

**Contextualizing Gender**  
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**Lecture - 01**  
**Introduction, Aims and Objectives**

Dear participants, greetings and a warm welcome to this NPTEL course on Contextualizing Gender. Today, we shall have an overview of various topics and essential critical frameworks which we are going to take up over the course of coming weeks and which are fundamental to properly contextualize our study of gender in today's perspective.


These frameworks include understanding of the convergence of early feminist criticism with contemporary gender studies. This convergence leads us to queer theory intersectionality, masculinity studies, post structuralist and post humanist approaches to gender.

We will analyze an outline not only how the concept of gender has evolved and advanced over the last 50 years, but also how ideas about gender are changing in complex ways and how they are reflective of the new ways of gender identification and gender non conformity. This course shall equip its participants with necessary tools of critical analysis and also with a comprehensive understanding of gender in all its intricacy.

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### Gender: Etymology & Derivation

- Etymologically, the word 'gender' has been derived from the Latin word *genus*. Its origin is also traced to the Middle English *gender*, a loanword from Norman-conquest-era Old French. Both words mean 'kind' or 'type'.
- Their derivation in turn can be traced to Proto-Indo European (PIE) root *gen-*, which is also the source of English words like kin, kind, king etc.
- A survey of the literary use of the word shows that it has been in use after the 14<sup>th</sup> century to refer to femininity and masculinity as types.
- Traditionally gender has been used primarily as a grammatical term and the masculine as the linguistic norm.
- The concept of gender, in the modern sense, is a recent invention in human history.



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If we look at the word 'gender' etymologically, it has been derived from the Latin word *genus*. Its origin is also traced to the Middle English *gender*, a loanword from Norman-conquest-era Old French. Both words mean 'kind' or 'type'. Their derivation in turn can be traced to Proto - Indo European root *gen-*, which is also the source of English words like kin, kind, king etcetera.


A survey of the literary use of this word shows that it has been in use after the 14<sup>th</sup> century to refer to femininity and masculinity as sex types. Traditionally gender has been used as a grammatical term and the masculine as a linguistic term. The concept of gender, in the modern sense, is a very recent invasion in human history.

Although, the term gender as a synonym for sex has a history that goes back to the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the 1960s it was rarely used in non-grammatical contexts, as an analytic and critical term with reference to sex related categories the term gender was introduced into contemporary critical thought by way of sexological sciences.


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### Analytical Origins

- In 1955 psychologist and sexologist John Money (1921-2006) proposed the concept of a gender role to “signify all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively” (Haig, 2004).
  - He introduced the terms *gender identity*, and *gender role*. He believes that gender role is particularly resistant to change. Gender role is acquired in early childhood and may differ from a person’s sex. He is one of the first researchers to theorize on the influence of societal constructs of gender on individual formation of gender identity.
- Psychoanalyst Robert Stoller (1924-1991) further extended the distinction between biological sex and social gender. He challenges the Freudian belief in biological bisexuality, and also talks about the diversity in homosexuality.



John Money  
Source: John Hopkins University



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It was in 1955, that John Money a famous psychologist and sexologist proposed the concept of a gender role to “signify and I quote all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman respectively”, unquote.

He also introduced the terms gender identity and gender role. He believes that gender role is particularly resistant to change. Gender role is acquired in early childhood and may also differ from a person’s sex. Money is one of the first researchers to theorize on the influence of societal constructs of gender on individual formation of gender identity. Robert Stoller further extended the distinction between biological sex and social gender.


He challenges the Freudian belief in biological bisexuality and also talks about the diversity within homosexuality. In order to explain why some people felt that they were trapped in the wrong bodies Stoller in mid 1960s began using the terms sex and gender. Sex in order to pick out biological traits and gender to pick out the amount of femininity and masculinity a person exhibited, which may also be linked with environmental and psychological influences.

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- Separating these terms – sex and gender - allowed Stoller to explain the phenomenon of transsexuality: because the sex and gender of transsexuals do not equate with each other.
- Along with psychologists like Stoller, feminists found it useful to distinguish between sex and gender.
- This distinction enabled them to argue that many differences between women and men were socially produced and, therefore, changeable.



Robert Stoller  
Source: Babelio





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Separating these two terms sex and gender allowed Stoller to explain the phenomenon of transsexuality, because the sex and gender of transsexuals do not equate with each other. Along with psychologists like Stoller, feminist critics also found it useful to distinguish between the terms of sex and gender, as it enabled them to argue that many differences between women and men were socially produced and therefore, changeable.

