

Talking about Gender and Sexual Diversity

OPT Clinical Perspectives on Sexual Health Conference
Richmond, BC.
October 25, 2009

Aaron H. Devor, PhD
ahdevor@uvic.ca
web.uvic.ca/~ahdevor

Human Social Complexity

- Multi-cultural society
- Multi-generational society
- Competing world views
- Competing interests
- Change is uneven
 - Old ideas persist along with new
 - People can hold contradictory views

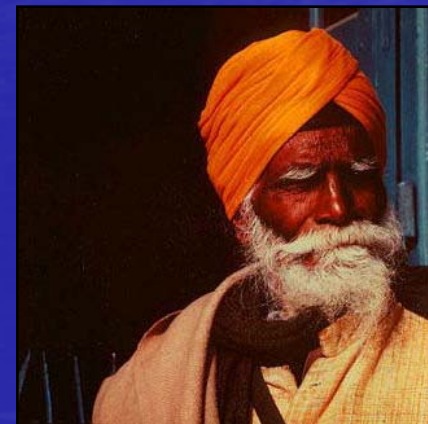


Gender & Sexual Knowledge

- Gender & sexual conformity are assumed to be simple and natural
- Most people receive little education about gender or sexual diversity
- Speaking about gender variance or any kind of sexuality is uncomfortable for most people
- Knowledge about gender or sexual diversity is most often incomplete or inaccurate
- Admitting ignorance can feel shameful
- Sources of good information are scarce

Persistent Common Beliefs

- **Gender & sexuality are often viewed through a moral lens**
 - Gender standards involve self-discipline
 - Everyone has sexual appetites
 - All are capable of aberration and sin
- **Standards applied can vary with:**
 - Gender / sex
 - Age
 - Marital status
 - Ethnicity & race
 - Health status
 - Sexual orientation



Persistent Common Beliefs

- Only certain forms of gender expression and heterosexuality are "right"
 - Biologically determined
 - Ordained by God
 - Legally supported
 - Socially rewarded
- Gender & sexual orientation variations
 - Mental illness
 - Physical illness
 - Biological error



Persistent Common Beliefs

- Anything other than gender-conforming, procreative, missionary-position heterosexuality is "wrong"
 - Pre-marital sexuality
 - Non-monogamy
 - Variations in sexual positions
 - Use of "props"
 - More than two people present
 - Buying or selling sexual services
 - Cross-dressing
 - BDSM
 - Intergenerational sexuality
 - Homosexuality / Bisexuality
 - Paraphilias / Fetishes
 - Disabled bodies
 - Transgendered and intersexed bodies



Lois & Penny

Contradictory Social Messages

- **Honesty and integrity**
 - Be true to yourself
 - Be honest with others
 - Clear up misunderstandings
- **Gender consistency & conformity**
 - There are only two sexes & genders
 - Real sex or gender change is impossible
 - If you're different, you'd better hide it!
- **Don't ask, don't tell!**



Contradictory Social Messages

- **Sexual health is important**
 - Everyone should enjoy sexuality
 - Sexuality should be satisfying & safe
- **Sexuality will make you feel great**
 - Love
 - Spiritually transcendent
 - Fun
 - Physical release
 - Conquest / Desirability
- **It is important to do sexuality "right"**
 - Otherwise be celibate

