

# WS MIDTERM

## WEEK 2: CHALLENGING THE GENDER BINARY

### Readings:

- Gould, Lois : “X: A Fabulous Child's Story.”
  - ◆ (S) Short story that asks: what would it be like to raise a child without gender? (more questions at bottom)
- Wilchins, Riki (2019) : “About Gender and Gender Norms” (Ch. 2 pp. 17-41).
  - ◆ (S) Your comprehensive introduction to questions like: what is gender, how is it different from sex, and how might we begin to challenge these binaries?

### Terms:

Sex and gender are **binary** which means that there are only two possibilities offered therefore, anything that challenges this is dismissed.

- SEX: biological characteristics (female / male intersex)
- GENDER: expected behaviours and attitudes based on sex (feminine / masculine)
  - ★ There are distinct biological differences between the sexes therefore a persons sex is fundamental to their identities.
  - ★ Gender is something we apply to others based on our sex.  
We associate certain behaviours and attitudes with sex
    - ⇒ Because men have testosterone.  
Ex. It's only natural that men are the ones who do construction work because they have more testosterone (therefore stronger).
  - ★ Characteristics are supposed to be natural, a gendered behaviour determines profession.
  - ★ This perspective is described by **biological determinism** – we are who we are because of biology
    - ⇒ The way men and women behave are predetermined and not to be changed.

→ BINARY THINKING: “one or the other” (if men are tall, women are short)

(S) Binary assumptions vs “bimodal distribution”

★ **Biological sex** refers to:

- (RW) **Physical characteristics** of bodies, including primary sex characteristics like chromosomes, genitals, and hormones  
AND
- (RW) **Secondary characteristics**- sexual characteristics including bone structure, fat distribution, musculature, and body hair.

★ **Binary assumption** is what society assumes -> they want there to be only two.

RW: “We like to think that sexual characteristics are distinct—men have wide shoulders and deep voices, women wide hips and fuller lips. But when it comes to **secondary characteristics** (the ones that are actually most visible), there tends to be what statisticians call a “**bimodal distribution**” (visualize a camel with two humps). What this means is there is a lot of **overlap**, and almost as much variation within sex categories as between them”.

“Almost all primary and secondary characteristics are linked to one of two things: the so-called “**sex chromosomes**” (XY for boys and XX for girls), and sex hormones (estrogen for girls and testosterone for boys).”

EX. “Unsurprisingly, experts still cannot agree on a single, definitive marker for sex. This is why Olympic committees continue to struggle with determining which athletes are “really” female, and have mostly thrown in the towel, especially when it comes to intersex athletes.”

→ HIDDEN CURRICULUM: a set of universal rules/ beliefs that everyone must follow to survive but never explicitly taught or help.

(S) RW: “Gender norms constitute a kind of hidden curriculum: a set of universal rules, beliefs, and actions that every young person must master to survive, but for which none receives the least bit of formal help or guidance” (Wilchins<sup>34</sup>).

★ **gendered socialization**; the social construction of gender

- Social construction – we become who we are, and we are shaped by our environment
- Unlike biological determinism, they argue that sex and gender are different things
- and we are often taught our gender based on our sex
- Hold a little more potential for change

★ Negative or positive reinforcement:

- Negative- sitting like a man, man getting bullied
- Positive- boys getting rewarded for having sex while girl gets slut shamed.
- Economic survival- if guy shows up to a work interview in a dress he might not get a job rather than showing up in a suit

→ GENDER POLICING: assumptions about gender cause us to monitor ourselves and others in performance of genders.

→ (S) Consists Of policing and monitoring yourself for others to make sure we are not violating the expectations of our gender...

★ What happens if we violate gender norms/don't police our gender?

- Risk of discrimination or violence
- The world will crumble!
  - In Western patriarchal society, gender hierarchy is the norm.
    - Ex. White men get jobs easier.

★ Change is resisted by those with (even just a little) privilege

(S) CLASS VIDEO: Ivan Coyote: “We all need a safe place to pee”

<https://youtu.be/wUKAVcjoNVA>

•Clip: What instances of gender policing does Coyote cite?

- What possibilities (for gender, for existence) does Coyote cite or yearn for?
- How does Coyote enact resistance?

→ GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE WORK: question and challenge gender norms (not stamp them out, just make sure no one is forced to confirm).

★ (S) Thinking critically to question and challenge gender norms (in reading in RW page 36).

