

# **“Teaching About Human Sexuality and Sexual Orientation in an Introductory Sociology Class” 2015 Lesson Study Final Report**

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**Discipline:** Sociology

**Submission Date:** April 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Course Name:** The Social World

**Course Description:** The Social World is an introduction to the discipline of sociology and what that discipline has to offer our understanding of the modern world. It is a 100-level General Education course (Self and Society), that seeks to help students think sociologically and critically about the nature of human behavior and the social world around them. The course is required of every sociology major and minor and should be their first introduction to the discipline. The course is typically taught in large sections (64 students), but this iteration was taught in an under-enrolled section of 15. The students ranged from freshmen to seniors and there was only one sociology major in the course. The lesson was designed to stretch over two class periods and to constitute one of four topic sections in the third and final unit of the course.

**Abstract:** Our lesson study was to develop a lesson that would help students learn more about the socially constructed elements of human sexuality and how those elements operate within our society. In previous versions of our introduction to sociology courses, we had struggled with this topic and found it one students had trouble with, both conceptually and ideologically. In particular, we wanted to achieve some “deep learning” where students grasped on an experiential level, the degree of sexuality-based discrimination that exists in our society. The lesson we designed was to have two class periods devoted toward the topic: one in which we addressed the concepts and what sociology offers our understanding of human sexuality, and a second in which we stressed how human sexuality can operate as a dimension of inequality in our society. The second lesson revolved around a guided visualization exercise and a discussion about student reactions to it. As a whole, we found that the lesson worked quite well. Students responded well and seemed comfortable discussing the topic. Additionally, the students reported getting quite a bit out of the guided visualization exercise.

## **Learning Goals:**

Our specific learning goals for this lesson were as follows:

- 1) Students will be able to accurately describe the difference between sexual orientation (to whom one is sexually attracted) and human sexuality (the socially constructed norms and values associated with sexual activity).
- 2) Students will appreciate and be able to describe how sexual orientation functions as an important dimension of inequality and discrimination in our society.
- 3) Students will be able to recognize and describe how both of the prior two points operate in their daily surroundings.

These learning goals tie into the broader course goals of:

1. Utilize the sociological imagination to examine multiple features of their lives and society.
4. Recognize the influence of social structures and culture upon the actions of individuals.
5. Critically examine the concept of “human nature” and use scientific thinking to delineate between that which is instinctual and that which is learned.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the forms and mechanisms of oppression, discrimination, and privilege.

The above goals also fall under the broad disciplinary goals of helping our students achieve new and important knowledge about the social world, questioning “common sense” assumptions about the social world, and enabling students to view society critically and objectively.

Our lesson is designed to promote achievement of these goals by providing students with objective analytical concepts (sexual orientation and human sexuality) that they can use to better understand how sexuality operates in the social realm. We also review a number of examples and evidence (both qualitative and quantitative) of inequality and discrimination operating over the dimension of human sexuality. Finally, using the guided visualization experience, we provide students with a chance to “experience” much of the above, rather than simply thinking about it objectively.

**Lesson Plan:** The lesson was designed to operate over two different class periods.

First Class Period (Readings- Schaefer Chpt. 8, 220-223 “*Human Sexuality*”, Kimmel and Plante (2007) “*Keywords: Sexualities*”)-

The first class was devoted toward providing students with the analytical tools to discuss human sexuality in our society.

We started with a group Gay Stereotypes Quiz as both an icebreaker and a way of stressing to students that many “common sense” assumptions about homosexuals in our society are erroneous. (See attached PowerPoint)

We then had a small lecture on the concepts of **sexual orientation** (who a given person is attracted to, sexually and/or emotionally) and **human sexuality** (all of the socially constructed norms, values, and categories that are associated with sexual behavior in our society). The lecture on sexual orientation included a description of the research of Alfred Kinsey and his scale of sexual orientation.

We then broke the class up into pairs and had them apply the three questions of social construction (Does it vary from society to society? Does it vary over time? Is it learned? This was a regular exercise in the class.) to human sexuality. There was then a class discussion on the answer to each question.

