

SEMINAR

**Theorizing Sexuality:
Lost Insights and New Directions**

(in English)

Speaker: Professor Stevi Jackson
University of York, United Kingdom

Date: 10 March 2010 (Wednesday)

Time: 2:00pm-3:00pm

**Venue: Room SO-322, Dorothy Y. L. Wong Bldg.,
Lingnan University**



Abstract

This paper, based on a forthcoming book co-authored with Sue Scott, revisits the history of feminist and sociological thinking on sexuality in order to recover some earlier insights that have been lost with the shift to postmodern and queer theorizing. Our project is to revive the radical potential of the pragmatist/interactionist tradition and to establish its continued relevance to a distinctively sociological and feminist analysis of sexuality. I will focus specifically on the utility of the ground-breaking contribution of John Gagnon and William Simon for the development of a fully social understanding of sexuality and suggest that, because it has so often been misunderstood or interpreted overly simplistically, the conceptual tools it offers us are too often ignored. In particular this perspective gives us a purchase on the ways in which sexuality is embedded in everyday sociality, and especially in gender relations, and offers a multidimensional approach to the construction of sexuality. In developing this further, I argue, we should not seek a theory of sexuality, but a flexible mode of *theorizing* that enables us to think sociologically about both the ordinariness of sexuality (as just one aspect of social life) and its complexity. Such theorizing should also enable us to address some central feminist concerns: first the problem of agency in relation to sociality and, secondly, the ways in which gender and sexuality interconnect with class, ethnicity and other sources of social division and differentiation within the rapidly changing landscapes of late modern societies.

Biographical note

Stevi Jackson is Professor of Women's Studies and Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York, UK. Her main research interests are feminist theory, gender and sexuality, with a particular emphasis on heterosexuality, self and identity and modernity. She is author of *Childhood and Sexuality* (Blackwell 1982), *Christine Delphy* (Sage 1996), *Heterosexuality in Question* (Sage 1999) and, with Sue Scott, *Theorizing Sexuality* (Open University Press, March 2010), as well as over seventy book chapters and journal articles. Recent articles include: 'Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity' *Feminist Theory*, 7 (1) 2006, 'Faking Like a Woman: Towards an Interpretive Theorization of Sexual Pleasure, *Body and Society*, 13 (2) 2007 (with Sue Scott), 'The Appalling Appeal of Nature: The Popular Influence of Evolutionary Psychology as a Problem for Sociology', *Sociology*, 41 (5) 2007 (with Amanda Rees) and 'Self, Time and Narrative: Re-thinking the Contribution of G.H. Mead' *Life Writing*, 7 (3), forthcoming 2010. She has co-edited six books including, with Sue Scott, *Feminism and Sexuality* (Edinburgh University Press/Columbia University Press 1997) and *Gender: A Sociological Reader* (Routledge 2002) and, with Liu Jieyu and Woo Juhyun, *East Asian Sexualities: Intimacy, Modernity and New Sexual Cultures* (Zed Books 2008). She is currently working on a series of papers on the gendered and sexual self and, with Dr Ho Sik-ying (university of Hong Kong), on a project on women, intimacy and modernity in Europe and East Asia (co-funded by the ESRC [UK] and RGC [Hong Kong]).