- “The point of addressing gender norms is not to stamp them out, but rather to make sure that no young person is forced to conform to them...[or] be punished and discriminated against for not fitting into them”

→ GENDER NORMS: widespread assumptions, socially constructed

→ GENDER EXPRESSIONS: communicating gender identity through hair etc..

→ NON- BINARY: don't conform to one or the other

→ JERK- A- PHOBIA: people with authority scared of gender because might “get it wrong”

READING: (S) The Story of X:

- How is X's gender policed?
  - IE: What does the manual for raising a child without gender address? What **problems** do X and X's parents face? From which sources do these problems originate?
- What **advantages** does X's mixed-gender upbringing offer? What advantages did the other children see?
- “never make Baby X embarrassed or ashamed about what it wants to play with” (Gould pg. 4).
  - Why Is this important?

## WEEK 3: CHALLENGING THE SEX BINARY

### **Readings:**

- Allen, Kate (2019) : How the practice of sex-testing targets female Olympic athletes (Ch. 13 pp.115-120).
  - ◆ How does the “bimodal distribution” of sex apply to athletes? How is gender policed in sports?
- Davis, Georgiann (2019) : Contesting Intersex (Ch. 14 pp. 121-129).
  - ◆ What does it mean to be intersex? How have intersex writers and activists contributed to gender transformative work?

### **Terms:**

#### Sex and Gender Binaries in Sport

- ★ (S) ‘Common-sense’ cultural understanding of sport and/as necessary for masculinity
    - Aggression, physicality, competitive spirit, athletic skills
  - ★ (S) “Homophobia equates female athletic accomplishment with lesbianism” (Cahn)
    - howdoes media work to support/construct/’correct’ the hetero-femininity of women in sport?
- INTERSEX : being born with a cobination of characteristics that are typically presumed to be excusivly male or female.

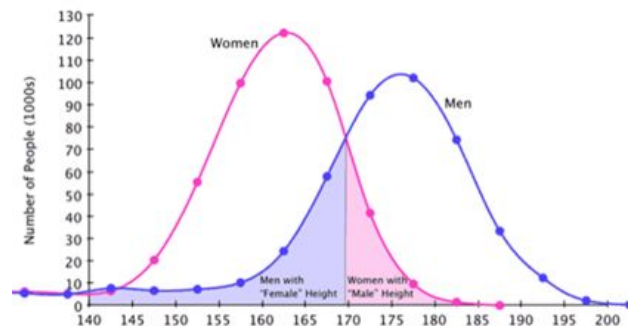
#### **(S) Davis: Contesting Intersex**

- Where “the sex [one] is born with had been deemed biologically ambiguous by the medical profession” (Davis 121).
- Intersex “is used to describe the state of being born with a combination of characteristics (e.g. genital, gonadal, and/or chromosomal) that are typically presumed to be exclusively male or female” (Davis 122).

- Incredibly normal variation: about as common as red-headedness (just under 2%)

(S)

- ★ Can we think of sex as...a spectrum?  
A series of options? A range of degrees?... Rather than an either/or binary?
- ★ How would you visually represent sex?



Gingerbread man takeaway:

**Gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation are independent of one another (i.e., they are not connected).**

People's **sexual orientation** doesn't determine their **gender expression**.

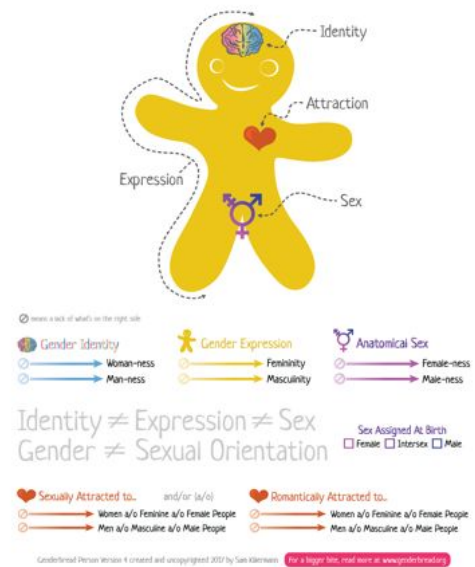
And

their **gender expression** isn't determined by their **gender identity**.

And

their **gender identity** isn't determined by their **biological sex**.

The Genderbread Person v1 by its pronounced?MeIKOsexual



→ GENDER AMBIGUITY: genitals aren't clearly male or female.