Second Class Period (Readings- Morton (2013) “*Out On the Edge*”)-

The second class was devoted toward discussing how human sexuality can operate as a dimension of inequality in our society.

We started with a quick review of the concepts we had covered in the previous class.

We then had a small lecture on sexuality as a dimension of inequality, describing how homosexuals qualify as a minority and the types of subordination they face in our society (overt and subtle discrimination). We highlighted the Matthew Shepard incident in 1998 and the Itawamba County School District prom controversy from 2010. We also discussed institutional forms of homophobia.

Next, we broke the class into small groups of 3-4 and had them describe where in the reading (A story about an NFL lineman's experiences as a closeted gay professional athlete.) they saw examples of all three types of homophobia.

We then had a guided visualization exercise which walked students through a fictitious world in which heterosexuals were the minority. After the guided visualization, students did a two-minute Freewrite starting with the prompt "This exercise made me..." The class was then invited to share any of their thoughts. (See attached Guided Visualization)

**Approach:** The two of us had a series of approximately three meetings to share materials, discuss goals, consolidate our vision for this lesson, and to finalize the actual lesson plan. For the actual lesson, Lisa Kruse sat in on Adam Driscoll's class on April 20<sup>th</sup> and made detailed observations on both Adam's lesson and the students' reactions and participation. Afterward, Adam and Lisa sat down to debrief the lesson and discuss what went well, what went poorly, and what could be improved.

### **Findings/Discussion:**

Overall, both instructors were pleased with the end lesson and felt that it was largely effective. Students seemed highly interested and engaged in both class periods and the conversation was quite lively. Most of the class did not exhibit much in the way of reluctance to discuss a potentially sensitive topic. It seemed that giving the class the clarifying concepts on during the first class period helped foster open and objective discussion during the second. It also felt like the lesson was well integrated into the rest of the course.

The students seemed to respond well to the guided visualization exercise and the ensuing discussion provided evidence that the majority of the class (but by no means all) had "bought in" to the exercise. The amount of student participation in the discussion spoke well to the power of the exercise to engage student and foster a deeper, more experiential, type of learning.

Lisa observed that some students had not read the Morton piece prior to the second class period, which limited their ability to engage in the small group discussion. In future iterations, there should be some form of graded requirement or deliverable that ensures that all of the students complete the reading prior to class.

While in the minority, there were definitely some students who seemed "checked out" or uninterested in the guided visualization exercise (they failed to close their eyes or participate much in the following discussion). We hypothesize that this problem might be greater in a larger classroom. In the discussion that followed the exercise, some students mentioned a video that depicted a similar world to that described in the visualization exercise. We might use that in future classes, particularly with larger (64 student) sections.

During the discussion, a number of students brought up transgendered individuals, which had not been covered in the class. It might be good to include some discussion of this in future classes.

Some of the students mentioned the fact that the majority of the class had been 2-4 years old when the Matthew Shepard incident occurred. They would likely respond better to a more contemporary example.

In looking at student performance on their third unit exam on questions that derived from this section, the students did quite well and were able to produce a range of insightful examples of the various concepts.

**References:**

Kimmel, Michael S. and Rebecca F. Plante. (2007) "Keywords: Sexualities." *Contexts* 6(2):63-65.

Morton, Danelle. (2013) "Out On the Edge." *ESPN.com*. Retrieved April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from: [http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/9315650/former-offensive-tackle-kwame-harris-opens-six-year-nfl-career-spent-closet-espn-magazine](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/9315650/former-offensive-tackle-kwame-harris-opens-six-year-nfl-career-spent-closet-espn-magazine).

Schaefer, Richard T. (2014) *Sociology Matters*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: McGraw Hill.

**Appendix:** Find the following attached.

- The Gay Stereotypes Quiz PowerPoint slideshow.
- The class lecture PowerPoint slideshow.
- The Guided Visualization Exercise.