The terms sex and gender mean different things to different feminist theories and neither are easy or straightforward to characterize. Therefore, sketching out some feminist history of the terms provides us a helpful starting point.

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- In the second half of the twentieth century, largely through the rise of the debates of second-wave feminism, gender entered into everyday language.
- It entered either as a synonym of sex—serving to distinguish individuals on the basis of their reproductive capacities as male or female—or, in contrast, to set off precisely such organic or biological sex differences from the socio-culturally acquired roles that differentiate men from women in a given society.
- Second-wave feminist criticism, in 1950s initiated discussions about the impact of culture in defining gender.



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In the second half of the twentieth century, largely through the rise of the debates of second-wave feminism, gender entered into everyday language. It entered either as a synonym of sex that is serving to distinguish individuals on the basis of their reproductive capacities as male or female or in contrast to set of precisely such organic or biological sex differences from the socio-culturally acquired roles that differentiate men from women in any given society.

Second-wave feminist criticism in 1950s initiated discussions about the impact of culture in defining gender. Radical second wave feminism was theoretically based on a combination of neo-Marxism and psychoanalysis, it was outlined by feminist scholars such as Juliet Mitchell and Shulamith Firestone.

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- Radical second-wave feminism was theoretically based on a combination of neo-Marxism and psychoanalysis, outlined by feminist scholars such as Juliet Mitchell in *The Subjection of Women* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970).
- They claimed that patriarchy is inherent to bourgeois society and that sexual difference is more fundamental than class and race differences.\*
- At the core of this new movement was another significant work, *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett (1969), in which she insisted on women's right to their own bodies and a sexuality of their "own"—a sexuality that is disconnected from the obligations of marriage and motherhood.

\* Krolakke, Charlotte and Anne Scott Sørensen. "Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls." In *Contemporary Gender Communication Theories & Analyses: From Silence to Performance*. SAGE Publications, 2005.



Source: Verso Books  
Source: University of Illinois Press

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They claimed that patriarchy is inherent to bourgeois society and that sexual difference is more fundamental than the differences of class and race. At the core of this new movement was another significant work *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett in which she insisted on women's right to their own bodies and a sexuality of their "own" - a sexuality that is disconnected from the obligation of marriage and motherhood.

In the early phase radical second wave feminism was characterized by a claim for sisterhood in solidarity despite acknowledging differences among women. There was a simultaneous investment in slogans like women's struggle is class struggle and the personal is political.

Directing the feminist agenda to combine social, sexual and personal struggles and to see them as inextricably linked, post-feminist critics like Butler Nancy Chodorow and Teresa de Lauretis critically assessed exciting perceptions on feminism gender and sexual categories.

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- These critics suggested that one's sense of gender identity and gender role significantly mold one's perception of overall identity or sense of self.
- Nancy Chodorow remarked that heterosexuality is a compromise, a sexual orientation which has been made primary in the western culture since the 19th century. Culturally encouraged fairytales, myths, movies and books constitute sexual fantasies through language, which are later on individually appropriated to invent and solidify gender stereotypes.



The slide features a small portrait of Nancy Chodorow, an older woman with glasses, wearing a patterned shawl, seated in front of a bookshelf. The slide also includes logos for IIT ROORKEE and NIPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE at the bottom, along with the number 7.


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Culturally encouraged fairy tales, myths, movies and books constitute sexual fantasies through language, which are later on individually appropriated to invent and solidify gender stereotypes. Thus, the notions of sexual attraction and attractiveness are constructed historically and cross culturally, one of the primary aims of this course is to strengthen and detail the concept of gender through historical knowledge and theoretical understanding. Let us review the aims and objectives for this course at this point.

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### Aims and Objectives

- Discuss key contributions of critics as they diversely discuss the construction of inequality, reproduction of gender, as well as individual and collective modes of agency and resistance.
- Challenge patriarchal power and analyse the complexities of gendered subjectivities.
- Define, redefine and expand the concept of gender to include sexual minorities like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals.
- Critically analyze the various ways in which gender enters everyday discourse.



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In this course we aim to discuss key contributions of critics as they diversely discuss the construction of inequality, reproduction of gender, as well as individual and collective modes of agency and resistance, to challenge patriarchal power and analyse the complexities of gendered subjectivities. To define, redefine and expand the concept of gender to include sexual minorities like lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, to critically analyze various ways in which gender enters everyday discourse.

Human history is as much about resisting, changing and denying descriptions of gender as it is about reinforcing, legitimizing and normalizing gendered practices. To meet the challenges posed by gender conception today we need to decode the social norms which establish the terms of gender and condition the experiences of lived gender that define people's lives.



