

GENDER

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Willis, Paul. "Masculinity and factory labor." In Alexander, Steven, and Jeffrey Seidman. *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990. ISBN: 978-0521359399. Originally in Clarke, John, et al. *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*. London, England: Hutchinson, 1979. ISBN: 9780312889784.

Cohn, Carol. "Wars, wimps, and women: Talking gender and thinking war." In Kimmel, Michael S. *The Gendered Society Reader*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0199733712.

Lucal, Betsy. "What it means to be gendered me: Life on the boundaries of a dichotomous gender system." *Gender and Society* 13 (1999): 781-797.

The distinction between "gender" and "sex" is new

Gender: the meanings that a particular society gives to the physical or biological traits that differentiate males and females

It's hard to understand nowadays that the notion of gender did not exist; "gender" was a grammatical term, not an analytic category

Masculinity isn't so much about men as about processes and practices we associate with male bodies (p. 166 Pascoe)

Pascoe mentions Judith Butler's dismissal of "male" & "female" as biological constructs

Gender is accomplished through day-to-day interactions, the "activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (in Pascoe pp. 13-14)

Brief history of anthropological thinking on gender

Earlier scholarship dealt with women's lives in ethnographic chapters on division of labor by sex, personality, or marriage, family and kinship

Behavioral sciences research on men *as men* appeared only in the early 1970s because earlier, "men" meant "human"

The topics of men's roles, masculinity, were found only in the subfields dealing with pathology and child development

In anthropology, more attention was paid to these issues because of anthropology's comparative approach

For example, what men were supposed to do and think and feel, *as men* in an exotic society sometimes differed greatly from our notions of masculinity, and so was mentioned

Very few studies focused on women; those that did appear continue to be regarded as important

Otherwise, women were in the background; women appeared as the pawns of men's exchanges in kinship theory, for example

Women were strikingly absent in the anthropological literature on human evolution and research on stratification, power, and political economy

An example of male bias: the research on foragers (hunter-gatherers) was done by men who talked to native men, or looked at male primates

Some researchers were women who were male-biased

The first book to appear that addressed gender issues was Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*¹ (lowland New Guinea, all within 100 miles of each other)

She is very clear that she is not searching for "actual and universal differences between the sexes"

Rather, has written "an account of how three primitive societies have grouped their social attitudes towards temperament about the very obvious facts of sex difference"

Mead understood long before the women's movement that women tend to lose out in the portrayals of them in social and biological theory

"Temperament" indicated a focus on psychological differences that were produced by culture

The book was read widely, even sold in drug stores along with popular paperbacks, and created a great deal of discussion

¹ 1935. New York: Morrow.

Because it *did* address questions about universal differences—
Western assumptions were challenged if women in another society
acted like Western men in some respects

Western assumptions held that biological differences (usually
oppositions) manifest themselves in psychological differences that
shape gender roles and relationships between men and women

E.g., sexual orientation is seen as homosexuality *versus*
heterosexuality: polarized, non-overlapping groups

In the 1970s, at the beginning of anthropological gender studies the questions centered around
just what are the differences between men and women? What is culture, what is nature?

First: just because something is a universal, can we conclude it's biological?

Second: some of our Western assumptions about what's universal are wrong

DISCUSS

Some examples of cultural universals:

Father: the social role of

Marriage—although universal only if we use a very minimal, weird definition

Division of labor by gender

Unique to our species

Not necessarily biological

And an almost-universal: higher male status

Matriarchy

Most scholars conclude there never has been a matriarchy

Ironic, because this is probably due to the fact that women
mother

It's easier to argue that there has been sexual equality in the
past

There *are* matrilineal societies; these are not matriarchal

Iroquois

Other evidence seen to support earlier matriarchy?

Myths of ancient rule by women

Archaeological remains

DISCUSS

Cross-cultural variation in gender is impressive: examples

The third gender

Hijiras in India

“Neither man nor woman”

Many Native American tribes

In some of these societies the child’s spiritual development and interests are used as criteria for gender attribution

The Mohave recognize four genders: man, woman, hwami (female berdache) or alyha (male berdache)

“Third gender” also recognized in Saudi Arabia, Tahiti, New Guinea, Dominican Republic, Indonesian *warias*

We find this hard to understand

What’s more natural than to assume everyone is a boy or a girl?

