

Sociology 265H1F

Gender and Society

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Office Hours: Tues. 3:00 to 4:00

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11:00 to 12:00 Tues., at 725 Spadina, Room 225F

Week 2: The Sexed Body (M/F): Thinking about Biology (Sex) and the Issue of Difference

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- I. Sex [male/female body] vs. Gender [masculinity/femininity] as personality, behaviour, etc.**
- II. The Assumption of Difference, in terms of Gender – in this Culture**
- III. Biological-Determinist Arguments: Today's Ideologies on Gender**
 - A. (1) An argument about individuals: Biology (genes, hormones, brain structure) causes**

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psychological and behavioural differences between boys and girls, men and women.

& (2) an argument about social organization: Psychological differences between men and women produce social inequality (e.g., controlling men created patriarchy)

Assessing these....

- (1) A 'reductionist' argument about individual behaviour: behaviour is reduced to physiological elements.

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- (2) An argument that is weak sociologically: Humans develop their abilities in a social community.

Evidence: the case of "feral children":
Physiological (bodily) equipment is necessary but not sufficient for human behaviour. Socialization not only teaches us to be socially acceptable boys and girls, but also how to hear, see, walk, talk, etc.

Evidence on whether our brains are 'masculinized' or 'feminized' in utero: C. Fine's review of a study of brains showing some differences, but not 'substantial' differences; there was a huge overlap between male & female

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brains. She concludes there is no such thing as a 'male brain' or a 'female brain'

Evidence on whether there is a relationship between brain characteristics and individuals' behaviour. C. Fine: only indirectly. The social environment (socialization) causes gender differences.

- (3) Similar problems with the argument on the way society is organized: also reductionist. Social organization cannot be explained by, or reduced to, people's psychology, given how complicated history is.

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(Example: Josiah Wedgewood and the moral dilemma of using child labour (19th century))

B. Another argument: Evolutionary psychology

- (1) Argument: Behaviour contributing to "reproductive success" was "naturally selected" – Hence, it's in our "nature"
- (2) Evidence typically used to support the story: not evidence on the ways people lived during the time humans were evolving, but about behaviour common today, in US and Cda.

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- (3) No hypothesis, or test of it; instead, selection of findings that support the argument; not scientific.

IV. Male and Female Bodies: How the Idea of the Sexed Body (Male-Female) Came to be Seen in terms of Difference -- Biologically 'Given' and Causing Gender Differences.

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A. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex* -- on the history of the creation of an ideology about the male/female body

- (1) The One-Sex model (from classical Greece to late 18th century)
- Women as inferior men; essentially the same model of the body for both
 - Gender as 'given' by nature and unchangeable, & sex as social, even changeable
 - Reflecting a patriarchal society

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(2) The Two-Sex model (dev. late 18th cen.)

- Female and male bodies [sexed bodies] as different; women and men [gendered people] as different – and sex difference as the foundation of gender differences
- (a) Sex as ‘given’ by nature & gender as social or changeable. (b) Difference emphasized, and used as a reason why there was gender inequality: women different from and inferior to men; idea of “separate spheres” for the men & women (ie, different roles).

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- A response to revolutionary ideas that challenged absolute authority and social inequality in the late 18th century (e.g., the ideas fueling the French Revolution: liberty, equality, fraternity). The response: an ideology about gender that supported the status quo, involving inequality.

- (3) Laqueur’s main argument: Models (or conceptions and accounts) of sex are shaped by the biases of the writers, including (especially) assumptions about gender. In turn, they often reflect and support unequal social arrangements. Ideology that males and females are naturally different, thus suited to different roles.

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B. Today's medical stories about male/female bodies: shaped by cultural biases about gender (reflecting stereotypes of gender as difference that entails inequality).

(1) Anne Fausto-Sterling on the story of how fetuses become male – an 'achievement'

(2) Emily Martin on the story of (very gendered) behaviour by the egg and sperm in reproduction

C. The social creation of two sexes today

(1) Intersexuals: 1 or 2 in every 2,000 infants

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(2) Medical intervention – creating two sexes (from a continuum with respect to sexed bodies)

C. Robert Sapolski: Evidence on Whether Testosterone Causes Aggression