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Centering the Center: Finding the 'Hetero' in Heteronormativity

Abstract

This paper begins with this question: what do we mean when we say “heterosexual” and how have we positioned “heterosexuality” in queer studies? The first part of the paper focuses on the normative heterosexual institutions of marriage and reproduction. Using a selection of historical works by Henry Abelove, Adele Perry, Ruth Perry, and Laura Ann Stoler, I proceed to challenge the perceived self-evident and ahistorical relationships between normative heterosexuality – heteronormativity – and the “heterosexual” institutions of marriage and reproduction. I propose a methodological opening to see “heterosexual” arrangements as often simultaneously crucial parts of colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, and racist regimes at different historical moments. This opening allows us to deconstruct the relationship between heterosexuality and heteronormativity, as well as uncover the non-sexual goals and implications of normalizing heterosexuality. In the last part of my analysis, I look at the role of “tradition” in framing discourses of heterosexuality in four Hong Kong sex and puberty education materials. I argue that comprehensive understanding of the definition and disciplining functions of “heterosexuality” in the materials requires engagement with Hong Kong’s colonial history and post-colonial present. This engagement includes, but is not limited to, the accounting for the relationship between “heterosexuality” and the erasure of same-sex desires in Hong Kong’s contemporary narratives of the Chinese “traditional” past.

Keywords: heterosexuality; queer theory; history of sexuality; Hong Kong; sex education; postcolonialism

1. Introduction

When I first encountered queer studies, I was struck by the field’s critical centering of queer persons, desires, and relations, as well as its immense potential to provide alternative analytical frameworks to question sexualities and norms. My investments in queer theoretical approaches in my own work are frequently sustained by Michael Warner’s promise in his collection Fear of a Queer Planet (1994). Warner argues that “if queers, incessantly told to alter their ‘behavior,’

can be understood as protesting not just the normal behavior of the social but the *idea* of normal behavior, they will bring skepticism to the methodologies founded on that idea.” (1994: xxvii).

As I investigate Hong Kong-Canadian discourses surrounding Canadian marriage law in my own work, I turn to studies of heterosexualities and normative sexualities in historical and contemporary Hong Kong and Canadian contexts. In turn, these discussions expose the multiple ways in which European and North American legacies of colonialism and imperialism continue to influence the construction of cross-sex sexual norms and practices in the post-colonial cultures of Hong Kong and Canada. While exploring North American, European, and Asian sources on cross-sex sexualities, I have discovered that there is no singular understanding of heterosexuality. In fact, queer studies scholars and historians of sexuality have used “heterosexuality” in different ways, varying from a descriptive shorthand for cross-sex relations (as in references to the “heterosexual couple”) to a “catch-all” for all hegemonic institutions with cross-sex participation (as in the use of “heterosexual family” to mean the nuclear family). In particular, historical works on time periods that predate the invention of the term “heterosexuality” point to our need to consider seriously when references to “heterosexuality” are useful and what its meanings are in specific historical and cultural contexts.¹ In *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), Michael Warner accurately, albeit fleetingly, describes the existing understandings of “heterosexuality” as “a contradictory amalgamation of histories and contexts” (1999: 129).² In this paper, I propose a *pause* in our study of sexualities; if queer studies promises alternate methodologies to demythologize the “*idea* of normal behavior” and we deem heterosexuality normal, we must critically engage with heterosexuality’s positioning within recent queer works.

This paper begins with this question: what do we mean when we say “heterosexual” and how have we positioned “heterosexuality” in queer studies? The next part of the paper focuses

¹ According to historian Jonathan Ned Katz, the term “heterosexuality” was first introduced by an American doctor named Dr. James Kiernan in the late 1880s. But the term “hetero-sexual” was popularized by sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1893) in which Krafft-Ebing explained “hetero-sexual” desires as the most innate, unchanging, and universal urge to reproduce (1995:21).

² Although Warner’s observation on the current understandings and uses of “heterosexuality” is accurate and profound, his work *The Trouble with Normal* centers on the various manifestations “sexual shame” and he refers to “heterosexual” only as a descriptive term for male-female relations, desires, and couplings. It is worth noting that feminist theorist Gayle Rubin - who Warner eloquently references in *Trouble* - similarly argues for scholarly recognition of the sexual complexities within heterosexuality in her article “Thinking Sex” (1984:282). While she sets the foundation for further discussions on multiple heterosexualities, her emphasis in *Thinking Sex* lies in sexual regulations within patriarchal institutions and feminist communities at the time.

on the normative heterosexual institutions of marriage and reproduction. Using a selection of historical works by Henry Abelove, Adele Perry, Ruth Perry, and Laura Ann Stoler, I proceed to challenge the perceived self-evident and ahistorical relationships between normative heterosexuality – heteronormativity – and the “heterosexual” institutions of marriage and reproduction. I propose a methodological opening to see “heterosexual” arrangements as often simultaneously crucial parts of colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, and racist regimes at different historical moments. This opening allows us to deconstruct the relationship between heterosexuality and heteronormativity, as well as uncover the non-sexual goals and implications of normalizing heterosexuality. In the last part of my analysis, I look at the role of “tradition” in framing discourses of heterosexuality in four Hong Kong sex and puberty education materials. I argue that comprehensive understanding of the definition and disciplining functions of “heterosexuality” in the materials *requires* engagement with Hong Kong’s colonial history and post-colonial present. This engagement includes, but is not limited to, the accounting for the relationship between “heterosexuality” and the erasure of same-sex desires in Hong Kong’s contemporary narratives of the Chinese “traditional” past.

2. Positioning Heterosexuality in Contemporary Queer Studies

In queer studies, scholars often discuss heterosexuality when exploring legal understandings of same-sex relations, cross-sex sexualities,³ and sexual categories. Two visible instances are scholarships addressing recent debates on same-sex marriage and laws on homosexuality and sodomy in North America.