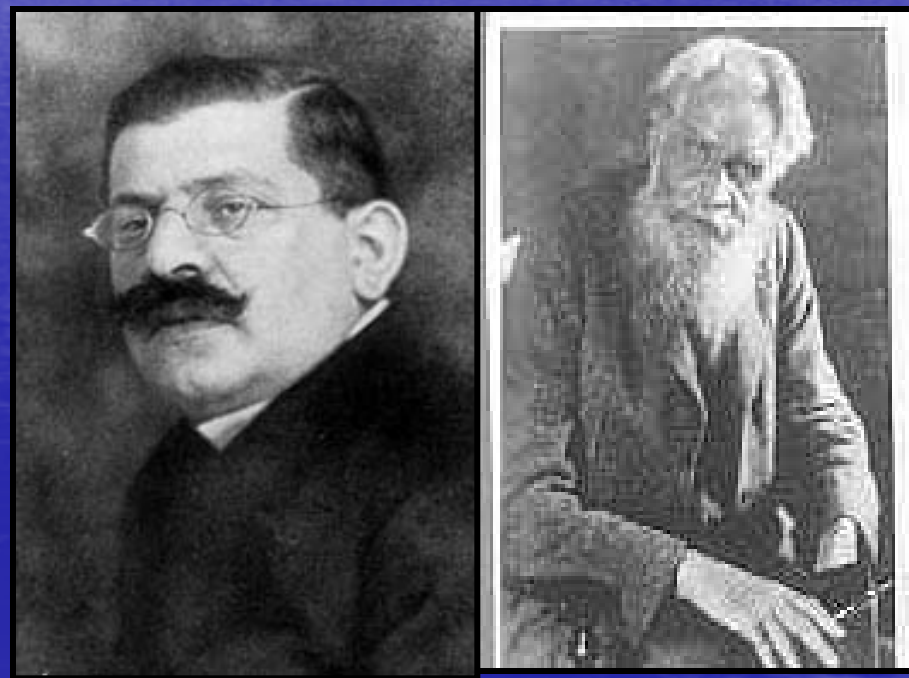
Contradictory Social Messages

- **Sexuality can feel dangerous**
 - Can be physically / emotionally perilous
 - Sexually Transmitted Infections
 - HIV / AIDS
 - Unwanted pregnancy
- **Sexuality can feel dirty**
 - Sexuality can feel sinful & guilt-ridden
 - Bodily fluids can feel messy
 - Forbidden things can be exciting



The concepts of "heterosexual" & "homosexual" first used in 1869

- People became defined by their sexuality as distinct types of people.
- Sexuality became increasingly medically and legally defined.



Magnus Hirschfeld & Havelock Ellis

Queer

- Derogatory term for LGB people starting in 1930s
- Reclaimed in the 1980s
 - Rejection of gay & lesbian as too rigid
- Umbrella term for any non-standard sex, gender, or sexuality
- Commonly used as a synonym for LGBT
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Pansexual
 - Asexual
 - Autosexual
 - Genderqueer
 - Transgender
 - Transsexual
 - Intersexed
 - Polyamorous
 - BDSM

Most first heard of transgendered people through the media

- Christine Jorgensen in 1952
- Renée Richards in the 1970s
- Talks shows in the 1980s
- *Boys Don't Cry* (1999)
- *TransAmerica* (2005)



Christine Jorgensen



Renée Richards

Contradictory Social Messages

- **LGBTQ is good**
 - Huge Pride events
 - TG & Gay celebrities
 - Some legal protections
- **LGBTQ is bad**
 - Sick. Unnatural. Sinful.
 - Bashing & murder
 - Many legal rights denied in practice



Pride / Shame

- Most people feel some gender and sexual shame
 - Unclear & contradictory expectations
 - Ignorance, confusion & isolation
 - Inability to measure up exactly right
 - Silence about diversity
 - Secrets & insecurity



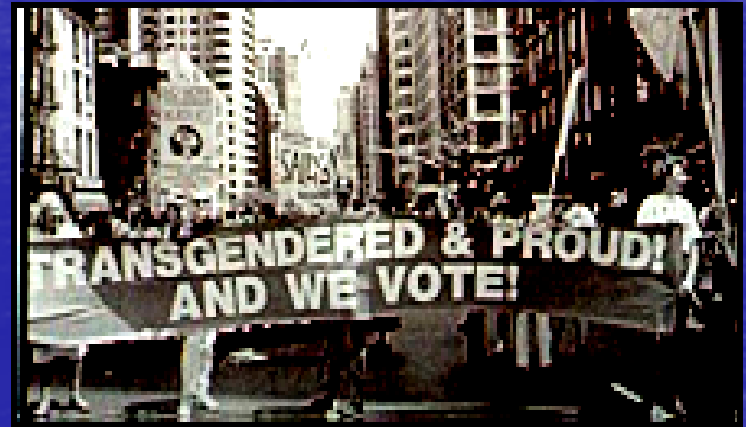
Pride / Shame

- **Shame & Pride can co-exist**
 - Childhood taunts & bullying
 - Teen confusions & isolation
 - Adult vulnerability & stigma management
 - Self-protectiveness
 - Self-destructiveness



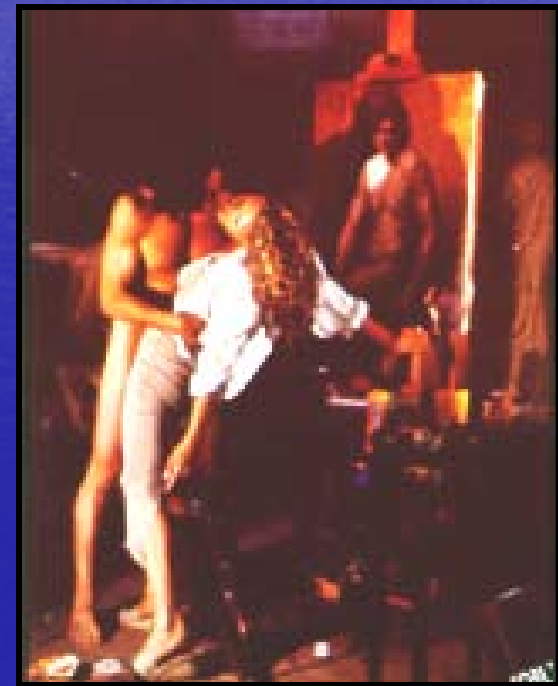
Pride / Shame

- **Pride can overcome shame**
 - Assertion of self
 - Confirmation of self
 - Social acceptance
 - Social integration
 - Role modeling



Identity / Attribution

- Fantasies
Behaviours or states of being which persons find exciting but which they have *no desire to actualize*.
- Desires
Behaviours or states of being which persons find exciting and which they *do desire to actualize*.
- Behaviours
What people actually do.