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- Critical response to interaction between gender and lived experiences of people belonging to different race, culture and sexual orientation;
- Gender as a significant yet continually changing marker of social Identity;
- The conception of gender and its manifestation in the humdrum of lives and practices: how bodies are shaped/categorised by gender, and intersecting factors of class, race and sexuality;
- Gendered negotiation of identity and power between conventional sex/gender binaries, and familiarization with the history of debates on/about sex, sexuality and different human experiences;
- 21<sup>st</sup> vs. the 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of gender;
- Intersections of gender with cyborgs, spatial cyber concerns, artificial intelligence, post-woman and the future/s of gender in these contexts.



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Some of the ways in which we shall analyze gender in this course are to look at critical response to interaction between gender and lived experiences of people belonging to different race, culture and sexual orientation. Gender as a significant yet continually changing marker of social identity.

The conception of gender and its manifestation in the humdrum of lives and practices to know how bodies are shaped and categorized by gender and intersecting factors of class, race and sexuality, gendered negotiation of identity and power between conventional sex, gender binaries, and familiarization with the history of debates on and about sex, sexuality and different human experiences.

Also, to discuss 21st versus the 20th century understanding of gender, also intersections of gender with cyborgs, spatial cyber concerns, artificial intelligence, post-woman and the futures of gender in these contexts. Along with this we will examine how the social construction of gender is effectively challenged through various modes of cultural representations including essays, novels, movies and OTT contents amongst others.


Most people ordinarily seem to think that sex and gender are co-extensive that women are human females and men are human males, this is commonly determined by biological features; that is chromosomes sex organs, hormones etc. Gender denotes women and men depending on social factors, social role, position, behaviour or identity.

The main feminist motivation for making this distinction was to counter biological determinism or the view that biology is destiny.


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**Biological determinism**

- Biological determinism refers to the idea that men and women's respective social positions are encoded and determined by their sexual differences.
  - For example, biological determinism has been used to argue that women are genetically predisposed towards nurturing behaviour, whereas, men have an inclination towards adventure and violence
- Early feminist scholars used gender to reject biological determinism by presenting evidence of the historically and culturally varied ways in which femininity and masculinity were expressed and understood.



Source: Alamy, The Guardian




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Biological determinism or the Freudian phrase that anatomy is destiny refers to the idea that men and women's respective social positions are encoded and determined by their sexual differences. For example, biological determination may be used to argue that women are genetically predisposed towards nurturing behaviour.

Whereas, men have an inclination towards adventure and violence or to say that women are better in languages and men are better in mathematics. Early feminist scholars used gender to reject biological determinism by presenting evidence of the historically and culturally varied ways in which femininity and masculinity were expressed and understood.

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- The introduction of the term gender in 1970s European and North American feminism; served to liberate women from their marginalized and oppressed position in society, and to expose the idea of natural gender as a male-biased ruse that served to continue women's subordination because of their reproductive capacities.
- Simone de Beauvoir's famous dictum, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", proclaims that behavioural and psychological differences have social, rather than biological, causes.
- Gender could be employed as an emancipatory tool that would ultimately allow women equal access to positions of power in society that had hitherto been the privilege of men.



The slide features a portrait of Simone de Beauvoir, a French philosopher, writer, and feminist. She is shown from the chest up, wearing a patterned shawl over a dark top, with her hands clasped in front of her. The background is a bookshelf filled with books.

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Simone de Beauvoir's famous dictum, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", proclaims that behavioural and psychological differences have social, rather than biological causes.

Gender could be employed as an emancipatory tool that would ultimately allow women access to positions of power in society that had hitherto been denied to them. If gender is a social and not a natural phenomenon, there is no intrinsic reason why women should be confined to the margins of culture on the grounds of their biological difference from men.


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### The Sex/Gender Binary

- Sex consists of two – and only two – types of human beings. The two-sex model of sexual difference - the distinction between females and males - is a natural fact of life. Biologically, individual bodies have a defined sex. Identities develop as either of these two sexes.
- A distinction can be made between sex (biology) and gender (culture).
  - Sex is biologically given and universal.
  - Gender is historically and culturally variable.



The Gender Binary  
Source: Anna High, Marquette University Law School



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Sex consists of two types of human beings. The two-sex model of sexual difference - the distinction between females and males is a natural fact of life. Biologically, individual bodies normally have a defined sex. Identities develop as either of these two sexes. A distinction can be made between sex which is biological and gender which is cultural.

So, we can say that sex is biologically given and universal whereas, gender is historically and culturally variable. According to these interpretations all humans are either male or female their sex is fixed, but cultures interpret sexed bodies differently and project different norms on their bodies thereby creating feminine and masculine persons.

