

## Sometimes the Social Becomes Personal: Gender, Class, and Sexualities



Paula England

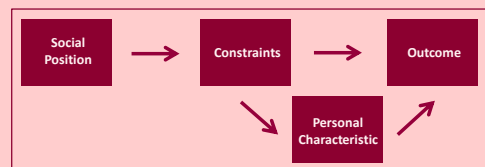
## Two Case Studies

- Sex with same-sex partners
  - Men avoid and stigmatize this more than women. Why?
- Heterosexual sex leading to an unintended pregnancy and a nonmarital birth
  - More from disadvantaged backgrounds have nonmarital births. Why?

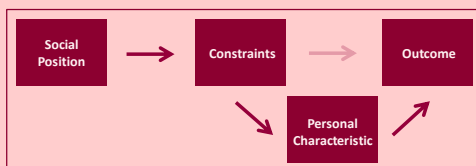
## Theoretical Message



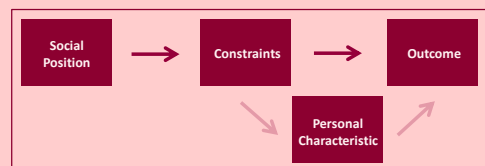
## Two Ways Social Positions Affect Outcomes



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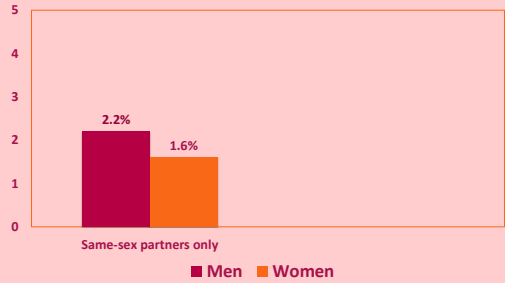
## Two Ways Social Positions Affect Outcomes



## Gender and Same-Sex Partners



### % of Men and Women Who Had Sex With A Same-Sex Partner Last Year



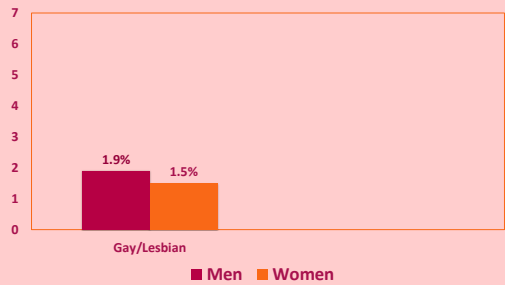
Source: NSFG 2011-2013. Age 18-35. N=6528.

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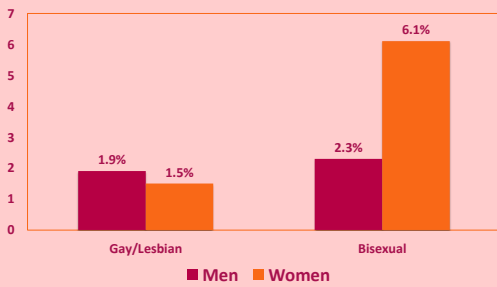
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### % of Men and Women Who Identify as Lesbian/Gay or Bisexual



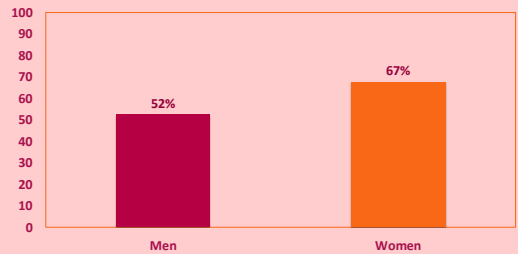
Source: NSFG 2011-2013. Age 18-35. N=6510.

### % of Men and Women Who Identify as Lesbian/Gay or Bisexual



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### % of Men and Women Who Believe Homosexuality is Not Wrong at All



Source: General Social Survey, 2012-2014, Age 18-35. N=747.

