Sociology of Gender
Spring Term 2002

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course looks cross-culturally at issues of gender. Socio-cultural enquiry examines the rich variety of ways in which gender is imagined and constructed.

There are, of course, clear biological differences between men and women, although social constructions of gender have often used physiology to justify structures of sexual apartheid (the imagining and structuring of men and women according to entirely separate and distinct principles). Traditionally women have been over-conceptualised in terms of their biology. Masculinised cultures supposedly develop from a cerebral effort that transcends the body; correspondingly femininity continues to be defined in terms of an emotionalism derived from the erratic and fluid state of their own bodies. It should be noted however, that abstract concepts such as masculinity and femininity can never do justice to the complex relational identities of real men and women.

Given the constructed nature of gender, defining roles of men and women in any society appears to require constant ritualised effort. The social practices which construct gender vary significantly from society to society, problematising the task of establishing any normative interpretative pattern of male and female role-playing. The most influential paradigm for explaining the repeated affirmation of gender divisions was offered by Levi-Strauss’ adaptation of the concept of the incest taboo. The incest taboo is often interpreted as a global human means by which culture (as we know it) is constructed as a system of alliances forged by men from different families. According to this analysis, marriage emerges as an economic and political institution that has far more to do with property relationships between men than to do with emotional relationships between men and women. This course will interrogate this paradigm (and other paradigms) in the light of recent challenges.

Culture as we know it depends upon reciprocal roles and relationships, in other words a division of labour. Gendered division of labour can be viewed as the allocation of particular spaces as male and female. The intransigence or permeability of these separate spheres varies from society to society, but their existence is often reinforced at a structural and political level. The anthropologist whether male or female is inevitably someone who enters unfamiliar territory, moving from one sphere into another, often thereby defying the very divisions they seek to analyse. The ‘reflexive’ movement in ethnography considers formative biographical factors of the researcher and their resultant influence on the research process. Feminist anthropologists have stressed reflexivity but have emphasised (inevitably) the importance of gender. Some recent writings by male anthropologists have contributed to a recognition of the necessity of discussing such issues in the teaching and practice of ethnography.

By the end of this course students will have undertaken a survey of social and cultural interpretations of gender, as well as exploring the possibility of transcending such interpretations.
ASSESSMENT

This module is an option, and thus will be have the following Exam/Coursework division:

60% Final Exam
40% Coursework

The coursework assessment will have two different parts.

Part 1. The first part consists of two short (750 words, 2.5 pages) reflection pieces on readings from the unit. For the first reflection paper, the student may choose to write about any of the readings from weeks 2-5, whereas the second paper will involve readings being chosen from weeks 6-9. Each of these pieces of work will carry 6 points towards the final grade (for a total of 12 points for this part of the assessment towards the final mark).

Part 2. The second part of the assessment involves a group project which students will work on throughout the term. In the tenth week each group will be required to make a brief presentation of their findings (8 points). In addition, each group will be required to hand in a written summary of the research which should amount to approximately 4500 words (1500 per group member, for groups of size three). The written material will be worth 20 points towards the final grade (for a total of 28 points from this part of the assessment towards the final mark). The details regarding these projects and the group arrangements will be discussed in class.

For finalists who wish not take the final exam for this module may choose instead to write a take home exam where students will be asked to complete three questions (approximately 1500 words in length) over a two week period.

REQUIRED READINGS

A useful overview of the issues covered in this course is provided by:

LECTURES

WEEK ONE

Lecture 1: Introduction to the unit.
Lecture 2: Politics of Difference and Domination


WEEK TWO

Lecture 1: Anatomy is Not Destiny: Discussion of Biology versus Culture.


**Lecture 2: Gender and Prehistory**


**WEEK THREE**

**Lecture 1: Nature, Culture and Gender**

Sherry Ortner, 1974. “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?.” In M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society*


Olivia Harris, ‘The Power of Signs: Gender, Culture and the Wild in the Bolivian Andes.’’ In C. MacCormack and M. Strathern (eds.), *Nature, Culture and Gender*

Gillian Gillison, ‘Images of nature in Gimi thought’’ In C. MacCormack and M. Strathern (eds.), *Nature, Culture and Gender*

**Lecture 2: Nature, Culture and Gender**

Jane Goodale, “A Kaulong view of nature and culture”

Marilyn Strathern, “No nature, no culture: the Hagen case”

*These articles are in* C. MacCormack and M. Strathern (eds.). 1980. *Nature, Culture and Gender*.

**WEEK FOUR**

**Lecture 1: Marriage and the Family**


Marilyn Strathern, (ed.), *The Gender of the Gift*

Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*


**Lecture 2: Thinking about the Incest Taboo**


**WEEK FIVE**

**Lecture 1: Kinship, Marriage and Exchange**


Malinowski, B. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

Lecture 2: Spheres of Exchange among the Trobrians.

Malinowski, B. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Ch. on the kula

**WEEK SIX**

Lecture 1: Gender, Property and The State


Lecture 2: The Domestic and The Public


**WEEK SEVEN**

Lecture 1: Gender and Health


Helman, Cecil. 1990. *Culture, health and illness*


Lecture 2: Gender, Politics and Reproduction


**WEEK EIGHT**

**Lecture 1: Gender and Sexuality**


**Lecture 2: Transcending Gender**


**WEEK NINE**

**Lecture 1: Science & Arts (Qaul. vs. Quant.), A Gendered Divide**


**Lecture 2: Gender and Sexuality in the Field**

Allen Abramson, ‘Between Autobiography and Method: being male, seeing myth and the analysis of structures of gender and sexuality in the eastern interior of Fiji’
Peter Wade, ‘Sexuality and Field work among Colombian blacks’

**WEEK TEN**

**Class Presentations**