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### Problems With the Sex/Gender Distinction

- People can be born with a mixture of 'sex' characteristics. Trans studies have also been important in problematizing the gender binary system.
- Judith Butler critiques the sex/gender distinction with her normativity argument. She argues that unitary gender notions fail to take differences amongst women into account, thus failing to recognise "the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' are constructed" (Butler 1999, 19–20).
- In their attempt to fix feminism's subject matter, feminists unwittingly defined the term 'woman' in a way that implies there is some *correct* way to be gendered as a woman (Butler, 1999).



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However, there are certain problems with this distinction people can be born with a mixture of 'sex' characteristics. Trans studies have also been important in problematizing the gender binary system. Butler critiques the sex gender distinction with her normativity argument.

She argues that unitary gender notions fail to take differences amongst women into account, thus failing to recognize "the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' are constructed". In their attempt to fix feminism's subject matter, feminists unwittingly define the term woman in a way that implies there is some correct way to be gendered as a 'woman'.

In their attempt to challenge biologically deterministic ways of defining what it means to be a woman. Feminists inadvertently created new socially constructed accounts of supposedly shared femininity. Butler's claim is that such false gender realist accounts are normative. Gender differentiation therefore, is not a neutral process it involves the attribution of differences in terms of value and power, attached to growing up as a girl or as a boy.


Post-feminist or third wave critics particularly Butler, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Nancy Chodorow and Julia Kristeva, critically assessed existing perceptions on gender, gender roles, sex and sexual categories. They insisted on the interactional processes involved in the creation of a gendered person in society. These critics proposed that

one's sense of gender identity and gender role significantly moulds one's awareness of overall individuality.


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### Third-Wave Feminist Criticism

- Traditional mind-body dualism has been both a contributing cause and an effect of women's historical subordination.
- The third wave opposed the concept of a universal and neutral human nature as it sets masculine values as a standard and thus promotes a gendered social hierarchy.
  - Universalizing the masculine implies setting it as a norm which results in the subordination of women and transgender.
- Feminist criticism has shown how women's association with the body has been presented in a negative light.



Women's March  
Source: Heidi Besen




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Traditional mind body dualism has been both a contributing cause and an effect of women's historical subordination. The third wave opposed the concept of a universal and neutral human nature as it sets masculine values as a standard and thus promotes a gendered social hierarchy. Universalizing the masculine implies setting it as a norm which results in the subordination of women and also of transgender. Feminist concern has shown how women's association with the body has been presented in a negative light.


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- Hence the assertion of the body in the writings of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, in their different ways, had a startling effect and met with a mixed reception from feminists and non-feminists alike.\*
- Helene Cixous attempts to discover a writing which is fluid and beyond binary systems of logic, thereby attempting to problematize gendered hierarchies. She argued that
  - Significations of gender and power construct each other.
  - Hierarchical structures rely on gendered understanding of relationships and are considered natural in a patriarchal setup.

\*Plain, G., & Sellers, S. (2007). *A history of feminist literary criticism*. Cambridge University Press



Helene Cixous  
Source: Claude Truong-  
Ngoc




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Hence, the assertion of the body in the writings of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, in their different ways, had a startling effect and met with a mixed reception from feminists as well as non-feminists. Cixous attempts to discover a writing which is fluid and beyond the binary system of logic, thereby attempting to problematize gendered hierarchies.


She argued that significations of gender and power construct each other and that hierarchical structures rely on gendered understanding of relationships and are considered natural in a patriarchal setup. Cixous essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' which was published in 1976 drew critical attention to her work; she had also coined the phrase 'Ecriture feminine' or women's writing in this essay.

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- Cixous's concept of *Écriture féminine* serves as a disruptive and deconstructive force, shaking the security and stability of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order, and therefore allowing more play—in gender, writing, and sexuality—for all language-using subjects.
- Similarly, Irigaray posits a “woman’s writing”, which evades male monopoly and risk of appropriation into the existing system. It draws upon the diversity, fluidity and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and functions of female sexual experiences.
- Julia Kristeva introduces the semiotic language that can break out in a revolutionary way to disrupt the authoritarian subject.
- Thus the term ‘writing the body’ is most strongly associated with the 1980s Anglophone reception of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva.



Luce Irigaray  
Source: Babette Babich



Julia Kristeva  
Source: Britannica



Her concept of *Écriture féminine* serves as a disruptive and deconstructive force, shaking the security and stability of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order, and therefore, allowing more play-in gender, writing, and sexuality for all language-using subjects. Similarly, Irigaray posits a “woman’s writing”, which evades male monopoly and risk of appropriation into the existing system.

