**Facilitator Notes**

**The Social Construction of Sexual Identities**

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This module was developed as part of **‘Introduction to Advancing Sexuality Studies: A short course on sexuality theory and research methodologies’**. The short course was developed by the Caribbean Region of the International Resource Network and presented through a partnership with the Institute of Gender & Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine (Trinidad & Tobago). The original module was developed by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, *and* the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society.

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This module was adapted for the Anglophone Caribbean by Professor John Campbell and the Caribbean IRN in partnership with the Institute of Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago (2013). This module was created by Professor Gary W. Dowsett and adapted by the Advancing Sexuality Studies short course team at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

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**Background**

This module introduces participants to a Caribbean context for critical perspectives on sexual identity from a social constructionist perspective. In particular, these approaches critique common assumptions about “natural,” trans-historical or “universal” sexuality and identify a range of factors at work in the constitution of sexual subjectivities in social and cultural context. More specifically the module encourages participants to analyse these factors, particularly in relation to the development of Caribbean sexual identities as a consequence of colonialism and the current modern context. Carnival and the carnivalesque will be utilized as a main example for this analysis.

**The aims of this module are:**

• To introduce participants to social constructionist understandings of sexual

identity from anthropology, history and contemporary sociology.

• To understand the origins/basis of Caribbean sexual identities.

• To bring together perspectives on culture and sexuality by exploring the ways in

which Caribbean sexuality is described.

**Participants will:**

• Develop a critical understanding of sexual identity as socially constructed in

relations of discourse and power.

• Be able to assess the development of Caribbean sexualities based on the development of the region’s sexual cultures.

• Examine connections between culture and sexuality through material culture,

especially through exploring the carnivalesque as an idea through which modern Caribbean sexual identities are represented and scripted.

Module approach

While this module contains a short lecture introducing approaches to the social

construction of sexuality and a pre-reading review, much of the content involves

participant group work and interaction with the facilitator. Time is provided for pair

work, small group work, and larger group discussions around key ideas.

**Introduction**

This module will encourage discussion on the basis of the Social Construction of Caribbean Sexual Identities. Participants will be encouraged to utilize both lecture and small group participation, utilizing reflective learning to understand the peculiar context of the Caribbean. In particular, the participants will appreciate the point that the region’s colonial history influenced many aspects of its socialization including its sexual socialization. As a result of this history, indigenous forms of sexual identities emerged.

Session 1. Sexual identities and social constructionism

This session asks participants to identify the social basis of sexual identities in their own

social contexts. It includes a lecture providing an introduction to anthropological,

historical, and contemporary sociological approaches to sexual identity as a regulatory feature of modern social life and the implications of this for sexual experience and subjectivity.

Session 2. The development of Caribbean sexual identities

This session discusses the growth of Caribbean sexual identities and questions the nature of the gendered dichotomy. It includes a lecture that interrogates the historical and social contexts in which a Caribbean identity(ies) developed following colonialism and to the present day. Students will be challenged to examine the extent to which the Caribbean “norm” followed on from contemporary mainstream sociological approaches.

Session 3. The carnivalesque and the social construction of Caribbean sexualities

In groups, participants will evaluate how sexuality in the Caribbean is socially constructed. This evaluation will be done in the context of the region’s Carnival and other performative moments, which are some of the popular reference points for the expression of national or regional sexual identities.

Session 4. Caribbean sexual construction: “Coming of age”

In this session participants will analyse the manner in which Caribbean sexualities can be understood as a social continuity of Victorian and Judeo-Christian norms and the extent to which contemporary global sexualities have impacted “Carnival culture”.

Conclusion:

At the end of this module students will realize that while the historical development of the Caribbean influenced its sexual development from the fifteenth through to the twentieth centuries, Caribbean ideas of sexuality also affected and, in many cases, superseded the imposed western Judeo-Christian norms. The effects of multi-ethnic societies (created as a result of the colonial legacy of 17th Century enslavement and 18th Century indentureship) not only affected accepted constructionist notions of sexual development, but affected also the plural make-up of the society and the divergent norms adopted. Ultimately the carnivalesque will be viewed as an important indigenous (sexual) creation, which can both reinforce and challenge the heterosexual ‘norm’.

**Required pre-reading:**

Chevannes, Barry. 2002. Gender and Adult Sexuality. In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, edited by P. Mohammed. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

Liverpool, Hollis 2001 *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago* 1763-1962. Research Associates Ltd. Chicago. Pp 127- 131.

Kempadoo, Kamala. 2004. *Sexing the Caribbean. Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*. Oxon: Routledge. Chap 2:Pp15-51.

**Optional pre-reading (in suggested order):**

Allen, Caroline F. 1998. “Caribbean Bodies: Representation and Practise.” In *Caribbean Portraits. Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities*, edited by C. Barrow. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

Kempadoo, Kamala. 2003. Theorizing Sexual Relations in the Caribbean: Prostitution and the Problem of the "Exotic". In *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender. Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, edited by E. Barriteau. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press. pp 159-187

**Material Required:**

Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens

**For Session 3**:

Handout A — “Carnival Origins” by Michael LaRose

**For Session 4**:

Pictures (see below) and a projector

[](http://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&docid=QszsuPu0VNsAGM&tbnid=xOsFvJN9Q2gQQM:&ved=0CAUQjRw&url=http://www.islandmix.com/backchat/f6/carnival-passa-passa-204305/&ei=1R-yUbSyJNGl4AOFmIDABw&bvm=bv.47534661,d.dmg&psig=AFQjCNGvMII5YqRRGqAaA1-f6HzK2bCzIw&ust=1370714372320942)



Sources: Trinidad Carnival 2011. Shutter Effex. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44GsNpo6h2c

& Passa Passa in Jamaica http://www.islandmix.com/backchat/f6/carnival-passa-passa-204305

The module asks each person to reflect on a typical scene of revelry present during the carnival period in Trinidad and Passa Passa in Jamaica. The participants will be encouraged to consider the implications for sexual identity represented by the pictures. In particular they would determine if the pictures represent any form of sexual identity and, if so, what peculiar form as understood in the Caribbean.

