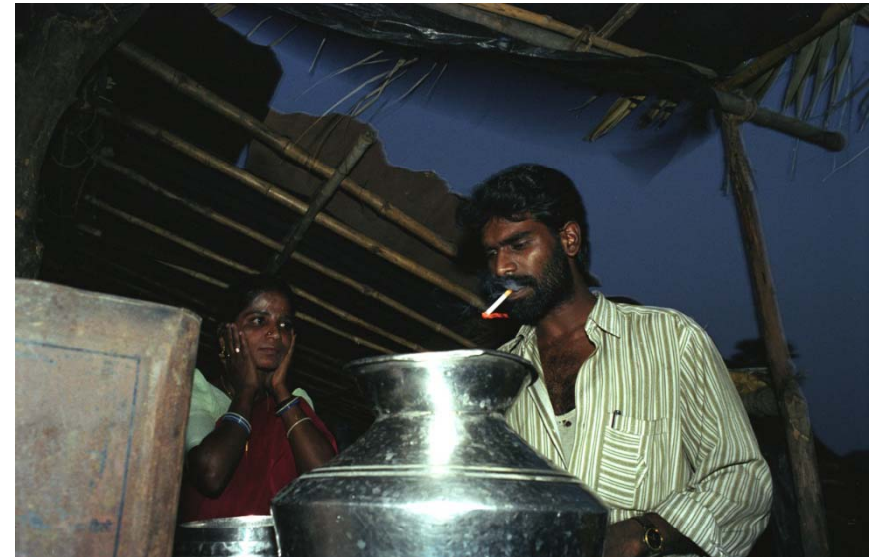
Queer and feminism converge insofar as both question the inevitability and naturalness of heterosexuality and both, to some extent at least, link the binary divide of gender with that between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Beyond this they differ in emphasis. Queer theorists seek to unsettle heteronormativity, but are relatively unconcerned with what goes on within heterosexual relations. Feminists, because they are concerned with the ways in which heterosexuality depends upon and guarantees gender division, are far more interested in the institutionalization and everyday practice of heterosexual relations.

Stevi Jackson 2005, The social complexity of heteronormativity: gender, sexuality and heterosexuality, Lecture at the international conference 'Heteronormativity – A Fruitful Concept?' Trondheim, June 2nd-4th 2005, p2



If you are still in a mental prison you will say “I’ve paid the dowry and sex is her duty”. When you are empowered then you will respect your wife and you will know that sex is not a duty. Sex is a game you should both enjoy. You play sex, you don’t demand sex.

Dorothy Okech, Women Action Forum for Networking, Kisumu, Kenya, cited in Susie Jolly, 2007, Looking at Sida Work in Kenya from a Sexuality Angle, Trip Report September 26-October 11 2007, p8



Heteronormativity 'not only establishes a heterosexual/ homosexual hierarchy but also creates hierarchies among heterosexualities' resulting in 'hegemonic and subordinate forms of heterosexuality'.

Steven Seidman 2005, 'From Polluted Homosexual to the Normal Gay: Changing Patterns of Sexual Regulation in America', in C.Ingraham (ed) Thinking Straight: New Work in Critical Heterosexuality Studies. New York: Routledge. p40





Maybe we're not all heteronormative, but there's a lot of normativity in LGBT and sexual rights work. We need to be critical of ourselves and our essentialism, even when talking about resistance.

Carolyn Williams, LSE, at IDS workshop 'Sexuality and the Development Industry'
April 2008



The contributions to this issue explore the histories of **homonormativity** within those discourses (medical, political, activist, capitalist, academic, etc.) that have shaped stable, safe and normalized identities with political and cultural cache out of formerly deviant categories.

Kevin Murphy, Jason Ruiz, and David Serlin, 'Editors' Introduction', *Radical History Review*, Issue 100, (Winter 2008), p5



Homonormative... where homosexual community norms marginalized other kinds of sex/gender/sexuality difference.

Susan Stryker, 'Transgender History, Homonormativity and Disciplinarity' in *Radical History Review*, Issue 100, (Winter 2008), p147

In a poster by the Bangladeshi transgender group, Bondhon, three Bangladeshi trans activists pose between a male and a female symbol, asking the question 'where are we?' What space is there in this male female dichotomy?

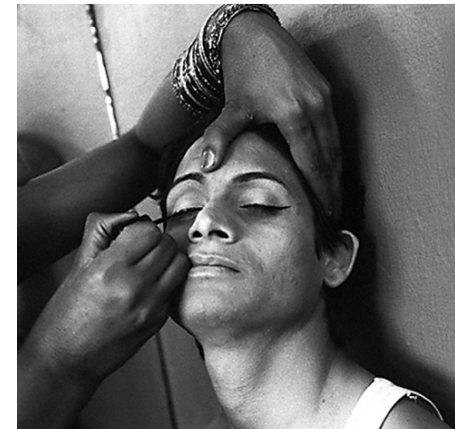


Gender is not what culture created out of my body's sex; rather; **sex is what culture makes when it genders my body.**

Wilchins, transgender activist, quoted in Surya Monro 2005, *Gender Politics: Citizenship, Activism and Sexual Diversity*, London: Pluto Press, p30

Gender categorisation can be best described as a large machine with lots of pins that dig into the sense of self and tear the mind to pieces. And in my situation, having been 'surgically treated' as a child... I see a lot of malice behind it.

