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

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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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social Position</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Characteristic</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Gender and Same-Sex Partners

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

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

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


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
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- 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

Class and Contraception

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

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

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

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


**Efficacy**

- 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**

- 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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- Higher SES women averaged higher efficacy
- Those with higher (noncontraceptive) efficacy more consistent in contraception

**How Class Affects Efficacy**

- Bad things happen; planning seems useless
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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**

- 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

Social Position (class) → Constraints (parenting, low income, violence) → Outcome (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

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

- 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

- 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

- 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

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

* Sometimes the social becomes personal *

Ask Me Anything About This Talk

• To submit a question or comment about this talk, visit contexts.org/blog/England-QA/

• Contexts will facilitate our conversation on their website in the coming weeks

Acknowledgements

• Our dedicated, skilled ASA Staff

• NYU Research Assistants
  — Jonathan Marc Bearak, PhD
  — Mónica L. Caudillo, MA
  — Jessie Ford, MA
  — Abigail Weitzman, PhD

• Scholars who have taken risks to study sexualities