It draws upon the diversity, fluidity and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and functions of female sexual experiences. Julia Kristeva introduces the semiotic language that can break out in a revolutionary way to disrupt the authoritarian subject. Thus, the term ‘writing the body’ is most strongly associated with the 1980s Anglophone reception of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva.

We note that the feminist critics of this era have put theories of feminine difference as a value and rejected the male symbolic order. They oppose the concept of a universal and neutral human nature as it sets masculine values as a standard thus promoting a gendered, social, hierarchy. More extensive inquiries into the masculine domination led to the academic scholarship identifying different modes of masculinity and hierarchies within it.

This introduced the field of masculinity studies led by critics such as Connell and Michael Kimmel. Modern interdisciplinary study of men and masculinities originated



with the men's liberation movement of the 1970s following women's liberation Second wave feminism and women's and gender studies formation.

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### Masculinity Studies

- A vibrant, interdisciplinary field of study broadly concerned with the social construction of what it means to “be a man”\*, It studies the social roles and meanings of masculinities.
- Connell argues that gender relations are power relations. Sex-role binarism naturalizes men's domination and women's subordination. It also obscures gender inequality and stigmatizes people who do not identify as strictly male or female.

\* Paoloo, C. I., & Bridges, T. (2015). Exploring Masculinities: Identity, inequality, continuity and change. Oxford University Press, USA.



Source: Owen Smith




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So, masculinity studies is an interdisciplinary field of study broadly concerned with the social construction of what it means to “be a man”. It studies the social roles and meanings of masculinities. Connell argues that gender relations are power relations. Sex-role binarism naturalizes men's domination and women's subordination. It also obscures gender inequality and stigmatizes people who do not identify strictly as male or female.


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- Michael Kimmel discusses 'toxic masculinity' as a reflection of male-enacted cultural norms that are harmful to men and society, because they encourage negative behaviours related to dominance, aggression and sexuality.
- Exploration of similarities and differences between and across masculinities in different parts of the globe, led us gradually to studies in Postcolonial Masculinities.



R.W. Connell Source: Twitter

Michael Kimmel Source: Stephen Roehl



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Kimmel takes his further to discuss ‘toxic masculinity’ as a reflection of male-enacted cultural norms that are harmful to men and society, because they encourage negative behaviours related to dominance, aggression and sexuality. Exploration of similarities and differences between and across masculinities in different parts of the globe let us gradually to studies in post-colonial masculinities.

We will look at the field of men and masculinity studies in detail in coming weeks, the post-feminist critics also initiated discussions to include the studies of queer and transgender individuals, which eventually led to the formation of queer studies as a discipline. Since the 1990s a different understanding of sex and its relationship to gender has emerged. The distinction between sex and gender has been challenged by new arguments which claim that sex is just as much a social construction as gender.

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### Sex as a Social Construction

- Rather than thinking about sex and gender as separate from each other, gender has increasingly been used to refer to any social construction having to do with the female/male binary, including male and female bodies.
- This has led to debates about whether it is useful any more to differentiate between sex and gender.
- For example, both Christine Delphy (2016) and Judith Butler (1990, 2006) have argued that the body is not free from social interpretation but is itself a socially constructed phenomenon.



Christine Delphy  
Source: Mattisvalerie

Judith Butler  
Source: University of California, Berkeley




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Rather than thinking about sex and gender as separate from each other, gender has increasingly been used to refer to any social construction having to do with the male female binary, including male and female bodies. This has led to debates about whether it is useful anymore to differentiate between sex and gender. For example, both Christine Delphy and Judith Butler have argued that body is not free from social interpretation, but is itself a socially constructed phenomenon. In other words, these critics think that there is no gender without a reproduction of social norms.

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- It is through understandings of gender that we interpret and establish meanings for bodily differences that are termed as sexual difference (Butler, 2011).
- In this model, sex is not something that one 'has', or a description of what someone is. Without the concept of gender, we cannot make sense of bodies as differently sexed.
- It is gender that provides the categories of meaning for us to interpret how a body appears to us as 'sexed'.
- In other words, gender creates sex rather than the other way round.



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So, it is through understandings of gender that we interpret and establish meanings for bodily differences that are termed as sexual differences. In this model, sex is not something that one 'has' or a description of what someone is. Without the concept of gender, we cannot make sense of bodies as differently sexed. It is gender that provides the categories of meanings for us to interpret how a body appears to us as 'sexed'.