**Module structure, materials and timing**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Session & Approach | | PowerPoint | Other materials (provided or required) | Est. Timing |
|  | | | | |
| **Introduction, objectives, schedule** | | **Slide 1-6** |  | **10 mins** |
|  | | | | |
| **Session 1: Sexual identities and social construction** | | **6** |  | **120 mins** |
| What is sexual identity? | Small group work & brainstorm | 7-9 | Flipchart & paper | 55 mins |
| Lecture: Social construction & sexual identity | Facilitator delivery, discussion | 10-24 | Lecture in Facilitator Notes | 55 mins |
| Presentation of pictures | Large group discussion | 25 | Pictures in Power Point & Participant outline | 10 mins |
|  | | | | |
| **Session 2. The development of Caribbean sexualities** | | **26** |  | **60 mins** |
| Colonisation | Brainstorm & large group Discussion | 27 | Flipchart & paper | 10 mins |
| Lecture: Colonisation and Caribbean sexualities | Facilitator delivery, discussion | 28-34 | Lecture in Facilitator Notes | 20 mins |
| Society & sexuality | Small group discussion | 35 | Flipchart & paper | 30 mins |
|  | | | | |
| **Session 3. The carnivalesque & the social construction of Caribbean sexualities** | | **36** |  | **75 mins** |
| Carnival & masking | Pair work & discussion | 37-39 | Handout A, markers, scissors, coloured paper | 25 mins |
| Carnival, society, & sexuality | Small group discussion | 40 | Flipchart & paper | 50 mins |
|  | | | | |
| **Session 4. Caribbean sexual construction: “Coming of age”** | | **41** |  | **90 mins** |
| Caribbean sexual identities | Small group discussion | 42 | Flipchart & paper | 60 mins |
| Producing Caribbean sexual culture | Large group discussion | 43 | Flipchart & paper | 30 mins |
|  | | | | |
| **Conclusion & acknowledgements** | | **44-45** |  | **15 mins** |
| **TOTAL** | |  |  | **365 mins (6hrs)** |

**Key to symbols and formatting**

Throughout these notes, the following symbols and formatting ‘clues’ have been used:

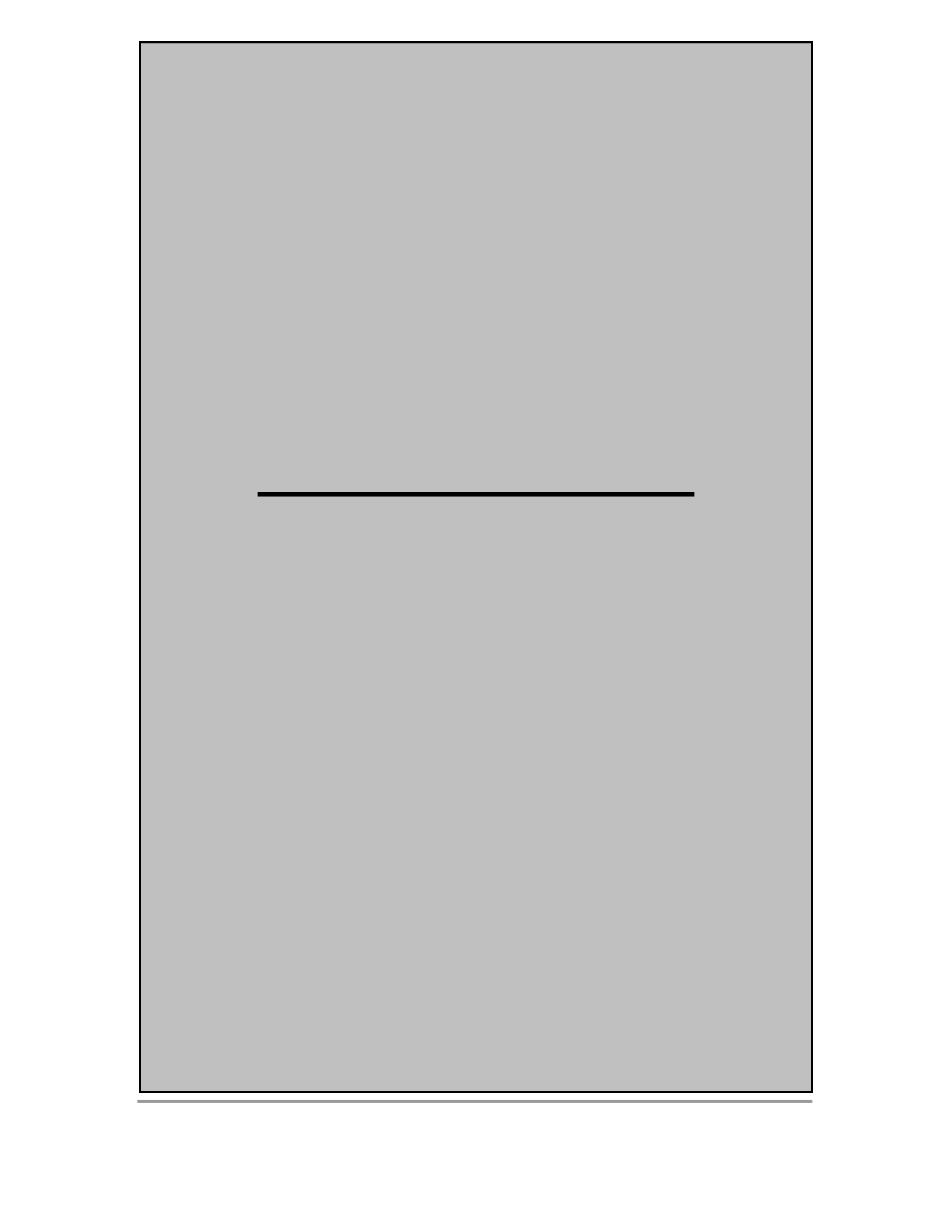
⇒ This symbol marks an instruction to the facilitator.