³ Unless I use quotation marks to refer to “heterosexual” as a specific sexual category, I use the terms heterosexual and cross-sex interchangeably to describe male-female desires and relations.

2.1. Discursive Constructions of Normative Heterosexualities

“Marriage”

In recent decades, debates surrounding same-sex marriage and same-sex civil union laws have dominated many North American and European legal and political discussions. Scholars such as Lisa Duggan, David Eng, Janet Jakobsen, and Michael Warner have noted that many mainstream gay and lesbian rights lobby groups in North America have appropriated liberal *heterosexual* arguments regarding marriage and family to secure the legalization of same-sex marriage (Duggan 2003, Eng 2005, Jakobsen 2005, Warner 1999). In the “Introduction” to *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* (2005), David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz contend that although queer activism in the past “sustained a radical critique of family and marriage,” many queer activists at present have abandoned “a more global critique of capitalist exploitation and domination, state violence and expansion, and religious fundamentalisms and hate” (2005: 11). Instead, queer activists demand “access to the nuclear family and its associated rights, recognition, and privileges from the state” (2005: 11).

Queer theorist Janet Jakobsen furthers this argument and claims that this assimilationist demand for queer participation in marriage and procreation reproduces an individualist logic that constructs a “queer liberal” notion of choice, where one’s permission to wed a partner of “one’s own ‘choosing’” becomes the “*only* expression of sexual freedom” (2005: 286). As a result, heterosexuals’ right to marriage and the nuclear family, to many queer activists, becomes the epitome of heterosexual sexual freedom and for queers to acquire this right marks the end of sexual inequality. In these discussions, scholars use “heterosexual marriage” to signify a particular form of cross-sex relations. They do not mean all forms of cross-sex marital relations, but only cross-sex relations that are monogamous, two-person, and have the potential for the nuclear family formation.

“Sodomy”

Apart from the discussions on marriage, North American legal debates surrounding homosexuality and sodomy and queer commentaries on these debates also ground popular and legal conceptualizations of homosexuality in specific understandings of heterosexuality. Queer theorists Cindy Patton in “Tremble, Hetero Swine!” (1994) and Janet Halley in “The Construction of Heterosexuality” (1994) argue that the popular equating of sodomy *exclusively* with male homosexuality is fundamental to maintaining seemingly-stable perceptions of heterosexuality. Their works on the discourses of AIDS and anti-discrimination legal cases in the 1980s and 1990s show that the (heterosexual) U.S. Right movement and the (heterosexual) U.S. judiciary claimed an “epistemological authority” (Halley 1994: 88) to identify homosexuals and further to distinguish themselves from what they regarded as immoral, anal-penetrating, and AIDS-carrying gay men. Consequently, such heterosexuals could ignore the complexity of heterosexual sex acts and their own same-sex desires, and thus collectively deny any possibility of immorality and disease among themselves. Both scholars contend that the rigid and exclusive association of homosexuals with sodomites define “heterosexuals” as “nonhomosexuals,” and thus this association exposes the centrality of homosexual sex and desires in societal understandings of heterosexuality.

In “Gay Rights versus Queer Theory” (2005), Teemu Ruskola responds to Halley and argues that present legal understandings of “homosexuality” not only help define “heterosexuality”; their equating of normative cross-sex sexuality with intimacy is fundamental to the construction of normative *homosexuality*. He investigates the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), which was framed around the question of “the validity of a Texas statute making it a crime for two persons of the same sex to engage in certain intimate sexual conduct” (2005: 236). While the court ruled against the Texas law, Ruskola claims that narratives of homosexuality in the case expose the deeply-entrenched argument that the (heterosexual) court is able to know the “truth” of homosexuality.

In this instance, the “truth” is that homosexuals interact only on “intimate terms” and “exist *only* in relationships”; at the same time, this intimacy “is just like heterosexual intimacy, except between persons of the same sex” and thus undeserving of discrimination and prosecution

(2003: 239, 241). As a result, Ruskola states that heterosexual acceptance of homosexuality and homosexuals is not unconditional, but limited only to a specific “intimate” and relationship-bound form of homosexuality which heterosexuals deem “respectable” (2003: 239). The implicit bargain in understanding homosexuality to be just like “respectable” heterosexuality reifies, rather than challenges, existing institutions of normative heterosexuality bounded by privileged concepts of relationships, intimacy, and family. As is the case in queer studies discussions of same-sex marriage, Patton, Halley, and Ruskola use “heterosexual” and “heterosexuality” to mean a particular “class of heterosexuals” (Halley 1994: 98) who only practice normative (read: non-anal) cross-sex sexual acts and only within intimate, two-person, committed, monogamous, and cross-sex relationships.

2.2. Heterosexuality and Homonormativity as Institutions

Many queer scholarly works on the debates surrounding same-sex marriage and sodomy demonstrate the positioning of “heterosexuality” in queer studies to mean institutionalized forms of normative sexuality. My understanding of “normative” is borrowed from Mary Louise Adams’ *The Trouble with Normal* (1997). She states that “individuals are encouraged, through a variety of discursive and institutional practices, to meet normative standards, and they come to desire the rewards that meeting those standards makes possible” (1997: 13). This complex system of encouragement, Adams argues, is the process of “normalization” (1997: 13). “As a form of social regulation,” she writes, “normalization defines and limits the choices that are available to us,” where “the point is not that we simply try to meet social norms it’s that we *want* to” (1997: 13). Similarly, heterosexuality becomes a specific form of normative sexuality through processes of legal and social normalization, as evident in the marriage and sodomy debates. As a result, society as a whole not only tries but *wants* to practice the “ideal” form of heterosexuality as monogamous, marital, reproductive or potentially reproductive, gender-

conforming (masculine male and feminine female), and two-person through memberships in institutions such as marriage, the nuclear family, and parenthood.⁴

Historian Jonathan Ned Katz effectively explains this interpretation of “heterosexuality” in *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1995). He states that “Heterosexuality is not identical to the reproductive intercourse of the sexes; heterosexuality is not the same as sex distinctions and gender differences; heterosexuality does not equal the eroticism of women and men. Heterosexuality, I argue, signifies one particular historical arrangement of the sexes and their pleasures” (1995:14). Similarly, Adams describes “heterosexuality” not as “a simple matter of sexual attraction between women and men, nor of the particular forms of sexual behaviour women and men might engage in with each other” (1997: 166). Rather, she states that “[h]eterosexuality is a discursively constituted social category that organizes relations not only between women and men, but also between those who fit definitions of heterosexuality and those who do not” (1997: 166).

