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SEXUALITY

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Learning objectives

- To discuss key theories explaining homosexuality in contemporary society
 - To investigate the impact of heteronormativity on the development of welfare systems
 - To outline ongoing discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ people
 - To illustrate the relevance of intersectionality to LGBTQ+ identities
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Framing questions

- What factors have created a heteronormative society?
 - Has full equality been attained for LGBTQ+ citizens?
 - How does queer theory challenge assumptions regarding welfare provision?
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Introduction

At the time of writing there is considerable global debate around issues of sexuality which remain prominent in political debates. While nations, such as Canada, have banned conversion therapy, a pseudoscientific practice of attempting to change an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual, other nations, such as the UK, have delayed their public consultation on the topic. High profile debates around trans identities and rights have dominated in the global West with celebrities and a range of academics coming out against trans recognition (attracting the acronym TERF – trans-exclusionary radical feminist). This is within a global context death penalty remains in effect within 6 countries and possible within 5 for same sex sexual acts and can result in 8–10 years to life in prison within a further 57 countries. In contrast 81 countries offer employment protection, 57 offer broad protection and 11 constitutional protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation. In the UK, after the referendum to leave the European Union, there was a reported 147% increase in homophobic hate crimes in the three months that followed the result. As illustrated in Figure 5.1 there has been an increase in hate crimes against people in relation to their sexual orientation and for being transgender (the data also show increases in hate crimes towards BAME and

Numbers and percentages						
Hate crime strand	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	England and Wales % change 2019/20 to 2020/21
Race	58,294	64,829	72,051	76,158	85,268	12
Religion	5,184	7,103	7,202	6,856	5,627	-18
Sexual orientation	8,569	10,670	13,311	15,972	17,135	7
Disability	5,254	6,787	7,786	8,465	9,208	9
Transgender	1,195	1,615	2,185	2,542	2,630	3
Total number of motivating factors	78,496	91,004	102,535	109,993	119,868	9
Total number of offences	74,967	86,254	97,474	105,362	114,958	9

Figure 5.1 Hate Crimes Recorded by the Police
Source: Home Office (2021) – emphasis added.

disabled people, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 7 of this book). Additionally, trans people are experiencing higher levels of hate crime and discrimination, with some of the findings from the Trans Lives Survey (TransActual, 2021) indicating that 40% of respondents experienced transphobia when seeking housing, 27% experienced homelessness, 63% experienced transphobia and 85% of trans women reported transphobic harassment from strangers in the street (71% for trans men and 73% for non-binary people). Despite a broader context of equality, there are significant challenges to address to ensure LGBTQ+ citizens are able to live safe, harassment-free lives.

This chapter examines the emergence of the term homosexuality and how it was established as a ‘deviant other’ against the heterosexual lifestyles. Providing insight into the power of discourse and social construction theory this leads into a discussion of homophobia and heterosexism and how discourses of homosexuality come to be reinforced through the wider structure of, and institutions within, societies: using the example of welfare provision to illustrate these points. The final parts of the chapter broaden out the discussion to consider intersectionality with class and race/ethnicity prior to a brief consideration of the critique of the equality agenda for adopting an assimilationist approach.

The Social Construction of ‘Homosexuality’

Developing from feminist analysis, theoretical work stated to suggest that sexuality plays an integral part in everyone’s life, from heterosexual, homosexual, asexual and all other varieties of sexuality. Although this chapter is focused upon LGBTQ+ citizens,