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PERSPECTIVES: AN OPEN INVITATION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Thomas McIlwraith*

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GENDER AND SEXUALITY

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify ways in which culture shapes sex/gender and sexuality.
- Describe ways in which gender and sexuality organize and structure the societies in which we live.
- Assess the range of possible ways of constructing gender and sexuality by sharing examples from different cultures, including small-scale societies.
- Analyze how anthropology as a discipline is affected by gender ideology and gender norms.
- Evaluate cultural “origin” stories that are not supported by anthropological data.

INTRODUCTION: SEX AND GENDER ACCORDING TO ANTHROPOLOGISTS¹

Anthropologists are fond of pointing out that much of what we take for granted as “natural” in our lives is actually cultural—it is not grounded in the natural world or in biology but invented by humans.² Because culture is invented, it takes different forms in different places and changes over time in those places. Living in the twenty-first century, we have witnessed how rapidly and dramatically culture can change, from ways of communicating to the emergence of same-sex marriage. Similarly, many of us live in culturally diverse settings and experience how varied human cultural inventions can be.

We readily accept that clothing, language, and music are cultural—invented, created, and alterable—but often find it difficult to accept that gender and sexuality are not natural but deeply embedded in and shaped by culture. We struggle with the idea that the division of humans into two and only two categories, “male” and “female,” is not universal, that “male” and “female” are cultural concepts that take different forms and have different meanings cross-culturally. Similarly, human sexuality, rather than being simply natural is one of the most culturally significant, shaped, regulated, and symbolic of all human capacities. The concept of humans as either “heterosexual” or “homosexual” is a culturally and historically specific invention that is increasingly being challenged in the United States and elsewhere.

Part of the problem is that gender has a biological component, unlike other types of cultural inventions such as a sewing machine, cell phone, or poem. We do have bodies and there are some male-female differences, including in reproductive capacities and roles, albeit far fewer than we have been taught. Similarly, sexuality, sexual desires and responses, are partially rooted in human natural capacities. However, in many ways, sexuality and gender are like food. We have a biologically rooted need to eat to survive and we have the capacity to enjoy eating. What constitutes “food,” what is “delicious” or “repulsive,” the contexts and meanings that surround food and human eating—those are cultural. Many potentially edible items are not “food” (rats, bumblebees, and cats in the United States, for example), and the concept of “food” itself is embedded in elaborate conventions about eating: how, when, with whom, where, “utensils,” for what purposes? A “romantic dinner” at a “gourmet restaurant” is a complex cultural invention.

In short, gender and sexuality, like eating, have biological components. But cultures, over time, have erected complex and elaborate edifices around them, creating systems of meaning that often barely resemble what is natural and innate. We experience gender and sexuality largely through the prism of the culture or cultures to which we have been exposed and in which we have been raised.

In this chapter, we are asking you to reflect deeply on the ways in which what we have been taught to think of as natural, that is, our sex, gender, and our sexuality, is, in fact, deeply embedded in and shaped by our culture. We challenge you to explore exactly which, if any, aspects of our gender and our sexuality are totally natural.

One powerful aspect of culture, and a reason cultural norms feel so natural, is that we learn culture the way we learn our native language: without formal instruction, in social contexts, picking it up from others around us, without thinking. Soon, it becomes deeply embedded in our brains. We no longer think consciously about what the sounds we hear when someone says “hello” mean unless we do not speak English. Nor is it difficult to “tell the time” on a “clock” even though “time” and “clocks” are complex cultural inventions.

The same principles apply to gender and sexuality. We learn very early (by at least age three) about the categories of gender in our culture—that individuals are either “male” or “female” and that elaborate beliefs, behaviors, and meanings are associated with each gender. We can think of this complex set of ideas as a **gender ideology** or a **cultural model of gender**. All societies have gender ideologies, just as they have belief systems about other significant areas of life, such as health and disease, the natural world, and social relationships, including family. For an activity related to this section, see Activity 1.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF GENDER

Gender Ideologies, Biology, and Culture

Gender vs. Sex

Words can reveal cultural beliefs. A good example is the term “sex.” In the past, sex referred both to sexuality and to someone’s biologic sex: male or female. Today, although sex still refers to sexuality, “gender” now means the categories male, female, or increasingly, other gender possibilities. Why has this occurred?

The change in terminology reflects profound alterations in gender ideology in the United States (and elsewhere). In the past, influenced by Judeo-Christian religion and nineteenth and twentieth

century scientific beliefs, biology (and reproductive capacity) was literally considered to be destiny. Males and females, at least “normal” males and females, were thought to be born with different intellectual, physical, and moral capacities, preferences, tastes, personalities, and predispositions for violence and suffering.³

Ironically, many cultures, including European Christianity in the Middle Ages, viewed women as having a strong, often “insatiable” sexual “drive” and capacity. But by the nineteenth century, women and their sexuality were largely defined in reproductive terms, as in their capacity to “carry a man’s child.” Even late-twentieth-century human sexuality texts often referred only to “reproductive systems,” to genitals as “reproductive” organs, and excluded the “clitoris” and other female organs of sexual pleasure that had no reproductive function. For women, the primary, if not sole, legitimate purpose of sexuality was reproduction.⁴

Nineteenth and mid-twentieth century European and U.S. gender ideologies linked sexuality and gender in other ways.⁵ Sexual preference—the sex to whom one was attracted—was “naturally” heterosexual, at least among “normal” humans, and “normal,” according to mid-twentieth century Freudian-influenced psychology, was defined largely by whether one adhered to conventional gender roles for males and females. So, appropriately, “masculine” men were “naturally” attracted to “feminine” women and vice versa. Homosexuality, too, was depicted not just as a sexual preference but as gender-inappropriate role behavior, down to gestures and color of clothing.⁶ This is apparent in old stereotypes of gay men as “effeminate” (acting like a female, wearing “female” fabrics such as silk or colors such as pink, and participating in “feminine” professions like ballet) and of lesbian women as “butch” (cropped hair, riding motorcycles, wearing leather—prototypical masculinity). Once again, separate phenomena—sexual preference and gender role performance—were conflated because of beliefs that rooted both in biology. “Abnormality” in one sphere (sexual preference) was linked to “abnormality” in the other sphere (gendered capacities and preferences).

In short, the gender and sexual ideologies were based on **biological determinism**. According to this theory, males and females were supposedly born fundamentally different reproductively and in other major capacities and preferences and were “naturally” (biologically) sexually attracted to each other, although women’s sexual “drive” was not very well developed relative to men’s and was reproductively oriented.

Rejecting Biological Determinism

Decades of research on gender and sexuality, including by feminist anthropologists, has challenged these old theories, particularly biological determinism. We now understand that cultures, not nature, create the gender ideologies that go along with being born male or female and the ideologies vary widely, cross-culturally. What is considered “man’s work” in some societies, such as carrying heavy loads, or farming, can be “woman’s work” in others. What is “masculine” and “feminine” varies: pink and blue, for example, are culturally invented gender-color linkages, and skirts and “make-up” can be worn by men, indeed by “warriors.” Hindu deities, male and female, are highly decorated and difficult to distinguish, at least by conventional masculinist U.S. stereotypes (see [examples](#) and Figures 1 and 2).

Women can be thought of as stronger (“tougher,” more “rational”) than men. Phyllis Kaberry, an anthropologist who studied the [Nsaw of Cameroon](#) in the 1940s, said males in that culture argued that land preparation for the rizga crop was “a woman’s job, which is too strenuous for the men” and that “women could carry heavy loads because they had stronger foreheads.”⁷ Among the Aka who live

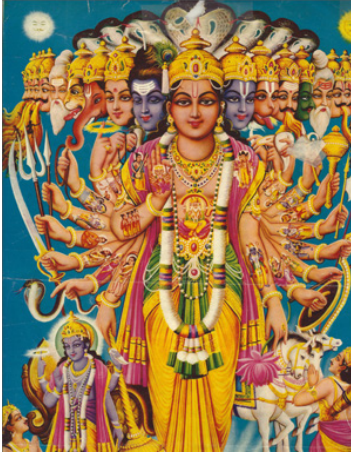


Figure 1: Hindu deities: Vishnu and his many “avatars” or forms (all male).



Figure 2: Hindu Deities: Vishnu and Goddess Shiva plus avatars.

in the present-day Central African Republic, fathers have close, intimate, relationships with infants, play major roles in all aspects of infant-care, and can sometimes produce breast milk.⁸ As for sexual desires, research on the human sexual response by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson established that men and women have equal biological capacities for sexual pleasure and orgasm and that, because males generally ejaculate simultaneously with orgasm, it is easier for women than men to have multiple orgasms.⁹

Gender: A Cultural Invention and a Social Role

One’s **biologic sex** is a different phenomenon than one’s **gender**, which is socially and historically constructed.¹⁰ Gender is a set of culturally invented expectations and therefore constitutes a role one assumes, learns, and performs, more or less consciously. It is an “identity” one can in theory choose, at least in some societies, although there is tremendous pressure, as in the United States, to conform to the gender role and identity linked to your biologic sex.

This is a profound transformation in how we think about both gender and sexuality. The reality of human biology is that males and females are shockingly similar.¹¹ There is arguably more variability **within** than **between** each gender, especially taking into account the enormous variability in human physical traits among human populations globally.¹² Notice, for example, the variability in height in the two photos of U.S. college students shown in Figures 3 and 4. Which gender is “taller”? Much of what has been defined as “biological” is actually cultural, so the possibilities for transformation and change are nearly endless! That can be liberating, especially when we are young and want to create identities that fit our particular configuration of abilities and preferences. It can also be upsetting to people who have deeply internalized and who want to maintain the old gender ideology.

The Gender Binary and Beyond

We anthropologists, as noted earlier, love to shake up notions of what is “natural” and “normal.” One common assumption is that all cultures divide human beings into two and only two genders, a **binary** or dualistic model of gender. However, in some cultures gender is more fluid and flexible,



Figure 3: Gender variability: students in a Human Sexuality Class at San Jose State University with Dr. Carol Mukhopadhyay, 2010.



Figure 4: Gender variability: students in Kalamazoo at Michigan State University, with Dr. Carol Mukhopadhyay, 2010.

allowing individuals born as one biologic sex to assume another gender or creating more than two genders from which individuals can select. Examples of non-binary cultures come from pre-contact Native America. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict long ago identified a fairly widespread phenomenon of so-called “two-spirit” people, individuals who did not comfortably conform to the gender roles and gender ideology normally associated with their biologic sex. Among the pre-contact Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, which was a relatively gender-egalitarian horticultural society, for example, individuals could choose an alternative role of “not-men” or “not-women.” A two-spirited Zuni man would do the work and wear clothing normally associated with females, having shown a preference for female-identified activities and symbols at an early age. In some, but not all cases, he would eventually marry a man. Early European ethnocentric reports often described it as a form of homosexuality. Anthropologists suggested more-complex motivations, including dreams of selection by spirits, individual psychologies, biological characteristics, and negative aspects of male roles (e.g., warfare). Most significantly, these alternative gender roles were acceptable, publicly recognized, and sometimes venerated.¹³

Less is known about additional gender roles available to biological women, although stories of “manly hearted women” suggest a parallel among some Native American groups. For example, a Kutenai woman known to have lived in 1811 was originally married to a French-Canadian man but then returned to the Kutenai and assumed a male gender role, changing her name to Kauxuma nupika (Gone-to-the-Spirits), becoming a spiritual prophet, and eventually marrying a woman.¹⁴

A well-known example of a non-binary gender system is found among the Hijra in India. Often called a **third gender**, these individuals are usually biologically male but adopt female clothing, gestures, and names; eschew sexual desire and sexual activity; and go through religious rituals that give them certain divine powers, including blessing or cursing couples’ fertility and performing at weddings and births. Hijra may undergo voluntary surgical removal of genitals through a *nirvan* or rebirth operation. Some hijra are males born with ambiguous external genitals, such as a particularly small penis or testicles that did not fully descend.¹⁵

Research has shown that individuals with ambiguous genitals, sometimes called “intersex,” are surprisingly common. Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein estimate that such intersex individuals constitute five percent of human births.¹⁶ So what are cultures to do when faced with an infant or child who cannot easily be “sexed?” Some cultures, including the United States, used to force children into one of the two binary categories, even if it required surgery or hormone therapy. But in other places, such as India and among the Isthmus Zapotec in southern Oaxaca, Mexico, they have instead created a third gender category that has an institutional identity and role to perform in society.¹⁷

These cross-cultural examples demonstrate that the traditional rigid binary gender model in the United States is neither universal nor necessary. While all cultures recognize at least two biological sexes, usually based on genitals visible at birth, and have created at least two gender roles, many cultures go beyond the binary model, offering a third or fourth gender category. Other cultures allow individuals to adopt, without sanctions, a gender role that is not congruent with their biological sex. In short, biology need not be destiny when it comes to gender roles, as we are increasingly discovering in the United States.

Variability among Binary Cultures

Even societies with a binary gender system exhibit enormous variability in the meanings and practices associated with being male or female. Sometimes male-female distinctions pervade virtually all aspects of life, structuring space, work, social life, communication, body decoration, and expressive forms such as music. For instance, both genders may farm, but may have separate fields for “male” and “female” crops and gender-specific crop rituals. Or, the village public space may be spatially segregated with a “men’s house” (a special dwelling only for men, like a “men’s club”) and a “women’s house.” In some societies, such as the Sambia of New Guinea, even when married couples occupy the same house, the space within the house is divided into male and female areas.¹⁸

Women and men can also have gender-specific religious rituals and deities and use gender-identified tools. There are cases of “male” and “female” foods, rains, and even “languages” (including words, verb forms, pronouns, inflections, and writing systems; one example is the Nu Shu writing system used by some women in parts of China in the twentieth century).¹⁹ Gender ideologies can emphasize differences in character, capacities, and morality, sometimes portraying males and females as “opposites” on a continuum.

In societies that are highly segregated by gender, gender relationships sometimes are seen as hostile or oppositional with one of the genders (usually female) viewed as potentially threatening. Female bodily fluids, such as menstrual blood and vaginal secretions, can be dangerous, damaging to men, “impure,” and “polluting,” especially in ritual contexts. In other cases, however, menstrual blood is associated with positive power. A girl’s first menstruation may be celebrated publicly with elaborate community rituals, as among the Bemba in southern Africa, and subsequent monthly flows bring special privileges.²⁰ Men in some small-scale societies go through ritualized nose-bleeding, sometimes called “male menstruation,” though the meanings are quite complex.²¹

Gender Relations: Separate and Unequal

Of course, gender-differentiation is not unique to small-scale societies like the Sambia. Virtually all major world religions have traditionally segregated males and females spatially and “marked” them in other ways. Look at eighteenth and nineteenth century churches, which had gender-specific seating; at contemporary Saudi Arabia, Iranian, and conservative Malaysian mosques; and at Orthodox Jewish temples today in Israel and the United States.

Ambivalence and even fear of female sexuality, or negative associations with female bodily fluids, such as menstrual blood, are widespread in the world’s major religions. Orthodox Jewish women are not supposed to sleep in the same bed as their husbands when menstruating. In Kypseli, Greece, people believe that menstruating women can cause wine to go bad.²² In some Catholic Portuguese villages, menstruating women are restricted from preparing fresh pork sausages and from being in

the room where the sausages are made as their presence is believed to cause the pork to spoil. Contact with these women also supposedly wilts plants and causes inexplicable movements of objects.²³ Orthodox forms of Hinduism prohibit menstruating women from activities such as cooking and attending temple.

