What’s your gender and how do you know?

What is gender and what would a sociology of it look like? These are the organizing questions of this course. Gender is not an innocent classification, but rather a highly contested category. We will look at when gender became a category of inquiry and, more importantly, why? What do we “know” about gender and how does knowledge of gender equal power- not just the power of gender, but of sex, class, race, sexuality, and nationality?
Each class will be a discussion of the readings as well as a discussion of how the readings relate to our everyday lives. That means that in addition to the readings, I will ask you to apply them to everything from Disney films to sports to our own gender presentations here at Middlebury as a way of shaking ourselves out of the habit of thinking about gender as a known quantity, a noun, and making it more of an unstable and slippery claim, a verb.

Readings:
Available in bookstore or online
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
Rebecca Jordon-Young, *Brainstorm*
Thom Laqueur, *Making Sex*.

Course Blog:  [http://blogs.middlebury.edu/soan191](http://blogs.middlebury.edu/soan191)
Find syllabi, readings, writing handouts, and other useful documents

Course Requirements:
1. Participation: Each student is expected to come to class having read the assigned readings and be able to discuss them.

You are also expected to answer a question/bring something in to each class. I will collect these at the end of session. Although you can email them to me, I will not accept any after the class itself since the point is to aid discussion. However, you only need to hand in 16 discussion responses (that means there are 5 days you can skip doing it and still receive full credit).

**Participation will constitute 20% of your grade.**

2. Four Papers: **These papers will be 3-5 typed pages plus citations and each paper will be worth 15% of your grade.** Please see handout “Everything you wanted to know… but were afraid to ask.”

**OR**

Three Papers & 1 Project: Instead of one paper, you can choose to do a project that is not a paper. The project should be some sort of cultural text (e.g. comic book, short documentary, blog or vlog) that utilizes the readings in that section. This project can be individual or group, but must be cleared with me ahead of time (just send me an email- no formal proposal is necessary). Examples of previous projects include: a comic book of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble, Gender Trash*, a zine of poetry and art in response to the readings, and “vlogs” of gender presentations at Middlebury. You may do one project only- the rest of the
assignments must be papers. **Like papers, a project will count as 15% of your grade.**

3. **There will be a take-home final exam that will constitute the final 20% of your grade.**

   A short note on the importance of being here: I do not take attendance in class. I will never know if you are here or not except by the depth of your work. However, if you do come, then I expect you to be here. That means no computers—seriously. Feel free to take notes by hand, doodle, knit, or whatever else you need to do to focus. But I do not allow computers in my class since nearly everyone taking notes on them is also answering emails, Facebooking or watching the next really cute kitten video. The point is, if I can’t watch that really cute kitten video or send a tweet during class, then neither can you.

I. **The Discovery of Gender**

9/10 Introduction


**Discussion Question 1** Let’s consider Butler’s narrative style. Take a particularly complex passage (a paragraph or two) from Butler’s work and rewrite it in a more accessible way—consider putting it into bumper sticker or comic strip form. Why do you think Butler writes the way she does—do complex notions about gender require complex language?


**Discussion Question 2** According to these authors, only white, heterosexual and middle class women were fully feminine. Find an example from advertising or pop culture where Black women and or lesbians are masculinized in some way.

9/19 * Anne McClintock, “Imperial Leather: Race, Cross-Dressing, and the Cult of Domesticity,” pp. 132-180 in *Imperial Leather*
**Discussion Question 3** McClintock says it wasn’t just race and sexuality, but class and Empire that were utilized to construct the gender binary. Can you find an example of how race, class, sexuality and even Empire or nation help construct gender?

**II. Gender and the Body**

9/24 Rebecca Jordan Young, *Brainstorm*, pp. 1-64, 109-143

**Discussion Question 4** Go through recent news stories and find an example of how gender is popularly located in the body (e.g. Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars type articles). Do these popular articles use science to persuade the reader? If not, how do they legitimate their claims that gender differences are located in our bodies, not our culture?

9/26 Rebecca Jordan Young, *Brainstorm*, pp. 198-292

**Discussion Question 5** Jordan Young is arguing that it is not science per se that is the problem, but bad science. What might a good science of gender look like? Can you find any examples? Or rewrite one of the studies that Jordan Young discusses so that it might actually tell us something we don’t already believe to be true?

10/1 *Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Dueling Dualisms” and “Of Gender and Genitals” pp. 1-29, 45-77 in Sexing the Body.

**Discussion Question 6** Go to any advice site for parents with young children. How do these sites keep the gender binary in place? Or look at children’s clothing or toys or room décor. Is the gender binary naturalized in these?

10/3*** Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Sexing the Baby Part 1” and “Sexing the Baby Part 2” Social Science and Medicine, 2011.

**Discussion Question 7** Despite the failings of science, Fausto-Sterling, like Jordan Young, still believes we can use science to figure out the hairball that is sex and the body. Do you agree with them? Why or why not? Can science teach us something new? If not science, what can we turn to to figure out gender, sex, sexuality, bodies and more? Poetry? Art? Dance? Boxing? Make a claim that understanding gender needs to happen in a particular field- whether boxing or science- and why?