* Use of a bullet point indicates steps to be followed in completing an instruction.

║ This symbol, plus a different font which is larger and more widely spaced, indicates text to be read aloud. The end of the text to be read aloud will be indicated with the following symbol.║

We have also indicated the points where a slide transition occurs on the PowerPoint presentation by inserting:

**SLIDE**

**Module instructions**

**SLIDE 1**

**Introduction (10 mins)**

⇒ Read the following text (or amend as desired):

║ This module will encourage discussion of the basis of the Social Construction of Caribbean Sexual Identities. Participants will be encouraged to utilize both lecture and small group participation, utilizing reflective learning to understand the peculiar context of the Caribbean. In particular the participants will appreciate the point that the region’s colonial history influenced many aspects of its socialization, including its sexual socialization. As a result of this, indigenous forms of sexual identities emerged, most notably within the carnivalesque. ║

**SLIDE 2**

**SLIDE 3**

Schedule

⇒ **N.B.** The module schedule does not currently contain tea/coffee or lunch breaks. Insert these as required.

**SLIDE 4**

Module aims

⇒ Read (on slide):

║ This module aims:

* To introduce participants to social constructionist understandings of sexual identity from anthropology, history and contemporary sociology.
* To understand the origins/basis of Caribbean sexual identities.
* To bring together perspectives on culture and sexuality by exploring the ways in which Caribbean sexuality is described.

**SLIDE 5**

Participants will:

* Develop a critical understanding of sexual identity as socially constructed in relations of discourse and power
* Be able to assess the development of Caribbean sexualities based on the development of the region’s sexual culture.
* Examine connections between culture and sexuality through material culture, especially through exploring the carnivalesque as an idea through which modern Caribbean sexual identities are represented and scripted.

**SLIDE 6**

**Session 1. Sexual identities and social constructionism** (120 mins)

⇒ Tell participants that this session begins with a small group brainstorming exercise

encouraging them to reflect on the social construction of sexual identities in their

social contexts. The brainstorm is followed by an interactive lecture that introduces

social constructionist understandings of sexuality and the regulatory aspects of sexual identity.

Small group work and brainstorming: What is sexual identity? (55 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend):

║ When we hear the term sexual identity we might be tempted to think that it refers solely to those people who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. Even in those societies that do not have identity positions for gay men or lesbians, there are likely to be words or concepts that identify people on the basis of who they have sex with. This is a “common sense” understanding of sexual identity, yet if we think about it, there are many other identities that apply to the way people see and name themselves, and others, in relation to sexual desire and behaviour. ║

**SLIDE 7**

⇒ Ask participants to form small groups of three or four, and conduct the following exercise (on slide):

* Make a list of sexual identities in your social context. Try to think of as many different kinds of sexual identity as you can.
* If there is more than one term for a particular identity, group these together (include traditional names, formal scientific or legal terms, more recent terms, slang terms, etc.).
* Organise these identities into a hierarchy that reflects their respective positions within society.
* Note which of these sexual identities might be specific to the Caribbean or its diaspora, and which (if any) are rarely found in Caribbean communities.

**(20 mins)**

⇒ Ask each group in turn to provide an example from their list and write this on the flipchart/whiteboard. Keep going around the small groups until there are no more examples forthcoming. **(5 mins)**

**SLIDE 8**

⇒ Ask the groups to continue with the exercise by taking two different sexual identities from the list and answering the following questions for each example (on slide):

* How are people with these identities thought about? What meanings are attached to these identities? Does gender inform how these identities are thought about? Does class?
* Where do these ideas come from? Are they based on scientific truths about sexual nature? Legal rules about appropriate social conduct? Traditional/historical or contemporary ideas about morality?
* How are these identities reproduced? Do people take them on by choice, or are they forced upon them?
* Can people engage in the sexual practices these identities refer to and not be labelled with these identities?

**(20 mins)**

**SLIDE 9**

⇒ In light of their group discussions, and drawing on the examples discussed, ask the whole group to brainstorm the following question (on slide):

− What is sexual identity and how does it relate to sexuality? **(10 mins)**

⇒ Summarise key points and tell participants you will now provide a lecture examining the theory behind this brainstorm exercise.

**SLIDE 10**

Lecture: Social construction and sexual identity (55 mins)

⇒ Tell participants that the following lecture draws on the Caroline Allen (1998)

pre-reading.

⇒ Read (or amend):

║ The discussion we have just had reveals that sexual identity is not fixed or unchanging, but is a product of social meanings about sexual desire and practice. Some meanings are more authoritative than others, perhaps because they are institutionalised in respected fields of knowledge or moral frameworks. Other meanings are contested and are more likely to shift over time. Importantly, this exercise reveals that sexual identities do not simply name sexual practices or individuals who engage in those practices; they also constitute individuals as *particular kinds of people*. A woman who sleeps with another man behind her husband's back may be identified as an adulterer, and may come to be understood as morally deficient and deserving of social scorn. A man who sleeps with other men may be understood as homosexual because this is the dominant social understanding of his behaviour. At different times in history, and in different societies, having sex with a man who is not one's husband, or sex between men, have been or are understood differently. This is the basis of social constructionist understandings of sexuality.