These traditions are being challenged. A 2016 British Broadcasting Company (BBC) television program, for example, described “Happy to Bleed,” a movement in India to change negative attitudes about menstruation and eliminate the ban on menstruating-age women entering the famous Sabriamala Temple in Kerala.²⁴

Emergence of Public (Male) vs. Domestic (Female) Spheres

In large stratified and centralized societies—that is, the powerful empires (so-called “civilizations”) that have dominated much of the world for the past several thousand years—a “public” vs. “private” or “domestic” distinction appears. The public, extra-family sphere of life is a relatively recent development in human history even though most of us have grown up in or around cities and towns with their obvious public spaces, physical manifestations of the political, economic, and other extra-family institutions that characterize large-scale societies. In such settings, it is easy to identify the domestic or private spaces families occupy, but a similar public-domestic distinction exists in villages. The public sphere is associated with, and often dominated by, males. The domestic sphere, in contrast, is primarily associated with women—though it, too, can be divided into male and female spheres. In India, for example, where households frequently consist of multi-generational groups of male siblings and their families, there often are “lounging” spaces where men congregate, smoke pipes, chat, and meet visitors. Women’s spaces typically focus around the kitchen or cooking hearth (if outside) or at other sites of women’s activities.²⁵ In some cases, an inner court is the women’s area while the outer porch and roads that connect the houses are male spaces. In some Middle Eastern villages, women create over-the-roof paths for visiting each other without going “outside” into male spaces.²⁶

The gender division between public and private/domestic, however, is as symbolic as it is spatial, often emphasizing a gender ideology of social separation between males and females (except young children), social regulation of sexuality and marriage, and male rights and control over females (wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers). It manifests as separate spaces in mosques, sex-segregated schools, and separate “ladies compartments” on trains, as in India (Figure 5).

Of course, it is impossible to separate the genders completely. Rural women pass through the more-public spaces of a village to fetch water and firewood and to work in agricultural fields. Women shop in public markets, though that can be a “man’s job.” As girls more often attend school, as in India, they take public transportation and thus travel through public “male” spaces even if they travel to all-girl schools (Figure 6). At college, they can be immersed in and even live on campuses where men predominate, especially if they are studying engineering, computer science, or other technical subjects



Figure 5: A women only train car in India. Photograph by Ajay Tallam, 2007.



Figure 6: All-girls' school in Bangalore, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1989.



Figure 7: Management studies graduate students at CUSAT-Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kerala, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 1989.

(Figure 7). This can severely limit Indian girls' educational and occupational choices, particularly for girls who come from relatively conservative families or regions.²⁷

One way in which women navigate “male” spaces is by adopting routes, behavior (avoiding eye contact), and/or clothing that create separation.²⁸ The term *pardah*, the separation or segregation of women from men, literally means “veiling,” although other devices can be used. In nineteenth century Jaipur, Rajasthan, royal Rajput women inhabited the inner courtyard spaces of the palace. But an elaborate false building front, the [hawa mahal](#), allowed them to view the comings and goings on the street without being exposed to the public male gaze.

As demand for educating girls has grown in traditionally sexually segregated societies, all-girl schools have been constructed (see Figure 6), paralleling processes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States. At the university level, however, prestigious schools that offer high-demand subjects such as engineering often have historically been all-male, excluding women as Harvard once did.²⁹ In other cases, there are no female faculty members teaching traditionally male subjects like engineering at all-women colleges. In Saudi Arabia, women's universities have taught courses using closed-circuit television to avoid violating norms of sexual segregation, particularly for young, unmarried women.³⁰ In countries such as India, gynecologists and obstetricians have been predominantly female, in part because families object to male doctors examining and treating women. Thus, in places that do not have female physicians, women's health can suffer.

Sanctions, Sexuality, Honor, and Shame

Penalties for deviating from the rules of social separation vary across and within cultures. In small communities, neighbors and extended family kin can simply report inappropriate behavior, especially between unmarried young adults, to other family members. More severe and sometimes violent responses by family members can occur, especially if the family's “honor” is involved—that is, if the young adults, especially girls, engage in activities that would “shame” or dishonor the family. Honor and shame are complex concepts that are often linked to sexuality, especially female sexuality, and to behavior by family members that involves or hints at sexual impropriety. The Turkish film *Mustang*, nominated for the 2016 best foreign film Academy Award, offers a good illustration of how concepts of sexualized honor and shame operate.

We hear in the news of “honor killings” carried out by conservative Muslims in countries such as Pakistan and powerfully portrayed in documentaries such as *A Girl in the River: The Price of For-*

givenness (2015).³¹ But it is not just Islam. Some orthodox sectors of major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, may hold similar views about “honor” and “shame” and impose sometimes violent sanctions against those who violate sexuality-related codes. The brutal 2012 gang rape-murder of a young woman on a bus in Delhi, though perpetrated by strangers, was rationalized by the men who committed the crime (and their defense attorney) as a legitimate response to the woman’s “shameful” behavior—traveling on a bus at night with a male friend, implying sexual impropriety.³²

Social separation, sex-segregated schools, and penalties for inappropriate sexual behavior have also existed in the United States and Europe, especially among upper-strata women for whom female “purity” was traditionally emphasized. Chastity belts in Europe, whether or not actually used, symbolized the idea that a woman’s sexuality belonged solely to her husband, thus precluding her from engaging not only in premarital and extra-marital sex but also in masturbation (Figure 8).³³ In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, set in mid-sixteenth century Massachusetts, Hester was forced to wear a scarlet A on her dress and to stand on a public scaffold for three hours a day, a relatively nonviolent but powerful form of shaming and punishment. Stoning women to death for sexually inappropriate behavior, especially adultery, and other violent sanctions may have occurred in some European Christian and Jewish communities.

Rape, so frequent in warfare past and present, also can bring shame to the victim and her family, particularly in sexually conservative societies. During the 1971 Bangladesh war of independence against Pakistan, East Bengali women who were raped by soldiers were ostracized by their families because of the “shame” their rape had brought. During the partition of India into India and Pakistan in 1947, some Sikh families reportedly forced daughters to jump into wells to drown rather than risk being raped by strangers.³⁴

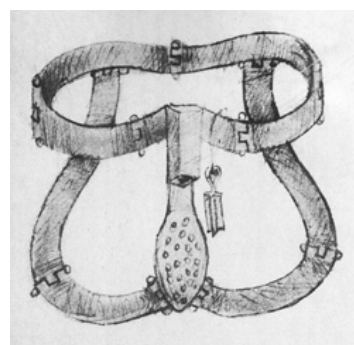


Figure 8: A sketch of a chastity belt, c. 1405.

Alternative Models of Gender: Complementary and Fluid

Not all binary cultures are gender-segregated; nor does gender hostility necessarily accompany gender separation. Nor are all binary cultures deeply concerned with, some might say obsessed with, regulating female sexuality and marriage. Premarital and extra-marital sex can even be common and acceptable, as among the !Kung San and Trobriand Islanders.³⁵ And men are not always clearly ranked over women as they typically are in stratified large-scale centralized societies with “patriarchal” systems. Instead, the two genders can be seen as complementary, equally valued and both recognized as necessary to society. Different need not mean unequal. The Lahu of southwest China and Thailand exemplify a complementary gender system in which men and women have distinct expected roles but a male-female pair is necessary to accomplish most daily tasks (Figure 9). A male-female pair historically took responsibility for local leadership. Male-female **dyads** completed daily household tasks in tandem and worked together in the fields. The title of anthropologist Shanshan Du’s book, *Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs* (1999), encapsulates how complementary gender roles defined Lahu society. A single chopstick is not very useful; neither is a single person, man or woman, in a dual-focused society.³⁶



Figure 9: Lahu farmers in Chiangmai, Thailand.

Like the Lahu, the nearby Na believe men and women both play crucial roles in a family and household. Women are associated with birth and life while men take on tasks such as butchering animals and preparing for funerals (Figures 10 and 11). Every Na house has two large pillars in the central hearth room, one representing male identity and one representing female identity. Both are crucial, and the house might well topple symbolically without both pillars. As sociologist Zhou Huashan explained in

his 2002 book about the Na, this is a society that “values women without diminishing men.”³⁷

Anthropologists have also encountered relatively androgynous gender-binary cultures. In these cultures, some gender differentiation exists but “gender bending” and role-crossing are frequent, accepted, and reflect circumstances and individual capacities and preferences. Examples are the !Kung San mentioned earlier, Native American Washoe in the United States, and some segments of European societies in countries such as Sweden and Finland and, increasingly, in the United States.³⁸ Contemporary twenty-first century gender ideologies tend to emphasize commonality, not difference: shared human traits, flexibility, fluidity, and individual expression.

Even cultures with fairly well-defined gender roles do not necessarily view them as fixed, biologically rooted, permanent, “essentialist,” or “naturalized” as occurred in the traditional gender ideology in the United States.³⁹ Gender may not even be an “identity” in a psychological sense but, rather, a social role one assumes in a particular social context just as one moves between being a student, a daughter, an employee, a wife or husband, president of the bicycle club, and a musician.

Cultures also change over time through internal and external forces such as trade, conquest, colonialism, globalization, immigration, mass media, and, especially, films. Within every culture, there



Figure 10: A Na woman, Sigih Lamu, weeds rice seedlings outside her family's home in southwest China's Yunnan Province. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2002.



Figure 11: Na men carry a wooden structure to be used at a funeral. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2002.

is tremendous diversity in class, ethnicity, religion, region, education level, and generation, as well as diversity related to more-individual family circumstances, predilections, and experiences. Gender expectations also vary with one's age and stage in life as well as one's social role, even within the family (e.g., "wife" vs. "sister" vs. "mother" vs. "mother-in-law" and "father" vs. "son" vs. "brother" vs. "father-in-law"). Finally, people can appear to conform to cultural norms but find ways of working around or ignoring them.

Even in highly male-dominated, sexually segregated societies, women find ways to pursue their own goals, to be actors, and to push the boundaries of the gender system. Among Egyptian Awlad 'Ali Bedouin families, for example, women rarely socialized outside their home compounds or with unrelated men. But within their spheres, they freely interacted with other women, could influence their husbands, and wrote and sang poetic couplets as expressive outlets.⁴⁰ In some of the poorest and least-developed areas of central India, where **patriloc** extended-family male-controlled households reign, activist Sampat Pal has organized local rural women to combat violence based on dishonor and gender.⁴¹ Her so-called "Gulabi Gang," the subject of two films, illustrates both the possibilities of resistance and the difficulties of changing a deeply embedded system based on gender, caste, and class system (Figure 12).⁴² For a related activity, see Activity 2: Understanding Gender from a Martian Perspective.



Figure 12: Gulabi Gang in India.

Unraveling Our Gender Myths: Primate Roots, "Man the Hunter," and Other "Origin Stories" of Gender and Male Dominance

Even unencumbered by pregnancy or infants, a female hunter would be less fleet, generally less strong, possibly more prone to changes in emotional *tonus* as a consequence of the estrus cycle, and less able to adapt to changes in temperature than males.⁴³

—U.S. anthropologist, 1969

Women don't ride motorcycles because they can't; they can't because they are not strong enough to put their legs down to stop it.⁴⁴

—Five-year-old boy, Los Angeles, 1980

Men hunted because women were not allowed to come out of their houses and roam about in forests.⁴⁵

—Pre-college student in India, 1990

All cultures have "creation" stories. Many have elaborate gender-related creation stories that describe the origins of males and females, their gender-specific traits, their relationships and sexual proclivities, and, sometimes, how one gender came to "dominate" the other. Our culture is no different.

The Judeo-Christian Bible, like the Koran and other religious texts, addresses origins and gender (think of Adam and Eve), and traditional folk tales, songs, dances, and epic stories, such as the Ramayana in Hinduism and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, treat similar themes.

Science, too, has sought to understand gender differences. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of scientists, immersed in Darwinian theories, began to explore the evolutionary roots of what they assumed to be universal: male dominance. Of course, scientists, like the rest of us, view the world partially through their own cultural lenses and through a gendered version. Prior to the 1970s, women and gender relations were largely invisible in the research literature and most researchers were male so it is not surprising that 1960s theories reflected prevailing male-oriented folk beliefs about gender.⁴⁶

The Hunting Way of Life “Molds Man” (and Woman)

The most popular and persistent theories argued that male dominance is universal, rooted in species-wide gendered biological traits that we acquired, first as part of our primate heritage, and further developed as we evolved from apes into humans. Emergence of “the hunting way of life” plays a major role in this story. Crucial components include: a diet consisting primarily of meat, obtained through planned, cooperative hunts, by all-male groups, that lasted several days and covered a wide territory. Such hunts would require persistence, skill, and physical stamina; tool kits to kill, butcher, transport, preserve, and share the meat; and a social organization consisting of a stable home base and a monogamous nuclear family. Several biological changes were attributed to adopting this way of life: a larger and more complex brain, human language, an upright posture (and humans' unique foot and stride), loss of body hair, a long period of infant dependency, and the absence of “estrus” (ovulation-related female sexual arousal) (Figure 13), which made females sexually “receptive” throughout the monthly cycle. Other human characteristics purportedly made sex more enjoyable: frontal sex and fleshier breasts, buttocks, and genitals, especially the human penis. Making sex “sexier,” some speculated, cemented the pair-bond, helping to keep the man “around” and the family unit stable.⁴⁷

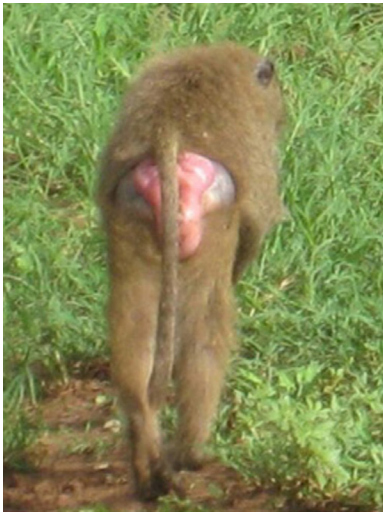


Figure 13: Female baboon in estrus. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, Tanzania, 2010.



Figure 14: Baboon pair in tree: male-female voluntary relations. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, Tanzania, 2010.

Other human characteristics purportedly made sex more enjoyable: frontal sex and fleshier breasts, buttocks, and genitals, especially the human penis. Making sex “sexier,” some speculated, cemented the pair-bond, helping to keep the man “around” and the family unit stable.⁴⁷

Hunting was also linked to a “world view” in which the flight of animals from humans seemed natural and (male) aggression became normal, frequent, easy to learn, rewarded, and enjoyable. War, some have suggested, might psychologically be simply a form of hunting and pleasurable for male participants.⁴⁸ The Hunting Way of Life, in short, “molded man,” giving our species its distinctive characteristics. And as a result, we contemporary humans

cannot erase the effects of our hunting past even though we live in cities, stalk nothing but a parking place, and can omit meat from our diets.

The biology, psychology, and customs that separate us from the apes—all these we owe to the hunters of time past. And, although the record is incomplete and speculation looms larger than fact, for those who would understand the origin and nature of human behavior there is no choice but to try to understand “Man the Hunter.”⁴⁹

—Washburn and Lancaster (1974)

Gender roles and male dominance were supposed to be part of our evolutionary heritage. Males evolved to be food-providers—stronger, more aggressive, more effective leaders with cooperative and bonding capacities, planning skills, and technological inventiveness (tool-making). In this creation story, females never acquired those capacities because they were burdened by their reproductive roles—pregnancy, giving birth, lactation, and child care—and thus became dependent on males for food and protection. The gender gap widened over time. As males initiated, explored, invented, women stayed at home, nurtured, immersed themselves in domestic life. The result: men are active, women are passive; men are leaders, women are followers; men are dominant, women are subordinate.

Many of us have heard pieces of this Hunting Way of Life story. Some of the men Mukhopadhyay interviewed in Los Angeles in the late 1970s invoked “our hunting past” to explain why they—and men generally—operated barbecues rather than their wives. Women’s qualifications to be president were questioned on biological grounds such as “stamina” and “toughness.” Her women informants, all hospital nurses, doubted their navigational abilities, courage, and strength despite working in intensive care and regularly lifting heavy male patients. Mukhopadhyay encountered serious scholars who cited women’s menstrual cycle and “emotional instability” during ovulation to explain why women “can’t” hunt.

Similar stories are invoked today for everything from some men’s love of hunting to why men dominate “technical” fields, accumulate tools, have extra-marital affairs or commit the vast majority of homicides. Strength and toughness remain defining characteristics of masculinity in the United States, and these themes often permeate national political debates.⁵⁰ One element in the complex debate over gun control is the male-masculine strength-through-guns and man-the-hunter association, and it is still difficult for some males in the United States to feel comfortable with their soft, nurturant, emotional, and artistic sides.⁵¹

What is most striking about man-the-hunter scenarios is how closely they resemble 1950s U.S. models of family and gender, which were rooted in the late nineteenth century “cult of domesticity” and “true womanhood.” Father is “head” of the family and the final authority, whether in household decisions or in disciplining children. As “provider,” Father goes “outside” into the cold, cruel world, hunting for work. Mother, as “chief mom,” remains “inside” at the home base, creating a domestic refuge against the “survival of the fittest” “jungle.” American anthropologists seemed to have subconsciously projected their own folk models onto our early human ancestors.

