What’s your gender and how do you know?

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Office hours: Weds 2-3
Thurs 11-1 or by appointment
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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? How we “know” gender produces the social world. We will also consider how knowledge of gender always intersects with 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. I will ask you to apply the readings 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 online from your favorite vendors including independent booksellers like Powell Books http://www.powells.com/
Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Routledge)
(NB: This exists as an e-book in Middlebury Library so you do not need to buy- but I highly recommend it)


Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Harvard University Press)

All other readings online at the Course Blog:
http://blogs.middlebury.edu/soan191

*On the course blog find readings, hints on writing your papers, cool links about gender and more*

**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 each session or you can email them to me before class. 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 several 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 20% of your grade.* Papers are due on the date listed in the syllabus.
   Please see handout “Everything you wanted to know about writing a paper for Soc of Gender but were afraid to ask.”
   OR
   Three Papers & 1 Project: Instead of one paper, you can choose to do a project. The project should be some sort of cultural text (e.g. a 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 20% of your grade.**

*A 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.*
A note on the messiness of gender: Gender is a highly fought over category and much of our discussions and readings involve painful topics. I do not give trigger warnings since everything we read and discuss involves social power, oppression, and the messiness of gender, race, class, sexuality, sex and more. I encourage you to decide upon reading this whether you are comfortable in a class without trigger warnings and if not, wish you luck finding a class that better suits your needs.

I. The Discovery of Gender
9/13 Introduction: What’s your gender and how do you know? Check this out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRw4H8YWoDA


**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 considered fully feminine at the birth of the Modern Era. Find an example from advertising or pop culture where Black women and or lesbians are masculinized in some way.

9/22 * 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
9/27 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?
**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 rethink one of the studies that Jordan Young discusses so that it might actually tell us something we don’t already believe to be true?

10/4 *Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Dueling Dualisms” and “Of Gender and Genitals” pp. 1-29, 45-77 in *Sexing the Body.*

**Discussion Question 6** 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?


**Discussion Question 7** Look at the Olympics. What does it mean to test women athletes for their true sex? What does the science of sex testing and sports do to the intersexed body? Now consider the sexed brain in many popular neuroscience articles. Does a sexed brain “solve” the problem of sexing the body? Or does it just create new ones?

10/11 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? Check this out and see if it might be part of pre-modern notions of sex and reproduction: http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/02/idaho-lawmaker-still-thinks-rape-cant-result-pregnancy-and-its-2016

10/13 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 write down how they respond to this information.

10/14 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 unsexed body. Please email papers to lessig@middlebury.edu

10/18 NO CLASS Fall Recess

III. Speaking Gender
10/20 *Kate Bornstein, “Naming all the Parts,” from *Gender Outlaw* and *Ricki Wilchins, from Read My Lips.*

**Discussion Question 10** What might make speaking from a transgendered subject position different than a cisgendered one? Can you find examples from contemporary culture of transgendered persons as able to “speak” and what does their speaking have to do with forms of power other than gender, like race or class?

IV. Growing Up Gendered

A. Becoming a Man

**Part 1: Sex, Sport and War**


**Discussion Question 11** What is Middlebury Guyland like? Can you think about how it is not just about gendered, but sexuality, race, class, etc.?


**Discussion Question 12** 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?

**Part 2: Men as Monsters and Myths**


**Discussion Question 13** Think about media and even institutional discourse on campus “rape culture.” How does rape culture construct normative masculinity as monstrous? Is rape culture raced and classed in a particular way?


**Discussion Question 14** How does being a man rely on racial hierarchies? What does it mean to be a white man versus an Asian American man in the US? What does it mean to be a Black man? How do racialized masculinities intersect with sexuality? Give an example from popular culture of how this works- like an ad or a music video.

11/4 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. Please email papers to lessig@middlebury.edu
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. It is also ELECTION DAY

11/10 NO CLASS


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

11/17 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 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?


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?

11/24 THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/29 Hanne Blank, Virgin, pp. 146-257.

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.?

**Discussion question 20** Consider how motherhood is being used at this moment politically and in the 2016 presidential election. Who are good mothers? Who are monster mothers? What does it have to do with race, class, sexuality and nationality?

12/2 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. Email: lessig@middlebury.edu

V. 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?

12/10 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. Email: lessig@middlebury.edu