**SLIDE 11**

This understanding turns conventional understandings of sexuality based in biology and psychology on their heads. Dominant ideas about sexuality in the Caribbean and the global north mean that we usually understand sexuality to reflect a person's gendered nature, whereby sexual behaviour follows “natural” sexual difference. This implies that men and women have distinct sexual natures that reflect their biology. According to these dominant ideas, sexuality is the expression of an innate, natural sexual instinct or drive to reproduce that men and women are born with. Deviations from accepted categories of natural behaviour indicate “immorality,” “depravity” or “disorder.”

**SLIDE 12**

A social constructionist position, as we have seen, argues that these understandings are socially produced and support the dominant social hierarchy, rather than simply reflect the “true” natures of men and women. Rather than having a focus on types of persons, sexual behaviours, or sexual instincts or drives, social constructionist approaches to sexuality are instead interested in socially produced meanings, socially accepted practices, and socially agreed upon identities, and how these are related to discourses, institutions and power relations.

**SLIDE 13**

In Critical Sexuality Studies, discourses are understood as institutionalised ways of thinking about a possible object that, in turn, limit how that object might be thought about. This understanding of discourse is derived from the work of Michel Foucault and is influential in a number of humanities and social sciences disciplines. One of Foucault's key ideas was that *knowledge is power*. Whereas, traditionally, we tend to think of power as something held by one person and exercised against another, Foucault conceived of power as exercised *through* discourse. Depending on the authority of the discourse, it may be difficult to speak about the thing being described in any other way.

Discourses are sometimes referred to as 'truth claims' because they often claim to speak the truth. Yet, Foucault's approach to discourse encourages us to be attentive to the idea that such truth claims are authoritative only insofar as they support established power relations. It is possible to counter authoritative discourses with alternative truth claims.

Examples of discourses addressed in sexuality studies include such truth claims as:

− Women are more suited to raising children because they give birth

− Sex education for young people encourages sexual promiscuity

− Homosexuality is unnatural.

These are familiar discourses that have, at one time or another, been institutionalised in disciplinary fields of knowledge such as biology, education or psychology, and which circulate in the everyday attitudes and understandings of people in many parts of the world. These discourses have very real effects for how people come to understand their own sexual desires, practices and identities, and those of others. This is what Foucault meant when he described knowledge as power. Yet, these 'truth claims' have also been contested by alternative discourses, many of which have emerged from within Feminism and Critical Sexuality Studies.

**SLIDE 14**

The term *social constructionism* became increasingly popularised in social scientific studies of sexuality during the 1980s and 1990s. Importantly, there is no one social constructionist theory. It might be better to think of social constructionism as an epistemology, or a way of thinking about the world that emphasises the power of culture, language and knowledge to construct what we experience as reality. Social constructionist positions stress that there is no prior, objective 'reality' beyond our interpretation of it. This foregrounds interpretation and perspective in all knowledge construction. One's social position and cultural background inform how one sees the world, and other people may see things very differently from us.

Constructionist perspectives of sexuality tend to stress that sexual practices are not the same across time and space, nor are they the same throughout history or across cultures. Categories used to conceive, talk about and practice sexuality in one context will not be the same in others.

**SLIDE 15**

We can see this when we look at cross-cultural variability in sexuality. For example, evidence from across cultures has revealed that same-sex sexual practices take a number of forms and can have very different meanings. In a famous example, the anthropologist Gil Herdt described a cultural practice among the Sambia people of New Guinea where early adolescent boys fellate and then consume the semen of older men in their tribe as a way attaining masculinity. The meanings of this practice are entirely different to those in other societies, where such behaviour might be considered indicative of homosexuality, or even paedophilia.

Thus, practices that may appear the same have entirely different meanings, and reveal how the cultural construction of meaning is central to sexual practice and sexual identity in different cultures. In some cultures, it is possible for men to engage in same-sex behaviours as adolescents provided they are discreet about their activities, and give up these practices upon marriage.

These men are not understood to have an innate sexual identity related to their engagement in these practices, unlike in most global north cultures where such behaviour would at least raise personal questions about whether one is homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual.

**SLIDE 16**

Historical scholarship, particularly by the scholars Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks, has been especially influential in identifying the social and cultural construction of sexuality. This work emphasised the ways in which sexuality was increasingly defined as a discrete attribute of human experience in 19th century European thought. Prior to the late 19th century, people engaged in sexual acts and behaviours, but were not understood to have distinct sexual identities on the basis of their sexual practice. However, increasing state concern with the management of urban populations led to a rise of professional and institutional discourses related to the regulation of individual conduct and behaviour. Disciplines such as medicine, psychology, anthropology, sociology and education (to name a few) not only sought to understand sexuality, but also helped bring it into being as a social practice. In particular, medical and psychological discourses emerged which described increasingly specific forms of 'sexual deviance', designated as pathologies. Sexuality came to be defined as an attribute of a person, an indicator of the true self and, over time, a key aspect of identity. Homosexuality, and then, subsequently, heterosexuality emerged as ways of categorising and differentiating people on the basis of sexual desire and sexual practice.

This insight has been at the heart of contemporary social scientific studies of sexuality ever since. Sexuality can no longer be regarded as an intrinsic attribute of 'self' or as biologically inherent (Gagnon and Parker 1995). This should be clear from the Allen pre-reading. Rather, sexuality can be seen as the historically specific outcome of intellectual and cultural processes and, as such, an attribute of human experiences intimately bound up with the language and knowledge systems of the post-Enlightenment era.

**SLIDE 17**

Importantly, in Western systems of understanding, meaning is often defined in oppositional or binary terms. This means that, in order to make sense of something, we begin by defining what it is not. For example, 'day' becomes meaningful in relation to 'night'; 'white' becomes meaningful in relation to 'black'; and so on. *Difference* is the basis to meaning-making in binary thinking. This is obviously a crude way of differentiating and making sense of the world, but is very powerful when it is applied to social life. The power of one group of people to differentiate, categorise and identify another group of people often means the identified group has less control over the meanings that shape their identity.