# Guided Visualization

- Note: This exercise normally works well in classes over 10 but less than 50.
- When doing the visualization exercise, it is important to consider the following:
  - The visualization should be read aloud to the audience by someone who is already familiar with the material since an authentic and sooth voice is imperative to the success of the exercise.
  - Read the material out loud a number of times until it sounds as if you are telling your own story. The story can become almost impromptu so when you are reading it you shape it to become your own version of the story (see next page)
  - Set the mood as you read through the story. Notice where it might be important to pause, slow down, speed up, speak softer, speak louder. Your intonations will be imperative for conveying a certain feeling of serenity.
  - Remember, some people will connect with this exercise and some will not. Try to connect with as many people you can while also realizing that some people will be defensive from the moment you begin.
  - Review the debrief questions at the end of the visualization (see next page). You may only need one or two of these questions, or you may need all of them. It is important that you appropriately limit discussion to allow time for Personal Stories and time for Questions & Answers.

## **Significance:**

You want to make sure to acknowledge that everyone might not have connected with the exercise and that's okay. What audience members should consider is what was said and how it might have affected them if they were in the place of the person described. The purpose of the exercise is to give people the opportunity to feel what it is like to be in another's shoes. Often we assume we know what it is like and we find we have no clue. I sometimes ask members of the audience to remember that often times LGBT people are invisible so that at any moment we hear inaccurate stereotypes from family and friends who do not know the impact of what they say. It may be effective to ask them to consider how it was that they know during their lifetime that to be LGBT was not acceptable. Normally, there are five sources: media, parents, peers, education, and religion.

## Guided Visualization

### Introducing the Exercises:

As this point, I'd like to ask you to participate in a guided visualization exercise. I'm going to describe a number of situations, and I'd like you to think about how you might feel if what I describe were to happen to you. When we've finished the exercise, I'll invite you to share what you experienced.

The purpose of this exercise is to give you some insight into experiences and issues that are common among lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women, and the transgendered. In other words, not all lesbian and gay people have experienced all of these situations, but many have.

Please remove anything you have in your hands or on your lap, and get comfortable in your chair or on the floor. Now close your eyes and imagine how you might feel in the following situation.

### The Exercise:

Think of the person you've been most in love with (If you've never been in love, think about what it might be like). Think of the joy and happiness you feel when you're with this person and of how much you like being together. Think about how important this person is to you. What do you like to do when you're with this special person? When you're strolling across campus, or shopping at the mall, or having coffee at a café. Do you hold hands? Do you put your arms around each other? Do you kiss each other? How do people react when they see the two of you together?

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Now imagine that 90 percent of the world is lesbian, gay, or bisexual and that only 10 percent of the population is heterosexual. Heterosexual people are stigmatized on the basis of their sexual orientation and regularly experience discrimination, verbal harassment, and physical assault. Therefore heterosexual people regularly have to decide whether to come out of the closet about their sexual orientation to family, friends, co-workers, and other people they meet, most of whom are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans. Try now to picture yourself in the following situations. Focus on how you think this would feel.

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It's Friday afternoon in the residence hall. People are talking about their plans for the weekend, and getting ready for their Friday night dates. You are in your room listening to the stereo and flipping through a magazine. Your roommate comes in with several friends and says, "We're going out to dinner, and then to the club to go dancing." One of your roommate's friends asks, "What are you doing tonight? You're not going to stay in and study *again*, are you?" You reply that you don't have any big plans, that you're just going to stay in and hang out.

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They try to fix you up with someone. You say, "No thanks—maybe some other time." They continue talking about their dates and plans. Whenever you can, you nod and smile and joke with them about same-sex love and relationships so they won't suspect you're heterosexual. You think about the person you've been seeing for three months. You wish you could tell your roommate and friends about the good times you've had with this person, and how it feels to be in love. But you feel like you can't say anything.

