

**USP3501: THE PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT OF “GENDER”
UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS PROGRAMME, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
AY2021-22 SEMESTER 1**

Seminar: Tuesdays and Fridays 12-2 pm in U-Town Auditorium 3

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INTRODUCTION

What is “gender”? When was the word and the category invented? What kinds of definitions have been advanced or implied for this perplexing term? How have thinkers—in fields as diverse as anthropology, film studies, history, literature, medicine, philosophy, popular culture and the mass media, psychology, science studies, and sociology—helped to shape the meaning of this concept, and how have their disciplines both aided and limited their use of the term? How have these definitions changed the ways we think? What kinds of problems have these definitions created?

Pursuing such questions, this module is therefore concerned with the concept or conceptualizing of “gender.” As the past tenses used in the previous paragraph suggest, the approach will be primarily historical (we are examining how “gender” has been defined over the last 60+ years), though this history comes up to present times (thus, the ongoing *conceptualizing* of “gender”). We will encounter a range of complex definitions, but our job is not simply to parrot them. We will also need to think about the enabling possibilities these definitions opened up, as well as the disabling problems they created. We will begin with a short and contextualizing introduction to the idea of “subjectivity,” and look at the early appearances of the word “gender” in scholarly writing. We will then survey four important moments in the conceptualization of gender, ranging from (1) landmark efforts to conceive of a “sex/gender system” that therefore first sketched out the difference between the two terms, and related attempts to think about “sexuality”; to theories that variously imagine gender as (2) masquerade and mimicry, (3) performance, and (4) embodiment. Some of the case studies we will look at include intersex, transgender, sissies and tomboys, exaggerated masculinity and femininity, drag kings and queens, and the role of the body.

Because the definition of gender can be an abstract process, this module—in addition to being historical—is also quite theoretical or philosophical in nature: it is as much a class *about* gender studies as it is a class *in* gender studies. Although we will be examining several case studies that shed light on the meaning of “gender” (chiefly films, and medical and psychological cases), and you will be encouraged and expected to bring in various examples, the module will mainly focus on the knotty task of defining gender. This module is thus especially suitable for students who are interested in working out such definitional problems in order to lay the groundwork for further work on gender-related issues.

This is a level-3000 Inquiry-tier module (and therefore cannot be taken on an S/U basis). Aside from fulfilling USP requirements, it can also be read for FASS’s Gender Studies Minor.

SCHEDULE

Aug 10

Seminar 1.1: Introducing the Subject (I)

Kafka, Franz. “Before the Law.” Reprinted in Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 48-49.

Aug 13

Seminar 1.2: Introducing the Subject (II)

Descartes, Rene. "Meditation Two: Concerning the Nature of the Human Mind: That the Mind is More Known Than the Body." *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Hackett, 1980, pp. 61-67.

Hegel, G. W. F.. "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage." *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 111-119.

Nealon, Jeffrey and Susan Searls Giroux. "Subjectivity." *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 35-50.

Aug 17

Seminar 2.1: Sex, Gender (I)

Money, John. "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyper-Adrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings." *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital*, vol. 96, 1955, pp. 253-264.

Stoller, Robert J.. Excerpt from "Preface." *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity*. Hogarth, 1968, pp. vii-xiii.

Aug 20

Seminar 2.2: Sex, Gender (II)

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna R. Reiter. Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 157-210.

Note: This is a long essay. You can skim or even skip the sections titled "Marx" and "Engels" (pp. 160-169), as long as you figure out the big point that Rubin ends up making in these sections (hint: "the failure of classical Marxism to fully express or conceptualize sex oppression" [160]).

Aug 24

Seminar 3.1: Sex, Gender (III)

Colapinto, John. "The True Story of John/Joan." *Rolling Stone*, 11 December 1997, pp. 54-97.

Aug 27

Seminar 3.2: Sex, Gender (IV)

Kessler, Suzanne J. "The Medical Construction of Gender." *Lessons from the Intersexed*. Rutgers University Press, 2002, pp. 12-32.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "Of Gender and Genitals: The Use and Abuse of the Modern Intersexual." *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. Basic Books, 2000, pp. 45-77.

Aug 31

Seminar 4.1: Sex, Gender (V)

Prince, Virginia. "Sex vs. Gender," and "The 'Transcendents' or 'Trans' People." *Virginia Prince: Pioneer of Transgendering*, edited by Richard Ekins and Dave King. Haworth Medical Press, 2005, pp. 29-32, 39-46.

Enke, A. Finn. Excerpts from “The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies.” *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*. Temple University Press, 2012, pp. 60-62, 68, 73-4.

MacDonald, Eleanor. “Critical Identities: Rethinking Feminism through Transgender Politics.” *Atlantis*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1998, pp. 3-11.

Sep 3

Seminar 4.2: Sex, Gender—and Sexuality (I)

Hekma, Gert. “‘A Female Soul in a Male Body’: Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology.” *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, edited by Gilbert Herdt. Zone Books, 1994, pp. 213-239.

