

Sexual Normativity

When talking about sexual normativity, we mean the sets of norms and expectations surrounding sexuality, and how they work. How what is considered “normal” is constructed, and how we see certain sexual practices and relational forms as ideal and/or more natural.

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Compulsory sexuality can be described as “a set of assumptions and behaviors that support the idea that every “normal” person is sexual, that not wanting (socially approved) sex is unnatural and wrong, and that people who don’t care about sexuality are missing out on an utterly necessary experience”. (Chen, 2020) (Text by Michaela)



Photo by Claire



Photo by Michaela



Photo by Eva

Sexual normativity can be envisioned as a bridge: a construction that determines what is considered “good”, “normal”, and “healthy”. Those who veer slightly outside the lines risk falling off and are labeled strange, deviant, or problematic. And some people are not granted access to the bridge at all. (Text by Eva)

As mentioned in the course, sexual normativity is a structuring logic through which certain sexual practices, desires, bodies, and relational forms are constituted as normal, natural, or legitimate. However, as Kurowicka and Usiekiewicz show in their analysis of *My Mad Fat Diary*, fat bodies often disrupt normative expectations of sexuality and are frequently portrayed as both desexualised and hypersexualised (Kurowicka & Usiekiewicz, 2021). Fat girls are rarely associated with so-called ordinary sexuality; on the contrary, their sexuality is considered excessive, inappropriate, or pathological: ‘Fat women’s sexuality is often presented in culture as either monstrous and threatening, or non-existent (...)’ (Kurowicka & Usiekiewicz, 2021) Thus, the abundance of food depicted in the photo completely echoes this logic. The waffles and toppings symbolise excess, and the indulgence of the toppings refers to very Western characterisations of fatness. (Text by Claire)

I would add to this that desirability is part of the sexual normativity - everyone should aim to be desired by other, be attractive to others. Desirability is focused on beauty standards such as thinness. As Gailey puts it: “Western heteronormative cultural norms dictate that women should be beautiful (thin), and if they aren’t they are compelled to at least try to be, which typically means losing weight” (Gailey 2023). (Text by Michaela)

REFERENCES

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- Kurowicka, Anna & Marta Usiekiewicz (2021) «Fat Girl’s Wet Dream: Girl Sexuality, Fatness, and Mental Disability in *My Mad Fat Diary*». *Fat Studies* 10(1), pp.7-20.