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Finally, they all leave for their dates. You take a shower, dress and meet your friend in front of the residence hall. Although you're really glad to see each other, you're afraid to hug or kiss each other in public. Instead, you just smile at each other and say, "Hello." You go to a restaurant for dinner. You avoid looking too long into each other's eyes, or holding hands across the table like some of the same-sex couples are doing. And you're not sure, but you think the staff at the restaurants is being rude to you because they suspect you're heterosexual.

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After dinner you both want to go dancing, but you can't dance together in public, except on "Straight Night" at the local club/bar, and it's the wrong night for that. Instead you decide to see a movie. All of the movies that are playing have gay, lesbian, or bisexual characters, except for the occasional heterosexual character, who is usually depicted as depressed, weird, or psychopathic. But at least in the movie theater, you get to sit next to each other, and can touch each other on the arm or leg, or discretely hold hands.

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When you come out of the movie theater, you would like to put your arms around each other or hold hands, but you're afraid to do that in public. Other heterosexual couples you know have been called names, spat upon, and even hit when they held hands with each other in public. You've even read about heterosexual people who have been killed—the victims of straight-bashing—just because of their sexual orientation. You may even know someone who was murdered because they were straight.

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You wish there was someplace the two of you could get together. You wish you could just go to your room and hang out there, but people might wonder why you always go there, plus your roommate could walk in. You wish that you could just tell the whole world about your love for each other, but you're afraid that your parents and family will disown you, that your roommate and friends won't talk to you, or that you won't get that job you want—just because of whom you love.

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### **Guided Visualization Debriefing Questions:**

1. When you're ready, slowly come back to this room this time, and this group. Open your eyes, stretch, and think about the thoughts, feeling and emotions that you experienced as we did this exercise.
2. How many of you have ever been in relationships with someone of whom your family of friends do not or would not approve? What was that like?
3. What did you learn about yourself doing this exercise?
4. What parts in the guided visualization bothered you most?/ What parts were the most disturbing to you?
5. What kinds of support would have been helpful during some of the situations you experienced through the guided visualizations?
6. As you reflect on your experience in doing the exercise, to what degree may it have helped you understand the daily experience of lesbians, gay men, and bisexual women and men?
7. What do you think lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people might need from you?
8. Any other comments?



# Human Sexuality

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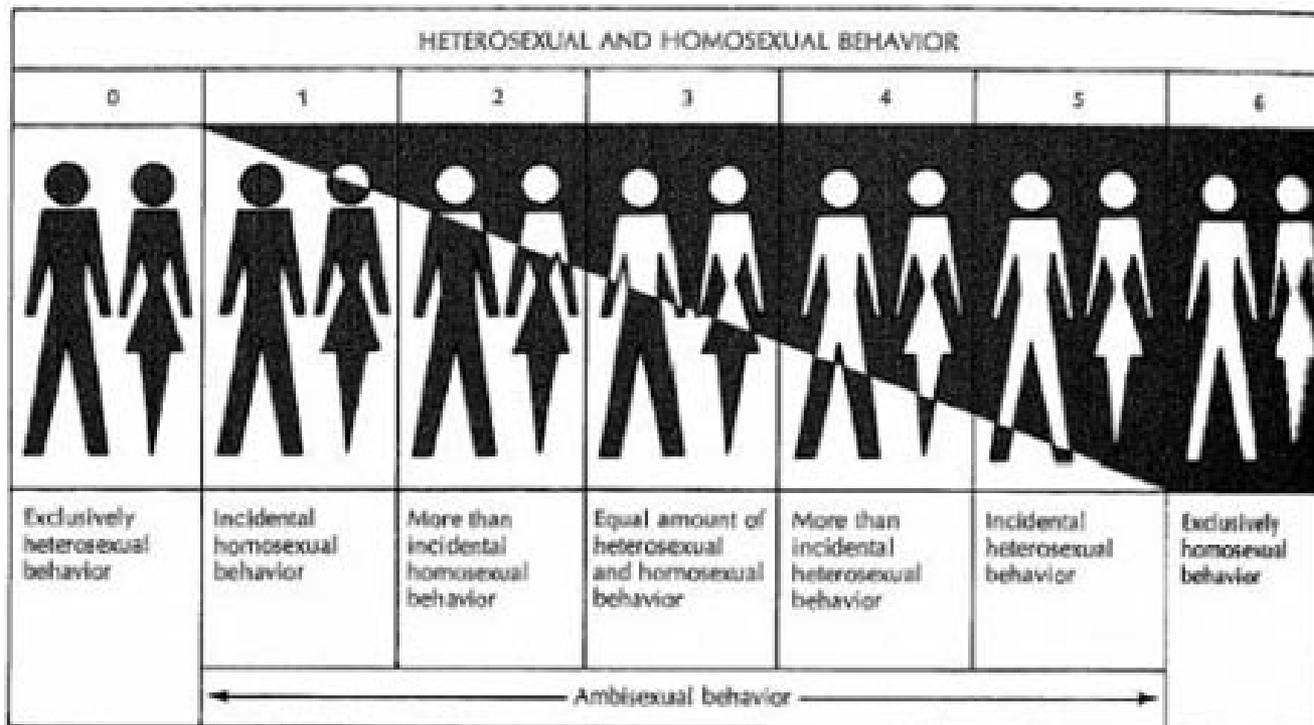
# Defining the Concepts