Altering this supposedly “fundamental” gender system, according to widely read authors in the 1970s, would go against our basic “human nature.” This belief was applied to the political arena, then a virtually all-male domain, especially at state and national levels. The following quote from 1971 is particularly relevant and worthy of critical evaluation since, for the first time, a major U.S.

political party selected a woman as its 2016 presidential candidate (See Text Box 3, Gender and the Presidential Election).

To make women equal participants in the political process, we will have to change the very process itself, which means changing a pattern bred into our behavior over the millennia.

—Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox⁵²

Replacing Stories with Reality

Decades of research, much of it by a new generation of women scholars, have altered our view of the hunting way of life in our evolutionary past.⁵³ For example, the old stereotype of primates as living in male-centered, male-dominated groups does not accurately describe our closest primate relatives, gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos. The stereotypes came from 1960s research on savannah, ground-dwelling baboons that suggested they were organized socially by a stable male-dominance hierarchy, the “core” of the group, that was established through force, regulated sexual access to females, and provided internal and external defense of the “troop” in a supposedly hostile savannah environment.⁵⁴ Females lacked hierarchies or coalitions, were passive, and were part of dominant male “harems.”

Critics first argued that baboons, as monkeys rather than apes, were too far removed from humans evolutionarily to tell us much about early human social organization. Then, further research on baboons living in other environments by primatologists such as Thelma Rowell discovered that those baboons were neither male-focused nor male-dominated. Instead, the stable group core was **matrifocal**—a mother and her offspring constituted the central and enduring ties. Nor did males control female sexuality. Quite the contrary in fact. Females mated freely and frequently, choosing males of all ages, sometimes establishing special relationships—“friends with favors.” Dominance, while infrequent, was not based simply on size or strength; it was learned, situational, and often stress-induced. And like other primates, both male and female baboons used sophisticated strategies, dubbed “primate politics,” to predict and manipulate the intricate social networks in which they lived.⁵⁵

Rowell also restudied the savannah baboons. Even they did not fit the baboon “stereotype.” She found that their groups were loosely structured with no specialized stable male-leadership coalitions and were sociable, matrifocal, and infant-centered much like the Rhesus monkeys pictured above (see Figure 15). Females actively initiated sexual encounters with a variety of male partners. When attacked by predators or frightened by some other major threat, males, rather



Figure 15: Rhesus monkeys at the Periyar Reserve in Kerala, India. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, 2008.



Figure 16: Baboon group with infants being carried by female. Photograph by Carol Mukhopadhyay, Tanzania, 2010.

than “defending the troop,” typically would flee, running away first and leaving the females carrying infants to follow behind (Figures 16).⁵⁶

Man the Hunter, the Meat-Eater?

The second, more important challenge was to key assumptions about the hunting way of life. Archaeological and paleontological fossil evidence and ethnographic data from contemporary foragers revealed that hunting and meat it provided were not the primary subsistence mode. Instead, gathered foods such as plants, nuts, fruits, roots and small fish found in rivers and ponds constituted the bulk of such diets and provided the most stable food source in all but a few settings (northerly climates, herd migration routes, and specific geographical and historical settings). When meat was important, it was more often “scavenged” or “caught” than hunted.

A major symposium on human evolution concluded that “opportunistic scavenging” was probably the best description of early human hunting activities. Often, tools found in pre-modern human sites such as caves would have been more appropriate for “smashing” scavenged bones than hunting live animals.⁵⁷ Hunting, when carried out, generally did not involve large-scale, all-male, cooperative expeditions involving extensive planning and lengthy expeditions over a wide territorial range. Instead, as among the Hadza of Tanzania, hunting was likely typically conducted by a single male, or perhaps two males, for a couple of hours, often without success. When hunting collectively, as occurs among the Mbuti in the Central African rainforest, groups of families likely participated with women and men driving animals into nets. Among the Agta of the Philippines, women rather than men hunt collectively using dogs to herd animals to a place where they can be killed.⁵⁸ And !Kung San men, despite what was shown in the 1957 ethnographic film *The Hunters*, do not normally hunt giraffe; they usually pursue small animals such as hares, rats, and gophers.

Discrediting the Hunting Hypothesis

Once the “hunting-meat” hypothesis was discredited, other parts of the theory began to unravel, especially the link between male dominance and female economic dependency. We now know that for most of human history—99 percent of it prior to the invention of agriculture some 10,000 or so years ago—women have “worked,” often providing the stable sources of food for their family. Richard Lee, Marjorie Shostak, and others have detailed, with caloric counts and time-work estimates, the significance of women’s gathering contributions even in societies such as the !Kung San, in which hunting occurs regularly.⁵⁹ In foraging societies that rely primarily on fish, women also play a major role, “collecting” fish from rivers, lakes, and ponds. The exceptions are atypical environments such as the Arctic.

Of course, “meat-getting” is a narrow definition of “food getting” or “subsistence” work. Many food processing activities are time-consuming. Collecting water and firewood is crucial, heavy work and is often done by women (Figure 17). Making and maintaining clothing, housing, and tools also occupy a significant amount of time. Early humans, both male and female, invented an array of items for carrying things (babies, wood, water), dug tubers, processed nuts, and cooked food. The invention of string some 24,000 years ago, a discovery so essential that it produced what some have called the “String Revolution,” is attributed to women.⁶⁰ There is the work of kinship, of healing, of ritual, of teaching the next generation, and emotional work. All are part of the work of living and of the “invisible” work that women do.



Figure 17: Collecting firewood in Bansankusu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

and child-rearing that required cooperative nurturing, and many different kinds of “work” that even the simplest human societies performed.

Refuting Pregnancy and Motherhood as Debilitating

Finally, cross-cultural data refutes another central man-the-hunter stereotype: the “burden” of pregnancy and child care. Women’s reproductive roles do not generally prevent them from food-getting, including hunting; among the Agta, women hunt when pregnant. Foraging societies accommodate the work-reproduction “conflict” by spacing out their pregnancies using indigenous methods of “family planning” such as prolonged breast feeding, long post-pregnancy periods of sexual inactivity, and native herbs and medicinal plants. Child care, even for infants, is rarely solely the responsibility of the birth mother. Instead, multiple caretakers are the norm: spouses, children, other relatives, and neighbors.⁶¹ Reciprocity is the key to human social life and to survival in small-scale societies, and reciprocal child care is but one example of such reciprocity. Children and infants accompany their mothers (or fathers) on gathering trips, as among the !Kung San, and on Aka collective net-hunting expeditions. Agta women carry nursing infants with them when gathering-hunting, leaving older children at home in the care of spouses or other relatives.⁶²

In pre-industrial horticultural and agricultural societies, having children and “working” are not incompatible—quite the opposite! Anthropologists long ago identified “female farming systems,” especially in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, in which farming is predominantly a woman’s job and men “help out” as needed.⁶³

In most agricultural societies, women who do not come from high-status or wealthy families perform a significant amount of agricultural labor, though it often goes unrecognized in the dominant gender ideology. Wet-rice agriculture, common in south and southeast Asia, is labor-intensive, particularly weeding and transplanting rice seedlings, which are often done by women (Figure 10). Harvesting rice, wheat, and other grains also entails essential input by women. Yet the Indian Census traditionally records only male family members as “farmers.” In the United States, women’s work on family-owned farms is often invisible.⁶⁴

Women may accommodate their reproductive and child-rearing roles by engaging in work that is more compatible with child care, such as cooking, and in activities that occur closer to home and

Nor is it just hunting that requires intelligence, planning, cooperation, and detailed knowledge. Foragers have lived in a wide variety of environments across the globe, some more challenging than others (such as Alaska). In all of these groups, both males and females have needed and have developed intensive detailed knowledge of local flora and fauna and strategies for using those resources. Human social interactions also require sophisticated mental and communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal. In short, humans’ complex brains and other modern traits developed as an adaptation to complex social life, a lengthy period of child-dependency

are interruptible and perhaps less dangerous, though cooking fires, stoves, and implements such as knives certainly can cause harm!⁶⁵ More often, women adjust their food-getting “work” in response to the demands of pregnancy, breast-feeding, and other child care activities. They gather or process nuts while their children are napping; they take their children with them to the fields to weed or harvest and, in more recent times, to urban construction sites in places such as India, where women often do the heaviest (and lowest-paid) work.

In the United States, despite a long-standing cultural model of the stay-at-home mom, some mothers have always worked outside the home, mainly out of economic necessity. This shifting group includes single-divorced-widowed mothers and married African-Americans (pre- and post-slavery), immigrants, and Euro-American women with limited financial resources. But workplace policies (except during World War II) have historically made it harder rather than easier for women (and men) to carry out family responsibilities, including requiring married women and pregnant women to quit their jobs.⁶⁶ Circumstances have not improved much. While pregnant women in the United States are no longer automatically dismissed from their jobs—at least not legally—the United States lags far behind most European countries in providing affordable [child care](#) and [paid parental leave](#).

Family and Marriage: A Cultural Construct and a Social Invention

Unraveling the theory of the hunting-way-of-life scenario, especially female dependence on males, undermines the “naturalness” of the nuclear family with its male-provider-protector and female-domestic-child-care division of labor. More than one hundred years of cross-cultural research has revealed the varied forms humans have invented for “partnering”—living in households, raising children, establishing long-term relationships, transmitting valuables to offspring, and other social behaviors associated with “family.” Once again, the universality and evolutionary origins of the U.S. form of the human family is more fiction than fact, a projection of our cultural model of family and gender roles onto the past and onto the entire human species.

Family: Biology and Culture

What **is** natural about the family? Like gender and sexuality, there is a biological component. There is a biological mother and a biological father, although the mother plays a significantly larger and longer role from the time of conception through the end of infant’s dependence. In the past, conception usually required sexual intercourse, but that is no longer the case thanks to sperm banks, which have made the embodied male potentially obsolete, biologically speaking. There is also a biological relationship between parents and offspring—again, more obvious in the case of the mother since the baby develops in and emerges from her body. Nevertheless, DNA and genes are real and influence the traits and potentialities of the next generation.

Beyond those biological “realities,” culture and society seem to take over, building on—or ignoring—biology. We all know there are biological fathers who may be unaware of or not concerned about their biological offspring and not involved in their care and biological mothers who, after giving birth, give up their children through adoption or to other family members. In recent decades, technology has allowed women to act as “surrogate mothers,” using their bodies as carriers for implanted fertilized eggs of couples who wish to have a child. On the other hand, we all probably know of excellent parents who are not the children’s biological mothers and fathers, and “legal” parenthood

through adoption can have more-profound parenting consequences for children than biological parenthood.

When we think of good (or bad) parents, or of someone as a really “good mother,” as an “excellent father,” as two “wonderful mothers,” we are not talking biology. We usually are thinking of a set of cultural and behavioral expectations, and being an adoptive rather than a biological parent isn’t really the issue. Clearly, then, parenthood, mother-father relationships, and other kinship relationships (with siblings, grandparents, and uncles-aunts) are not simply rooted in biology but are also social roles, legal relationships, meanings and expectations constructed by human cultures in specific social and historical contexts. This is not to deny the importance of kinship; it is fundamental, especially in small-scale pre-industrial societies. But kinship is as much about culture as it is about biology. Biology, in a sense, is only the beginning—and may not be necessary.

Marriage also is not “natural.” It is a cultural invention that involves various meanings and functions in different cultural contexts. We all know that it is not necessary to be married to have sex or to have children. Indeed, in the United States, a growing number of women who give birth are not married, and the percent of unmarried women giving birth is higher in many northwestern European countries such as Sweden.⁶⁷ Cross-culturally, marriage seems to be primarily about **societal regulation of relationships**—a social contract between two individuals and, often, their families, that specifies rights and obligations of married individuals and of the offspring that married women produce. Some anthropologists have argued that marriage IS primarily about children and “descent”—who will “own” children.⁶⁸ To whom will they belong? With what rights, obligations, social statuses, access to resources, group identities, and all the other assets—and liabilities—that exist within a society? Children have historically been essential for family survival—for literal reproduction and for social reproduction.

Think, for a moment, about our taken-for-granted assumptions about to whom children belong.⁶⁹ Clearly, children emerge from a woman’s body and, indeed, after approximately nine months, it is her body that has nurtured and “grown” this child. But who “owns” that child legally—to whom it “belongs” and the beliefs associated with how it was conceived and about who played a role in its conception—is not a biological given. Not in human societies. One fascinating puzzle in human evolution is how females lost control over their sexuality and their offspring! Why do so many, though not all, cultural theories of procreation consider women’s role as minor, if not irrelevant—not as the “seed,” for example, but merely as a “carrier” of the male seed she will eventually “deliver” to its “owner”? Thus, having a child biologically is not equivalent to social “ownership.” Marriage, cross-culturally, deals with social ownership of offspring. What conditions must be met? What exchanges must occur, particularly between families or kinship groups, for that offspring to be theirs, his, hers—for it to be a legitimate “heir”?

Marriage is, then, a “contract,” usually between families, even if unwritten. Throughout most of human history, kinship groups and, later, religious institutions have regulated marriage. Most major religions today have formal laws and marriage “contracts,” even in societies with “civil” marriage codes. In some countries, like India, there is a separate marriage code for each major religion in addition to a secular, civil marriage code. Who children “belong to” is rarely solely about biology, and when biology is involved, it is biology shaped by society and culture. The notion of an “illegitimate” child in the United States has not been about biology but about “legitimacy,” that is, whether the child was the result of a legally recognized relationship that entitled offspring to certain rights, including inheritance.

From this perspective, what we think of as a “normal” or “natural” family in the United States is actually a culturally and historically specific, legally codified set of relationships between two individuals and, to some extent, their families. Cross-culturally, the U.S. (and “traditional” British-Euro-American) nuclear family is quite unusual and atypical. Married couples in the United States “ideally” establish a separate household, a nuclear-family-based household, rather than living with one spouse’s parents and forming a larger multi-generational household, often referred to as an “extended” family, which is the most common form of family structure. In addition, U.S. marriages are monogamous—legally, one may have only one husband or wife at a time. But a majority of societies that have been studied by anthropologists have allowed polygamy (multiple spouses). Polygyny (one husband, multiple wives) is most common but polyandry (one wife, multiple husbands) also occurs; occasionally marriages involve multiple husbands and multiple wives. Separate spouses, particularly wives, often have their own dwelling space, commonly shared with their children, but usually live in one compound, with their husbands’ parents and his relatives. Across cultures, then, most households tend to be versions of extended-family-based groups.

These two contrasts alone lead to families in the United States that are smaller and focused more on the husband-wife (or spousal) and parent-child relationships; other relatives are more distant, literally and often conceptually. They are also more “independent”—or, some would say, more dependent on a smaller set of relationships to fulfill family responsibilities for work, child care, finances, emotional companionship, and even sexual obligations. Other things being equal, the death or loss of a spouse in a “traditional” U.S. family has a bigger impact than such a loss in an extended family household (see Text Box 1). On the other hand, nuclear families own and control their incomes and other assets, unlike many extended families in which those are jointly held. This ownership and control of resources can give couples and wives in nuclear families greater freedom.

There are other cross-cultural variations in family, marriage and kinship: in expectations for spouses and children, exchanges between families, inheritance rules, marriage rituals, ideal ages and characteristics of spouses, conditions for dissolving a marriage and remarriage after a spouse’s death, attitudes about premarital, extra-marital, and marital sexuality, and so forth. How “descent” is calculated is a social-cultural process that carves out a smaller “group” of “kin” from all of the potential relatives in which individuals have rights (e.g., to property, assistance, political representation) and obligations (economic, social). Often there are explicit norms about who one should and should not marry, including which relatives. Marriage between people we call “cousins” is common cross-culturally. These variations in the definition of marriage and family reflect what human cultures do with the biological “facts of life,” creating many different kinds of marriage, family, and kinship systems.