**SLIDE 18**

We can see this most clearly in the example of sexual identity, where 'heterosexual' makes sense in relation to what it is not: 'homosexual'. Foucault's work identified the social and historical processes that constituted homosexuality as a marker of a distinct type of person, and which have led to the ongoing stigmatisation and marginalisation of those who came to be identified as homosexual. In the process of identification with those institutional discourses that described homosexuality, in many societies gay men and lesbians came to see themselves as specific kinds of people with distinct sexual natures. However, something unpredictable also emerged in the process of categorisation and identification. At least since the 1960s, gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities have organised politically to challenge negative understandings of non-heterosexual sexualities based on pathology or deviancy. While gay men and lesbians may have been quite different from each other in terms of class, ethnicity, age, social position, etc., in the global north they came together under the identifier homosexual to challenge their marginalisation. In other words, while identifying with the discourses of homosexuality that preceded them, they were able to challenge and shift many of the dominant ideas about what being a homosexual meant. Thus, identity can be a source of power, and new possibilities for being sexual emerge even in conditions of regulation and repression.

**SLIDE 19**

In contrast to homosexuality, heterosexuality is a traditionally *unmarked* category. Because it is understood as the primary category, from which homosexuality is the deviation, heterosexuality is usually understood to be “natural” and “normal.” As a result, it is often not necessary to define oneself as heterosexual because heterosexuality is the unremarkable norm. It hardly seems necessary to name oneself as heterosexual when everyone else is supposed to also be heterosexual. Yet, this is an assumption that has powerful social effects, and which reveals how sexual identify functions as a regulatory tool. ║ **(15 mins)**

⇒ Ask participants about heterosexual identity (on slide):

− How do we know people are heterosexual?

− How often are people required to identify themselves as heterosexual?

− How do they do this? **(5 mins)**

⇒ Ask if there are there any questions about the lecture so far. **(5 mins)**

**SLIDE 20**

║ It only becomes necessary to identify heterosexuality when certain practices cross moral lines of acceptable behaviour. The anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984) identified a 'charmed circle' of sexuality in societies within the global north whereby married, monogamous, heterosexual coitus involving penetration was understood as the most normal and natural form of sexual conduct. Other forms of sexual practice are less privileged and may be contested and thus their meanings may shift over time. Certainly, cultural attitudes to sex outside of marriage, promiscuous sex, masturbation, and nonheterosexual relationships have changed enormously in the last 40 years in many societies in Europe and North America. However, other sexual behaviours continue to be widely considered “abnormal,” “immoral” or “sinful.” These include sadomasochism, fetishistic sex, sex for money, transvestitism, and cross-generational sex.

**SLIDE 21**

Thus, we can see that heterosexuality is also an identity category that is highly differentiated in terms of those practices that are favoured (and are thus beyond identification or scrutiny), and those that cross a moral boundary. Yet, simply because one conforms to the heterosexual norm does not mean one is beyond regulation.

Because heterosexuality involves normative expectations about sexual conduct, and because the transgression of dominant norms of sexual behaviour invites censure and identification as a sexual Other, we can in fact see that heterosexuality is not natural at all, but is a socially prescribed category. Heterosexuality is therefore *made* 'natural' and 'normal' through discourses and power-knowledge relations that constitute individuals as either moral citizens, or as unnatural, sinful, ill, or immoral (Warner, 1993; Seidman, 1996; Gamson, 2000). Notice how binary thinking categorises people as either one, or the other. Critical sexuality studies highlights how the heterosexual/homosexual binary functions as an ideology that sustains unequal sexual and social relations, and that constrains the possibilities for sexual expression.

**SLIDE 22**

Thus, we can see that the heterosexual/homosexual binary is a socially constructed model of social difference which classifies and organises people on the basis of their sexual desires, sexual bodies, and sexual practices. It has taken shape in a modernist context where such a distinction is seemingly important. Why else would it be necessary to define people on the basis of sexuality? ║ **(5 mins)**

⇒ Ask participants to discuss the following questions (on slide):

− What purposes might the classification and differentiation of sexual desires,

sexual bodies, or sexual practices actually serve?

− Who benefits from this organisation of social life? **(5 mins)**

║ An important point to remember in this understanding of sexuality is that sexual practices do not simply have different meanings in different locales. Rather, dominant discourses help bring social practice into being as a regulated aspect of self-identity. In the interests of being a moral citizen, individuals are expected to adjust their conduct to adhere to desirable norms. Sexuality then, is not just a core natural impulse that is given different expression in different contexts, in different words or language. Rather sexuality is actually conceived and experienced in and through social categories and discourses that shape the possibilities for sexual expression and personhood. Several recent examples from Critical Sexuality Studies demonstrate this most effectively.

**SLIDE 23**

Social and historical research has shown how masturbation emerged as a specific social problem in discourses of child-rearing in 19th century Europe. In the 20th century, meanings around masturbation shifted from it being a shameful activity to a legitimate aspect of personal sexual expression. The more natural and normal masturbation has become, at least in some societies, the less likely people who engage in masturbation are to think of themselves as deviant or immoral. This does not mean that masturbation is accepted equally everywhere. Indeed, there are limits as to the acceptability of masturbation. It remains something that people are expected to do in private, and certainly not openly discuss. There was recently controversy in the UK when a local men's health initiative encouraged men to practise masturbation as an important part of a healthy lifestyle. This example shows how the meanings of sexuality can shift over time, as a result of debates between experts, the work of political activists and social groups, and broader shifts in popular social values and beliefs related to the body and sexuality.