References to “heterosexuality” as normative sexuality or what Warner coins as “heteronormativity” (1994: xxi) are at the heart of current discussions of “homonormativity” in queer studies. Lisa Duggan explains “homonormativity” as a liberal platform on which gays and lesbians “rhetorically” remap and recode “freedom and liberation in narrow terms of privacy, domesticity, and the unfettered ability to consume in the ‘free’ market” (cited in Eng et. al 2005: 11). The mainstream queer adoption of normative heterosexual institutions such as marriage and family are instances where boundaries of “homonormative” desires and relations are charted along those of normative heterosexuality. In particular, theorists such as Duggan and Roderick Ferguson contend that mainstream queer activist negotiation for sexual and marital rights using individualist understandings of privacy and an immutable “gayness” have further marginalized non-normative queers.

In “Race-ing Homonormativity” (2005), Ferguson states that many queers claim their sexual orientation and relations as private matters that should be constitutionally protected and

⁴ Adams writes – and I agree - that there exist other heterosexual norms that seem to compete with “ideal” heterosexuality; one example is the glorification of young men who have multiple dating partners at the same time. However, she argues convincingly that such competing norms eventually give way to a dominant singular understanding of mature heterosexuality as monogamous, marital, gender-conforming and reproductive, and these competing norms of cross-sex relations are merely “heterosexual practice” for young persons’ inevitable destiny of marriage (1997:100-2).

their right to marry not be hindered. He argues that this argument takes on an “ethnic type” where persons claim queerness, like race, as a “private particularity” and not a “general threat” (2005:55, 60).

Duggan makes a similar point in “Making It Perfectly Queer” (1992). She claims that many queer activists evoke arguments based on the civil rights movement to align “the lesbian and gay population with racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups and women in a quest for full economic, political, and cultural participation in U.S. life” (1992: 13). Duggan believes that just as like many ethnic community-based movements claim to speak for a perceived “fixed minority constituency,” queer liberals have falsely constructed a monolithic queer community that “suppress[es] internal differences and political conflict” (1992: 16, 17). As a result, the movement establishes the gay identity as “a unitary, unproblematic given” and further perpetuates queer assimilationist and uncritical pursuits of equality (1992: 17). As a result, homonormativity’s dependence on the dual liberal (hetero)normative regimes of privacy and visibility favors white male capitalists and renders “the immigrant, the poor, [and] the person of colour” “bad” homosexuals, unfit Western citizens, and as the “cultural antitheses of a stable health social order” (Ferguson 2005: 65).⁵

2.3. The Subjectless Heterosexual

These readings suggest that “heterosexuals” and “heterosexuality” are often used as tropes rather than to describe specific realities of cross-sex relations and desires. While particular forms of cross-sex desires, relations, and behaviors indeed inhabit, perpetuate, and actively encourage sexual models such as marriage, reproduction, and the nuclear family, many references to

⁵ In response to the heteronormative and homonormative realities in the West, many scholars have looked to queer diasporic frameworks and narratives to combat racialized and sexist models of sexualities as well as provide alternate frameworks for studying queerness. An effective example is Gayatri Gopinath’s “Bollywood Spectacles” (2005) and *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005). Other works in queer and critical race studies have used queer diasporic narratives to displace Western-centric and homonormative understandings of “coming out.” See Martin Manalansan IV (2003) Marlon Ross (2005), C.S. Chan (1997), and William Spurlin (2001). The authors’ extensive references to various articulations and forms of same-sex desires, relations, and gender representations expose the Eurocentric and patriarchal privileging of gay, white, able-bodied, male, middle class culture as the sole legitimate gay vantage point.

heterosexuals and heterosexuality in queer studies do not analyze critically the multiple *and* different ways in which cross-sex desires and institutions have come to be normative. In other words, “heterosexuals” and “heterosexuality” in many queer works represent the models the queer frameworks must resist and challenge, leaving little room to raise the possibility that different “heterosexuals” may have drastically different investments in their normative arrangements and that these categories may “normalize” in multiple ways.

One example is Gayatri Gopinath’s proposal for a “queer diasporic framework” that challenges “a geneological, implicitly heteronormative reproductive logic” of nation and nationalism in *Impossible Desires* (2005: 10). She further suggests that by exploiting the “analogous relation between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other” one can successfully expose and denaturalize the hetero/sexist notion of nationalism and female domesticity (2005: 11). The result is the restoration of “the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of diaspora” (2005: 11). What is left unquestioned in this perceived seamless pairing of reproduction and domesticity with heterosexuality is whether heterosexuality is *necessarily* reproductive and inextricably tied to feminine domesticity. In addition, even if reproduction and feminine domesticity have historically been heterosexual institutions, the roles of heterosexuals in these institutions, these institutions’ relationships to each other, and their processes of normalization have been far from stable and self-evident.

In the “Introduction” to *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* (2005), Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz draw attention to queer epistemology’s “‘subjectless’ critique of queer studies” that “disallows any positioning of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent” (2005: 3). To borrow this vocabulary, I believe that many works in queer studies point to “heterosexuals” and “heterosexual” regimes of marriage, reproduction, domesticity, and family as “subjectless critiques.” That is, they refer to the regimes’ normalizing power without interrogating how cross-sex desires may have functioned in them in heterogeneous ways and that these regimes’ relations to each other may be far from natural and coherent. This undertheorization of “heterosexuality,” I argue, creates the false impression that the normative power of regimes such as reproduction and marriage lies primarily

in heterosexuality and these arrangements contribute collectively and equally to the disciplining discourses of heterosexuality.