Identity / Attribution

- A young girl has never had any sexual experience with anyone else
 - She reads teen magazines and dreams about her Prince Charming
- A teenaged boy double-dates girls
 - And he has crushes on his male sports teammates

Identity / Attribution

- A woman marries young, enjoys sex with her husband, has two kids
 - At age 35 she falls in love with another mom and they move in together
- A married businessman regularly has sex with his wife
 - A couple times a month he pays young male sex workers to fellate him

Identity / Attribution

- A mild-mannered male office worker has a regular girlfriend
 - He likes to have her anally penetrate him using a strap-on dildo
- A burly male police officer has been married for 20 years and has three kids
 - He has convinced his reluctant wife to occasionally have sex with him while he is wearing one of her nightgowns

Identity / Attribution

- A woman loses her ability to have children
 - She and her husband want to have a family
 - Her transman husband stops his testosterone treatments and gets pregnant



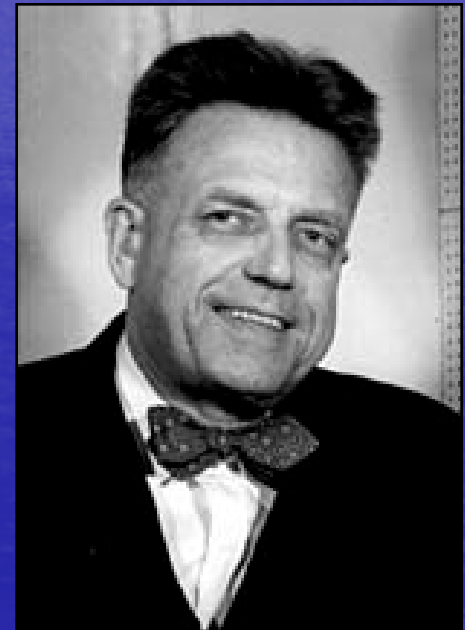
Thomas Beattie

Talking about Gender & Sexual Diversity

- Social attitudes and beliefs are complex, contradictory, and in constant flux
- People hold multiple, shifting, and contradictory identities and beliefs
- People will not fully disclose their needs and desires unless they feel safe
- Make no assumptions, ask explicitly
- Restrain your moral judgments

Lessons from Kinsey

- Set the right tone
 - Be calm & *matter of fact*
 - Ask one question at a time
 - Be explicit, non-euphemistic
 - Use accessible language
 - Provide positive feedback
 - Don't be judgmental
- Assume everything is possible
 - What is your experience with...?
 - Don't suggest a "right" answer



Alfred Kinsey

Supporting LGBTQ People

- Learn the differences between sex, gender, and sexual orientation
- Become familiar with the diversity of genders and sexualities
- Become familiar with terms LGBTQ people are likely to use
- Learn how to ask about and when to use which pronouns / names
- Learn when and how to support gender transitions

Supporting LGBTQ People

- Everyone has a right to enjoy their gender and sexuality
- Become familiar with common LGBTQ sexual health concerns
- Learn how to distinguish between non-problematic identities, behaviours, and concerns and those that may warrant clinical or legal attention
- Become sensitive to when to connect LGBTQ status to sexual health questions and when not to do so
- Make yourself aware of local support resources (e.g., Gay Community Centre, Transgender Health Programs)

LGBTQ resources on line

- Gay and Lesbian Medical Association www.glma.org
- The LGTB Centre, Vancouver www.lgtbcentrevancouver.com
- EGALE Canada www.egale.ca
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) www.nglftf.org
- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) www.pflag.org
- Partners Task Force for Gay & Lesbian Couples buddybuddy.com/partners.html
- Bisexual Resource Center www.biresource.org
- Transgender Health Program www.vch.ca/transhealth/resources/tcp.html
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) www.wpath.org
- Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH) www.cpath.ca

Talking about Gender and Sexual Diversity

OPT Clinical Perspectives on Sexual Health Conference
Richmond, BC.
October 25, 2009

Aaron H. Devor, PhD
ahdevor@uvic.ca
web.uvic.ca/~ahdevor