

I

Gender, Sexuality & Society**I. TOPICS**

WHAT GENDER IS	WHAT GENDER IS NOT
• Can you think of some characteristics, traits that differentiate men and women from behavioural, social, aesthetic, etc. points of view? • What it takes <i>to be good at being a man/woman?</i> • Can things be <i>gendered</i>? (an outfit, a colour – pink/blue -, sports, jobs, etc.)	• Gender is not a euphemism for "women." • Gender is not natural.

The analytical concept of gender was introduced in the 1970s to indicate the social roles, characteristics and values *assigned* to males and females in a given society; gender understood as historically and cross-culturally particular is therefore social, not natural, not fixed in nature. A major implication is that gender hierarchy, patriarchy, is thus social and not natural or inevitable. Gender includes value judgements, positive and negative, associated with masculinity and femininity.

The sex/gender system of differences is a replication of the nature/culture system of polarities. On oversimplifying things, one may conclude that:

SEX = BIOLOGY *whereas* GENDER = SOCIAL NORMS

The above-mentioned meanings of sex and gender have entered the public commonplace understanding.

We are going to use *gender* to mean social, cultural expectations and actions and *sex* to refer to physiological characteristics. However, we are not to talk about the gender system

as simply the cultural elaboration of fundamental differences, given in nature, between women, as a whole, and men, as a whole, and we'll refer instead to the inappropriate nature of the sex/gender system for the task of understanding what it actually means to be a man or a woman.

	WHAT IS SEXUALITY? (as opposed to sex difference)	
SEXUAL DESIRE as an aspect of human nature	→	➤ hormones ➤ bodies as well as feelings ➤ thoughts
SEXUAL ACTS, PRACTICES, BEHAVIOUR	→	➤ what people <i>do</i>, sexually, within social relations (that might be characterised by hierarchy, inequality, etc.)
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	→	➤ personal identity (gay, straight, bi) based on the gender of one's generalized object of desire.

Sexuality has to do with all of these - desire, practice, and identity – and with the way in which they mingle and interact.

II. OBJECTIVES

This course will therefore try to make sense of :

1. The variety of what it means to be, to live as man/woman, historically and cross-culturally.

Our readings will focus mainly on the UK, but will take us around the world because masculinity and femininity do not *mean* the same thing everywhere and are not *valued* in the same way everywhere. Moreover, what it means to be woman/man differs not just based on the socio-cultural context, but also on one's relative position within society. IN Great Britain, the way in which people experience gender and sexuality is very much informed by socio-economic class, race or ethnicity, religion and age. So we'll talk about differences w/in as well as b/w cultures and societies.

2. The variety in sexual desires, practices and how and why they are socially accepted or stigmatized. Again, these are incredibly varied around the world – from sexual modesty of Muslim women in Middle East to ritualized male homosexuality as part of the initiation ceremony in Papua New Guinea.
3. Reproduction of symbolic and structural inequalities between men and women.

Here we are supposed to answer the following questions:

- What is *patriarchy*?
 - How does patriarchy work?
 - Are UK and USA still patriarchal societies? What about Romania?
 - Is gender an economic, a social, an emotional relationship or all of these together?
4. Homophobia and Heterosexism and the problem of social pressure to conform with the binary system of identity.
 5. Sexual Violence, Misogyny (including the internalization of psychological violence).
 6. Resistance:
 - Gender Bending
 - Sex change surgery
 - Cross-dressing
 - Hermaphroditism/Androgynism challenging gender binary m/f or reinforcing it in new ways.

It is obvious, I hope, that things are not so clearly cut as they might appear when one looks at the above-mentioned issues as they are simply enumerated. There is a huge malleability and an infinite variety of human behaviour as well as different ways this behaviour is bundled into a sense of identity, attached to morality and used to legitimate social inequality.

The starting point in any discussion related to sex and gender is **culture** because culture encompasses both the things people make, do, believe and is also a frame of reference – the conceptual vocabulary through which we perceive things - that gives meaning to things.



It is not only the Barbie Doll that is cultural but what we do with this object:

- dutifully dress it up for a Malibu beach party?
- hack it off its hair and stick pins in its eyeholes?

Culture dictates and reproduces social norms, but it also provides opportunities for subverting, resisting, messing with social norms. It is important to recognize how this works in terms of gender. When we take into account the dominant culture norms, expectations are important but even more important is how the individual interprets those norms or bends the rules of those norms in her/his everyday life.



GENDER AND SEXUALITY, LIKE CULTURE MORE GENERALLY, ARE BOTH CODIFIED BY TRADITION AND IMPROVISED IN DAILY LIFE.



Write 1 – 2 paragraphs (typed or legibly hand-written) with arguments about the analytical limitations of theorizing gender as the social elaboration of biological sex difference.

Gender & Sexual Identity