Another major contrast between the U.S. and many other cultures is that our husband-wife relationship is based on free choice and “romantic love.” Marriages are arranged by the couple and reflect their desires rather than the desires of larger societal groups. Of course, even in the United States, that has never been entirely the case. Informal prohibitions, often imposed by families, have shaped (and continue to shape) individual choices, such as marrying outside one’s religion, racial/ethnic group, and socio-economic class or within one’s gender. Some religions explicitly forbid marrying someone from another religion. But U.S. formal government prohibitions have also existed, such as laws against inter-racial marriage, which were only declared unconstitutional in 1967 (*Loving v. Virginia*).

These so-called anti-miscegenation laws, directed mainly at European-American and African-Americans, were designed to preserve the race-based system of social stratification in the United States.⁷⁰ They did not affect both genders equally but reflected the intersection of gender with class and racial inequality. During slavery, most inter-racial sexual activity was initiated by Euro-American

males. It was not uncommon for male slave owners to have illicit, often forced sexual relations with female slaves. The laws were created so that children of slave women inherited their mother's racial and slave status, thereby also adding to the slave property of the "father."

Euro-American women's relationships with African-American men, though far less frequent and usually voluntary, posed special problems. Offspring would inherit the mother's "free" status and increase the free African-American population or possibly end up "passing" as "White." Social and legal weapons were used to prevent such relationships. Euro-American women, especially poorer women, who were involved sexually with African-American men were stereotyped as prostitutes, sexually depraved, and outcasts. Laws were passed that fined them for such behavior or required them to work as indentured servants for the child's father's slave owner; other laws prohibited cohabitation between a "White" and someone of African descent.

Post-slavery anti-miscegenation laws tried to preserve the "color line" biologically by outlawing inter-racial mating and maintaining the legal "purity" and status of Euro-American lineages by outlawing inter-racial marriage. In reality, of course, inter-racial mating continued, but inter-racial offspring did not have the rights of "legitimate" children. By the 1920s, some states, like Virginia, had outlawed "Whites" from marrying anyone who had a "single drop" of African blood. By 1924, 38 states had outlawed Black-White marriages, and as late as the 1950s, inter-racial marriage bans existed in almost half of the states and had been extended to Native Americans, Mexicans, "East Indians," Malays, and other groups designated "not White."⁷¹

Overall, stratified inegalitarian societies tend to have the strictest controls over marriage. Such control is especially common when some groups are considered inherently superior to others, be it racially, castes, or "royal" blood. Patriarchal societies closely regulate and restrict premarital sexual contacts of women, especially higher-status women. One function of marriage in these societies is to reproduce the existing social structure, partially by insuring that marriages and any offspring resulting from them will maintain and potentially increase the social standing of the families involved. Elite, dominant groups have the most to lose in terms of status and wealth, including inheritances. "Royalty" in Britain, for example, traditionally are not supposed to marry "commoners" so as to ensure that the royal "blood," titles, and other privileges remain in the "royal" family.

Cross-culturally, even in small-scale societies that are relatively egalitarian such as the San and the Trobriand Islanders studied by Annette Weiner, marriage is rarely a purely individual choice left to the wishes—and whims of, or "electricity" between—the two spouses.⁷² This is not to say that spouses never have input or prior contact; they may know each other and even have grown up together. In most societies, however, a marriage usually has profound social consequences and is far too important to be "simply" an individual choice. Since marriages affect families and kin economically, socially, and politically, family members (especially elders) play a major role in arranging marriages along lines consistent with their own goals and using their own criteria. Families sometimes arrange their children's marriages when the children are quite young. In Nuosu communities of southwest China, some families held formal engagement ceremonies for babies to, ideally, cement a good cross-cousin partnership, though no marital relationship would occur until much later.⁷³ There also can be conventional categories of relatives who are supposed to marry each other so young girls might know that their future husbands will be particular cousins, and the girls might play or interact with them at family functions as children.⁷⁴

This does not mean that romantic love is purely a recent or U.S. and European phenomenon. Romantic love is widespread even in cultures that have strong views on arranging marriages. Traditional cultures in India, both Hindu and Muslim, are filled with "love stories" expressed in songs, paintings,

and famous temple sculptures. One of the most beautiful buildings in the world, the Taj Mahal, is a monument to Shah Jahan's love for his wife. Where young girls' marriages are arranged, often to older men (as among the Maasai), we know that those girls, once married, sometimes take "lovers" about whom they sing "love songs" and with whom they engage in sexual relations.⁷⁵ Truly, romantic love, sex, and marriage can exist independently.

Nevertheless, cross-culturally and historically, marriages based on free choice and romantic love are relatively unusual and recent. Clearly, young people all over the world are attracted to the idea, which is "romanticized" in Bollywood films, popular music, poetry, and other forms of contemporary popular culture. No wonder so many families—and conservative social and religious groups—are concerned, if not terrified, of losing control over young people's mating and marriage behavior (see, for example, the excellent PBS documentary *The World before Her*).⁷⁶ A social revolution is truly underway and we haven't even gotten to same-sex sex and same-sex marriage.

Text Box 1: What Can We Learn from the Na? Shattering Ideas about Family and Relationships

By Tami Blumenfield

We have certain expectations about the trajectories of relationships and family life in the United States—young people meet, fall in love, purchase a diamond, and then marry. To some extent, this specific view of family is changing as same-sex relationships and no-longer-new reproductive technologies expand our views of what family can and cannot be. Still, quite often, we think about family in a rigid, heteronormative context, assuming that everyone wants the same thing.

What if we think about family in an entirely different way? In fact, many people already do. In 2014, 10 percent of American adults lived in cohabitating relationships. Meanwhile, 51 percent were married in state-endorsed relationships, and that percentage has been dropping fast.⁷⁷ Those numbers may sound familiar as part of politicians' "focus on the family," decrying the number of children born to unmarried parents and bemoaning the weakening of an institution they hold dear (even though their colleagues are frequently exposed in the news for sexual indiscretions).

It is true that adults with limited resources face challenges raising children when they have limited access to affordable, high-quality child care. They struggle when living wage jobs migrate to other countries or other states where workers earn less. In an economic system that encourages concentration of resources in a tiny fraction of the population, it is no wonder that they struggle. But is the institution of marriage really to blame? The number of cohabitating unmarried individuals is high in many parts of Europe as well, but with better support structures in place, parents fare much better. They enjoy parental leave policies that mandate their jobs be held for them upon return from leave. They also benefit from strong educational systems and state-subsidized child care, and their children enjoy better outcomes than ours.

Critics see the "focus on the family" by U.S. politicians as a convenient political trick that turns attention away from crucial policy issues and refocuses it on the plight of the institution of marriage and the fate of the nation's children. Few people can easily dismiss these concerns, even if they do not reflect their own lived realities. And besides, the family model trumpeted by politicians as lost is but one form of family that is not universal even in the United States, much less among all human groups, as sociologist Stephanie Coontz convincingly argued in books including *The Way We Never Were* (1992) and *The Way We Really Are* (1997). In fact, the "focus on family" ignores the diverse ways peoples on this

continent have organized their relationships. For Hopi, a Native American group living in what is today the southwestern United States, for example, it is their mother's kin rather than their husbands' from whom they draw support. The Navajo, Kiowa, and Iroquois Native American cultures all organize their family units and arrange their relationships differently.

Na people living in the foothills of the Himalayas have many ways to structure family relationships. One relationship structure looks like what we might expect in a place where people make their living from the land and raise livestock to sustain themselves. Young adults marry, and brides sometimes move into the husband's childhood home and live with his parents. They have children, who live with them, and they work together. A second Na family structure looks much less familiar: young adults live in large, extended family households with several generations and form romantic relationships with someone from another household. When they are ready, the young man seeks permission to spend the night in the young woman's room. If both parties desire, their relationship can evolve into a long-term one, but they do not marry and do not live together in the same household. When a child is conceived, or before if the couple chooses, their relationship moves from a secretive one to one about which others know. Even so, the young man rarely spends daylight hours with his partner. Instead, he returns to his own family's home to help with farming and other work there. The state is not involved in their relationship, and their money is not pooled either, though presents change hands. If either partner becomes disenchanted with the other, the relationship need not persist. Their children remain in the mother's home, nurtured by adults who love them deeply—not just by their mothers but also by their grandmothers, maternal aunts, maternal uncles, and often older cousins as well. They enjoy everyday life with an extended family (Figure 18). The third Na family structure mixes



Figure 18: Na grandmother with her maternal grandchildren. They live in the same household, along with the grandmother's adult sons and her daughter, the children's mother. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2002.

the preceding two systems. Someone joins a larger household as a spouse. Perhaps the family lacked enough women or men to manage the household and farming tasks adequately or the couple faced pressure from the government to marry.

As an anthropologist who has done fieldwork in Na communities since 2001, I can attest to the loving and nurturing families their system encourages. It protects adults as well as children. Women who are suffering in a relationship can end it with limited consequences for their children, who do not need to relocate to a new house and adjust to a new lifestyle. Lawyers need not get involved, as they often must in divorce cases elsewhere in the world. A man who cannot afford to build a new house for

his family—a significant pressure for people in many areas of China that prevents young men from marrying or delays their marriages—can still enjoy a relationship or can choose, instead, to devote himself to his role as an uncle. Women and men who do not feel the

urge to pursue romantic lives are protected in this system as well; they can contribute to their natal families without having to worry that no one will look out for them as they age.

Like any system composed of real people, Na systems are not perfect, and neither are the people who represent them. In the last few decades, people have flocked to Lugu Lake hoping to catch a glimpse of this unusual society, and many tourists and tour guides have mistakenly taken Na flexibility in relationships as signifying a land of casual sex with no recognition of paternity. These are highly problematic assumptions that offend my Na acquaintances deeply. Na people have fathers and know who they are, and they often enjoy close relationships despite living apart. In fact, fathers are deeply involved in children's lives and often participate in everyday child-rearing activities. Of course, as in other parts of the world, some fathers participate more than others. Fathers and their birth families also take responsibility for contributing to school expenses and make other financial contributions as circumstances permit. Clearly, this is not a community in which men do not fulfill responsibilities as fathers. It is one in which the responsibilities and how they are fulfilled varies markedly from those of fathers living in other places and cultures.

Though problems exist in Na communities and their relationship patterns are already changing and transforming them, it is encouraging that so many people can live satisfied lives in this flexible system. The Na shatter our expectations about how families and relationships should be organized. They also inspire us to ask whether we can, and should, adapt part of their ethos into our own society.⁷⁸

For more information, see the [TEDx FurmanU presentation](#) by Tami Blumenfield.

Male Dominance: Universal and Biologically Rooted?

Unraveling the myth of the hunting way of life and women's dependence on male hunting undermined the logic behind the argument for biologically rooted male dominance. Still, for feminist scholars, the question of male dominance remained important. Was it universal, "natural," inevitable, and unalterable? Were some societies gender-egalitarian? Was gender inequality a cultural phenomenon, a product of culturally and historically specific conditions?

Research in the 1970s and 1980s addressed these questions.⁷⁹ Some argued that "sexual asymmetry" was universal and resulted from complex cultural processes related to women's reproductive roles.⁸⁰ Others presented evidence of gender equality in small-scale societies (such as the !Kung San and Native American Iroquois) but argued that it had disappeared with the rise of private property and "the state."⁸¹ Still others focused on evaluating the "status of women" using multiple "variables" or identifying "key determinants" (e.g., economic, political, ecological, social, and cultural) of women's status.⁸² By the late 1980s, scholars realized how difficult it was to define, much less measure, male dominance across cultures and even the "status of women" in one culture.

Think of our own society or the area in which you live. How would you go about assessing the "status of women" to determine whether it is male-dominated? What would you examine? What information would you gather and from whom? What difficulties might you encounter when making a judgment? Might men and women have different views? Then imagine trying to compare the status of women in your region to the status of women in, let's say, the Philippines, Japan, or China or in a kin-based, small society like that of the Minangkabau living in Indonesia and the !Kung San in Botswana. Next, how might Martians, upon arriving in your city, decide whether you live in a "male dominated" culture? What would they notice? What would they have difficulty deciphering? This

experiment gives you an idea of what anthropologists confronted—except they were trying to include all societies that ever existed. Many were accessible only through archaeological and paleontological evidence or through historical records, often made by travelers, sailors, or missionaries. Surviving small-scale cultures were surrounded by more-powerful societies that often imposed their cultures and gender ideologies on those under their control.

For example, the !Kung San of Southern Africa when studied by anthropologists, had already been pushed by European colonial rulers into marginal areas. Most were living on “reserves” similar to Indian reservations in the United States. Others lived in market towns and were sometimes involved in the tourist industry and in films such as the ethnographically flawed and ethnocentric film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980). !Kung San women at the time were learning European Christian ideas about sexuality, clothing, and covering their breasts, and children were attending missionary-established schools, which taught the church’s and European views of gender and spousal roles along with the Bible, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. During the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the South African military tried to recruit San to fight against the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO), taunting reluctant !Kung San men by calling them “chicken” and assuming, erroneously, that the !Kung San shared their “tough guys / tough guise” version of masculinity.⁸³

Given the complexity of evaluating “universal male dominance,” scholars abandoned the search for simple “global” answers, for key “determinants” of women’s status that would apply to all societies. A 1988 *Annual Review of Anthropology* article by Mukhopadhyay and Higgins concluded that “one of the profound realizations of the past ten years is that the original questions, still unanswerable, may be both naive and inappropriate.”⁸⁴ Among other things, the concept of “status” contains at least five separate, potentially independent components: economics, power/authority, prestige, autonomy, and gender ideologies/beliefs. One’s life-cycle stage, kinship role, class, and other socio-economic and social-identity variables affect one’s gender status. Thus, even within a single culture, women’s lives are not uniform.⁸⁵

New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender

More-recent research has been focused on improving the ethnographic and archaeological record and re-examining old material. Some have turned from cause-effect relations to better understanding how gender systems work and focusing on a single culture or cultural region. Others have explored a single topic, such as menstrual blood and cultural concepts of masculinity and infertility across cultures.⁸⁶

Many American anthropologists “returned home,” looking with fresh eyes at the diversity of women’s lives in their own society: working-class women, immigrant women, women of various ethnic and racial groups, and women in different geographic regions and occupations.⁸⁷ Some ethnographers, for example, immersed themselves in the abortion debates, conducting fieldwork to understand the perspective and logic behind pro-choice and anti-choice activists in North Dakota. Others headed to college campuses, studying the “culture of romance” or fraternity gang rape.⁸⁸ Peggy Sanday’s work on sexual coercion, including her cross-cultural study of rape-prone societies, was followed by other studies of power-coercion-gender relationships, such as using new reproductive technologies for selecting the sex of children.⁸⁹

Many previously unexplored areas such as the discourse around reproduction, representations of women in medical professions, images in popular culture, and international development policies (which had virtually ignored gender) came under critical scrutiny.⁹⁰ Others worked on identifying

complex local factors and processes that produce particular configurations of gender and gender relations, such as the **patrifocal** (male-focused) cultural model of family in many parts of India.⁹¹ Sexuality studies expanded, challenging existing binary paradigms, making visible the lives of lesbian mothers and other traditionally marginalized sexualities and identities.⁹²

The past virtual invisibility of women in archaeology disappeared as a host of new studies was published, often by feminist anthropologists, including a pioneering volume by Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. That book gave rise to a multi-volume series specifically on gender and archaeology edited by Sarah Nelson. Everything from divisions of labor to power relations to sexuality could be scrutinized in the archaeological record.⁹³

Some anthropologists argued that there are recurring patterns despite the complexity and variability of human gender systems. One is the impact of women's economic contributions on their power, prestige, and autonomy.⁹⁴ Women's work, alone, does not necessarily give them control or ownership of what they produce. It is not always valued and does not necessarily lead to political power. Women in many cultures engage in agricultural labor, but the fields are often owned and controlled by their husbands' families or by a landlord, as in many parts of India and Iran.⁹⁵ The women have little authority, prestige, or autonomy.⁹⁶ Many foraging and some horticultural societies, on the other hand, recognize women's economic and reproductive contributions, and that recognition may reflect relative equality in other spheres as well, including sexuality. Gender relations seem more egalitarian, overall, in small-scale societies such as the San, Trobrianders, and Na, in part because they are kinship-based, often with relatively few valuable resources that can be accumulated; those that exist are communally owned, usually by kinship groups in which both women and men have rights.

