Within western sociology there is an increasing emphasis on the loosening of normative constraints on sexuality and the increased visibility of forms of sexuality that transgress, subvert or unsettle the heterosexual norm. At the same time the sociological lens has been applied to the institution and practice of heterosexuality itself. This marked a departure from earlier sociological and even feminist work, which may have subjected marriage and family to critical scrutiny but rarely even named heterosexuality as an object of inquiry. The theorisation of heterosexuality has, however, has been markedly Eurocentric. In the context of recent challenges to the parochialism of western theory this presentation will consider how the analysis of heterosexuality could benefit from widening its scope beyond the current Eurocentric focus. It cannot be assumed that what we identify as heterosexuality is everywhere the same. If we are to develop a critical perspective that is less Eurocentric, we need to do so flexibly and perhaps eclectically and be open to questioning our assumptions. This seems essential in order to appreciate the diversity of changing practices of intimacy throughout the world. As a first step, I will consider whether my own approach to heterosexuality, which locates it within a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of the social, is flexible enough to work cross-culturally or whether it is too strongly marked by its western origins to have wider applicability.

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Lecture in English / No RSVP necessary