10/8 Thom Lauqueur, 1-24 and 63-114 in *Making Sex.*
**Discussion Question 8** Can you find examples of the one sex model that exist still in popular culture? Ads or news stories? You could look back to Representative Todd Akin (R-MO) comments about pregnancy and rape- could this be a remnant of the one sex model?

10/10 Laqueur, pp. 149-192 in Making Sex.

**Discussion Question 9** Let’s face it. The idea that humans actually believed there was only one sex is rather mind blowing. Now blow your friends’ minds. Explain how Westerners viewed the human body from the Ancient Greeks to the Reformation to three friends and have them give you a paragraph written response to this information.

10/11 **Paper #1 Due**: What would happen if, when you were born, you were not given a sex? Use the authors we’ve read to consider the social power that would circulate around your sexually unclear body.

**III. Speaking Gender**

10/15 Jackie Orr, “’Keep Calm!’ for the Cold War: Diary of a Mental Patient,” pp. 79-164 in Panic Diaries.

**Discussion Question 10** Find some representation of the gendered speaking subject in classic children’s movies- Sleeping Beauty, The Lion King, The Little Mermaid, etc. Who is marked as “insane,” “irrational,” or “not worth listening to” and what does it have to do with gender? What about other forms of social power, like race or class or nationality?

10/17 *Kate Bornstein, “Naming all the Parts,” from Gender Outlaw and *Ricki Wilchins, from Read My Lips.

**Discussion Question 11** What might make speaking from a transgendered subject position different than a cisgendered one? (that is: How might occupying a gender that was not given to you at birth change how you speak about being a human, a man or a woman?)

10/22 **FALL BREAK**

**III. Growing Up Gendered**

**A. Becoming a Man**

**Part 1: Sex, Sport and War**
10/24 Michael Kimmel, Guyland, Chapters 2, 3, 5, and 7.

Discussion Question 12 Look again at the world of pop culture. What are men and boys told they need to do to be a man? Find an ad or a magazine article that says it will make a man out of you.

Part 2: Men as Monsters and Myths


Discussion Question 13 Bring in examples of how the ritual of Halloween is gendered- as well as raced, classed, sexualized, etc. Do some research- what will you and your friends dress up as? What does that say about gender? And other forms of social power?

11/1 Paper 2 Due: What role have sports played in your life? How have they taught you to “be a man” or “be a woman”? If you have never participated in sports, what effect does that have on your claims to be a man or woman? Why? Use the authors we’ve discussed and don’t forget to consider class and race and sexuality in addition to gender when thinking about your own experience of sport.


Discussion Question 14 What does white masculinity tell us about other racial forms of masculinity? What is the relationship between Asian American men and masculinity? Black men? Find examples in popular culture.

B. Becoming a Woman
Part 1: Girl Culture: Consuming the Body


Discussion Question 15 What did you do in the past 48 hours to participate in the body project. Make a list. Bring it in.

**Discussion Question 16** How do girls and women learn to be their bodies? Find a magazine or advertisement aimed at young women. What does it teach girls/women about their bodies? How does that relate to marketing? Where are race and class and sexuality in these texts?

Part 2: Women as Myths and Monsters
11/14 Evelynn M. Hammonds, “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence” and *Patricia Hill Collins, “Prisons for Our Bodies, Closets for our Minds.”

**Discussion Question 17** Find examples of monstrous women in our culture. Who are the monsters and why? What does it have to with race, class, sexuality, embodiment?


**Discussion Question 18** What does the able body have to do with gender? Why is a “productive” body so central to our sense of gender? Can you find examples from ads where our gender is clearly linked to our body’s ability to be “fit” and what might “fitness” have to do with race, class, and nationality?


**Discussion Question 19** When does having sex mark a body as “good” and when does having sex mark a body as “bad”? Find examples from popular culture of “virgins” or “sluts” and what does it have to do with their bodies’ race, class, gender, age, etc.?

11/22 **Paper 3 Due:** Find a representation of a human body that is clearly gendered (e.g. in an advertisement, a porn site, or whatever else catches your eye). What does the image say about what it means to be a woman or a man? What other forms of power are at play? (i.e. age, race, sexuality, able-bodied, size, class, etc.). Don’t forget to include the authors in this section.

11/28 Thanksgiving Break

IV. Unlearning Gender?


Discussion Question 20 Butler and other postmodern theorists of gender tell us that gender is always trouble- or more specifically, that a politics born of gender identity always creates more fractures than unities. This week, I want you to imagine a world without gender. How would we organize sexuality? Work and play? Is such a world possible?


Discussion Question 21 Unlearn one aspect of your gendered behavior- at least for discussion section. Come to class and perform gender in a way that is different than you normally do. Sit differently, talk differently, dress differently, etc. What does your gender presentation have to do with other forms of power- like class, race, or sexuality?

12/9 Paper 4 Due: It is twenty years from now. After Middlebury you became an architect. You’ve just been hired to build a huge new building on campus, but what will you do about the bathrooms? If the gender binary is blurring or even disappearing to the point of no longer being recognizable, how will we divide up urinary space? And why? Don’t forget to use the theorists from this section.

12/18 Take home final exam due by 4pm in Sociology Office 201 Munroe. I will pass out questions on the last day of class as well as posting it online.