Cole, Shaun. “‘Macho Man’: Clones and the Development of a Masculine Stereotype.” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2011, pp. 125-140.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. Excerpt from “How to Bring Up Your Kids Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys.” *Tendencies*. Duke University Press, 1993, pp. 154-159.

Sep 7

Seminar 5.1: Sex, Gender—and Sexuality (II)

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Vintage, 1990, pp. 3-73.

Sep 10

Seminar 5.2: Sex, Gender—and Sexuality (III)

Rubin, Gayle. Excerpts from “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin. Routledge, 1993, pp. 3-4, 8-16, 27-44.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. “Axiom 1” and “Axiom 2.” *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press, 1990, pp. 22-35.

Sep 14

Seminar 6.1: Cinematic Case Study #1

Boys Don't Cry. Directed by Kimberly Peirce. 1999. 20th Century Fox, 1999. DVD.

Sep 17

Seminar 6.2: Synthesis and Reflection

Mid-term test

Mid-term Break

Sep 28

Seminar 7.1: Masquerade and Mimicry (I)

Freud, Sigmund. “Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes.” *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, edited by Rachel Adams and David Savran. Blackwell, 2002, pp. 14-20.

Lacan, Jacques. Excerpt from "The Signification of the Phallus." *Ecrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Norton, 1977, pp. 288-291.

Riviere, Joan. "Womanliness as a Masquerade." *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by Victor Burgin, James McDonald, and Cora Kaplan. Routledge, 1986, pp. 35-44.

Irigaray, Luce. Excerpts from *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 68-71, 76-77, 132-134, and 220 (entries for "masquerade" and "mimicry").

Oct 1

Seminar 7.2: Masquerade and Mimicry (II)

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*." *Contemporary Film Theory*, edited by Antony Easthope. Longman, 1999, pp. 111-134.

Oct 5

Seminar 8.1: Masquerade and Mimicry (III)

Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" and "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator." *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, and Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 1991, pp. 17-43.

Oct 8

Seminar 8.2: Cinematic Case Study #2

Elizabeth. Directed by Shekhar Kapur. 1998. Universal Studios, 1998. DVD.

Oct 12

Seminar 9.1: Performativity (I)

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.

Butler, Judith. "From Interiority to Gender Performatives." *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition. Routledge, 1999, pp. 171-180.

Oct 15

Seminar 9.2: Performativity (II)

Halberstam, Judith. "Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance." *Female Masculinity*. Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 231-266.

Tyler, Carole-Anne. Excerpts from "Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag." *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, edited by Diana Fuss. Routledge, 1991, pp. 32-34, 52-58, 62-70.

Oct 19

Seminar 10.1: Performativity (III)

Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Agency: What's the Problem?" *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*. University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 178-193.

Butler, Judith. "Conclusion: From Parody to Politics." In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition. Routledge, 1999, pp. 180-190.

Butler, Judith. Excerpt from "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism.'" *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. Routledge, 1992, pp. 12-21.

Oct 22

Seminar 10.2: Cinematic Case Study #3

Paris is Burning. Directed by Jennie Livingston. 1991. Miramax, 2005. DVD.

Oct 26

Seminar 11.1: Embodiment (I)

Grosz, Elizabeth. Excerpt from "Refiguring Bodies." *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 3-10, 13-24.

Butler, Judith. "Preface" and excerpt from "Introduction." *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Routledge, 1993, pp. ix-xii, 1-16.

Oct 29

Seminar 11.2: Embodiment (II)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Experience of the Body and Classical Psychology." *The Body: A Reader*, edited by Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco. Routledge, 2005, pp. 52-54.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh." *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 86-111.

Young, Iris Marion. Excerpt from "Lived Body vs. Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity." *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 16-18.

Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing Like a Girl." *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, edited by Donn Welton. Blackwell, 1998, pp. 259-273.

Nov 2

Seminar 12.1: Embodiment (III)

Michel Foucault. "The Political Investment of the Body." *The Body: A Reader*, edited by Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco. Routledge, 2005, pp. 100-104.

Bordo, Susan. "Feminism, Foucault, and the Politics of the Body." *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 246-257.

Heyes, Cressida J.. "Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers." *Hypatia* vol. 21, no. 2, 2006, pp. 126-149.

Nov 5

Seminar 12.2: Cinematic Case Study #4

Air Doll. Directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. 2009. First Press, 2010. DVD.

Nov 9

Seminar 13.1: Conclusions

RESOURCES

All the essays we are reading will be accessible from our Luminus site as pdf files, except for Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol 1*. We're reading about 2/3 of this book, so please purchase it if you can. Kinokuniya has various editions (<https://singapore.kinokuniya.com/bw/9780241385982>; <https://singapore.kinokuniya.com/bw/9780679724698>), and probably in-store as well. Alternatively, you can use the copies of Foucault that are in the USP Reading Room (HQ12.0 HIS 1990) or in the RBR collection of the NUS Central Library (HQ12 Fou).