What we do with hermaphrodites: intersexed persons, androgynes

As we saw in the film, we medicalize the condition and say it’s an abnormality

“Natural” = “normal” = “moral” is the assumption everywhere

Although many cultures lack a concept of “nature,” or “natural”

Our equation of “natural” with “moral” is why we initially react with disgust at obligatory homosexuality in New Guinea cultures

We don’t react with simple incredulity; not a neutral reaction

A culture's prescriptions and proscriptions do not take the form of "it would be a good idea if you did/felt/believed this, but if you don't agree, that's OK"

Rather,

"This is how humans/real people/decent people behave"

"This is what the gods command you to do"

"Do it this way or you will be considered very deviant, abnormal, sick"

Knowing this, we can understand just how disturbing it can be when what you think is natural, a trait of the species, is by no means the case

In "You Don't Know Dick"

A friend of one of the men says a small part of her *wanted* his decision to result in a huge failure, demonstrating that he had been "out of his flipping mind"

Because then she wouldn't have to rethink so much of what she'd come to believe

Sexuality

Even though it was a very taboo topic, enough anthropological work was done in enough exotic places for there to be considerable knowledge about widely differing notions about how to think, feel, and behave sexually

Activities condemned in one society are encouraged in another; ideas about what is attractive or erotic or sexually satisfying or even sexually possible vary a great deal

A wide range of permitted behaviors

In some societies young people are encouraged to have a great deal of sexual experience (e.g., Tikopia)

In other societies women, rather than men, are seen as the sexually assertive ones

Or some women are: Kapsalis mentions that black female sexuality was seen to be "heathen, lascivious, and excessive" (p. 41)

Societies where women are thought to have extremely strong “sexual desires,” “instincts”

Female circumcision, infibulation

In still other societies neither men nor women are supposed to have sex before or outside of marriage

With terrible punishments, such as death, for women who disobey

“Honor killings” in eastern Mediterranean countries, Pakistan

We can conclude that in all cultures:

The body and its actions are understood according to prevailing codes of meaning

If we define sexuality as: “sexual behaviors, feelings, thoughts, practices, and people’s sexually based bonding behaviors”

What would “female sexuality” *mean* in a society that says women are asexual, like mid-19th century America?

Note that there were blatant contradictions in this ideology

“Women” in this definition did not mean “all human women”

We’ve seen that “primitive” women were definitely seen as sexual

Lower-class women, minority women, prostitutes were seen as sexual

A book by a historian of technology, *The Technology of Orgasm*, on electric vibrators,

Reports that in the late 19th century in this country doctors manually stimulated patients until they reached orgasm for health reasons

And were very happy when the vibrator was invented; for they could do it more quickly

The author of the book cites evidence that physicians did not find this anything but a duty

Anthropological investigations into gendered authority, power, status

Some of the earliest theorists thought that there *had* been matriarchal societies in the past

Early feminist anthropology debated this question a great deal for the entire decade of the 1970s

Three books appearing in 1974-1975

Denied that biology determined women's subordination

Argued that we must describe the variability in women's lives and examine social and cultural explanations for that variability

Culture mediated the meanings and constraints of biology on human behavior

Some of the research pointed out how biased research on these topics had been

Research done by both men and women

But did assume that women's subordination was pervasive

Some argued it was universal, even allowing for bias of male researchers

Two main types of argument

First: women's childbearing and childrearing roles provide the basis for an opposition between a "domestic" and a "public" sphere in all human societies, and this constitutes the basis of hierarchical gender relations

This explanation assumed the centrality of motherhood in women's lives, in cultural constructions of gender, and in the organization of families and social structure

Second: a materialist explanation made the point that different subsistence technologies correlated with different degrees of male dominance

Women's roles in production varied

The evidence and the argument were revolutionary

That in many societies women *produced* food

Our model, which has the man going "out" and "bringing home" the bacon to the women and children

Which in fact appeared only with the Industrial Revolution—production left the domestic arena (Bordo points out)

But the idea that women only processed and consumed was so pervasive

It was found in archaeologists' reconstructions of early hominids

And in science fiction authors' depictions of life in other galaxies

The debate raged over whether hunter-gatherers were egalitarian or not

Those on the universal female subordination side pointed out differences, although slight, between males and females in forager societies

Those on the other side said all these societies had undergone contact with outsiders, which explained the asymmetry

Ortner, who had argued for universal subordination earlier

Later conceded that the material on the Andaman Islanders off the coast of India was comprehensive enough to warrant concluding they were egalitarian

Other Western notions about what is in fact universal were found to be inaccurate