(S)

- ★ Surgery and shame: “near-universal practice of performing immediate, ‘corrective’ surgery” (Fausto-Sterling 13)
  - Some intersex conditions require surgery as a life-saving intervention (eg urinary tract blockage), but most is cosmetic.
- ★ Physicians have a lot of power to define children as intersex and to intervene medically (Fausto-Sterling 15)
  - Often, response is about appearances or managing parental or cultural anxieties about the necessity of matching sex/gender.

## Re-Thinking Assumptions about Surgery

(S)

- ★ Is (early) surgery less distressing than growing up with **atypical/ambiguous genitalia** (when a child's gender questioned at birth)?
  - Doctors think so
  - Intersex people and advocates do not
- ★ Evidence exists that early surgery is the cause of emotional and physical distress, not the intersex condition itself
- ★ Surgeries violate the autonomy of the individual
  - 2013UN Special Rapporteur on Torture “condemned the medical profession’s nonconsensual surgical treatment of intersex by associating it with torture” (Davis 125).

## Biological Citizenship

- BIOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP: the right for medical care based on biological basis (READING: Davis).
- HERMAPHRODITE VS. INTERSEX VS. DISORDER OF SEX: assumption that gender matches sex (READING: Davis 122).

(S) **Questions from slide on BC**

- ★ What are the benefits of using medicalized language?
- ★ Do medical actions (surgery) alone do harm, or can medical frameworks (ie, language) also do harm?
- ★ Those who reject the DSD “embrace intersex itself as a powerful identity. In doing so, they challenge gender essentialist ideologies” (Davis 125).

**From slide...**

(S) Sex Testing in Sports (READING: Allen)

- ★ The International Olympic Committee first began “sex testing” athletes prior to the 1968 Games, though the practice gained more attention in 2009 with the case of Caster Semenya

- ★ “sextesting” is almost exclusively performed on female athletes, for the purposes of confirming their femaleness
- ★ “maleness” would imply an unfair advantage
- ★ Ah! But, no consensus on what “maleness” consists of: “The public is by now used to the idea that sex is biological while gender is a social construct. But where in our biology does sex reside: in our genes, in our genitals, in our hormones?” (Allen 116).

**Allen: the Case of Four Elite Female Athletes:**

- ★ “These women were chromosomally male, but had lived their lives, and competed athletically, as women...The doctors proposed a solution: gonadectomies, or surgical removal of their reproductive organs; clitoridectomies, or partial surgical removal of their clitorises; and later, surgeries to feminize their vaginas and estrogen replacement therapy. These measures were not medically necessary, but after a year, the women would be able to compete. All four agreed” (Allen 116).
  - Why might they have agreed to these interventions?

**(S) Gender (and sex!) Transformative Work**

→ INTERSEX LIBERATION: Confront gender structures  
(stop surgeries, peer support, education, medical consent for kids) (READING: Davis)

- ★ **(S)** Intersex liberation comes from “directly confronting the gender structure. When we make the gender structure visible – that is, when we understand how gender constrains us at the institutional, individual, and interactional levels of society – we diminish at least some of the powerful control it has over our lives” (Davis 126).
  - Stop surgeries
  - Expand and diversify peer support and education
  - Replace fear with power
  - Listen to children’s voices in the medical decision-making process

## Week 4: INTERSECTIONALITY AND SOLIDARITY

### **Readings:**

- Crenshaw's "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"
  - ◆ **(S)** Intersectionality is important theory and a contemporary buzzword: see where it all started with Crenshaw's work.
- Slater and Liddiard's "Why Disability Scholars Must Challenge Transmisogyny and Transphobia"
  - ◆ **(S)** Continues our discussion of the sex binary by asking us to consider what trans women and disability advocates have in common.

### **Terms:**

- **(KC)** INTERSECTIONALITY: gender, race, class, ability all intertwined.
- **(SL)** TRANSMISOGYNY: transphobia against "femine" people.
- **(SL)** SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DISABILITY: interaction of biological and social to create or prevent disability
  - ★ **(SL)** Medical Model of Disability: an individual has an ailment, inborn or acquired, that makes them 'different from' the (able-bodied) norm.
    - Individuals must seek medical treatment or use adaptive devices to make them 'fit in'
    - Often, care duties fall disproportionately to women and feminized folks

**\*SEE SLIDE SHOW\***

## Week 5: CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITIES

### Readings:

- Messerschmidt's "Hegemonic Masculinity"
  - ◆ You might be more familiar with the concept of "toxic masculinity"
- Narby's "Double Rainbow: Autism and Masculinity"
  - ◆ On Bitch Media's website: explore while you're there! Bitch is a magazine focused on feminist responses to pop culture

### Terms:

**In this chapter:** Gender relations are about power: hegemonic masculinity is power-over women, femininity, subordinated masculinities, and non-binary genders.