In the next section, I will reference historical investigations of what we have come to know as the heteronormative institutions of marriage and reproduction. I will complicate the seemingly self-evident dominant position of heterosexuality and heterosexual power in these arrangements and expose the arrangements' concurrent, and sometimes more powerful, functions as racialized, classed, and sexist regimes.

3. Historicizing Heteronormativity

3.1. Multiple "Lines of Penetration"

To untangle effectively the tightly weaved web of "heteronormative" institutions, I will employ Michel Foucault's notion of "lines of penetration" (Foucault 1979: 42). In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume 1* (1979), Foucault traces the nineteenth-century production of "childhood" as "an indiscreet anatomy and possibly mysterious physiology" by, what he calls, "an entire medico-sexual regime" formed by doctors and psychologists (1979: 43, 42). Foucault argues that rather than understanding the "vice" of children's sexuality as a temporary "evil to be eliminated," doctors pathologized children, and educators and parents were "alerted and left with the suspicion that all children were guilty" (1979: 42). The result, according to Foucault, was the production of an essentialized understanding of children and their sexuality as problematic and dangerous. Hence the nineteenth-century saw the medical-sexual regime build a surveillance and disciplining system all around children that "multiplied its relays and its effects, while its targets expanded, subdivided and branched out, penetrating further into reality at the same pace" (1979: 42). Foucault argues that the nineteenth-century medical-sexual regime witnessed the

beginning of “indefinite *lines of penetration*”⁶ (1979: 42) all around children that have continued into the present.

I find Foucault’s notion of “lines of penetration” (1979: 42) especially useful in understanding institutions such as marriage and reproduction as social arrangements that penetrate particular societies at specific historical moments with multiple lines of normalizing power. At certain times the institutions may regulate cross-sex sexualities vigilantly, while at other times they may function most effectively as a racializing force. In other words, Foucault’s notion of “indefinite lines of penetration” can offer us a *methodological opening* in viewing normative heterosexual institutions as possessing diverse, and often concurrent, regulatory capacities. This opening allows us to denaturalize the connections between heterosexuality and heteronormativity and draw attention to the non-sexual goals and implications of normalizing heterosexuality. Indeed, historical works referenced in the following sections reveal that sexual arrangements of marriage and reproduction at different times have functioned as powerful markers of racial superiority, class unity, and patriarchy, as well as heteronormativity.

3.2. Marriage

Historians Laura Ann Stoler and Adele Perry both argue that cross-sex, monogamous “marriage” has long served as the yardstick of civilization and white superiority, yet the institution’s heteronormative power was enacted in multiple ways.

In *Carnal Knowledge* (2002), Stoler investigates European colonial projects in Deli, Sumatra’s plantation belt in South East Asia from the late nineteenth-century to the beginning of the twentieth-century. Through exploring changes in marital regulations among white European populations in Deli, she aims to complicate “the politically constructed dichotomy of colonizer and colonized” that she claims has not been investigated in anthropological research. Rather than viewing whites as a unified community of oppressors and beneficiaries of colonial privileges, Stoler argues that only middle class white men enjoyed economic, political, and social

⁶ According to Foucault, children formed one of the many populations doctors and psychologists at the time deemed deviant and perverse. Other groups include “mad men and women,” criminals, and persons “who did not like the

dominance in Deli in the beginning of the 1860s. The white middle-class population, according to Stoler, enjoyed colonial authority over economic production and social arrangements that disenfranchised *both* poor impoverished white workers and the non-white populations (2002: 25). Stoler states that major European businesses only employed single applicants to work in Deli and the workers were not allowed to marry while employed (2002: 29). At the same time, “concubinary arrangements with Javanese women were considered preferable because they imposed a less onerous financial burden on low-salaried staff and helped newcomers to learn local language and customs quickly,” while European marriages “threatened to take up too much time and too much of employees’ salaries” (2002: 29).

However, Stoler claims that the problems of brawly single white workers fighting over native women, combined with white riots over their impoverishment and poor working conditions towards the end of the nineteenth-century caused a shift in European businesses’ marital restrictions (2002: 30). Stoler writes that, in the beginning of the twentieth-century “the recruitment of single male workers from Java and a bachelor staff from Europe was replaced by a policy that encouraged married couples and promoted conditions that would allow ‘family formation’ for both” (2002: 31).

According to Stoler, the permission for *all* white men to marry white women successfully blurred class differences and unified middle-class and working-class European men under the racial identity of whiteness. With the formation of a cohesive white colonial community, European businesses effectively shifted the explanation of further violence and conflicts within the colony “from the poor quality of low-level staff to the clandestine infiltration of communist and nationalist elements among Javanese and Chinese recruits” (2002: 31). At the same time, Stoler claims that the new marital regulations further consolidated white superiority, as white wives in Deli became vigilant guardians of their now racially segregated compounds and perceived superior white moral purity (2002: 34). Consequently, the changes in the marital laws in the 1920s secured both the economic interests and the racial superiority of white middle-class colonizers by labeling non-white workers and native Javanese men and women unfit workers, sexual inferiors, and racially denigrated in general.

opposite sex” (Foucault, 1979, 38).

In *On the Edge of Empire* (2001) and “White Women, Race, and Immigration to British Columbia” (2004), Adele Perry’s study of Canada’s “importation” of white European women in the middle of the nineteenth-century marks racial purity, rather than the blurring of class differences, as the primary impetus for promoting white monogamous marriages. According to Perry, a huge population of British white male workers emigrated to British Columbia, Canada for mining opportunities in the middle of the nineteenth-century. However, the white authorities in British Columbia were aghast about the likelihood that men in these large white male homosocial communities would turn to same-sex sex or mixed-race, cross-sex white-Aboriginal relationships (2001: 42). Perry claims that anxieties surrounding mixed race relations were especially rampant as many whites considered mixed race relations “a symbol of imperialism gone awry,” as Aboriginal women were perceived as “squaws” and Aboriginal people in general “were constructed as inherently inferior, physically, and moral weak” (2001:74). Thus white authorities viewed mixed-race relations and, more importantly, mixed race children “a threat to the colony’s political stability” (2001:74).