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- Gender-
  - “A social category built around sex”
- Sexual Orientation
  - Sexual attraction
- Human Sexuality
  - Sexual Identity
  - Sexual Behaviors

# Alfred Kinsey

- *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*
  - The first Western study of sexual behavior
  - Radical findings





# Defining the Concepts

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- Sexual Orientation
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  - “All the socially constructed norms, values, and categories that are associated with sexual behavior”
  - Sexual Identity
  - Sexual Behaviors



# The Social Construction of Human Sexuality

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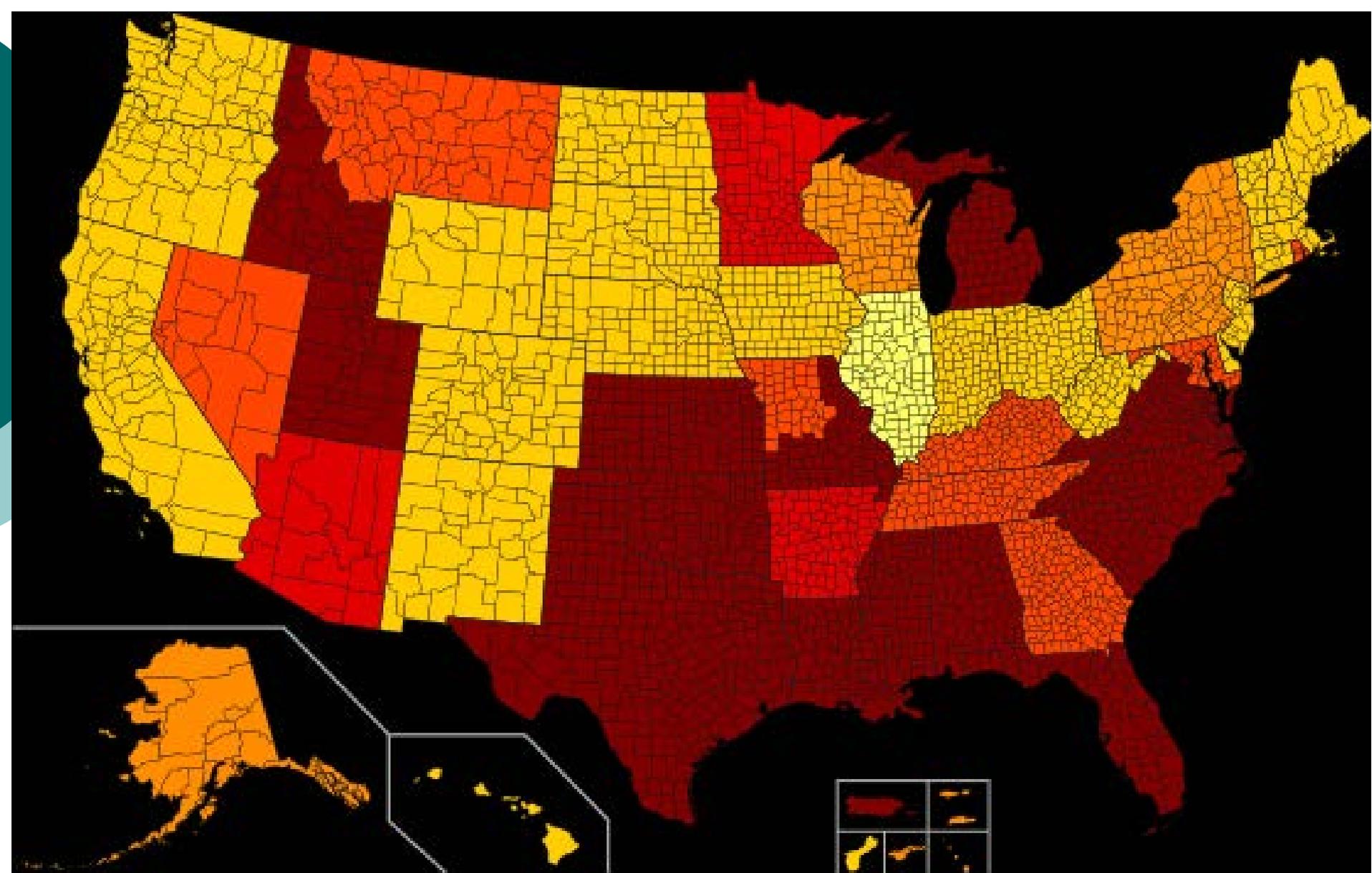
- Discuss with a buddy
- Does it change over time?
- Does it change from society to society?
- Is it learned?