## Why These Gender Differences?

- My social hypothesis involves the gender system
- But doesn't preclude genetic effects

## Two Aspects of the Gender System

- What each gender is supposed to do or be
  - Includes "be heterosexual"
- Which gender is more valued
  - Things associated with women valued less
    - E.g. jobs filled by women pay less than jobs filled by men requiring equal education

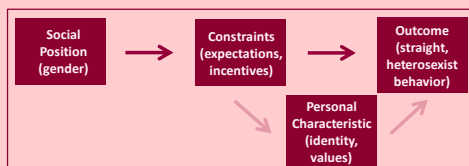
## Large Penalties for Men's Gender Nonconformity

- Men's gender-nonconformity more controversial because male gender more valued
  - Men more stigmatized for being gay or bisexual

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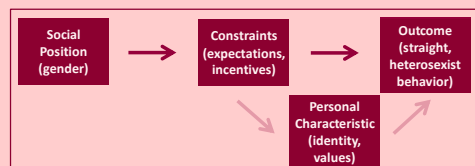
- Men's gender-nonconformity more controversial because male gender more valued
  - Men more stigmatized for being gay or bisexual
- Gender revolution mostly women bucking gender conformity to enter "male" spheres, not vice versa
  - More women than men having same-sex partners is consistent with this broader pattern

## Short-term Effects of Constraints



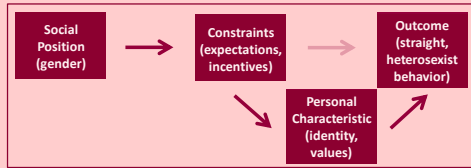
- Expectations lead men to "do gender" by "doing straight" to make sense to people

## Short-term Effects of Constraints



- Incentives (ridicule, violence, discrimination) lead men to stop or hide gay behavior, police others

### Durable Effects of Constraints

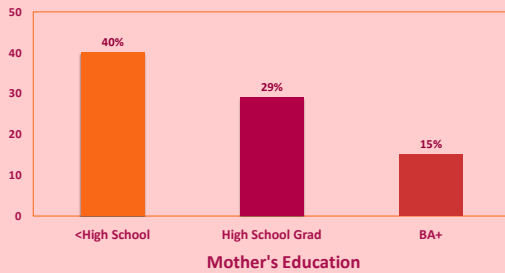


- Constraints create durable straight identities and heterosexist values

### Class and Nonmarital Births



### % of Women Who Have Had a Nonmarital Birth by Age 25

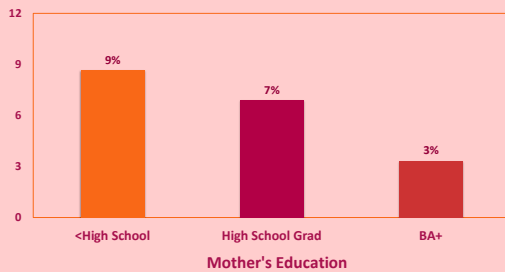


Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health, 2008. N=5111.

### Class and Contraception

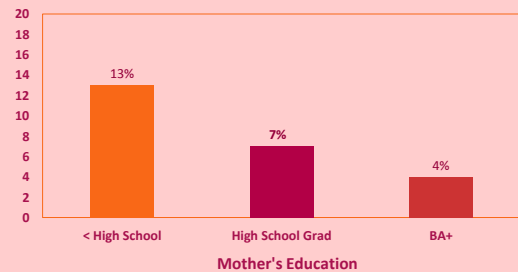
- Single women and men from disadvantaged backgrounds contracept less consistently
  - even when they don't want a pregnancy

### % of Unmarried Women 18-21 Who Didn't Contracept Last Week, Among Those Desiring to Avoid Pregnancy



Source: Relationship Dynamics and Social Life Study, 2008-2012. Age 18-21. N=14196 weeks, 672 women.