As a result, Perry states that Assisted Female Immigration from Britain to British Columbia began in 1859 and white British women were imported for the main purpose of marrying white workers in Canada. Perry argues that “marriage was constructed as the ultimate bulwark maintaining appropriate racial segregation,” where white workers would no longer need to relinquish their racial superiority by sexually interacting with Aboriginal women (2001: 68). At the same time, white women who eventually became the wives of white workers would further concretize racial privilege by enslaving Aboriginal male and female workers in their homes (2001: 183).

While both Stoler and Perry describe marriage as a colonial regime of white and what we might perceive as heteronormative control, the political goals and implications of the institution “marriage” differed. In Stoler’s *Deli* in the beginning of the twentieth-century, the proliferation of marriage rights for all whites in Sumatra functioned to mask class differences and class-based violence and discontent. White business owners used marriage as a form of white middle-class privilege *primarily* to pacify class and economic, and not race-based, anxieties. The identity of whiteness was a convenient, yet very powerful, tool for economic consolidation through manufactured racial unity. However, Perry’s study of British Columbia a few decades earlier

points to white authorities' use of marriage as means to eradicate interracial sociality and sexuality and solidify white colonial racial superiority.

In both instances, the disciplining power of marriage extended well beyond the sexes and genders of the partners involved. Normative heterosexuality came to mean race and/or class-specific sexualities, as well as particular forms of cross-sex relations. In other words, while the institution of marriage may be the normative framework for heterosexuality across various historical moments, how it became heteronormative and the ways in which heteronormativity was justified and policed vastly differed. Stoler's and Perry's historical investigations effectively demonstrate that to attribute the normalizing power of marriage simply to the supremacy of cross-sex relations, or even white cross-sex relations, is insufficient to understand normative heterosexuality comprehensively, since white heterosexuality has been celebrated historically for multiple reasons as a flexible means of social control.

Hence, it is imperative to recognize that the "lines of penetration" of marriage multiply and mutate depending on specific contexts. While marriage guarded monogamous cross-sex sexualities as shown in both Perry's and Stoler's works, we must also recognize the institution's ability to exert equally, if not more powerful, effects to produce and strengthen race- and class-based oppression.

3.3. Reproduction

While reproduction, like marriage, has become a marker of normative heterosexuality, its role as a regulatory and normative heterosexual institution is by no means natural and ahistorical. In "Colonizing the Breast" (1991), historian Ruth Perry effectively argues that the concept of reproduction in the eighteenth-century was an extremely pervasive tool that justified British colonialism, blurred class differences among British women, and secured patriarchy within cross-sex relations. Perry writes that at the same time as Britain expanded its colonial empire abroad in the eighteenth-century, the domestic medical profession began to define knowledge concerning reproduction and motherhood as properties belonging to the domain of (male) doctors and no longer to midwives or women themselves (1991: 234). She argues that this was

no coincidence. Since British colonization signaled “new political and economic imperatives of an expanding English empire” and the need for an existing local social system to adapt to these new imperatives, motherhood was redefined as “a colonial form - the domestic, familial counterpart to land enclosure at home and imperialism abroad” (1991: 206).

According to Perry, the “new belief in the rational manipulation of natural forces for greater productivity” in imperialist conquests contributed to the notion that the purpose of procreation among white British women as the production of colonizing citizens (1991: 207). At the same time, since the British government was unable to provide public services to care for the rapidly rising population, Perry writes that the institution of “motherhood” as a patriotic, private, feminine, and, most importantly, voluntary duty of women emerged (1991: 208). In addition, Perry writes that the rising movements for sex equality in Britain also prompted the state’s naturalization of women’s sexual passivity and domestic responsibility through redefining femininity to mean reproductive motherhood (1991: 212). By the middle to the end of the eighteenth-century, Perry concludes, popular British journals, women’s literature, as well as the medical profession lauded British participation in reproduction and British women’s roles as mothers and as the producers of nationalist British citizens.

The valorization of motherhood and the naturalization of maternal instincts for *all* women, Perry writes, erased “class differences among women,” as the possibilities and meanings of the female body and “the degree of freedom in interpreting a woman’s duties” were universally reduced (1991: 234). As a result, women’s duties in Britain became increasingly defined by gender, rather than class (1991: 234). As is evident in Perry’s study, the discourse of reproduction as nationalist and natural charted the boundaries of ideal heterosexual relations. Yet the discursive power of reproduction also rested firmly in colonial, economic, patriarchal, and class-based logic. Thus at this historical moment, the promotion of procreative cross-sex sexualities as normative heterosexuality must be understood in a wider context as a means to colonial, economic, and patriarchal ends, all the while rearranging class divisions among British women.

In “Some Speculations on the History of Sexual Intercourse During the Long Eighteenth-century in England” (1989), historian Henry Abelove posits additional reasons for the drastic increase in birth rates in Britain in the eighteenth-century. He draws attention to two concurrent

trends in Britain at the time: the popularity of sexual intercourse and a rise in production. Ablove notes that cross-sex sexual intercourse – “penis in vagina, vagina around penis, with seminal emission uninterrupted”- became very popular in Britain in the late eighteenth-century (1989: 127). He suspects that the popularity of potentially reproductive sex acts was accompanied by the diminishing importance of non-procreative sexual practices such as voyeurism, anal sex, and mutual masturbation, which were reconstructed as foreplay (1989: 129). At the same time, he states that there was a rise in all indices of production (1989: 128). While he does not argue that an increase in material production caused a rise in reproductive sexual practices, he hypothesizes that “the rise in production (the privileging of product) and the rise in the popularity of the sexual act which uniquely makes for reproduction (the privilege of intercourse so-called) may be aspects of the same phenomenon” (1989: 128). Here, Ablove places understandings of cross-sex sexual relations and sex acts within the discourse of capitalism. Just as reproduction was a normative heterosexual institution in Britain in the eighteenth-century, Ablove posits that it may have been equally, if not more so, a normative capitalist institution, where capitalist productive principles affected the definitions and popularity of cross-sex sex acts.