In other words, gender creates sex rather than the other way round. In the 1990s new conceptualization of gender associated with postmodernism and the rise of queer theory emerged shifting the emphasis away from definitions of gender as fixed coherent and stable towards seeing gender categories as plural, provisional and situated.

Postmodern models of power demanded a more complex account of gender is hierarchy. In this context Foucault account of power moved away from the old idea of power as something wielded by social institutions and particular groups in society, claiming that power is everywhere it is diffused rather than concentrated and is enacted through discourses. The third way feminists followed a similar understanding of power and discourse in their conception of gender.

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- Gender is not only about *difference*, but also about *power*.
- Gender is imposed by force hidden as a biological/mythic/cultural argument and is promoted by media and popular culture.
- Reading with gender on the agenda involves not only the writer, but also the reader, in an active process of imagination and interpretation.
- It alerts the readers to the need to look beyond the limiting gendered possibilities of textual decoding, encouraging them to look beyond prescriptive critical norms.



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For the third wave feminist gender is not only about *difference*, but also about power, it is imposed by force hidden as a biological or mythic or cultural argument and is promoted by media and popular culture. Reading with gender on the agenda involves not only the writer, but also the reader, in an active process of imagination and interpretation.


It alerts the readers to the need to look beyond the limiting gendered possibilities of textual decoding, encouraging them to look beyond prescriptive critical norms. The new conceptualizations of gendered power relations were also connected with a partial shift in feminist thinking in the 1980s, away from a primary focus on divisions between women and men to theorizing differences among women.

In particular differences of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality and, associated with this, the problematization of the category of women. What these developments highlighted was the need for theoretical approaches that recognized the complexity of social hierarchies and attempted to theorize the intersections of gender with other social inequalities.


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## Intersectionality

- Intersectionality provides a way of understanding the interaction of different forms of disadvantage and inequality, focusing in particular on the linkages between categories such as race and gender.
- Intersectionality means more than the sum of the parts, such as the notion that black women are 'doubly disadvantaged' as a consequence of racism and sexism.
- It represents a move towards more complex models of understanding of how different forms of inequality are routed through one another (Grabham et al., 2009).



Source: Yasin Yusuf for Unsplash



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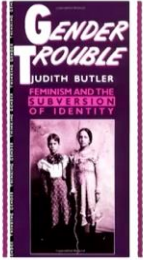
Intersectionality thus provides a way of understanding the interaction of different forms of disadvantage and inequality, for focusing in particular on the linkages between categories such as race and gender. Intersectionality means more than the sum of the parts, such as the notion that black women are 'doubly disadvantaged' as a consequence of racism and sexism.

It represents a move towards more complex models of understanding of how different forms of inequality are rooted through one another. We will discuss intersectionality in detail in the coming weeks; we can say that the post structuralist theories of gender have shaped the 21st century understanding of the concept of gender.


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### Poststructuralist Theories of Gender

- The works of Judith Butler in particular are associated with poststructuralist theories of gender. Inspired by thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault, Butler's work deconstructs several biased notions of gender identity.
- *Gender Trouble* (1990) has been enormously influential in conceptualizing gender and the development of queer theory.
- In this work Butler:
  - proposes a new understanding of gender performativity;
  - questions the usefulness of the sex/gender binary; and
  - suggests heterosexuality as an effect of gender.



Source: Routledge




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The works of Judith Butler in particular are associated with the post structuralist theories of gender. Inspired by thinkers like Derrida and Foucault, Butler's work deconstructs several biased notions of gender identity. Her 1990 work *Gender Trouble* has been enormously influential in conceptualizing gender and the development of the queer theory.

Butler proposes a new understanding of gender performativity in this work, questions the usefulness of the conventional sex/gender binary and suggests heterosexuality as an effect of gender. We will discuss Butler's theories in detail in the coming modules. However, in the next slide we will play a video which is a very recent interview of Judith Butler, Butler explains the importance of understanding gender recognition and acceptance.

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- Among other statements, Woolf also argues that gender is ambiguous and often fluid; envisaging the post-feminist demands.

Source: The School of Life [YouTube]

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We talk about ourselves having a gender identity, but it may be that our gender is actually produced through time through a set of practices repeated and sometimes repeated with a difference that we should not really think that gender is something that is internal to us from the start.

It is something that gets negotiated in our cultural and historical worlds and it gets negotiated and changed through time which is why you can have an idea of what it is to be a woman in the 1950s in London which you know contrasts with what it means to be a woman in 2012 or 2020.