**SLIDE 24**

As another example, contemporary critical sexuality research is exploring the social construction of 'erectile dysfunction' and 'female sexual disorder' in medical discourses. A number of feminist authors have discussed the implications of these discourses, including the prescription of medical solutions for problems that may have their true origin in social life, such as unequal gender relations (Marshall, 2006; Tiefer, 1995). Women who take a greater responsibility than their male partners for housework and childcare may express less interest in sex due to being tired or resentful of their partners. Meanwhile, the emphasis on erections in medical discourse may mean that men place greater emphasis on penetration and personal performance, rather than on those sexual or relational practices that bring their female partners the most satisfaction.

These examples demonstrate how ideas and understandings about sexuality may shape people's sexual experience. Sexuality is not the expression of a “true” or “innate” sexual drive—it is shaped by social conditions and dominant discourses. Thus, how sexuality is understood has direct implications for how people see themselves, and how they experience their sexual lives. This is why Critical Sexuality Studies is political, and why critical sexuality researchers are engaged in political struggles related to the status of knowledge. ║

**(10 mins)**

⇒ Check to see if there are any questions about the lecture or the reading. **(10 mins)**

**SLIDE 25**

Presentation of objects (10 mins)

⇒ Ask participants to discuss the carnival pictures they have been shown or given,

*without* significant comment or elaboration at this stage*.*

**SLIDE 26**

**Session 2. The Development of Caribbean Sexualities** (55 mins)

⇒ This session discusses the growth of a Caribbean sexual identity and questions the nature of the gendered dichotomy. It includes a lecture that interrogates the historical and social contexts in which a Caribbean identity(ies) developed following colonialism and to the present day. Students will be challenged to examine the extent to which the Caribbean “norm” followed on from contemporary mainstream sociological approaches.

**SLIDE 27**

Brainstorm (5 mins)

⇒ Ask students to brainstorm the concept of 'colonisation' through the two focus

questions (on slide):

− What social processes are related to colonisation?

− How has colonisation impacted Caribbean sexual cultures?

⇒ Summarise the key points on flipchart paper or the whiteboard. **(5 mins)**

**SLIDE 28**

Lecture: Colonisation and Caribbean sexualities (20 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend):

║ In regards to the development of Caribbean sexual identities, fundamental issues that emerge concern whether such identities should be considered “private” or “public” and, if private, how can they be created or impacted by laws and social rules made by a colonial authority?

An additional issue that emerges when studying Caribbean sexual identity formation is whether or not sexual identity within a society can be fixed or interpreted in one way by a particular group within the society and be similarly fixed, or interpreted differently by other groups within that same society.

**SLIDE 29**

The legal subjugation of particular races in Caribbean colonies only officially ended in 1917 with the end of Indian indentureship and in 1886 with the ending of slavery in Cuba. Colonialism itself, of course, legally existed throughout most of the region through the 1960s. There was therefore an extended period in time (which for some territories continues to this day) during which the colonial context was dominant, influencing all forms of identity, including sexual identity.

This is an important point to note at the outset of our presentation as we know that in the colonial context the society was not an homogenous one but consisted of different groups of which only one was dominant and set the sexual “norms” for the society. While here we are largely referring to colonialism in the past tense, we must note that even though many Caribbean territories gained “flag” independence in the 1960s, several continue to exist in other political statuses, including the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Aruba, and Guadeloupe.

**SLIDE 30**

As in all aspects of societies, norms concerning sexual matters are generally made by particular interest groups within the society, and often the most powerful groups construct laws and norms in their own best interest.

In so far as Caribbean sexual identities are concerned, male, heterosexual interest groups have traditionally been the main creators and beneficiaries of the freedoms of both secular and religious laws and customs controlling sexual matters.

**SLIDE 31**

Historically, Caribbean women have often seen as property (sources of children, unpaid labor, and heterosexual sex) – to be protected and/or as individuals not capable of seeing about themselves. Even before colonialism and in pre-Columbian times (prior to 1492), indigenous cultures in the Caribbean resolved sexual identity issues by considering male views the foundation of social organisation.

In studying the development of sexual identity formation in the Caribbean one is faced with two issues

1. The general anthropological problem of applying contemporary societal meanings, by analogy, in order to understand past societies and

2. The added problem of having, in large measure, unqualified observer’s reported evidence rather than the participants as the main source of information.

However we can still attempt to reconstruct the sexual norms and traditions that controlled the formation of sexual identities in these early societies. We do this keeping in mind issues of gender that affected male-female interactions and the question of the differences between male and female sexual identities.

Most of the descriptions of the early indigenous women came from the first European colonisers, especially the Spanish invaders (Shepherd 4, 1999). Their accounts described the women as very feminine, heterosexual and as going about naked or scantily dressed, (except the married women who wore a small loin cloth).

**SLIDE 32**

Richard Ligon writing in the 17th Century described indigenous women as having:

…very small breasts; and have more of the shape of the Europeans than the Negroe, their hair black and long, a great part whereof hangs down upon their backs…with a large lock hanging over either breasts, which seldom or never curls; clothes they scorn to wear especially if they are well-shaped. (Ligon, 1673:54)

They were subjected to sexual stereotyping as they were described as being “loose,” “promiscuous” and lacking in sexual inhibitions. The Spaniards took their interpretation of these women as license to exhibit their own sexual desires with the indigenous women. They proceeded to rape many of these women and use them as their concubines, despite any previous relations these women had with indigenous men. In Hispaniola, for example, by 1514 about 40% of Spanish men had officially recognised Neo Indian wives and many more had them as concubines.

**SLIDE 33**

**The 17th and 18th Century sugar plantation and sexuality**

An extreme manifestation of gender roles and sexual identity was imposed on enslaved Africans in the seventeenth century Caribbean where stereo­types of black sexuality provided a justification for the insti­tutions of slavery and white power. Europeans' ethnocentric reactions in their first encounters with Africans set the stage for the interpretation of black Caribbean sexuality during enslavement. Dehumanizing West Africans as animalistic, oversexed "heathens" gave many white owners of enslaved people a rationale for their exploita­tion and domination.