Works by R. Perry and Ablove demonstrate that reproduction in eighteenth-century Britain not only normalized procreative cross-sex relations, colonization, and patriarchy; it also normalized capitalist principles of maximizing productivity. Again, to borrow Foucaultian vocabulary, reproduction’s “lines of penetration” in the two historical studies are vast and multiple. On the one hand, the discourse of reproductive relations penetrated and regulated cross-sex arrangements and definitions of sexual practices in Britain in the eighteenth-century. On the other hand, reproductive cross-sex sexuality’s normalizing power was bolstered by and, in turn, further entrenched imperial, patriarchal, and capitalist structures.

Apart from demonstrating multiple sites of normative power in the institutions of marriage and reproduction at various moments and locations, these historical texts also reveal that heteronormative institutions have not always functioned alongside each other. Stoler’s study reveals that the reforms in marital regulations among white Europeans in Deli in the early eighteenth-century were aimed primarily at preventing class-based riots among white settlers and

placed reproduction of white children at the periphery.⁷ Reproduction, however, plays a larger role in A. Perry's study of the import of white British females and their marriage to white male miners in British Columbia during the late nineteenth-century. Yet A. Perry's work demonstrates that white authorities did not institutionalize marriage as a normative form of cross-sex relation to facilitate white reproduction as its primary objective. Rather, white cross-sex marriages were encouraged to curb mixed-race reproduction between Aboriginal women and white men.

Similarly, Ablove's and R. Perry's works on British sexual culture in the eighteenth-century show that normative understandings of cross-sex sex and marriage have not always entailed reproduction, and vice versa. They argue that reproduction as a mandatory, ideal, and natural form of cross-sex relations only became a prevailing phenomenon with the growing strength of British colonial conquests and domestic capitalist industrial production. At the same time, Ablove demonstrates that a spike in fertility among the British population - the result of increasing instances of cross-sex genital intercourse - did not secure the simultaneous normalization of cross-sex marriage, as births increased both inside and outside of marriage.

As I appeal to historical studies of marriage and reproduction, I do not doubt that participants in these arrangements engaged in cross-sex relations. I am also persuaded by historical and queer theoretical arguments that institutions such as marriage and reproduction champion monogamy, reproduction, mono-racial relations, and cross-sex marriages as the dominant and normative forms of sexual arrangements. However, I question the assumptions that heterosexuality's relationships to these institutions are always natural, unproblematic, ahistorical, and, most of all, primary. Works by Ablove, A. Perry, R. Perry, and Stoler have shown that marriage and reproduction were "heterosexual" institutions, and yet they were also simultaneously crucial parts of colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, and racist regimes, as well as different combinations of the above to different degrees at specific historical moments.

⁷ Although Stoler discusses white anxiety over mixed race children in other parts of her book she emphasizes that white European middle-class reformed marital regulations mainly due to increasing frequency of class-based riots

4. Race-ing Heterosexuality – Puberty and Sex Education Literature

In this third and last section of my paper, I use the methodological openings proposed in the earlier sections to look at specific discourses of normative sexuality. In particular, I concentrate on four books published by the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK)⁸ between 2003 to 2007: *Youth Diary on Puberty* (2003), *Youth Diary on Puberty II* (2007), *All About Sex – Youth Q & A* (2005), and *All About Sex – Youth Q & A (II)* (2006).⁹ These are educational materials that aim to provide accurate and comprehensive information on puberty and sexuality to Hong Kong teenagers. They extensively cover topics ranging from the growth of body hair, menstruation, acne, and mood swings to issues surrounding masturbation, homosexuality, contraception, marriage, and reproduction. Targeting youth who are entering adolescence, these Chinese-language books are popular among teachers, sex educators, and teenagers and they have been reprinted due to high demand.¹⁰

Here, I focus on the authors' narratives of cross-sex sexualities and relationships in the context of dating, marriage, monogamy, and reproduction. I argue that the study of heterosexualities and normative cross-sex sexualities *must* simultaneously interrogate race, class, culture, and historical categories, since normative heterosexual institutions are at once normative, racialized, classed, and gendered regimes with concurrent and sometimes competing "lines of penetration."

among poor white workers and mixed race sociality.

⁸ On its website, FPAHK explains that it was formerly called the Eugenics League founded in 1936, and was reorganized and renamed under its present name in 1950 to provide birth control services in Hong Kong. The Association became one of the eight founding members of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in 1952. The other members were India, Netherlands, Singapore, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, and West Germany. At present, the FPAHK is funded by both the Hong Kong Department of Health and the IPPF. Among its many services, the FPAHK operates 32 birth control clinics, a Sex Education Mobile Library, artificial insemination services, a pregnancy termination operation, a youth advisory service, and a pre-marital medical check-up service.

⁹ Other than the titles of the books that bear original English translations, I am responsible for all Chinese-English translations in this paper.

¹⁰ *Youth Diary on Puberty* (2003), *All About Sex – Youth Q & A* (2005), and *All About Sex – Youth Q & A (II)* (2006) have also been awarded respectively the "Critics Recommendation" Prize at the 2004, 2006 and 2007 Hong Kong Book Fair.