Another factor in gender equality is the social environment. Positive social relations—an absence of constant hostility or warfare with neighbors—seems to be correlated with relatively egalitarian gender relations. In contrast, militarized societies—whether small-scale horticultural groups like the Sambia who perceive their neighbors as potential enemies or large-scale stratified societies with formal military organizations and vast empires—seem to benefit men more than women overall.⁹⁷ Warrior societies culturally value men's roles, and warfare gives men access to economic and political resources.

As to old stereotypes about why men are warriors, there may be another explanation. From a reproductive standpoint, men are far more expendable than women, especially women of reproductive age.⁹⁸ While this theme has not yet been taken up by many anthropologists, male roles in warfare could be more about expendability than supposed greater male strength, aggressiveness, or courage. One can ask why it has taken so long for women in the United States to be allowed to fly combat missions? Certainly it is not about women not being strong enough to carry the plane.⁹⁹

Patriarchy . . . But What about Matriarchy?

The rise of stratified agriculture-intensive centralized "states" has tended to produce transformations in gender relations and gender ideologies that some have called **patriarchy**, a male-dominated political and authority structure and an ideology that privileges males over females overall and in every strata of society. Gender intersects with class and, often, with religion, caste, and ethnicity. So, while there could be powerful queens, males took precedence over females within royal families, and while upper-class Brahmin women in India could have male servants, they had far fewer formal assets, power, and rights than their brothers and husbands. Also, as noted earlier, families strictly controlled their movements, interactions with males, "social reputations," and marriages. Similarly,

while twentieth-century British colonial women in British-controlled India had power over some Indian men, they still could not vote, hold high political office, control their own fertility or sexuality, or exercise other rights available to their male counterparts.¹⁰⁰ Of course, poor lower-class lower-caste Indian women were (and still are) the most vulnerable and mistreated in India, more so overall than their brothers, husbands, fathers, or sons.

On the other hand, we have yet to find any “matriarchies,” that is, female-dominated societies in which the extent and range of women’s power, authority, status, and privilege parallels men’s in patriarchal societies. In the twentieth century, some anthropologists at first confused “matriarchy” with **matrilineal**. In matrilineal societies, descent or membership in a kinship group is transmitted from mothers to their children (male and female) and then, through daughters, to their children, and so forth (as in many Na families). Matrilineal societies create woman-centered kinship groups in which having daughters is often more important to “continuing the line” than having sons, and living arrangements after marriage often center around related women in a **matrilocal** extended family household (See Text Box 1, What Can We Learn from the Na?). Female sexuality may become less regulated since it is the mother who carries the “seed” of the lineage. In this sense, it is the reverse of the kinds of patrilineal, patrilocal, patrifocal male-oriented kinship groups and households one finds in many patriarchal societies. Peggy Sanday suggested, on these and other grounds, that the Minangkabau, a major ethnic group in Indonesia, is a matriarchy.¹⁰¹

Ethnographic data have shown that males, especially as members of matrilineages, can be powerful in matrilineal societies. Warfare, as previously mentioned, along with political and social stratification can alter gender dynamics. The Nayar (in Kerala, India), the Minangkabau, and the Na are matrilineal societies embedded in, or influenced by, dominant cultures and patriarchal religions such as Islam and Hinduism. The society of the Na in China is also **matrifocal** in some ways. Thus, the larger context, including contemporary global processes, can undermine women’s power and status.¹⁰² At the same time, though, many societies are clearly matrifocal, are relatively female-centered, and do not have the kinds of gender ideologies and systems found in most patriarchal societies.¹⁰³ Text Boxes 1 and 2 provide examples of such systems.

Text Box 2: Does Black Matriarchy Exist in Brazil? Histories of Slavery and African Cultural Survivals in Afro-Brazilian Religion

By Abby Gondek

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian spirit possession religion in which Yoruba (West African) deities called *orixás* are honored at religious sites called *terreiros* where the Candomblé priestesses (*mães do santo*) and their “daughters” (*filhas do santo*) live. One of the central “hubs” of Candomblé worship in Brazil is the northeastern state of Bahia, where Afro-Brazilians make up more than 80 percent of the population in the capital city, Salvador. Brazil’s geography is perceived through the lenses of race and class since Bahia, a majority Afro-Brazilian state, is viewed as underdeveloped, backward, and poor relative to the whiter and wealthier Southern region.¹⁰⁴

In the 1930s, a Jewish female anthropologist Ruth Landes provided a different perspective about Bahia, one that emphasized black women’s communal power. During the time in which Landes conducted her research, the Brazilian police persecuted Candomblé communities for “harboring communists.” The Brazilian government was linked with Nazism, torture, rape, and racism, and Afro-Brazilians resisted this oppression.¹⁰⁵ Also during this period, debate began among social scientists about whether Candomblé was a matriarchal

religion in which women were the primary spiritual leaders. The debate was rooted in the question of where “black matriarchy” came from. Was it a result of the history of slavery or was it an African “cultural survival”? The debate was simultaneously about the power and importance of Afro-Brazilian women in spiritual and cultural life.

On one side of the debate was E. Franklin Frazier, an African-American sociologist trained at University of Chicago, who maintained that Candomblé and the lack of legal marriage gave women their important position in Bahia. He believed that black women had been matriarchal authorities since the slavery period and described them as defiant and self-reliant. On the other side of the debate was anthropologist Melville Herskovits, who was trained by German immigrant Franz Boas at Columbia University. Herskovits believed that black women’s economic roles demonstrated African cultural survivals, but downplayed the priestesses’ importance in Candomblé.¹⁰⁶ Herskovits portrayed patriarchy rather than matriarchy as the central organizing principle in Bahia. He argued that African cultural survivals in Brazil came from the patrilineal practices of Dahomey and Yoruba in West Africa and portrayed Bahian communities as male-centered with wives and “concubines” catering to men and battling each other for male attention.

Ruth Landes and her work triggered the debate about “black matriarchy” in Bahia. Landes had studied with anthropologists Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia University. She began her studies of Candomblé in 1938 in Salvador, Bahia, working with her research partner, guide, and significant other, Edison Carneiro, a scholar of Afro-Brazilian studies and journalist, resulting in publication in 1947 of *The City of Women*.¹⁰⁷ Landes contended that Afro-Brazilian women were the powerful matriarchal leaders of *terreiros* de Candomblé. She called them matriarchal because she argued that their leadership was “made up almost exclusively of women and, in any case controlled by women.”¹⁰⁸ Landes claimed that the women provided spiritual advice and sexual relationships in exchange for financial support from male patrons of the *terreiros*. She also explained that newer *caboclo* houses (in which indigenous spirits were worshipped in addition to Yoruba spirits) had less-stringent guidelines and allowed men to become priests and dance for the gods, actions considered taboo in the Yoruba tradition. Landes elaborated that these men were primarily “passive” homosexuals. She looked down on this “modern” development, which she viewed as detracting from the supposedly “pure” woman-centered Yoruba (West African) practices.¹⁰⁹

Even Landes’ (controversial) argument about homosexuality was part of her claim about matriarchy; she contended that the homosexual men who became *pais do santo* (“fathers of the saint,” or Candomblé priests) had previously been “outcasts”—prostitutes and vagrants who were hounded by the police. By becoming like the “mothers” and acting as women, they could gain status and respect. Landes was strongly influenced by both Edison Carneiro’s opinion and the convictions of Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim (a revered *babalaô* or “father of the secrets”) and the women priestesses of the traditional houses (*Gantois*, *Casa Branca*, and *Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá*) with whom she spent the majority of her time. Thus, her writings likely represent the views of her primary informants, making her work unique; at that time, anthropologists (ethnocentrically) considered themselves more knowledgeable about the cultures they studied than the people in those cultures.

Landes incorporated ideas from the research of E. Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits to contend that the existence of the matriarchy in Bahia rested on women’s economic positions, sexuality, and capacities, which were influenced by 1) white slave owners’ preference for black women as heads of families and the inculcation of leadership traits in black women and not black men and 2) the history of women’s roles as property owners, market sellers, priestesses, and warriors in West Africa.¹¹⁰

Landes' findings continue to be critiqued in contemporary academic contexts because some scholars disagree with her matriarchy thesis and her views about homosexual *pais* and *filhos do santo*. J. Lorand Matory, director of African and African-American research at Duke University, has taken one of the strongest positions against Landes, arguing that she altered the evidence to argue for the existence of the "*cult matriarchate*." Matory believes that her division between "new" and "traditional" houses is a false one and that men traditionally were the leaders in Candomblé. In fact, Matory contends that, at the time of Landes' research, more men than women were acting as priests.¹¹¹ In contrast, Cheryl Sterling sees Landes' *The City of Women* as "still relevant today as the first feminist account of Candomblé" and maintains that Candomblé is a space in which Afro-Brazilian women are the "supreme authority" and that the *terreiro* is an enclave of "female power." The Brazilian state stereotypes black women as socially pathological with "unstable" family structures, making them "sub-citizens," but Sterling argues that Candomblé is a space in which female blackness prevails.¹¹²

Has Civilization "Advanced" Women's Position?

Ironically, some nineteenth and twentieth century writers and social scientists, such as Herbert Spencer, have argued that women's positions "advanced" with civilization, especially under European influence, at least relative to so-called "primitive" societies. The picture is complicated, but the opposite may actually be true. Most anthropological studies have suggested that "civilization," "colonialism," "development," and "globalization" have been mixed blessings for women.¹¹³ Their traditional workloads tend to increase while they are simultaneously excluded from new opportunities in agricultural cash crops, trading, and technology. Sometimes they lose traditional rights (e.g., to property) within extended family kinship groups or experience increased pressure from men to be the upholders of cultural traditions, whether in clothing or marriage practices. On the other hand, new political, economic, and educational opportunities can open up for women, allowing them not only to contribute to their families but to delay marriage, pursue alternatives to marriage, and, if they marry, to have a more powerful voice in their marriages.¹¹⁴

Deeply embedded cultural-origin stories are extremely powerful, difficult to unravel, and can persist despite contradictory evidence, in part because of their familiarity. They resemble what people have seen and experienced throughout their lifetimes, even in the twenty-first century, despite all the changes. Yet, nineteenth and twentieth century cultural models are also continuously reinforced and reproduced in every generation through powerful devices: children's stories; rituals like Valentine's Day; fashion, advertisements, music, video games, and popular culture generally; and in financial, political, legal, and military institutions and leaders. But profound transformations can produce a "backlash," as in U.S. movements to restore "traditional" family forms, "traditional" male and female roles, sexual abstinence-virginity, and the "sanctity" of heterosexual marriage.¹¹⁵ Some would argue that backlash elements were at work in the 2016 Presidential and Congressional elections (see Text Box 3).

Cultural origin stories also persist because they are **legitimizing ideologies**—complex belief systems often developed by those in power to rationalize, explain, and perpetuate systems of inequality. The hunting-way-of-life theory of human evolution, for example, both naturalizes and essentializes male dominance and other gender-related traits and provides an origin story and a legitimizing ideology for the "traditional" U.S. nuclear family as "fundamental to human social organization and life." It also can be used to justify "spousal rape" and domestic violence, treating

both as private family matters and, in the past, as male “rights.” Not surprisingly, elements of the traditional nuclear family model appear in the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage, especially in the [dissenting views](#). And cultural models of gender and family played a role in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. For a related activity, see Activity 3 below.

Text Box 3: Gender and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

By Carol C. Mukhopadhyay

The 2016 presidential election was gender precedent-setting in ways that will take decades to analyze (see for example [Gail Collins](#)). For the first time, a major U.S. political party chose a woman as its presidential candidate. And while Hillary Rodham Clinton did not win the electoral college, she won the popular vote, the first woman to do so, and by nearly three million votes. As a cultural anthropologist who has long studied women and politics, I offer a few preliminary observations on the role of gender in the 2016 presidential election.¹¹⁶

Women on the Political Leadership Stage

From a positive perspective, for the first time, two women (Republican Carly Fiorina and Democrat Hillary Clinton) participated in televised presidential primary debates and one went on to the “[finals](#).” Millions of people, including children, saw articulate, accomplished, powerful women competing with men to be “Commander-in-Chief.” During the 2016 [Democratic National Convention](#), the country watched a major political party and key male leaders celebrate the life and professional and leadership-relevant achievements of a woman, its presidential nominee. The role-modeling impacts are enormous—and, one hopes, long-lasting.

The Gendered White House Family

The 2016 presidential campaign challenged, at least momentarily, the traditional, taken-for-granted, gendered institution of the White House first “family.” What if the president’s spouse were male? This would wreck havoc with the conventional “first lady” role! Traditionally, the spouse, even if highly educated, becomes the “help mate” and “listener,” handles “domestic affairs,” organizes and attends important social occasions, and works on gender-appropriate projects such as children’s health. Hillary Clinton was roundly criticized, as first lady, for venturing beyond the “domestic sphere” and pursuing health care reform in Bill Clinton’s administration even though she had indisputably relevant professional expertise. Michelle Obama, with her Harvard law degree and prior career as a lawyer, became best known as “First Mom” and a “fashion trend-setter” whose clothing was discussed and emulated. While she was a very positive role model, especially for African-Americans, and developed major initiatives to combat childhood obesity and promote fresh food, she did not challenge [gender conventions](#). How many girls remember her professional credentials and achievements?

Had Hillary Clinton won, the need to confront gendered elements of the conventional White House family would have come to the forefront as the “first gentleman” role gradually evolved. Certainly, no one would have expected Bill Clinton to choose china patterns, redecorate the living quarters, or become a “fashion trend-setter.”

Consensual Sexual Interactions: Which Century Are We In?

The 2016 presidential campaign stimulated discussion of other often-ignored gender-related topics. Despite some progress, sexual harassment and sexual assault, including rape, remain widespread in the workplace and on college campuses (cf. [Stanford case](#), [The Hunting Ground](#)). Yet there has been enormous pressure on women—and institutions—to remain silent.

In October 2016, after a video was released of Donald Trump bragging about his ability to sexually grope women he did not know, the presidential candidate said it was only “locker room talk”...not anything he had ever done. Hearing these denials, several women, some well-known, came forth with convincing claims that Trump had groped them or in other ways engaged in inappropriate, non-consensual sexual behavior. Trump responded by denying the charges, insulting the accusers, and threatening lawsuits against the claimants and news media organizations that published the reports.¹¹⁷ For many women, the video aroused memories of their own recurring experiences with sexual harassment and assault. After the video was released, Kelly Oxford started a tidal wave of women unburdening long-kept secrets with her tweet: “[Women: tweet me your first assaults](#).” Others went on record denouncing Trumps’ talk and behavior, and the hashtag #NotOkay surged on Twitter.

In a normal U.S. presidential election, the video and repeated accusations of sexual assault would have forced the candidate to withdraw (as happened with [Gary Hart](#) in a previous election). Instead, accusers experienced a backlash not only from Trump but from some media organizations and Trump supporters, illustrating why women are reluctant to come forth or press sexual charges, especially against powerful men (see the 1991 [Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas case](#)). These voters’ reactions and the continued willingness of so many others to vote for the candidate suggest that “locker room banter” and unwanted sexual advances are still considered normal and acceptable among significant segments of our population. After all, “boys will be boys,” at least in the old (false) baboon stereotype of male behavior! Clearly, we need more public conversations about what constitutes appropriate and consensual sexually related behavior.

Sexism: Alive and Well

The 2016 presidential campaign revealed that sexism is alive and well, though not always [recognized](#), explicit, or acknowledged even when obvious (see article by [Lynn Sherr](#)). The media, both before and after the election, generally underplayed the impact of sexism despite research showing that sexist attitudes, not political party, were more likely to predict voters preference for Donald Trump over [Hillary Clinton](#).¹¹⁸

The campaign also reflected a persistent double standard. Despite widespread agreement that Hillary Clinton was highly qualified to be president, her judgment, competence, “stamina,” and even her proven accomplishments were subjected to scrutiny and criticism not normally applied to similarly experienced male candidates. Additional gender-specific criteria were imposed: “likeability,” “smiling enough,” “warmth,” and appearance. She did not “look” “presidential”—an image of leadership that evoked the stereotype baboon model! But being six feet tall with large biceps and acting “tough” and “aggressive” probably would have disqualified her, as a woman, from the start! Other traits that are acceptable in men—ambitious, goal-focused, strategic, “wanting” the presidency—were treated as liabilities in Clinton, part of a “power-hungry” critique, as though women are not legitimately supposed to pursue or hold power.