Especially for the enslaved female, sexual subjugation was at a maximum. The dominant image of enslaved African womanhood was the Jezebel—a treacherous seduc­tress with an insatiable sexual appetite. To slave owners, the image justified the life situation enslaved women were forced to endure. Enslaved women lacked clothing to cover their bodies "properly," and their field- and housework often required them to raise their dresses above their knees—nothing a "decent" woman would do.

Enslaved people had no rights to their own bodies, and during sales they were stripped naked for prospective buyers to closely examine them, including their genitals. *Slaves had no rights to physical privacy, protection from bodily harm, or reproductive autonomy.*

The irrational logic that no self-respect­ing woman would allow herself to be put on such display was used by whites to confirm black women's wanton nature. Slave owners publicly discussed female slaves' reproductive capacity and managed their "breeding," compelling them to an imposed promiscuity that reinforced the Jezebel stereo­type. The stereotype of "Mammy" provided slave owners with a counterbalance to the Jezebel and represented the slave owner's successful civilizing of black women's sexuality. Mammy was supposed to be loyal, obedient, and asexual. She cooked, cleaned, and cared for white children, and often even nursed their infants. Thus regardless of which side of the working dichotomy enslaved women found themselves, they were forced automatically into a heterosexual, aberrant identity. The male complement to the Jezebel was the stereotyped highly sexual, potentially violent "buck."

**SLIDE 34**

The importance of this overview is that the sugar estates were present on *every* island of the Caribbean and, as such, the attitudes created in the formation of sexual identities and imposed by the colonial class have resonance to this present day.

**The role and consequences of 18th Century sexual identification on sugar estates**

Individuals were not free to publicly construct alternate sexual identities and they had to conform to particular identities according to the needs of the colonial masters. Some examples/reasons of the social construction of sexual identities in the 18th century Caribbean are given below.

1. Debasement of women: rape of enslaved women on the middle passage by sailors, on the shores and holding areas by the salesmen, by their new “owners”, and by visitors to the estate. Beckles argued that ‘domesticks’ often became domestics in name only and were usually mistresses or hired sex slaves (Beckles 694, 2000). This was the expected sexual identity of the enslaved worker. Sexual practices like these advocated the right of the master to not only have control of the enslaved woman’s body in the field, but extended his rights to her body within the house as well. Womens’ sexual identity became then a social construct based on societal norms.

2. Sexuality within the economic system: Hillary Beckles elaborated on the (ab)use made of enslaved women’s sexuality during the period of enforced labour. He also identified the association between sexuality and manumission in the prostitution taverns of British West Indian sugar society where enslaved women were offered the boon of freedom as an incentive for maintaining their heterosexual ‘enthusiasm’. As he concluded, in these cases manumission was an appropriate incentive for them as “freedom was a legal status not easily rejected” (Beckles 697, 2000).

3. Creation of a new social system: Miscegenation resulted in the creation of a new “breed” of people in the Caribbean called mulattoes. They were the end result of the mass rapes that occurred during this period. They again showed the limited scope of black female sexual identity allowed by the colonial society. While it is true that countless enslaved women were violated under these conditions, many enslaved women, far from being only victims, also used their sexual identity to better their positions. Long for example wrote:

In regard to the African mistress … her dexterity consists in persuading the (white) man she detests to believe she is most violently smitten with the beauty of his person… and, by this stratagem, she is better able to hide her private intrigues with her real favourites (Long 87-88, 1973).

There were however some anomalies in the creation of sexual identities and what was considered “normal.”

4. Punishment:Rape was also used as punishment. The Jamaican planter Thomas Thistlewood for example had sex with an enslaved woman to punish her for stealing canes.Planter society **e**ngaged in many acts of sexual sadism that involved both male and female victims. Clearly then the juxtopositioning of plantation discipline and the derivation of personal pleasures for those inflicting this ‘discipline’ were not divorced. On the one hand whippings (whether male or female) can be seen as pleasurable both as a physical sexual stimulant and also because of the heightened sense of arousal one received from administering brutal, bloody punishments.

Thistlewood also wrote about other sugar planters, like Mr Cope, who had a sexual preference for little girls and who even abandoned his wife for this preference (pedophilia). Thistlewood also spoke of Planters having homosexual relationships with other men and boys when free in colonial society and out of the watchful eyes of a Victorian heterosexual identity “ideal”.

The point is that after colonial intervention many of the established sexual “norms” and identities continued within colonial society and even to the present day. The Caribbean provides an excellent example of how constructionist sexual identity formation dominated the society. ║ **(10 mins)**

⇒ Ask participants if they have any questions about the Liverpool pre-reading. **(10 mins)**

**SLIDE 35**

Small group discussion (30 mins)

⇒ Ask participants to form groups of three or four and appoint a rapporteur.

In groups, ask participants to discuss the following questions (on slide):

− In your society, what are among the most prevalent influences on the way

people think about and practice sexuality?

− In what ways are contemporary sexualities influenced by the state or other

forms of national power such as the law?

− In your society, do you see changes in sexual attitudes and practices that might

be associated with the processes of colonialism, imperialism, or globalization? **(20 mins)**

⇒ Ask the rapporteur from each group to respond to a question each, until there are no

more questions. For each response, ask if other participants agree.

⇒ Summarise the key points on flipchart paper or the whiteboard.

⇒ Wrap up the session by reviewing the key points from the discussion. **(10 mins)**

**SLIDE 36**

**Session 3. The carnivalesque and the social construction of Caribbean sexualities** (75 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend):

║ The broad field of Critical Sexuality Studies has produced a range of arguments and analyses relating to how sexualities are conceived within cultures. In the following exercise you will be asked to reflect critically upon your own understandings and experiences of Caribbean sexualities especially as they relate to Carnival and other festivals. **║**

**SLIDE 37**

Pairs work (25 mins)

⇒ Tell participants that this should be treated as an exploratory exercise that evolves

into a preliminary critical analysis composed by the whole group.