4.1. “Tradition”

Since the limited space here does not allow for an in-depth examination of cross-sex narratives and the genre of sex and adolescent advice literature in Hong Kong as a whole, I will concentrate on a frequently deployed key term in the books – “tradition.”¹¹ In their advice, the authors often use the term “tradition” to signal a conservative position and a repressive past. The term is often followed by encouragement for a timely and necessary transition into the present. An example would be the authors’ argument in *All About Sex – Youth Q & A* that “teenagers may be anxious, embarrassed, or ashamed of talking about sexuality because of ‘traditional influences’” (2005: 11). Another example is when the authors of *All About Sex – Youth Q & A (II)* look to “tradition” to explain the “double standard” that exists in cross-sex dating cultures that champion and police female virginity vigorously, while paying little attention to male virginity (2006: 23). In the latter book, the authors also attribute homophobia to “tradition” as parents may not accept their children’s same-sex sexuality due to “traditional beliefs” (2006: 71). In these instances, “tradition” comes to mean a sex-negative and homophobic culture that must be rejected. This rejection of “tradition” is often framed in the language of progress, where teenagers must enter into “contemporary Hong Kong society” through their rejection of “traditional” views on sexuality. Thus, youth sexuality and sexuality in general are positioned at the centre of contemporary Hong Kong perceptions of communities as “traditional” and “modern,” “backward” and “progressive.”

Similar arguments are made in *Youth Diary on Puberty* (2003) and *Youth Diary on Puberty II* (2007), two works that trace the diary entries of two fictional characters, Lam and Lui, as early adolescents in the first book and older teenagers in the second. Although direct references to “tradition” are less visible than in the *All About Sex* series, the authors of *Youth Diary I* and *II* clearly indicate the need to combat “backward” notions of sexuality. While Lam’s and Lui’s daily experiences show that the society has “double standards” for the sexes and that homosexuality is the butt of jokes at school, the authors suggest that the characters’ healthy heterosexual adolescence in “a contemporary advanced Hong Kong society” depends on their

respect for sexual equality and acceptance of *others* who may be homosexual (2003:59, 85; 2007: 59-61, 68).

Although the authors explicitly state in all four books that homosexuality is a legitimate sexual desire and must not be suppressed due to the “traditional mindset,” the heterosexuality of its main characters and readers are assumed and unquestioned. In fact, the authors in all the books point to cross-sex attraction as a crucial and fundamental marker of one’s entrance into puberty (2003: 74; 2005: 14; 2006: 8; 2007: 87). Also, the four books centre on themes such as cross-sex relations, cross-sex desires, and cross-sex sexual behaviors and illustrate a linear trajectory of casual cross-sex dating, monogamous courtship, marriage, and reproduction, all the while emphasizing that sexual activities are most rewarding and healthy within committed long-term, serious, monogamous, and cross-sex relationships. Boundaries of normative and ideal heterosexuality are most apparent in *Youth Diary on Puberty I* and *II* where the (male) characters who pursue multiple partners are deemed immature and untrustworthy and eventually suffer from the “failures” of short-term relationships.

All in all, young readers learn that: they are heterosexually oriented unless in exceptional circumstances and they enter into puberty when they desire cross-sex sex and into maturity when they promise long-term monogamy to their cross-sex partners. While these discourses of normative heterosexualities police all forms of sexual relations and desires, the textual and conceptual entangling of “sexuality” and “tradition” reveal the complex ways in which heterosexualities come to enact discursive power. To comprehend fully this particular discourse of heterosexuality, we must study “tradition” in the specific context of Hong Kong.

4.2. “Tradition” and the Colonial Past

In the four books, the authors never fully articulate their definition of “tradition,” assuming its meaning to be self-evident to their readers. Since a large majority of the population in Hong Kong is of Chinese-descent, the literature is directed specifically at Chinese youth, and “tradition” in the Cantonese dialect refers to Chinese culture, it is almost certain that the authors

¹¹ The term for “tradition” in Traditional Chinese characters is 傳統.

understand “tradition” to mean Chinese tradition. If the authors indeed equate Chinese culture with conservative and backward notions of sexuality and envision a different Hong Kong society that is progressive and sexually-open, this “healthy” heterosexual society, with a few exceptional homosexuals, would become “un-Chinese” or “progressively Chinese.” This hypothesis raises questions regarding the places of “race” and culture in the construction of normative heterosexuality in the advice literature, as well as in a contemporary and cosmopolitan Chinese society in places such as Hong Kong.

More importantly, if “tradition” indeed points to “Chinese tradition,” it glosses over the history of Hong Kong as a British colony from 1842 to 1997. During British colonial rule, Hong Kong institutions including the health education syllabus, community activist organizations, and legal structures were standardized based on British models. Although Hong Kong’s colonial status ended more than a decade ago, the current Hong Kong systems and syllabus for sex and youth education and laws regarding sexual crimes and behaviors still largely resemble those of Britain. Thus contemporary understandings of “Chinese tradition” in the context of this collection of literature and in Hong Kong in general *must* take into account colonial influences and the import of British categories of sexuality, morality, and youth. More significantly, we must also investigate the meanings of Chinese culture as “traditional” and the ways in which this frames current discourses of heterosexuality beyond the British paradigms.

4.3. “Tradition” and the Heterosexual Past

We must also consider the possibilities that the current understanding of “conservative Chinese tradition” is the product and/or part of an ongoing process of resistance to categories of sexuality enforced by more than a-century of colonization. The authors’ concept of Chinese “tradition” as “conservative” and therefore heterosexual and anti-homosexual requires further dissection. In fact, the claim by formerly colonized and/or presently racially marginalized people that their culture’s past and traditions are heterosexual and anti-homosexual is not unique. Postcolonial scholars Kendall Thomas (1997), William Spurlin (2005), and Gayatri Gopinath (2005) have argued that the homophobic reinvention of the cultural past as strictly heterosexual in post-

colonial South Africa, post-colonial India, and post-slavery America respectively are the results of colonial trauma and ongoing discrimination.