Patriarchal Stereotypes of Women

Hillary Clinton's candidacy seems to have activated long-standing patriarchal stereotypes and images of women. One is the "good vs. bad" woman opposition. The "good" woman is chaste, obedient, nurturing, self-sacrificing, gentle—the Virgin Mary/Mother figure. The "bad" woman is greedy, selfish, independent, aggressive, and often, sexually active—importantly, she lies, deceives, is totally untrustworthy. Bad ("nasty") women in myths and reality must be punished for their transgressions; they are dangerous to men and threaten the social order.

As a researcher and someone who had many conversations with voters during this election, I was shocked by the intensity and level of animosity directed at Hillary Clinton. It was palpable, and it went far beyond a normal critique of a normal candidate. At Republican rallies, mass shouts of "lock her up" and T-shirts and bumper stickers bearing slogans like "[Trump that Bitch](#)" ([and worse](#)) bore a frightening resemblance to violence-inciting hate-speech historically directed at African-Americans and at Jews, gays, and socialists in Nazi Germany, as well as to hate-filled speech that fueled Medieval European witch-burnings in which thousands (if not millions), mainly women, were burned at the stake ["burn the witch"].¹¹⁹ Clinton was indeed challenging "traditional" gender roles in U.S. [politics](#), the workplace, and at home. Patriarchy was being threatened, and many, though not all, voters found that profoundly disturbing even though they did not necessarily recognize it or admit it.¹²⁰

Beyond that, there is a long tradition of blaming women for personal and societal disasters—for convincing Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, for the breakup of joint family households in places like India. Women often become the repository for people's frustrations when things "go wrong" (Remember the spoiled sausage in Portuguese culture discussed earlier in this chapter?). Women—like minorities, immigrants, and "evil empires"—are culturally familiar, available targets to which one can legitimately assign blame, frustration, and even rage, as we saw in the [2016 election](#).¹²¹

Hillary Clinton as a Symbol of Change

Ironically, Hillary Clinton was depicted and criticized during the campaign as a symbol of the "establishment" while her key opponents stood for "change." I think it is just the opposite. Hillary Clinton and her campaign and coalition symbolized (and embraced) the major transformations—indeed, upheavals—that have occurred in the United States since the 1960s. It is not just feminism and a new definition of masculinity that rejects the old baboon male-dominance tough-guy model, although that is one change.¹²² While economic anxiety and "white nationalism" both played roles, the election was also about an "America" that is changing demographically, socially, religiously, sexually, linguistically, technologically, and ideologically—changing what constitutes "truth" and reality. For many in rural areas, outside forces—especially the government, run by liberal, urban elites—are seen as trying to control one's way of life with gun control, environmental regulations, ending coal mining, banning school (Christian) prayer, requiring schools to teach evolution and comprehensive sex education (vs. abstinence only). Hillary Clinton, her coalition, and her alignment with the Obama White House, not just with its policies but with an African-American "first family," symbolized the intersection of all these social, demographic, and cultural transformations. She truly represented "change."

Ironically, Clinton's opponents, even in the Democratic Party, were more "establishment" candidates culturally, demographically, and in their gender relationships. Bernie Sanders attracted an enormous, enthusiastic following and came close to winning the Democratic presidential primary. Yet his rhetoric and policy proposals, while unusual in twenty-first

century mainstream politics, resembled the economic inequality, anti-Wall Street, “it’s only about economics” focus of early twentieth century democratic socialists such as Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas and of progressive Henry Wallace. And, not surprisingly, Sanders appealed largely to Euro-American demographic groups rather than to the broader spectrum of twenty-first century voters.

In short, the election and the candidacy of Hillary Rodham Clinton symbolized more than half a century of enormous change—and a choice between continuing that change or selecting a candidate who symbolized what was traditional, familiar, and, to many, more comfortable. Whether the transformations of the past fifty years will be reversed remains to be seen.¹²³

Discussion

From a global perspective, the United States lags behind many countries in women’s political leadership and representation. For national legislative bodies, U.S. women constitute only 19 percent of Congress, **below** the world average of 23 percent, below the average in the Americas, 28 percent, and far below Nordic countries, 41 percent. The U.S. ranks 104th of 193 countries in the world (see <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>). When it comes to political leadership, over 65 nations have elected at least one woman as their head of state, including countries with predominantly Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and/or Buddhist populations. (see <https://www.theglobalist.com/women-on-top-of-the-political-world/>.) Yet the U.S. still has never elected a woman President (or even Vice-President). Are you surprised by these data or by some of the countries that rank higher than the United States? Why? What do you think are some of the reasons the US lags behind so many other countries?

Additional Resources and Links

[Center for American Women and Politics](#)

Presidential Gender Watch: <http://presidentialgenderwatch.org/>

[Institute for Women’s Policy Research](#)

[Pew Research Institute](#) (U.S. and international data)

[United Nations, UN Women](#)

CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO STUDYING SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Contemporary anthropology now recognizes the crucial role played by gender in human society. Anthropologists in the post-2000 era have focused on exploring fluidity within and beyond sexuality, incorporating a gendered lens in all anthropological research, and applying feminist science frameworks, discourse-narrative analyses, political theory, critical studies of race, and queer theory to better understand and theorize gendered dynamics and power. Pleasure, desire, trauma, mobility, boundaries, reproduction, violence, coercion, bio-politics, globalization, neoliberal “development” policies and discourses, immigration, and other areas of anthropological inquiry have also informed gender and sexuality studies. We next discuss some of those trends.¹²⁴

Heteronormativity and Sexuality in the United States

In the long history of human sexual relationships, we see that most involve people from different biological sexes, but some societies recognize and even celebrate partnerships between members of the same biological sex.¹²⁵ In some places, religious institutions formalize unions while in others unions are recognized only once they result in a pregnancy or live birth. Thus, what many people in the United States consider “normal,” such as the partnership of one man and one woman in a sexually exclusive relationship legitimized by the state and federal government and often sanctioned by a religious institution, is actually **heteronormative**. **Heteronormativity** is a term coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault to refer to the often-unnoticed system of rights and privileges that accompany normative sexual choices and family formation. For example, a “biologically female” woman attracted to a “biologically male” man who pursued that attraction and formed a relationship with that man would be following a heteronormative pattern in the United States. If she married him, she would be continuing to follow societal expectations related to gender and sexuality and would be agreeing to state involvement in her love life as she formalizes her relationship.

Despite pervasive messages reinforcing heteronormative social relations, people find other ways to satisfy their sexual desires and organize their families. Many people continue to choose partners from the so-called “opposite” sex, a phrase that reflects the old U.S. bipolar view of males and females as being at opposite ends of a range of characteristics (strong-weak, active-passive, hard-soft, outside-inside, Mars-Venus).¹²⁶ Others select partners from the same biological sex. Increasingly, people are choosing partners who attract them—perhaps female, perhaps male, and perhaps someone with ambiguous physical sexual characteristics.

Labels have changed rapidly in the United States during the twenty-first century as a wider range of sexual orientations has been openly acknowledged, accompanied by a shift in our binary view of sexuality. Rather than thinking of individuals as either heterosexual OR homosexual, scholars and activists now recognize a *spectrum* of sexual orientations. Given the U.S. focus on identity, it is not surprising that a range of new personhood categories, such as bisexual, queer, questioning, lesbian, and gay have emerged to reflect a more-fluid, shifting, expansive, and ambiguous conception of sexuality and sexual identity.

Transgender, meanwhile, is a category for people who transition from one sex to another, male to female or female to male, using a number of methods. Anthropologist David Valentine explored how the concept of “transgender” became established in the United States and found that many people who were identified by others as transgender did not embrace the label themselves. This label, too, has undergone a profound shift in usage, and the high-profile transition by [Caitlyn Jenner](#) in the mid-2010s has further shifted how people think about those who identify as transgender.¹²⁷

By 2011, an estimated 8.7 million people in the United States identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender.¹²⁸ These communities represent a vibrant, growing, and increasingly politically and economically powerful segment of the population. While people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender—or any of a number of other sexual and gender minorities—have existed throughout the United States’ history, it is only since the Stonewall uprisings of 1969 that the modern LGBT movement has been a key force in U.S. society.¹²⁹ Some activists, community members, and scholars argue that LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender) is a better choice of labels than GLBT since it puts lesbian identity in the foreground—a key issue because the term “gay” is often used as an umbrella term and can erase recognition of individuals who are not gay males. Recently, the acronym has been expanded to include LGBTQ (queer or questioning), LGBTQQ (both

queer and questioning), LGBTQIA (queer/questioning, intersex, and/or asexual), and LGBTQAIA (adding allies as well).

Like the U.S. population overall, the LGBTQ community is extremely diverse. Some African-Americans prefer the term “same-gender loving” because the other terms are seen as developed by and for “white people.” Emphasizing the importance and power of words, Jafari Sinclair Allen explains that “same-gender loving” was “coined by the black queer activist Cleo Manago [around 1995] to mark a distinction between ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ culture and identification, and black men and women who have sex with members of the same sex.”¹³⁰ While scholars continue to use gay, lesbian, and queer and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control uses MSM (men who have sex with men), “same-gender loving” resonates in some urban communities.

Not everyone who might fit one of the LGBTQIA designations consciously identifies with a group defined by sexual orientation. Some people highlight their other identities, as Minnesotans, for example, or their ethnicity, religion, profession, or hobby—whatever they consider central and important in their lives. Some scholars argue that heteronormativity allows people who self-identify as heterosexual the luxury of not being defined by their sexual orientation. They suggest that those who identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth be referred to as **cisgender**.¹³¹ Only when labels are universal rather than used only for non-normative groups, they argue, will people become aware of discrimination based on differences in sexual preference.

Though people are urging adoption of sexual identity labels, not everyone is embracing the move to self-identify in a specific category. Thus, a man who is attracted to both men and women might self-identify as bisexual and join activist communities while another might prefer not to be incorporated into any sexual-preference-based politics. Some people prefer to eliminate acronyms altogether, instead embracing terms such as *genderfluid* and *genderqueer* that recognize a spectrum instead of a static identity. This freedom to self-identify or avoid categories altogether is important. Most of all, these shifts and debates demonstrate that, like the terms themselves, LGBTQ communities in the United States are diverse and dynamic with often-changing priorities and makeup.

Changing Attitudes toward LGBTQ People in the United States

In the last two decades, attitudes toward LGBTQ—particularly lesbian, gay and bisexual—people have changed dramatically. The most sweeping change is the extension of marriage rights to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. The first state to extend marriage rights was Massachusetts in 2003. By 2014, more than half of U.S. Americans said they believed same-sex couples should have the right to marry, and on June 26, 2015, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. supreme court declared that same-sex couples had the legal right to marry.¹³² Few civil rights movements have seen such progress in such a short period of time. While many factors have influenced the shift in attitudes, sociologists and anthropologists have identified increased awareness of and exposure to LGBTQ people through the media and personal interactions as playing key roles.¹³³

Legalization of same-sex marriage also helped normalize same-sex parenting. Sarah, whose three young children—including a set of twins—are mothered by Sarah and her partner, was active in campaigns for marriage equality in Minnesota and ecstatic when the campaign succeeded in 2013 (see Text Box 4).

However, legalization of same-sex marriage has not been welcomed everywhere in the United States. Anthropologist Jessica Johnson’s ethnographic work profiling a Seattle-based megachurch from 2006 through 2008 initially explored their efforts to oppose same-sex marriage. Later, she

shifted her focus to the rhetoric of gender, masculinity, and cisgender sexuality used by the church and its pastor.¹³⁴ Official church communications dismissed homosexuality as aberrant and mobilized members to advocate against same-sex marriage. The church's efforts were not successful.

Interestingly, activists and gender studies scholars express concern over incorporating marriage—a heteronormative institution some consider oppressive—into queer spaces not previously governed by state authority. These concerns may be overshadowed by a desire for normative lives and legal protections, but as sociologist Tamara Metz and others have argued, legally intertwining passion, romance, sexual intimacy, and economic rights and responsibilities is not necessarily a move in the right direction.¹³⁵ As Miriam Smith has written, “We must move beyond thinking of same-sex marriage and relationship recognition as struggles that pit allegedly normalized or assimilated same-sex couples against queer politics and sensibilities and, rather, recognize the increasingly complex gender politics of same-sex marriage and relationship recognition, a politics that implicates groups beyond the LGBT community.”¹³⁶

While U.S. culture on the whole has become more supportive and accepting of LGBTQ people, they still face challenges. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not federally protected statuses. Thus, in 32 states (as of 2016), employers can legally refuse to hire and can fire someone simply for being LGBTQ.¹³⁷ Even in states where queer people have legal protection, transgender and other gender-diverse people do not. LGBTQ people can be legally denied housing and other important resources heterosexual people take for granted. LGBTQ youth made up 40 percent of homeless young people in the United States in 2012 and are often thrust into homelessness by family rejection.¹³⁸ Transgender people are the most vulnerable and experience high levels of violence, including homicide. See Activity 4: Bathroom Transgression.

Text Box 4: Moving Toward Marriage Equality in Minnesota: Sarah's Letter

In 2013, the Minnesota state legislature voted on whether to approve same-sex marriage. Before the vote, a woman named Sarah made the difficult decision to advocate publicly for the bill's approval. In the process, she wrote the following letter.

Dear Minnesota Senator,

This is an open letter to you in support of the marriage equality bill. I may not be your constituent, and you may already know how you are planning to vote, but I ask you to read this letter with an open mind and heart nonetheless.

I want same-sex marriage for the same reasons as many others. My partner Abby and I met in the first days of 2004 and have created a loving home together with our three kids and two cats. We had a commitment ceremony in 2007 in Minneapolis and were legally married in Vancouver during our “honeymoon.” We want our marriage to be recognized because our kids deserve to have married parents, and because we constantly face increased stress as a result of having our relationship not recognized. But that's not why I'm writing. I'm writing because there is one conversation I have over and over again with my son that puts a pit in my stomach each time, and I'm ready for that pit to go away.

Abby and I both wear wedding bands. We designed them prior to our ceremony and spent more time on that decision than we did on the flowers, dresses, and music combined. Our son is now three and a half and, like other kids his age, he asks about everything. All the time. When I get him dressed, change his diaper (please let him be potty-trained soon), or wipe his nose, he sees my ring. And he always asks:

“Mama, what’s that ring on your finger?”

“It’s my wedding band.”

“Why you wear a wedding band?”

“Because when Ima and I got married, we picked out wedding bands and now we wear them every day. It shows that we love each other.”

“I want wear wedding band.”

“Someday when you’re all grown up, you’ll fall in love and get married. And you’ll get to wear a wedding band, too.”

“I’ll grow up and get married? And then I get a wedding band?”

“Yep.”

“Okay.”

And then he goes about his day. This conversation may seem silly and harmless to you, but read it again. Look at how many times the issue of marriage comes up. We call it a wedding band, but every time we say that, we know it’s not completely true because we were not legally wed in Minnesota. When I tell my son about our marriage or our wedding, I know I’m hiding a secret from him, but am I really supposed to explain that it was a “commitment ceremony” and we are “committed, but not “married”? He’s too young to be saddled with the pain that comes from being left out. He looks at our pictures and sees that his parents made a commitment to each other because of love. He doesn’t understand his grandfather’s speech recognizing how bittersweet the day was because the state we call home refused to bless our union as it blesses the unions of our friends. And he doesn’t understand that, when I tell him he will grow up and get married, his marriage will (most likely) be part of a tradition from which his parents are excluded.

I am grateful that he is blissfully unaware right now. Imagine having the conversation with your children. Imagine the pain you would feel if innocent conversations with your child reminded you constantly that your love is not valued by your community. Don’t get me wrong; our friends and family treated our ceremony as they would a legal wedding. We had a phenomenal time with good food, music, laughter, and joy. If our ceremony in Minneapolis had been enough, though, we wouldn’t have bothered to get legally married in Vancouver. There is something so powerful and intangible about walking into a government office and walking out with a marriage license. We are grateful we had the opportunity there, and simply wish our state would recognize our commitment as the marriage that it is.

Take a look at the picture of my family. It’s outdated, primarily because we can’t get our kids to sit still long enough for a photo. I’m on the right, Abby on the left. Our son is now 3.5 and our girls (twins) are almost 2. We can appreciate that this is a difficult vote for many of you and we would be honored if you think of our family and the im-



Figure 19: Sarah’s family photo.

pact this vote will have on us. We know many people outside of the Twin Cities never have a chance to meet families like ours. Tell them about us, if it helps. We are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for reading.