### % of Unmarried Women 21-35 Who Didn't Contracept at Last Intercourse, Among Those Who'd Be Upset if Pregnant



Source: NSFG, 2006-2013. Age 21-35. N=1331

## Efficacy

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- Being able to align behavior with goals through
  - Concrete plans
  - Believing you *can* affect a goal
  - Self-regulation: make yourself do onerous things to achieve a goal

## Efficacy and Contraception

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- Qualitative study of 99 single women in their 20s
- Efficacy coded from stories in transcripts, e.g.
  - Planning
  - Believing you have some control
  - Procrastination
  - Losing temper, violence
  - Drug or alcohol problems

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  - Planning
  - Believing you have some control
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  - Losing temper, violence
  - Drug or alcohol problems
- Higher SES women averaged higher efficacy
- Those with higher (noncontraceptive) efficacy more consistent in contraception

## How Class Affects Efficacy

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- Bad things happen; planning seems useless
- Exposure to violence lowers self-regulation

## How Class Affects Efficacy

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- Bad things happen; planning seems useless
- Exposure to violence lowers self-regulation
- Scarcity and sadness lower self-regulation
- Time-intensive parenting builds efficacy
- Education increases sense of control over life

## Class and Abortion

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- Disadvantaged women have more unintended pregnancies
- Thus, they are more likely to have an abortion in any given year

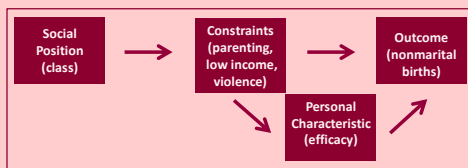
## Class and Abortion

- Disadvantaged women have more unintended pregnancies
- Thus, they are more likely to have an abortion in any given year
- But, faced with a given unintended pregnancy, they are less likely to get an abortion

## Income Constraints on Abortion

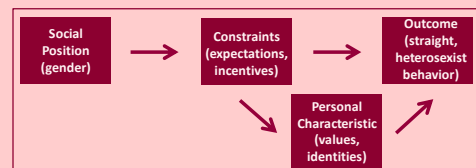
- Lack of money affects having an abortion
- Hyde Amendment prohibits federal funds being used to pay for abortions
  - Only 15 states use state funds
- This deters abortions among poor women

## Two Mechanisms Explaining Class Difference in Nonmarital Births



- Direct Effects of Constraints
  - Some low income women can't afford an abortion
- Effects of Constraints through Personal Characteristics
  - Parenting, low income, and violence affect efficacy, which affects contraception

## Two Mechanisms Explaining Gender Difference in Same-Sex Sexuality



- Direct Effects of Constraints
  - Expectations and incentives encourage appearing straight
- Effects of Constraints through Personal Characteristics
  - Expectations and incentives create heterosexist values and straight identities, which encourage straight and heterosexist behavior

## Choosing Theoretical Mechanisms

- Two mechanisms are not mutually exclusive
- Absent contrary evidence, a theory containing both is best

## Scientific Objection to Explanations Featuring Personal Characteristics

- Objection: Social constraints ignored
- Response:
  - Not ignored, but farther upstream in chain of causation
  - A theory seeing constraints as able to change personal characteristics sees them as powerful

### Political Objection to Explanations Featuring Personal Characteristics

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- Objection: Encourage changing disadvantaged people, leaving inequality-related constraints intact
- Response: One way to change personal characteristics *is* to change the constraints that shape them

### Ethical Objection to Explanations Featuring Personal Characteristics

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- Objection: Blaming the victim
- Response:
  - Blame not implied by empirical findings
  - If blame *is* assessed, why not blame those with power over constraints?

### How To Avoid Misreadings

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- Point to constraints shaping personal characteristics
- Suggest interventions attacking constraints

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- Point to constraints shaping personal characteristics
- Suggest interventions attacking constraints
- Suggest interventions making personal characteristics less consequential

### My Hope



## Recognizing Two Ways Constraints Affect Outcomes

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- Effects on what we do and what happens
- Effects on our personal characteristics

*Sometimes the social becomes personal*

## Ask Me Anything About This Talk

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- To submit a question or comment about this talk, visit [contexts.org/blog/England-QA/](http://contexts.org/blog/England-QA/)
- *Contexts* will facilitate our conversation on their website in the coming weeks

## Acknowledgements

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