Salamacis, intersex activist, quoted in Surya Monro 2005, *Gender Politics: Citizenship, Activism and Sexual Diversity*, London: Pluto Press, p47



We believe it is indispensable to deconstruct the binary sex/gender system that shapes the Western world so absolutely that in most cases it goes unnoticed. For 'other sexualities to be possible' it is indispensable and urgent that we stop governing ourselves by the absurd notion that only two possible body types exist, male and female, with only two genders inextricably linked to them, man and woman. We make trans and intersex issues our priority because their presence, activism and theoretical contributions show us the path to a new paradigm that will allow as many bodies, sexualities and identities to exist as those living in this world might wish to have, with each one of them respected, desired, celebrated.

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission [IGLHRC], 2005, Institutional Memoir of the 2005 Institute for Trans and Intersex Activist Training, p8 ,
<http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/takeaction/resourcecenter/282.html>

People thought we were wasting time talking about sex and pleasure, when maternal mortality is so high... but I was convinced that if this delicate taboo thing – sexual pleasure – could be negotiated by women, then almost anything can be negotiated... and that idea gave me multiple orgasms!

Dorothy Aken'Ova, INCREASE, Nigeria cited in Knerr, W, 2008, *Global Mapping of Pleasure Focussed Projects*, The Pleasure Project , p 52



No one can logically dispute the relationship between sexual pleasure and happiness. Economists cannot deny, by their own definitions, the centrality of sexuality to human well-being. The problem is, because they can't measure it, they have chosen to ignore it.

Martin Greeley, economist, IDS, at IDS Workshop
'Realising Sexual Rights' September 2005



...our vision of sexual justice must have space for pleasure and desire, and it must thus grapple with how to reclaim those terms from their currently commodified status.

Kate Bedford, and Janet Jakobsen, 2008, 'Towards a Vision of Sexual and Economic Justice', *New Feminist Solutions*, Volume 4, p11





People have the right to pleasure, desire and sexuality, as well as a right not to experience these if they don't want to. How can we tell if these rights are being realised? We don't need to measure sexual pleasure, which would be quite difficult! Instead we can measure rights, and there has already been a lot of work done on how to do this.

Henry Armas, GRUPAL – Working Group for Local Participation, Peru, in Susie Jolly 2006 'Not So Strange Bedfellows: Sexual rights and International Development', Development 49.1, p80

Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognised in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- sexuality education;
- respect for bodily integrity;
- choose their partner;
- decide to be sexually active or not;
- consensual sexual relations;
- consensual marriage;
- decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others.

World Health Organization Working Definitions
http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/gender_rights/sexual_health/en/index.html





Women living with HIV are not seen as sexual beings. They are not supposed to get pregnant or have sex. The focus is on saving the babies and screening for sexually transmitted infections. The perception is that they have 'retired' from sex and sexuality.

Promise Mthembu, International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS, South Africa, at IDS Workshop 'Realising Sexual Rights' September 2005

Poverty versus sexuality: it seems the two are mutually exclusive. When gay men have HIV, it's about sex. When women have HIV, it's about poverty.

Cheryl Overs, Network of Sex Work Projects/Monash University, UK/Australia, at IDS Workshop 'Sexuality and the Development Industry' April 2008



We need to enable people to be as comfortable in talking about sexuality as they have become about gender.

Robert Chambers, IDS, at IDS Workshop 'Realising Sexual Rights' September 2005





The idea of dignity and rights in the body is powerful and can unify coalitions across groups that for too long have worked in fragmented ghettos: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups; reproductive health and rights groups; disability rights, HIV/AIDS and treatment access groups; feminists mobilised around violence against women and female genital mutilation; sex workers, Central American banana workers challenging use of harmful pesticides; and prisoners' rights groups fighting sexual and other forms of torture and degradation.

Rosalind Petchesky 2005 'Rights of the Body and Perversions of War: Sexual Rights and Wrongs Ten Years Past Beijing', UNESCO's International Social Science Journal, special issue on Beijing+10, p315

We used to talk about development with a human face. We should be talking about development with a body.

Arit Oku-Egbas, Africa Regional Sexuality Centre, Nigeria, at IDS Workshop 'Realising Sexual Rights' September 2005





Institute of Development Studies: Sexuality and Development Programme

Development usually treats sexuality as a problem - to do with over-population, sexually transmitted disease, or sexual violence in the home and as a weapon of war. The images that come with any mention of the subject are those of risk and danger, disease and death. This focus well describes some of the consequences of the disregard for sexual rights that exists the world over. However, this negativity generates fear and disempowerment, and discourages us from seeing how we might be able to change our situations. Rather than focusing on pain, harm and wrongs, a more positive, pleasure-oriented, view of sexuality offers an entirely different set of entry points for work to make sexual rights real.

It is with these entry points that the work of the IDS Sexuality and Development Programme is concerned. We currently support research and communications aimed at rethinking the relationship between sexuality, rights and development and building stronger links between people in different contexts working to realize their sexual rights.

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/sexualityanddevelopment>

Naz Foundation International

Naz Foundation International is an international organisation focused on the sexual health needs of males who have sex with males in South Asia. By providing technical support and assistance, along with mentoring, to MSM groups, networks and organisations, we assist in enabling self-help organising for the provision of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services, as well as advocate for the urgent scale up of the response to HIV among MSM through an increase in investment in service provision, support for the development of more MSM community based sexual health services across the region, more strategic information to inform these services, while addressing stigma, discrimination and social exclusion of MSM.

For more information go to www.nfi.net