Sincerely,

Sarah

Minneapolis, Minnesota

April 2013

Note: Minnesota legalized same-sex marriage in 2013.

Sexuality outside the United States

Same-sex sexual and romantic relationships probably exist in every society, but concepts like “gay,” “lesbian,” and “bisexual” are cultural products that, in many ways, reflect a culturally specific gender ideology and a set of beliefs about how sexual preferences develop. In many cultures (such as the Sam-bia discussed above), same-sex sex is a behavior, not an identity. Some individuals in India identify as practicing “female-female sexuality” or “male-male sexuality.” The film *Fire* by Mira Nair aroused tremendous controversy in India partly because it depicted a same-sex relationship between two married women somewhat graphically and because it suggested alternatives available to women stuck in unhappy and abusive patriarchal marriages.¹³⁹ Whether one is “homosexual” or “heterosexual” may not be linked simply to engaging in same-sex sexual behavior. Instead, as among some Brazilian males, your status in the sexual relationship, literally and symbolically, depends on (or determines!) whether you are the inserter or the penetrated.¹⁴⁰ Which would you expect involves higher status?

Even anthropologists who are sensitive to cross-cultural variations in the terms and understandings that accompany same-sex sexual and romantic relationships can still unconsciously project their own meanings onto other cultures. Evelyn Blackwood, an American, described how surprised she was to realize that her Sumatran lover, who called herself a “Tombois,” had a different conception of what constituted a “lesbian” identity and lesbian relationship than she did.¹⁴¹ We must be careful not to assume that other cultures share LGBTQ identities as they are understood in the United States and many European countries.

Furthermore, each country has its own approach to sexuality and marriage, and reproduction often plays a central role. In Israel, an embrace of pro-natalist policies for Jewish Israelis has meant that expensive reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization are provided to women at no cost or are heavily subsidized. An Israeli gay activist described how surprised queer activists from other countries were when they found that nearly all Israeli female same-sex couples were raising children. (This embrace of same-sex parenting did not extend to male couples, for whom the state did not provide assisted reproductive support.) The pro-natalist policies can be traced in part to Israel’s emergence as a state: founded in the aftermath of persecution and systematic genocide of Jewish residents of Europe from 1937 through 1945, Israel initially promoted policies that encouraged births at least in part as resistance to Nazi attempts to destroy the Jewish people. The contexts may be less dramatic elsewhere, but local and national histories often inform policies and practices.

In Thailand, Ara Wilson has explored how biological women embrace identities as *toms* and *dees*. Although these terms seem to be derived from English-language concepts (*dees* is etymologically

related to “ladies”), suggesting international influences, the ubiquity and acceptance of *toms* and *dees* in Thailand does diverge from patterns in the United States.¹⁴²

In China (as elsewhere), the experiences of those involved in male-male sexuality and those involved in female-female sexuality can differ. In her book *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*, Lucetta Yip Lo Kam discusses how lesbians in China note their lack of public social spaces compared with gay men.¹⁴³ Even the words *lala* and *tongzhi* index different categories from the English terms: *lala* encompasses lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people while *tongzhi* is a gloss term that usually refers to gay men but has been expanded in the last two decades to other uses. (*Tongzhi* is a cooptation of the Chinese-language socialist-era term for *comrade*.)

Language makes a difference in how individuals and communities articulate their identities. Anthropologists such as Kam have commented on how sharing their own backgrounds with those with whom they work can be instrumental in gaining trust and building rapport. Her identity as a Chinese-speaking queer anthropologist and activist from Hong Kong helped women in Shanghai feel comfortable speaking with her and willing to include her in their networks.¹⁴⁴

From these examples, we see that approaches to sexuality in different parts of the world are evolving, just as gender norms in the United States are undergoing tremendous shifts. Anthropologists often cross boundaries to research these changes, and their contributions will continue to shape understandings of the broad range of approaches to sexuality.

Anthropology of the Body

Another important topic for anthropologists interested in gender and sexuality is the anthropology of the body, sometimes referred to as embodied anthropology. Viewing the human body as an analytic category offers exciting new theoretical possibilities.¹⁴⁵ Topics that have attracted particular attention include popular and scientific representations of the body; (dis)ability; the anthropology of obesity; the politics of reproduction; coercion; complex issues associated with genital modifications such as female circumcision; and the relationship between bodies and borders.¹⁴⁶ Who can cross which lines physically (think about national borders), emotionally, psychologically, and socially? Embodied anthropology foregrounds these questions.

Anthropologists increasingly write about their own experiences using an auto-ethnographic mode. For example, Pamela Runestad examined how her time as a patient in a Japanese maternity ward influenced her understanding of the importance of carefully crafted meals and nutrition for HIV/AIDS patients.¹⁴⁷ In subsequent research on HIV/AIDS in Japan, she probed more deeply into how patients’ nourishment inside and outside clinical settings affected their perceptions of health.

Anthropology of the body overlaps with work on gender and sexuality, including the discourse surrounding women’s bodies and reproductive functions. Emily Martin’s pioneering book, *The Woman in the Body*, critically examined lay women and medical descriptions of menstruation, child-bearing, and menopause in the United States. She identified a scientific ideology of reproduction that is infused with traditional U.S. binary gender stereotypes similar to those in man-the-hunter origin stories. In her classic essay about what she calls a “scientific fairy tale,” Martin describes how U.S. biology texts represented the egg and sperm as romantic partners whose actions are described with passive or active verbs according to gendered assumptions.¹⁴⁸

I realized that the picture of egg and sperm drawn in popular as well as scientific accounts of reproductive biology relies on stereotypes central to our cultural definitions of male and

female. The stereotypes imply not only that female biological processes are less worthy than their male counterparts but also that women are less worthy than men. Part of my goal in writing this article is to shine a bright light on the gender stereotypes hidden within the scientific language of biology.¹⁴⁹

Subsequent work has challenged the “sperm penetrates egg” model of fertilization, noting that it is medically inaccurate and reinforces male-active-dominant, female-passive (penetrated) gender models. In reality, the egg and sperm fuse, but the egg activates the sperm by releasing molecules that are crucial for it to find and adhere to the egg.¹⁵⁰ Old videos like *The Miracle of Life* offer, in their narration and background music, striking examples of the cultural ideology of reproduction in the United States that Martin and others have described.¹⁵¹

In another classic essay, Corinne Hayden explored interactions between biology, family, and gender among lesbian couples. Even though both members of the lesbian couples she studied did not necessarily contribute biologically to their offspring, the women and their families found ways to embrace these biological differences and develop a new formulation of family that involved biological connection but was not limited to it.¹⁵²

Some research analyzes the body, especially the female body, as a site of coercion and expression of power relations by individuals (e.g., partner rape and domestic violence), but state-sanctioned collective acts also occur, such as using women as “sex slaves” (Japan’s so-called “Comfort Women” during World War II) and using civilian rape as a form of psychological warfare. Anthropologists document other ways in which states exert power over bodies—through family planning policies (China’s planned birth policy), legislation that bans (or permits) artificial forms of contraception and abortion, and government programs to promote fertility, including subsidized infertility treatments.¹⁵³ For example, Turkish anthropologists have described how state policies in Turkey have appropriated, for state purposes, sexual issues of concern to Turkish families, such as assisted reproduction for disabled war veterans and treatment of vaginismus, a condition that prevents women from engaging in sexual intercourse. Power relationships are also associated with new reproductive technologies. For example, the availability of amniocentesis often contributes to shifts in the ratio of male and female babies born. Unequal power relations are also in play between surrogate mothers (often poor women) and wealthier surrogate families desiring children.¹⁵⁴

Women in Anthropology

As seen earlier in this chapter, female anthropologists have always played a key role in anthropology. In sex-segregated societies, they have had unique access to women’s worlds. Recently, they have analyzed how gender might affect styles of authorship and authority in ethnographies. Social characteristics, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion, also influence how an anthropologist engages in fieldwork and how she and her colleagues relate to one another.¹⁵⁵ Sometimes the identity of an anthropologist creates new opportunities for deeper understanding and connection, but at other times one’s personal identity can create professional challenges.

Fieldwork

Women face particular challenges when conducting fieldwork regardless of the culture but particularly in sex-segregated and patriarchal societies. Sometimes women are perceived as more vulnerable

than men to sexual harassment, and their romantic choices in fieldwork situations are subject to greater scrutiny than choices made by men in similar situations.¹⁵⁶ Women may be more likely to juggle family responsibilities and professional projects and bring children with them for fieldwork. At first glance, this practice may raise eyebrows because of the risks it brings to accompanying children and because of potential negative impacts on the anthropologist's planned work, but many female anthropologists have found fieldwork undertaken with their families to be a transformative experience both professionally and personally. Whereas appearing as a decontextualized single fieldworker can arouse suspicion, arriving at a field site with the recognizable identities of parent, daughter, or spouse can help people conceptualize the anthropologist as someone with a role beyond camera-toting interviewer and observer. At the same time, arriving as a multi-person group also complicates what Jocelyn Linnekin called "impression management." One's child is often less aware of delicate matters and less sensitive in communicating preferences to hosts, causing potentially embarrassing situations but also creating levity that might otherwise be slow to develop. Fieldwork as a family unit also allows for a different rhythm to the elusive work-life balance; many families have reported cherishing time spent together during fieldwork since they rarely had so much time together in their activity-filled home settings.¹⁵⁷

More anthropologists now conduct fieldwork in their home communities. Some wish to explore theoretical and empirical questions best examined in local field sites. Others are reluctant or unable to relocate their families or partners temporarily. Conducting fieldwork close to home can also be a less expensive option than going abroad! But the boundaries of field and home can become quite porous. In their writings, women anthropologists reveal how the realms of public and private and political and personal are connected in the field/home. Innovative, activist, and self-reflective studies address intersections that other scholars treat separately.¹⁵⁸

Academic Anthropology in the United States

Though the representation of women in U.S. academic anthropology is now proportional to their numbers in the Ph.D. pool, discrepancies remain between male and female anthropology professors in rank and publication rates. A 2008 report on the status of women in anthropology, for example, found evidence of continuity of the "old boys' network"—the tendency for men in positions of power to develop relationships with other men, which creates pooled resources, positive performance evaluations, and promotions for those men but not for women. Furthermore, since women in the United States are usually socialized to avoid making demands, they often accept lower salary offers than could have been negotiated, which can have significant long-term financial consequences.¹⁵⁹

Women are also over-represented among non-tenure-track anthropology faculty members who are often paid relatively small per-course stipends and whose teaching leaves little time for research and publishing. Some married women prioritize their partners' careers, limiting their own geographic flexibility and job (and fieldwork) opportunities. Left with few academic job options in a given area, they may leave academia altogether.¹⁶⁰

On a positive note, women have an increasingly prominent place in the highest ranks of anthropology, including as president of the American Anthropological Association. Nonetheless, systemic gender inequality continues to affect the careers of female anthropologists. Given what we know about gender systems, we should not be surprised.

Masculinity Studies

Students in gender studies and anthropology courses on gender are often surprised to find that they will be learning about men as well as women. Early women's studies initially employed what has been called an "add women and stir" approach, which led to examinations of gender as a social construct and of women's issues in contemporary society. In the 1990s, women's studies expanded to become gender studies, incorporating the study of other genders, sexuality, and issues of gender and social justice.¹⁶¹ Gender was recognized as being fundamentally relational: femaleness is linked to maleness, femininity to masculinity. One outgrowth of that work is the field of "masculinity studies."¹⁶²

Masculinity studies goes beyond men and their roles to explore the relational aspects of gender. One focus is the enculturation processes through which boys learn about and learn to perform "manhood." Many U.S. studies (and several excellent videos, such as *Tough Guise* by Jackson Katz), have examined the role of popular culture in teaching boys our culture's key concepts of masculinity, such as being "tough" and "strong," and shown how this "tough guise" stance affects men's relationships with women, with other men, and with societal institutions, reinforcing a culture of violent masculinity. Sociologist Michael Kimmel has further suggested that boys are taught that they live in a "perilous world" he terms "Guyland."¹⁶³

Anthropologists began exploring concepts of masculinity cross-culturally as early as the 1970s, resulting in several key publications in 1981, including Herdt's first book on the Sambia of New Guinea and Ortner and Whitehead's volume, *Sexual Meanings*. In 1990, Gilmore analyzed cross-cultural ethnographic data in his *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts in Masculinity*.¹⁶⁴ Other work followed, including a provocative video on the Sambia, *Guardians of the Flutes*. But the growth of studies of men and masculinity in the United States also stimulated new research approaches, such as "performative" aspects of masculinity and how gender functions in wealthier, post-industrial societies and communities with access to new technologies and mass media.¹⁶⁵

Anthropologists sometimes turn to unconventional information sources as they explore gendered culture, including popular television commercials. Interestingly, the 2015 Super Bowl commercials produced for the Always feminine product brand also focused on gender themes in its [#Likeagirl campaign](#), which probed the damaging connotations of the phrases "throw like a girl" and "run like a girl" by first asking boys and girls to act out running and throwing, and then asking them to act out a *girl* running and throwing. A [companion clip](#) further explored the negative impacts of anti-girl messages, provoking dialogue among Super Bowl viewers and in social media spaces (though, ironically, that dialogue was intended to promote consumption of feminine products). As the clips remind us, while boys and men play major roles in perceptions related to gender, so do the women who raise them, often reinforcing gendered expectations for play and aspiration. Of course, women, like men, are enculturated into their culture's gender ideology.¹⁶⁶ Both girls and boys—and adults—are profoundly influenced by popular culture.

Though scholars from many disciplines publish important work on masculinity, anthropologists, with their cross-cultural research and perspectives, have significantly deepened and enriched interdisciplinary understandings. Anthropologists have made strong contributions not only by providing nuanced portrayals (of, for example, men in prison, heroin users, migrant laborers, college students, and athletes in the United States) but also through offering vivid accounts of expectations of men in other societies, including the relationship between those expectations and warfare. This can include

differences in expectations based on a person's age, other role-based variations, and transformation of traditional roles as a result of globalization.¹⁶⁷

Not all societies expect men to be “tough guys/guise,” and those that do go about it in different ways and result in different impacts on men and women.¹⁶⁸ For example, in Sichuan Province in China, young Nuosu men must prove their maturity through risky behavior such as theft. In recent years, theft has been supplanted for many by heroin use, particularly as young men have left their home communities for urban areas (where they are often feared by city residents and attract suspicion).¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in the Middle East, technologies such as assisted reproduction are challenging and reshaping ideas about masculinity among some Arab men, particularly men who acknowledge and struggle with infertility. There and elsewhere, conceptions of fatherhood are considered crucial components of masculinity. In Japan, for example, a man who has not fathered a child is not considered to be fully adult.¹⁷⁰

Elsewhere, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, men are expected to be gentle nurturers of young children and to behave in ways that do not fit typical U.S. stereotypes. In Na communities, men dote on babies and small children, often rushing to pick them up when they enter a room. In South Korea, men in wildly popular singing groups wear eyeliner and elaborate clothing that would be unusual for U.S. groups, and throughout China and India, as in many other parts of the world, heterosexual men walk down the street holding hands or arm-in-arm without causing raised eyebrows. Physical contact between men, especially in sex-segregated societies, is probably far more common than contact between men and women! Touch is a human form of intimacy that need not have sexual implications. So if male-male relations are the most intimate in a society, physical expressions of those relations are “normal” overall unless there is a cultural fear of male physical intimacy. There is much more nuance in actual behavior than initial appearances lead people to believe.

Anthropologists are also applying approaches taken in American studies to other cultures. They are engaging in more-intimate discussions of males' self-perceptions, dilemmas, and challenges and have not hesitated to intercede, carefully, in the communities in which they work. Visual anthropologist Harjant Gill, conducting research in the Punjab region of India, began asking men about pressures they faced and found that the conversations prompted unexpected reflection. Gill titled his film *Mardistan* (*Macholand*) and shepherded the film through television broadcasts and smaller-scale viewings to encourage wide discussion in India of the issues he explored.¹⁷¹ For a related activity, see Activity 5: Analyzing Gendered Stereotypes and Masculinity in Music Videos.