# Human Sexuality Over Time

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- Categories of Sexual Identity
  - The categories themselves
  - The associations with them
- Sexual Behaviors
  - Definitions of pedophilia
  - The Sexual Revolution
  - Hook-up culture



Laws repealed or struck down before 1970, from 1970 to 1979, from 1980 to 1989, from 1990 to 1999, from 2000 to 2002, or struck down by the Supreme Court of the United States in 2003.



# Human Sexuality Over Time

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  - The categories themselves
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# Human Sexuality Across Societies

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- Categories of Sexual Identity
  - The Native American concept of *two spirit*
  - Brazilian *travesti*
- Sexual Behaviors
  - Thonga and Sirono cultures
  - The Yapese vs. Marquesan men
  - The Sambia



# Learning Human Sexuality

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- From the family
  - “The talk”
- In school
  - Health class

# Sexuality as a Dimension of Inequality

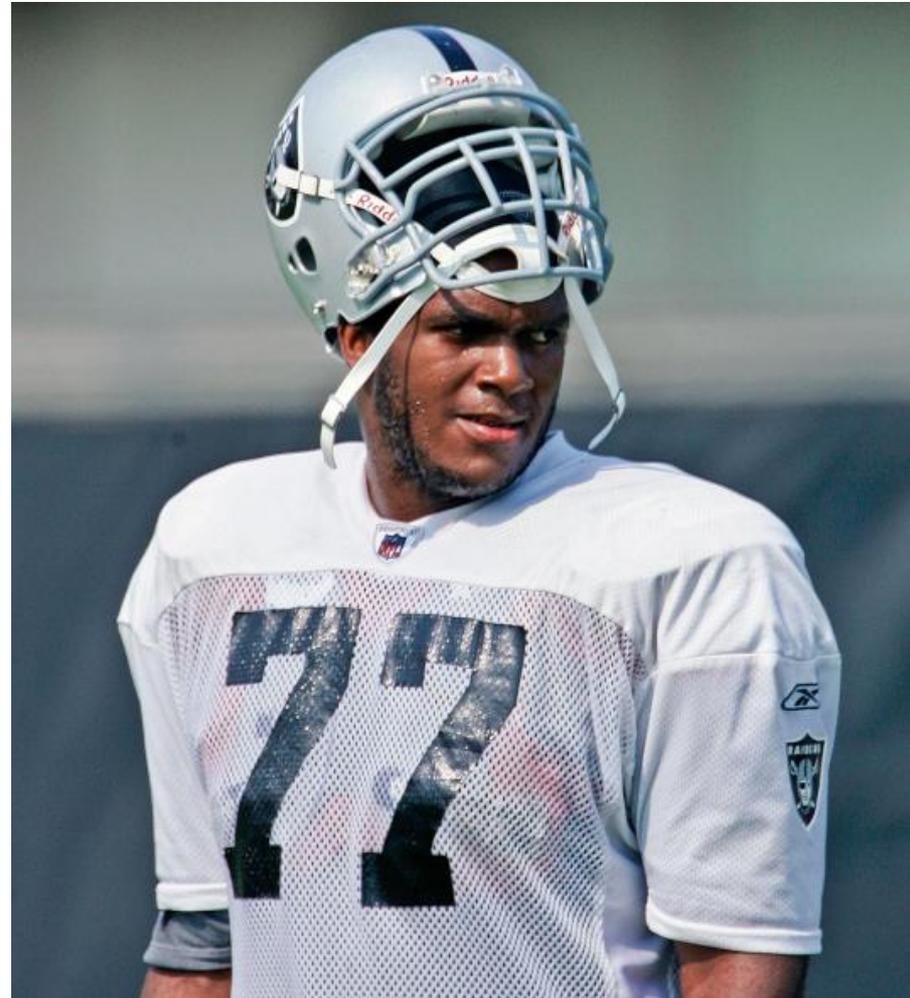
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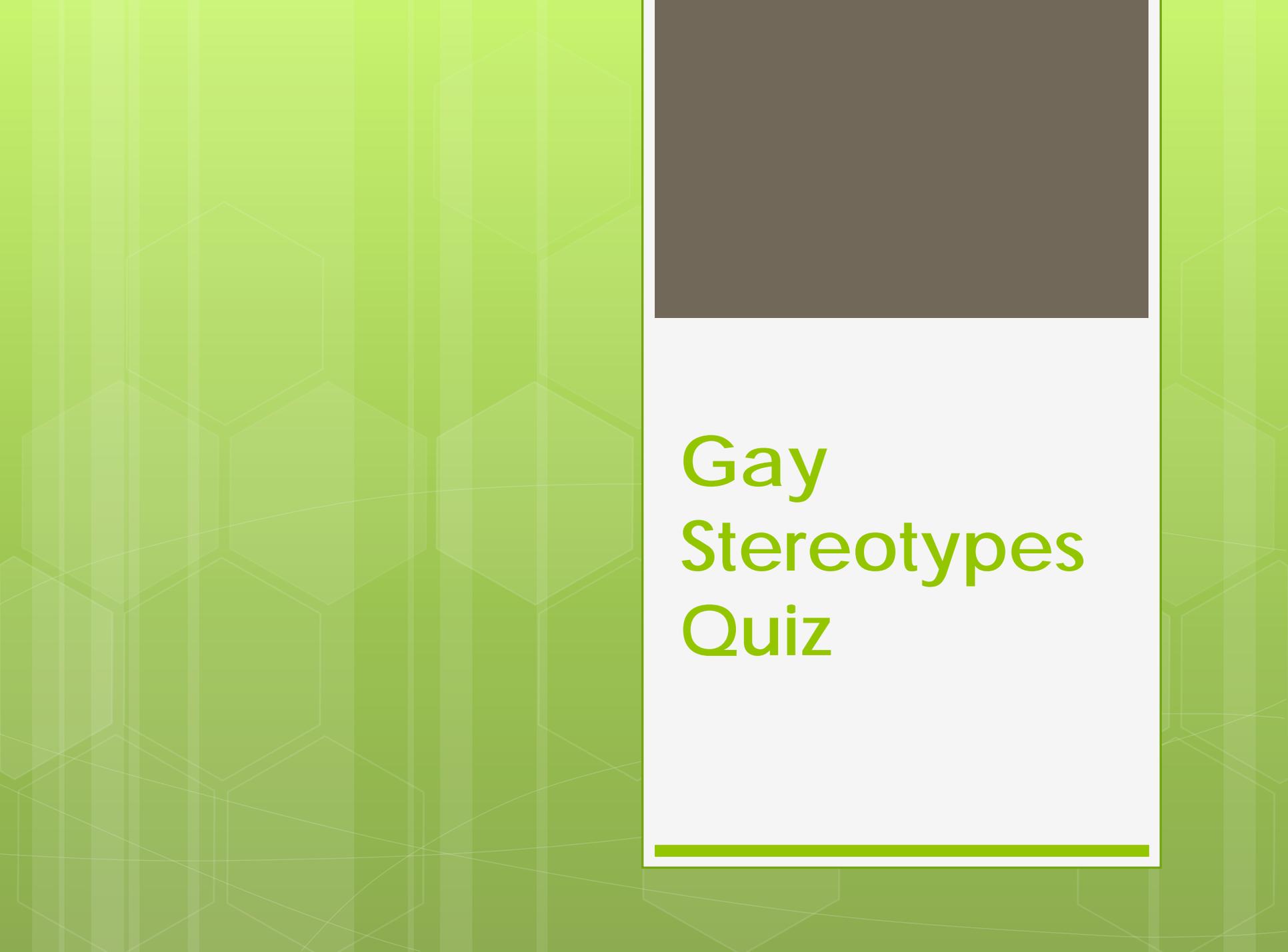
- Homosexuals as a minority
  - Distinct identity
  - A broad category (LGBT)
  - Subordination
- Homophobia
  - “Prejudice and Discrimination applied along the lines of sexual orientation.”
  - Can be overt or subtle
  - Can be individual or institutional