Many of the books and anthologies from which we are excerpting essays, as well as some relevant books that may be useful for the final project, are also in RBR at the Central Library.

We will be viewing four films in the course of the semester, indicated on the syllabus as "Cinematic Case Studies." These will be primary texts for analysis, during seminars facilitated by your classmate(s). You should therefore treat these films as the "readings" for the seminar, watching them and—as you would with textual readings—annotating, pondering, and analyzing them before the seminars. DVD copies of the film are available in two places: the USP Reading Room and the NUS Central Library, under the following call numbers.

	NUS Media Collection	USP Reading Room
<i>Boys Don't Cry</i>	CDV121R	PN1997BOY
<i>Elizabeth</i>	CDV6R	PN1997ELI
<i>Paris is Burning</i>	CVC10993R	PN1997PAR
<i>Air Doll</i>	CMR1080	PN1997AIR

REQUIREMENTS

There is no final exam for the module, which is 100% CA. The CA is in turn based on five components, as follows:

1. Attendance, Engagement with Readings, and Seminar Participation (10%)

Attendance of seminars is mandatory. You are allowed one unexcused absence; anything beyond that will negatively affect your grade. If you need to be excused from a class for good reason—family emergencies, documented illnesses—let me know, in advance if possible. When you miss a meeting, you are still responsible for doing the readings for the day (especially since the readings tend to refer to and build on each other), and for completing any work assigned during the class.

The assigned readings and viewings are a key part of the module: we will learn a lot of information from them, but also from questioning and pondering them. The requirement is therefore that you carefully read and think about the assigned readings before each class. The onus is then on you to thoughtfully demonstrate, during our seminars, that you have indeed done so. This is usually done by participating in the seminar discussions—by answering or posing basic questions about the readings, analyzing and interpreting them, and so on. Even when you find a reading difficult, you can still think and speak about how it is difficult, where in the text the difficulty arises, why this difficulty might be significant, and so on.

2. Forum Posts (10%)

The class has, and will be using the forum on Luminus. Aside from administration, I will often be using the forum to post guiding remarks or questions for the readings. You should therefore, at a minimum, check the forum before each seminar.

But *you* are also expected to contribute to the forum in two ways:

- a. Gender is not merely an academic subject, but instead pops up in everyday discourse. Over the course of the semester, you should post to the forum interesting discussions of gender that you come across: some piece of current media (a news report, a Facebook meme, a music video, etc.). You can even provide links with minimal commentary on your part, though there should be at least one post over the course of the semester on which your comments are more extensive, and analytical. You should also capitalize on the community that a blog affords, and comment on your classmates' posts when the spirit moves you.
- b. You will also be asked (likely around Weeks 7/8) to find and post about a small text as a simple illustration or exemplification of one of the theories we will encounter.

3. Seminar Facilitation (20%)

Four of our seminars are devoted to films that serve as case studies. Each of you, working in a team, will be responsible for facilitating one of these seminars, for about 75 minutes. This should not be confused with doing a class presentation. Rather, your overall aim is to help your classmates—via an energetic and structured discussion guided by you—to arrive at a better understanding of the film.

You will obviously need to prepare for the facilitation. After watching the film, you will need to identify what you see to be the most important issues raised in, by, or about the film, and think about why you consider those issues important. Though each film is positioned as a “case study” in the syllabus, and though each is more or less slotted into one of the units of the module, you don't necessarily have to link your film to, say, masquerade or embodiment. In identifying these issues, you should not neglect to think about the film as film—in other words, about “representation.” As with any text, the film will not be a transparent window into those issues; how the film *represents* those issues—the choices it makes, the cinematic techniques it uses, the genre of film it is—are also crucial things to consider. You should therefore devote some energy to a reading of the film's form.

You must meet with me *before* the seminar, during which you outline your plans, and the thinking behind why you want to do what you want to do. When you schedule this meeting is up to you, but I would suggest about 4-7 days before the seminar.

4. Synthesis and Reflection Test (25%)

There will be a test in Week 6. Though it might sound intimidating, the intention is to provide a pause or breather at that point of the module, in order that we might take stock. Accordingly, the test will require you to synthesize some of what we've discussed up to that point, and to reflect on the implications of those discussions.

5. Final Project (35%)

You have two options for your final project, due Reading Week. The first is to write an argumentative essay (3000-4000 words) in which you analyze a primary text or general phenomenon of your own choosing, alongside one of the theories of gender we will have encountered via our module readings. Such a final essay is, in a sense, a comparative paper—a comparison of “theory” with “example”—though it may also need involve an element of research. Your second option is to do a creative critical project (which accordingly has no stipulated page length). In this option, you will still have to make a rigorous argument. But you will *not* need to do so via the more traditional form of the academic essay, and instead thoughtfully choose some creative format (poetry, prose, film, painting etc.).