For example, women in many other societies traditionally have been collectively involved in politics, something that began to occur only in the mid-19th century in the West

Women warrior societies in W. Africa

Wielded a great deal of power

The matrilineal Iroquois—powerful women's groups

The arbitrariness of most sex specific tasks

And a pervasive sexual antagonism is found only in some societies, in others the lines of cleavage and opposition are stronger between:

Kin groups

Economically differentiated groups

Politically differentiated groups

Female reproductive system and female domestic roles are correlated, but not automatically so

West Africa market women travel far, are away for days at a time

Caribbean market women

Domestic and public arenas will be asymmetrical in terms of who plays what roles

And insofar as females are exclusively defined by their maternal and domestic roles, there will be subordination

Females will have less authority, prestige

And when they exercise power, it will be seen as illegitimate

Domestic power will be the only legitimate power, and its value will be limited by association with the domestic world

This is self-perpetuating psychologically because of the effect of women being mothers

Degree of seclusion of women correlates with rank in the societies that emphasize the importance of virginity, modesty, chastity, etc.

In part because the lower classes can't afford to have half their adult labor power so confined

In part because women's bodies are seen as the repository of family honor and the upper classes have more honor to maintain

In *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*,² about Morocco, there is a graphic description of a wedding involving a staged struggle between the groom and the bride's kinswomen after which he forcibly penetrates her (but doesn't continue, it's very bad form to ejaculate)

And the bloodstained sheet is immediately displayed in front of the wedding guests, cause of great celebration and ululation

Students very frequently find this hard to take and hard to understand, to "make familiar"

² Lila Abu-Lughod, Berkeley: U California Press, 1993.

But the values are stated, the logic is clear

It is indeed a very different logic

In Middle Eastern countries women may be locked up for their own protection because their father and brothers are trying to kill them

With their mother and sisters agreeing this must be done

Ostensibly such “honor killings” are against the law, but law is not enforced

There are Pakistani men in British and Scandinavian jails who have killed their daughters or sisters and are not repentant at all

And women’s groups that work to help women in danger of being killed find a safe place to live elsewhere in the country

A universal that held was females having more responsibility for raising children of both sexes, but it’s a *cultural* universal

Although we can certainly see the biological inputs that made this more likely

A general question, what are the implications of these findings for today?

For example, even though big-game hunting and warfare are found out to be exclusively male occupations, producing effects on male-female dominance arrangements, what does this tell us about options today?

The origin of something will not explain its persistence

The more recent scholarship:

A more integrated, complex approach

Less of a focus on women as opposed to women and men; more focus on gender

Gender as a social construct and as a relation

Pascoe, Willis, Lucal

Insistence on not isolating gender, but looking at an entire system of distinctions, stratifications

Race/ethnicity, social class/caste

Exploring differences among women; influenced by critiques written by women of color

Nagel mentions this

Critique of white, middle-class feminists' assumptions as ethnocentric, racist, and neo-imperialistic

Black feminists wrote about how neither white women feminists nor black males adequately represented their concerns

Less global theorizing about "women", greater stress on history, regional contexts; on apt comparisons

There is also a kind of anthropological analysis that looks at symbols, here gender as symbol

Explain the world symbolically

Earlier I mentioned the symbolism of the Amazons

For example, the Adam and Eve account

Explain women's position, yes, a just-so story

Later on Eve came to be seen as sexually transgressing

Even though in Genesis the sin is pride, the transgression is resisting authority

Second example, the symbolism of virgins

Not important in Old Testament, yes in New Testament

Vestal virgins

Will be notion of purity as power

Virgin men symbolically important

Here it will represent energy contained: power

Widespread dichotomy: secular/sacred; holy/profane

Often will employ sexual imagery

The Virgin Mary

DISCUSS

Exercise: analyze the Cherry Tree Carol

Struggle between Mary and Joseph

“Gather me cherries, for I am with child”

On the surface, over adultery

“Let the father of the baby gather cherries for thee”

But more deeply over authority

Joseph ordinarily would have authority, in a patriarchy

But Mary, because she is chosen of God and because she carries something holy in her womb, wins

Joseph is mistaken about the adultery – in a manner of speaking

It is extra-marital sex, but legitimate

A kind of *droit du Seigneur*, but for different reasons

Notice Mary doesn't have authority or power herself

Jesus speaks from her womb: “bow down, cherry tree, let my mother have some”

Nice illustration of the usurpation of power by son from the father
– in the carol the struggle is actually between them

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