# Kwame Harris- “Out on the Edge”

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- Stereotypes
- Homophobia
  - Overt
  - Subtle
  - Institutional





# Gay Stereotypes Quiz

# “Quiz- Question One”

True or false:

Gay/lesbian partners typically assume traditional roles with one dominant and one submissive partner when it comes to household labor, employment, and/or sex life.

## “ Quiz- Question Two ”

What percentage of same-sex couples are raising children in the United States?

- a. 3 percent
- b. 11 percent
- c. 27 percent
- d. 48 percent

## “ Quiz- Question Three ”

In which state are same-sex couples most likely to be raising children?

- a. California
- b. Massachusetts
- c. Mississippi
- d. South Carolina

## “ Quiz- Question Four”

What percentage of children being raised by same-sex couples are non-white?

- a. 10 percent
- b. 30 percent
- c. 45 percent
- d. 68 percent

## "Quiz- Question Five"

The median household income of different-sex married couples aged 25-55 with children in the U.S. is \$60,700. What is the comparable figure of similarly aged same-sex couples raising children?

- a. \$104,600
- b. \$96,200
- c. \$77,100
- d. \$51,900

## “ Quiz- Question Six”

True or false:

“Most children being raised by same-sex couples are adopted.”

# “ Quiz- Question Seven ”

True or false:

“ Gay men make up a disproportionately high number of pedophiles. ”

# “ Quiz- Question Eight ”

True or false:

“Most research finds that children raised by gay and lesbian people fare as well as children from other families on a wide variety of child well-being measures.”

## “Quiz- Question Nine”

An individual who has a homosexual experience as an adolescent:

- a. Usually has a gay or lesbian orientation as an adult.
- b. Usually has a heterosexual orientation as an adult.
- c. May have any sexual orientation as an adult; there's no consistent relationship.

# “ Quiz- Question Ten ”

True or false:

“Most children being raised by same-sex couples live in states where their parents can automatically obtain joint parental rights.”