- FRAGILE MASCULINITY: social construct, need dominance.

### (S)

- ★ "Some assumed this meant he was gay, while others admonished him for his choice saying "real men don't wear make-up". There were, of course, those that argued for his freedom to live life however he pleased and against the "**fragile masculinities**" on show.

But Kim Seung-hwanis used to it. He says he's been called gay by some Koreans online for as long as he's been doing make-up tutorials.

When asked about whether he thought he looked feminine after he put on make-up, he was confused by the question as if he had never even thought about it.

'No I don't. I do not think about this being a girly look,'he says. 'It's about looking good.'" (Asher)

→ HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY: legitimates unequal gender relations dominance over femininity, patriarchy.

(S)

- ★ Masculinity that legitimates unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt86)
- ★ Relies on its relationship with (and dominance over) femininity, “emphasized femininity”, various subordinated or non-hegemonic masculinities, as well as non-binary identities
- ★ Hegemonic masculinities collectively constitute a social structure
  - Aka patriarchy, the institutionalized dominance of (certain) men over women, ‘other’ men, and gender minorities

→ NON-HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY:

(S)

- ★ “Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (Connell in Messerschmidt86)
  - EG the sexist and homophobic insults used in Tough Guise clips
  - Complicit
  - Subordinate
  - Marginalized
  - Protest

### Autism and Masculinity

(S)

- ★ Argues that autism is constructed as “inherently masculine”, that is, that “autism is understood as a condition that predominantly affects cis males and is associated with exaggerated ‘masculine’ traits” (Narby)
- ★ And/or, is a threat to and “isn’t compatible with the performance of hegemonic masculinity”

## Connections to Slater and Liddiard

(S)

- ★ “So where does all this leave autistic femininity? Erased” (Narby)
- ★ Disabled women and trans women are both positioned outside of womanhood (S&L)
  - How do autism’s so-called “male traits” extend this?
- ★ Disability Studies critiques medicalisation whilst maintaining that everyone deserves life-affirming health care (S&L)
  - How do autism diagnoses for girls address this tension?

## Gender Transformative Work

(S)

- ★ "The way they (K-pop stars) play with masculinity, what it means to be a beautiful man in a heterosexual or non-heterosexual way, it **opens up possibilities for men on the street** and eventually makes it more acceptable." (Joanna Elfving-Hwang, quoted in Asher)
- ★ "I think the phenomenon should rather be explained through the notion of hybrid or versatile masculinity - **soft yet manly at the same time - which is different from effeminized**" (Jung quoted in Asher).

## Week 7: SCIENCE AND SEXUALITY

### **Readings:**

- Fine’s “Flies of Fancy”
  - ◆ The reproductive success of male fruit flies increases with promiscuity, but female fruit flies can reproduce successfully with a smaller number of partners...so that means that human males should sleep around, and human females should seek monogamy, right?!

- Birden's "Compulsory heterosexuality"
  - ◆ Why do the fruit flies need to be straight?

## TERMS:

### In this chapter:

- ★ Scientific arguments have been and continue to be mobilized in support of compulsory/enforced heteronormativity and against gender equality.
- ★ "Strong objectivity" can help us engage in gender transformative work, to question the institutions (like science, among others) which work to maintain the status quo.

- INCELS: "Involving celibate", cant get women
- THE WALL: age when lose sexual appeal (women sooner than men)

### (S)

Recall: An increased recognition of the value of 'diverse' ways of being

- ★ "Incels" as response/backlash
- ★ "TheWall is the age one reaches when they [lose sexual appeal]. Women tend to reach their "Wall" stage earlier than men; this is because women are fertile for a short[er] period of time than men" (Incel wiki)

### → SCIENTIFIC METHOD AND OBJECTIVITY:

- ★ Science has authority because we believe it to be objective
- ★ Scientific Objectivity: scientific claims are not or should not be influenced by community values, bias, or personal interest
  - Feminists advocate for "**strong objectivity**": acknowledging bias/motivation improves scientific results