Heteronormativity

1. This concept can be traced back to feminist theories of the relationship between gender, sexuality and heterosexuality in the 70s and 80s.
2. Heterosexuality is seen as an institution.
3. Gender is not just an identification with one sex, but entails sexual desire be directed towards the opposite sex.
4. Obligatory heterosexuality oppresses many ‘others’ – not just lesbians and gay men etc.
5. Rubin argues that there is a hierarchical system of sexual values in western society stemming from religion, medicine, psychiatry and popular culture.
6. Reproductive heterosexuals are at the top – at the very bottom are transsexuals, transvestites, prostitutes, sex workers etc.

Rewards

1. Rubin argues that society and culture reward those higher up in the hierarchy.
2. Those who practice sexual behaviours lower in the hierarchy are subjected to presumptions of mental illness, disreputability, criminality, restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, economic sanctions.
3. As society and culture change over time, arguments are conducted over where to draw the line and to determine what other activities are permitted to cross over into acceptability.
4. The sexual hierarchy was no longer understood to represent heterosexuality and its unequal other – homosexuality – based on socially and culturally valued forms of masculinity, femininity and gender roles.
5. But is more complex and far reaching.

Economics of prescriptive heterosexuality

1. Heterosexuality, like motherhood, is a political institution.
2. Feminism assumes that most women are innately heterosexual – which has had to be imposed, managed, organised, propagandized and maintained by force.
3. Including physical violence and false consciousness.
4. The imposition of heterosexuality needs to be challenged.

Gender

1. Restricting the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity within the framework of a heterosexual matrix (Butler).
2. The normative sexuality fortifies normative gender
3. Foregrounding the casual and structural links between sexuality and gender
4. One is a woman to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame
5. To call the frame into question is to lose something of one’s sense of place in gender
6. Butler seeks to answer the question of which expressions of gender and sexuality are acceptable and which are not
7. And how do presumptions about normative gender and sexuality determine in advance what will qualify as the human and liveable
8. This work incorporated postructuralist approaches to the destabilization of subject and identity categories
9. Such as gender, heterosexuality, lesbian, and the discursive structures within which they are formed
10. To expose the limitations and instability of social and cultural norms regulating gender and sexuality

Analytical Category
1. Heteronormativity as an analytical category in gender and sexuality studies has been important
2. To understand the workings of cultures and societies beyond the individual attitudes and behaviours
3. It is useful in deconstructing the heterosexual/homosexual binary
4. Examining heterosexuality as an institution and epistemology that constructs and regulates homosexuality and heterosexuality on the basis of normative notions of sexuality and gender
5. Noting that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not the same
6. The operation of a norm as an invisible and silent operation is most effective when it is never exposed

Sexuality politics
1. Forms of sexuality politics that do not contest the dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, But uphold and sustain them have been described as the new homonormativity
2. Studies of heteronormativity have extended analysis to different contexts outside the west
3. To connect sexuality and gender norms with historical processes of colonization and decolonization, race, ethnicity, class and modernity.
4. E.g., Alexander’s study of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas – looks at how governments in these states established powerful signifiers about appropriate and decent sexuality.
5. In contrast to the kind of sexuality that were seen to imperil the new, decolonised nation state.
6. Powerful feelings about sexuality, femininity and masculinity were mobilised by the state to embody and represent the nation.

International development
1. In the field of international development, the concept of heteronormativity has been used to analyse the heterosexist bias and gender normativity in post/neo colonial state planning traditions and technologies.
2. Influenced by international development theories, institutions and policies funding criteria.
3. These narratives share either a conscious or unintended complicity with reproductive heterosexuality.
4. And its central place in modernist international development conceptions of family life and the nation state.
5. Norms vary across time, place and culture and are reproduced, resisted and transformed by institutions, groups and individuals form the most progressive to the most conservative.
6. They therefore serve to remind us of the importance of examining the nature of heteronormativity as the starting point of research.
7. To understanding the complexities of its working so power – whether hidden unintended, contradictory or explicit in any given context.