Thomas argues that “blackness” in America in the recent past is articulated in monolithically hyper-masculine, heterosexist, and anti-queer jargons as a defensive response to “white supremacy from the body of black America” and “white racism’s phobic conception of black sexuality” both in the slavery past and the racist present (1997: 131). To Thomas, this “jargon of authenticity” falsely represents black histories and subjectivities as violent and homophobic, and, at the same time, excludes and enacts oppression against black queers (1997: 124, 123).

Similar to Thomas’ claim, Spurlin contends that imperialist emasculation of blackness and the colonial conflation of homosexuality with denigrated femininity have enacted “psychic violence” on South Africans. These processes have led to postcolonial search for “pure” blackness where this false “authentic” pre-colonial identity becomes inevitably heterosexual and homophobic (2005: 198). Gopinath’s example of the National Federation of Indian Association’s refusal of South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association’s (SALGA) participation in the annual Indian Day Parade in New York City during the 1990s also highlights heterosexism and homophobia within post-colonial diasporic Indian nationalism. (2005: 16). Works by Thomas, Spurlin, and Gopinath are convincing evidence that British colonial influence may have had significant impact on Hong Kong’s current conception of Chinese “tradition” as necessarily anti-homosexual and Hong Kong’s past as necessarily heterosexual.

However, as within all post-colonial societies, the colonial influences on Hong Kong communities’ cultural and sexual self-perceptions are only one manifestation of the city’s continuing tense and unstable relations with Britain and the West in general. The sex education authors’ call for a departure from heterosexist and homophobic Chinese “tradition” and their promotion of a “progressive” and “modern” Hong Kong society must also be understood in the context of Westernization of many Hong Kong’s sex education discourses, among other facets of the society.

Accompanying the authors’ justifications for the “progressive” acceptance of homosexuality and the fictional characters’ homosexual friends, the authors’ explanations of homosexuality as a “sexual orientation” are borrowed from Western English definitions and

narratives. In *All About Sex – Youth Q & A (II)*, the authors use the English terms “sexual desire and attraction,” “sexual behaviors,” and “sexual identity” to explain the “three tiers of sexual orientation” to their young readers (2006: 64). In addition, in the four books, the authors frequently rely on the explanations of homosexuals’ desires for long-term monogamy, marriage, sexual gratification, and children as proof that homosexuals are “the same” as the presumed heterosexual fictional characters and young readers (2006: 64-72; 2007: 80). This narrative of homosexuality as a private and apolitical “sexual orientation” grounded in the universality of desires for marriage, reproduction, and monogamy is influenced by and/or very closely resembles the earlier articulated discourse of homonormativity pervasive in the West (see Section 2). The authors’ message is clear: understanding Western models and definitions of homosexuality is crucial for youth to live in a homosexual-friendly contemporary Hong Kong society that repudiates “traditional prejudice.”

Yet despite this homosexual-friendly message, the assumed heterosexual status of all the main characters of the books and of all the targeted readers expose the authors’ narrowly defined model of heterosexuality as the most healthy, common, and legitimate. In doing so, they replicate, ironically, the heterosexism of the very “traditional” culture that they wish to denounce. More importantly, the authors’ uses of Western discourses and vocabulary to explain (normative) heterosexuality and homosexuality, coupled with their seemingly contradictory evocations of Chinese “tradition” demonstrate that relationships between the West and Hong Kong’s post-colonial culture are multiple, complex, and often very messy. That is, in order for the young Hong Kong readers to become sexually healthy (hetero)sexual adolescents, they must at once embrace Western liberal ideas of homosexuality and confront “traditional” Chinese heterosexism – which I argue is a homophobic reaction to historical British role - all the while living in a post-colonial Hong Kong society which is described to them as extremely heterosexual.

Thus to comprehend fully the construction of normative heterosexuality within the selected sex education materials, the roles of Chinese “tradition” and “modern” Western homosexual narratives *must* be mapped onto broader historical and contemporary transnational interactions between Hong Kong and the West in general. In short, historically- and culturally-

informed investigations *must* play a crucial, if not fundamental, part in understanding discursive constructions of heterosexuality.

5. Conclusion

This paper is prompted by the question: what do we mean when we say “heterosexual” and how have we positioned “heterosexuality” in queer studies? The first part of the study illustrates the uses of “heterosexuality” in queer studies scholarship to mean a particular arrangement of cross-sex relations – two-person, monogamous, committed, marital, long-term, and procreative or potentially procreative relations. In the second part, I appeal to historical works by Henry Abelove, Adele Perry, Ruth Perry, and Laura Ann Stoler to challenge perceived self-evident, ahistorical, and universal relationships between normative heterosexuality and the institutions of marriage and reproduction. I argue that while institutions such as marriage and reproduction have been and remain normative forms of heterosexualities, our understanding of them as “heteronormative” may have glossed over the historically contingent and highly turbulent connections between heterosexuality and these institutions’ processes of normalization. At the same time, the selected historical examinations draw attention to the undertheorization of heterosexuality in many queer works, where the discursive power of (hetero)sexuality is often privileged over racial, class, gender, and colonial relations and normative cross-sex institutions’ relationships to one another are assumed unproblematic. I argue that there is no monolithic heterosexuality, just as there is no monolithic normative heterosexuality. I propose a *methodological opening* where the normalizing power of “heterosexual” institutions are seen as sexual as well as racial, gendered, classed, and historically contingent. I attempt to apply this methodological alternative to look at the discourses of heterosexuality in four Hong Kong sex and puberty education materials in the third part of the study. To make such notions of heterosexuality intelligible, I argue that we must seriously consider the specific colonial, Chinese, contemporary, and historical contexts of Hong Kong. As queer studies emphasizes the dissection of the normative “center” as well as the queer “periphery,” my project questions how we come to define the “center” and the “norm.” Although my case study on Hong Kong sex

education literature is brief, I hope it has helped further sexuality studies' conversations about heterosexualities and sexual normativity. Most importantly, my goal is to expand such conversations beyond familiar Western, English-speaking subjects and environments.

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