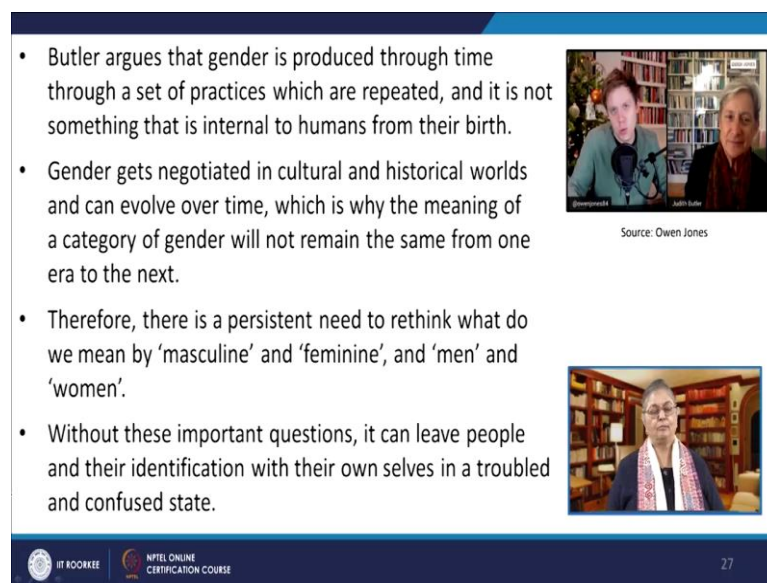
Gender categories changed through time and indeed feminism was always committed to the idea that we should be rethinking what we mean by masculine and feminine and men and women like you know do we know what it is to be a man, do we know what it is to be a woman and why is it that certain activities make us feel like we are not a woman anymore if we do that or we are not a man anymore or I will become a man if I do that or I will become a woman if I will do that.

And I think people do sometimes live with that anxiety unless they have sort of really worked it through a person who is burdened with a name that does not fit burdened with a sex assignment that does not fit, you are forced to live with that assignment you are if facing and denying something absolutely fundamental about who you are.

It stops your ability very often to eat to breathe to move to live to love, to inhabit the world and to call upon the world to recognize you as you are, your social and existential reality it is not a mere feeling, it is indispensable for one's life, it is not a luxury, it is a way of living, it is a way of loving, it is a way of flourishing and it is way of affirming oneself in the world.

Butler notes that gender norms influence and constrain how we act and how we allow ourselves to be seen and known.

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- Butler argues that gender is produced through time through a set of practices which are repeated, and it is not something that is internal to humans from their birth.
- Gender gets negotiated in cultural and historical worlds and can evolve over time, which is why the meaning of a category of gender will not remain the same from one era to the next.
- Therefore, there is a persistent need to rethink what do we mean by 'masculine' and 'feminine', and 'men' and 'women'.
- Without these important questions, it can leave people and their identification with their own selves in a troubled and confused state.

Source: Owen Jones

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Butler argues that gender is produced through time through a set of practices which are repeated and it is not something that is internal to humans from their birth. Gender is negotiated in cultural and historical worlds and can also evolve over time, which is why the meaning of a category of gender will not remain static in all historical periods.

Therefore, there is a persistent need to rethink what do we mean by 'masculine' and 'feminine' and 'men' and 'women'. Without these important questions, it can leave people and their identification with their own selves in a troubled and confused state. Because a forced gender assignment stops one's ability to live freely in the world and to call upon the world to recognize you as you are.

Until the emergence of queer theory in the 1990s the assumption that gender and sexuality need to be examined together remained relatively unchallenged. Critical works

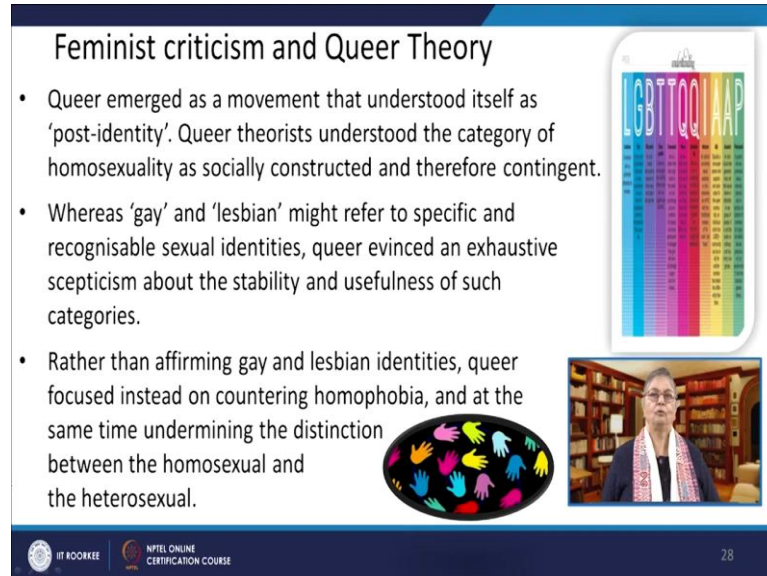


of theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick and others gave the field an unprecedented legitimacy.