⇒ Clarify that participants are being asked to critically reflect upon their subjective

relationship to categories of identity and the cultural influences bearing upon them. They are not being asked to divulge or 'confess' information that would make them feel uncomfortable.

⇒ Break the participants up into pairs and provide each with a copy of Handout A (“Carnival Origins” by Michael LaRose).

⇒ Pairs should consider the following focus questions (on slide):

• What about the carnival experience contributes to more overt public sexual behavior?

• Do you think public sexual behavior during carnival is specifically influenced by the fact that participants are in costume?

**SLIDE 38**

• Now consider very different settings and circumstances. Think about schools and/or the workplace. What kinds of sexual expression are supported in such contexts and what is considered unacceptable? Where do peer groups exercise definitions of sexuality and do they help to determine what does and does not count as legitimate sexuality?

• Do carnival and/or other Caribbean festivals allow sites for the expression and exploration of sexuality in Caribbean culture and society?

**SLIDE 39**

⇒ Read:

║ In relation to history and other social factors:

• How do historical factors influence sexual identity differently across social groups in the Caribbean? ║ **(25 mins)**

**SLIDE 40**

Small group work (50 mins)

⇒ Ask the pairs to now form groups of four or six and compare and contrast their

answers from the first part of the exercise.

⇒ Ask each group to construct a provisional hierarchy of the carnival elements (described in Handout A) and historical elements (e.g. slavery, indentureship, globalization) that inform sexuality in their social contexts. Groups should be able to present their hierarchies on a board or flipchart so that each hierarchy can be viewed and discussed by the larger group. **(25 mins)**

⇒ Ask a rapporteur from each group to present and explain the rationale for their

group's hierarchy of historical and carnival influences.

⇒ Referring to differences between groups' hierarchies, conduct a short discussion on

whether such hierarchies are stable or even useful. Focusing questions might include:

• Are the influences identified conceived of as bearing down on an already existing sexuality, or do they themselves constitute sexuality through social interaction?

• Does it make sense to think of sexuality in terms of discrete local or historical domains or are these closely interrelated?

⇒ Summarise the key points from the session. **(25 mins)**

**SLIDE 41**

**Session 4. Caribbean sexual construction: “Coming of age”**  (90 mins)

⇒ In this session participants will analyze the manner in which Caribbean sexual identities can be understood as a social continuity of Victorian and Judeo-Christian norms *and* also as a revolt against these colonial norms.

⇒ This discussion will provide a concrete and tangible way for participants to reflect

upon the theory and issues covered in the module in relation to their own experience.

**SLIDE 42**

Small group work: Caribbean sexual identities (60 mins)

⇒ **N.B.** One picture from Trinidad carnival and one from Jamaica’s Passa Passa are provided in the powerpoint. Feel free to add additional pictures from the internet of these or other Caribbean carnivals and festivals, such as Barbadian Crop Over, Bahamian Junkanoo, or carnival in London, New York City, or Toronto.

⇒ Arrange participants in a circle or around a table so that they are facing each other.

Ask participants to view the pictures and the conflicting sexual identities they portray.

⇒ Read (or amend):

║ Sexuality studies is increasingly interested in the material conditions through which sexualities are conceived and practised. Sexualities are represented in festivals, some of which may readily be associated with culturally specific ideas regarding sexuality, and some of which may be more readily imagined as revolutionary or “deliberately against the norm” in scope and scale. Your task is to explore the interaction between modern day Carnival sexuality and the implications for understanding Caribbean sexual cultures and identities.

The task is for group members to consider the ideas and emotions that these pictures evoke regarding sexuality, culture and identities. ║

⇒ Explain that their discussion of pictures can be guided by the following questions (on slide 25):

− Does the picture evoke personal meanings from participants' own experiences or

those of friends and family?

− What does the picture reveal about social and cultural context?

− Does the picture evoke ideas regarding social, political and/or economic realities

and their relationship to contemporary sexualities?

⇒ Tell participants to record the different views of the group.

⇒ Up one hour should be given to the discussion of pictures (10-15 minutes

per picture). (60 mins)

**SLIDE 43**

Whole group discussion: producing Caribbean sexual cultures (30 mins)

⇒ Once the pictures have been discussed, facilitate a large group discussion around the

following questions (on slide):

* Do the pictures suggest anything in particular about Caribbean sexual identities and sexual cultures?
* Do the pictures evoke ideas of 'traditional' sexualities or ideas more strongly associated with modernity? Can sexuality be easily categorised as 'traditional' or 'modern'?
* What, if anything, do the pictures imply about the carnivalesque? Are the pictures regionally specific or culturally specific, or linked to broader flows of information globally?

⇒ Summarise the key points of the discussion. (30 mins)

**SLIDE 44**

**Conclusion**  (15 mins)

⇒ Read (or amend):

║ During this module you have seen that while the historical development of the Caribbean influenced its sexual development from the fifteenth through to the twentieth centuries, Caribbean ideas of sexuality also affected and, in many cases, dominated the imposed western Judeo Christian norms. The effects of multi ethnic societies (created as a result of the colonial legacy of enslavement and indentureship), not only affected accepted notions of constructionist sexual development, but affected also the plural make-up of the society and the divergent norms adopted. Ultimately the “carnivalesque” was viewed as an important indigenous cultural creation, which ironically, in its expression, can both reinforce and challenge the heterosexual ‘norm.’ ║

⇒ Review some of the key outputs from group work carried out during the module.

**SLIDE 45**

Short course acknowledgements

**Further reading (includes lecture bibliography)**

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