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**Feminist criticism and Queer Theory**

- Queer emerged as a movement that understood itself as 'post-identity'. Queer theorists understood the category of homosexuality as socially constructed and therefore contingent.
- Whereas 'gay' and 'lesbian' might refer to specific and recognisable sexual identities, queer evinced an exhaustive scepticism about the stability and usefulness of such categories.
- Rather than affirming gay and lesbian identities, queer focused instead on countering homophobia, and at the same time undermining the distinction between the homosexual and the heterosexual.



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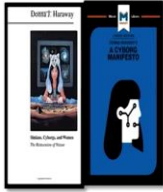
Rather than affirming gay and lesbian identities, queer focused instead on countering homophobia, and at the same time undermining the distinction between the homosexual and the heterosexual. This approach was not aimed at promoting the assimilation and acceptance of sexual minorities, but rather at examining the processes by which the norm and margin were created.

We will look at queer studies in detail in coming weeks an understanding of the body as technologically constituted was one of the key discursive shifts in both postmodern and feminist theories in the late 1980s. It is further intensified and extended in the 21st century incorporating intersections with cyberspace, biotechnology, cyborg and artificial intelligence.


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### Technologies of the Gendered Body

- The figure of the cyborg – that combination of the human and the technological – has become a symbol of the relationship between the body and technology.
- Rosi Braidotti argues that the cyborg ‘challenges the androcentrism of the poststructuralists’ corporeal materialism’ (2002: 180).
  - The publication of Donna Haraway’s ‘*A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*’ (1985) and her subsequent *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) are key points in accounting for a theorisation of the body as technology through the meat-metal fusion of the cyborg.



Source: Routledge      Source: Macat Library




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The figure of the cyborg - that combination of the human and the technological - has become a symbol of the relationship between the body and technology. Rosi Braidotti argues that the cyborg ‘challenges the androcentrism of the post structuralists’ corporeal materialism’. The publication of Donna Haraway’s ‘*A Cyborg Manifesto*’ in 1985 and her subsequent *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* in 1991 are key points in accounting for a theorization of the body as technology through the meat-metal fusion of the cyborgs.

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- Haraway uses the cyborg to move beyond the essentialist debates surrounding feminism in the late 1970s, which emphasised the factors uniting all women, regardless of race, class and sexuality.
- Anne Balsamo also argues that ‘cyborgs offer a particularly appropriate emblem, not only of postmodern identity, but – specifically – of woman’s identity. Cyborg identity is predicated on transgressed boundaries’ (Balsamo, 1996).\*


\*Plain, G., & Sellers, S. (2007). *A history of feminist literary criticism*. Cambridge University Press.



Rosi Braidotti  
Source: Ivar Pel

Anne Balsamo  
Source: The University of Texas

Donna Haraway  
Source: Rusten Hogness



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Haraway uses the cyborg to move beyond the essentialist debates surrounding feminism in the late 1970s, which emphasized the factors uniting all women, regardless of race, class and sexuality. Another critic Anne Balsamo argues that 'cyborgs offer a particularly appropriate emblem, not only a postmodern identity, but - specifically - of woman's identity. Cyborg identity is predicated on transgress boundaries.

The transgression is contained within it is fusion of body and technology a fusion which allows the prime subjectivity of selfhood to coexist in the same body with the threat of otherness. We will explore these philosophers and their understanding of the post body in detail in the later part of this course.

The quick review of early theoretical approaches to gender shows that they have problematized the gender binary system. Post structural theories understand gender as fluid and plural. A number of approaches have been identified expanding gender categories to include the LGBTQ communities. Gender pluralism is conceptualized as an intersecting range along a continuum that includes dissimilar prospects. The course will also take up concepts of gender blurring, gender non-conforming and non-gendered identities.

In the next module we will see how the discipline of contemporary gender studies emerged from early feminist thought this will help us trace the foundations of gender studies as a discipline today. A detailed outline of individual topics is also posted on the site. I expect this course to be essentially interactive, I would welcome as many questions as possible on discussion forums, howsoever trivial or troubling or tricky they may sound to you while posting.

Thank you we will meet again in the coming module, stay safe.

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