CONCLUSION

In 1968, a cigarette company in the United States decided to target women as tobacco consumers and used a clever marketing campaign to entice them to take up [smoking](#). “You’ve come a long way, baby!” billboards proclaimed. Women, according to the carefully constructed rhetoric, had moved away from their historic oppressed status and could—and should—now enjoy the full complement of twentieth-century consumer pleasures. Like men, they deserved to enjoy themselves and relax with a cigarette. The campaigns were extremely successful; within several years, smoking rates among women had increased dramatically. But had women really come a long way? We now know that tobacco (including in vaporized form) is a highly addictive substance and that its use is correlated with a host of serious health conditions. In responding to the marketing rhetoric, women moved into a new sphere of bodily pleasure and possibly enjoyed increased independence, but they did so at a huge cost to their health. They also succumbed to a long-term financial relationship with tobacco companies who relied on addicting individuals in

order to profit. Knowing about the structures at work behind the scenes and the risks they took, few people today would agree that women's embrace of tobacco represented a huge step forward.

Perhaps saying "You've come a long way, baby!" with the cynical interpretation with which we read it today can serve as an analogy for our contemporary explorations of gender and culture. Certainly, many women in the United States today enjoy heightened freedoms. We can travel to previously forbidden spaces, study disciplines long considered the domain of men, shape our families to meet our own needs, work in whatever field we choose, and, we believe, live according to our own wishes. But we would be naive to ignore how gender continues to shape, constrain, and inform our lives. The research and methods of anthropology can help us become more aware of the ongoing consequences of our gendered heritage and the ways in which we are all complicit in maintaining gender ideologies that limit and restrict people's possibilities.

By committing to speak out against subtle, gender-based discrimination and to support those struggling along difficult paths, today's anthropologists can emulate pioneers such as Franz Boas and Margaret Mead, who sought to fuse research and action. May we all be kinder to those who differ from the norm, whatever that norm may be. Only then will we all—women, men and those who identify with neither category—have truly come a long way. (But we will leave the infantilizing "baby" to those tobacco companies!)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is "natural" about how you experience gender and human sexuality? What aspects are at least partially shaped by culture? How do other cultures' beliefs and practices regarding gender and sexuality differ from those commonly found in the United States? Are there any parallels? Does it depend on which U.S. community we are talking about? What about your own beliefs and practices?
2. Reflect on the various ways you have "learned" about gender and sexuality throughout your life. Which influences do you think had the biggest impact?
3. How important is your gender to how you think about yourself, to your "identity" or self-definition, to your everyday life? Reflect on what it would be like to be a different gender.
4. How important is your "sexuality" and "sexual orientation" to how you think about yourself, to your identity or self-definition? Reflect on what it would be like if you altered your sexual identity or practices.
5. In what ways have your school settings been shaped by and around gender norms?
6. How are anthropologists influenced by gender norms? How has this affected the discipline of anthropology?

GLOSSARY

Androgyny: cultural definitions of gender that recognize some gender differentiation, but also accept "gender bending" and role-crossing according to individual capacities and preferences.

Binary model of gender: cultural definitions of gender that include only two identities--male and female.

Biologic sex: refers to male and female identity based on internal and external sex organs and chromosomes. While male and female are the most common biologic sexes, a percentage of the human population is intersex with ambiguous or mixed biological sex characteristics.

Biological determinism: a theory that biological differences between males and females leads to fundamentally different capacities, preferences, and gendered behaviors. This scientifically unsupported view suggests that gender roles are rooted in biology, not culture.

Cisgender: a term used to describe those who identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Dyads: two people in a socially approved pairing. One example is a married couple.

Gender: the set of culturally and historically invented beliefs and expectations about gender that one learns and performs. Gender is an “identity” one can choose in some societies, but there is pressure in all societies to conform to expected gender roles and identities.

Gender ideology: a complex set of beliefs about gender and gendered capacities, propensities, preferences, identities and socially expected behaviors and interactions that apply to males, females, and other gender categories. Gender ideology can differ among cultures and is acquired through enculturation. Also known as a cultural model of gender.

Heteronormativity: a term coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault to refer to the often-unnoticed system of rights and privileges that accompany normative sexual choices and family formation.

Legitimizing ideologies: a set of complex belief systems, often developed by those in power, to rationalize, explain, and perpetuate systems of inequality.

Matrifocal: groups of related females (e.g. mother-her sisters-their offspring) form the core of the family and constitute the family’s most central and enduring social and emotional ties.

Matrilineal: societies where descent or kinship group membership is transmitted through women, from mothers to their children (male and female), and then through daughters, to their children, and so forth.

Matrilocal: a woman-centered kinship group where living arrangements after marriage often center around households containing related women.

Patriarchy: describes a society with a male-dominated political and authority structure and an ideology that privileges males over females in domestic and public spheres.

Patrifocal: groups of related males (e.g. a father-his brothers) and their male offspring form the core of the family and constitute the family’s most central and enduring social and emotional ties.

Patrilineal: societies where descent or kinship group membership is transmitted through men, from men to their children (male and female), and then through sons, to their children, and so forth.

Patrilocal: a male-centered kinship group where living arrangements after marriage often center around households containing related men.

Third gender: a gender identity that exists in non-binary gender systems offering one or more gender roles separate from male or female.

Transgender: a category for people who transition from one sex to another, either male-to-female or female-to-male.

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: How Does Gender Shape Your Life?

Think about everything, and we do mean **everything**, you did since waking up this morning. Include micro-behaviors, tiny behavioral acts that take minutes or even seconds, as well as objects, substances, and language, spoken and written. Think about all the “cultural” (i.e. not found “in nature”) artifacts associated with these behaviors. For example, while urinating is natural, your “toilet” is a cultural invention. Now, which activities and behaviors were in some way “gendered”? That is, which had an element associated with “female” or “male” in some way?

As you think about how gender has shaped your life today, consider:

- What did you sleep in?
- How did you handle bodily functions?
- How did you clean yourself?
- How did you modify your body? (e.g. “shaving”, “makeup,” “deodorant”)
- What do the names for products, like deodorants, perfumes or aftershave, convey?

List all these gendered (and gender-neutral) aspects of your day thus far. Also consider: how typical is today? Would a weekend involve more or less “gendered” dimensions?

Activity 2. Understanding Gender from a Martian Perspective.

If you were a Martian, what would you have to “know” or “learn” in order to follow gender rules on a college campus? As you consider your response, think about the following questions.

- In what ways are we a gender “binary” culture? An “opposite sex” culture? An “androgynous” culture?
- Are areas of U.S. life informally sexually segregated? Are there, informally, “male” and “female” spheres? Are there male spheres where women are not supposed to go? Or spheres where if they go, they incur certain risks? Are there any parallels for men who enter female spheres?
- Are there any elements of an “honor” and “shame” culture in the U.S. that a Martian should be aware of? What about in your own social circle?

Activity 3. Ethnographic Interview: How has Gender Changed Over Time?

Interview someone at least age 65 (if you are close to 65, find someone a generation older or younger than you). Ask that person: What kind of changes in gender roles, gender relations, gender restrictions or privileges have occurred within your lifetime? After you conclude your interview, compare notes with others to find common threads. Then ask someone closer to your age what changes they anticipate may happen their lifetime?

Activity 4. Bathroom Transgression.

Transgender people often face dilemmas when needing to use public restrooms. As a way to experience what it’s like to be an ally, some people have started intentionally using bathrooms designated

for others—an issue that took on a heightened relevance in 2016, when North Carolina banned transgender people from using sex-segregated bathrooms that did not correspond to the sex registered on their birth certificates. As part of this activity, consider whether you dare enter the bathroom you don't normally use. If you do, then try it! What happens when you enter the men's room, or the women's room? How are these boundaries patrolled and enforced? Many European countries offer unisex facilities; do you think the U.S. should do so as well? Or do you agree with some politicians in North Carolina who cited safety concerns for public restroom use by transgender individuals?

Note: keep safety in mind if you choose this activity, and beware of settings where people may be hostile to an experiment like this.

Activity 5. Analyzing Gendered Stereotypes and Masculinity in Music Videos.

Popular culture plays an enormous role in shaping our ideas about gender, about femininity and masculinity, and about sexuality. Watch several of the videos below, paying careful attention to how these concepts are visible in current music videos. Do they draw on gendered stereotypes or push boundaries of expected gendered norms? Specify which videos you watched in your response, and also look for examples of other videos that could stimulate fruitful conversations about masculinity, femininity and other gender dynamics.

- Watch [Maddi & Tae, “Girl in a Country Song.”](#) This song is partly a response to Blake Shelton—“[Boys 'Round Here](#),” and Florida Georgia Line—“[Get your Shine On](#).” What do you think of Maddi & Tae's portrayal of men in their video? How does it compare with portrayals of women in videos by Blake Shelton and Florida Georgia Line?
- Compare “[Bitch in Business](#)” (created by MBA students), to “Girl in a Country Song.” Pay particular attention to the third and fourth verses of “Bitch in Business.” Would you change any lyrics, or do you think they are justified? What about the word “Bitch” itself? Is it problematic? In what ways? Do words matter? Can you really change the historically negative associations of a word, like “bitch” or “slut”? Are there parallels to ethnic slurs?
- Compare Niki Minaj and Lady Gaga: how do they deploy gender in their songs, lyrics and videos? How do their strategies compare to a male artist from a similar genre?
- Compare Sir Mix-A-Lot, “[Baby Got Back](#)” and Niki Minaj, “[Anaconda](#).” How do they deploy gender in their songs, lyrics, and videos? Is there any significant difference between what Minaj does in her video and what Sir Mix-a-Lot does in his? How is race used in these videos?
- Should the music video industry be regulated and if so, in what ways and why? Does it make a difference if the videos are frequently consumed by (and marketed to) young people, pre-teens and teens, rather than adults who have a more fully-developed personal sense of identity? What concerns might you as a parent have?

For further exploration and analysis, view the video, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (<http://www.mediaed.org/>). Do you think the analysis provided by filmmaker Byron Hurt can be applied to these music videos?

Also view *Dreamworlds 3* (<http://www.mediaed.org/>), which analyzes the stories told in popular culture about gender and sexuality. How well does this analysis apply to contemporary videos, including the ones that you've just viewed?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Educational Media Companies and Distributors:

- Documentary Education Resources. <http://www.der.org>. One of the earliest distributors of anthropology-ethnographic films. Includes older, but still very useful, ethnographic films. Such films document ways of life that are rapidly disappearing.
- Media Education Foundation. <http://www.mediaed.org/> Focuses on contemporary USA culture, with a wide range of videos analyzing mass media, popular culture, and advertising. . Videos often include teaching guides.
- Women Make Movies. www.wmm.com. Wide range of films/videos by women filmmakers on diverse topics, social groups, both within the US and throughout the world. One of the earliest distributors of films on gender.
- Women's Media Center. www.womensmediacenter.com/ More U.S.-centered resources, especially contemporary issues of women's representation in the media.

Some Key Accessible Readings by Anthropologists:

Brettell, Carolyn and Brettell, Carolyn B. and Carolyn F. Sargent, eds. *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. 6th edition (New York: Routledge, 2012). Excellent collection of articles, with overviews. Also includes a Film Bibliography for each topical section of the book.

Geller, Pamela L. and Miranda K. Stockett, eds., *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present, and Future* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Many articles by biological and archeological anthropologists.

Hodgson, Dorothy L., ed. *The Gender, Culture, and Power Reader*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Useful reader for students and non-specialist readers. Includes a wide range of articles, often adapted from longer academic articles.

Ellen Lewin, ed., *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). Excellent collection with introductory essay by editor, a pioneer in feminist and Lesbian-Gay studies.

Strum, Shirley and Fedigan, Linda, eds., *Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Ward, Martha and Monica Edelman, *A World full of Women*. 6th edition (New York: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2014). Readable overview of the field.

Some Useful Organizational Websites

[American Men's Studies Association](#)

[Association for Feminist Anthropology](#), American Anthropological Association

[VOICES: Journal of the Association for Feminist Anthropology](#)

[Book reviews](#) from the Association for Feminist Anthropology

[Association for Queer Anthropology](#)

[Center for American Women and Politics](#), Rutgers University

[Feminist Majority Foundation](#)

[Guttmacher Center](#) (Research on reproductive health)

[National Women's Studies Association](#)

[Planned Parenthood](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Mukhopadhyay specializes in gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and culture-cognition, with research in the USA and India on gendered families, politics, and science-engineering. In graduate school she co-created one of the earliest gender-culture courses. She has developed numerous gender classes and taught, for 20 years, a popular anthropology and gender-oriented, multi-section Human Sexuality course. Gender-related publications include: *Cognitive Anthropology Through a Gendered Lens* (2011). *How Exportable are Western Theories of Gendered Science?* (2009), *A Feminist Cognitive Anthropology: The Case of Women and Mathematics* (2004), *Women, Education and Family Structure in India* (1994, with S. Seymour). She co-authored an early *Annual Review of Anthropology* article on gender (1988) and is in the Association for Feminist Anthropology. In other work, she served as a Key Advisor for the AAA RACE project; co-authored *How Real is Race: A Sourcebook on Race, Culture and Biology*, (2nd Edition, 2014) and promotes active learning approaches to teaching about culture (cf.2007).



Tami Blumenfield is Assistant Professor of Asian Studies at Furman University and was a 2016 Fulbright Scholar affiliated with Yunnan University. Since 2001, she has been engaged in a long-term ethnographic fieldwork project in northwest Yunnan Province, studying changes in education, social life, and ecology in Na communities. Blumenfield is the co-editor of *Cultural Heritage Politics in China*, with Helaine Silverman (2013), and of *Doing Fieldwork in China... With Kids!* with Candice Cornet (2016). Blumenfield also produced *Some Na Ceremonies*, a Berkeley Media film by Onci Archei and Ruheng Duoji. Blumenfield holds a PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Washington.

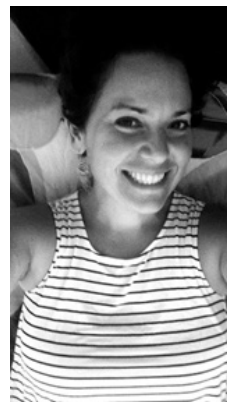


Susan Harper, Ph.D., is an educator, activist, and advocate in Dallas, Texas. She holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from Southern Methodist University and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from Texas Woman's University. Her ethnographic research focuses on New Religious Movements, primarily NeoPaganism, in the American South; the intersection of gender, sexuality, and religious identity; and sex, sexuality, and sex education. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Bisexuality*. Susan is passionate about a variety of social justice causes, including domestic and intimate partner violence prevention and recovery, sexual assault prevention and recovery, LGBTQ equality and inclusion, and educational justice. She has given presentations on LGBTQ+ equality and inclusion to a variety of audiences, including the North Texas Society of Human Resource Managers, The Turning

Point Rape Crisis Center, and various religious organizations. She teaches courses in anthropology, sociology, and Women's and Gender Studies at various universities and colleges in the DFW area. She also serves as Graduate Reader/Editor for Texas Woman's University. She is currently working on an

autoethnography about burlesque and visual anthropology project exploring the use of Pinterest by practitioners of NeoPaganism.

Abby Gondek is a PhD candidate in Global and Socio-cultural Studies (majoring in Anthropology/Sociology) at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. She defended her dissertation proposal in April 2016. Her project, “Jewish Women’s Transracial, Transdisciplinary and Transnational Social Science Networks, 1920–1970” uses social network analysis and grounded theory methodology to understand the relationships between the anti-racist and pro-political/economic justice stance taken by Jewish female social scientists and their Jewish gendered-racialized subjectivities. Further information about her work is available from <http://transform-art-gender.webs.com> and <http://abbygondek.blogspot.com> as well as <https://www.instagram.com/abbygondek/>.



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NOTES

1. The Introduction and much of the material in the Foundations segment draws upon and synthesizes Mukhopadhyay’s decades of research, writing, and teaching courses on culture, gender, and human sexuality. Some of it has been published. Other material comes from lecture notes. See <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay>.
2. We use quotation marks here and elsewhere in the chapter to alert readers to a culturally specific, culturally invented concept in the United States. We need to approach U.S. cultural inventions the same way we would a concept we encountered in a foreign, so-called “exotic” culture.
3. See Carolyn B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargent, *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Also, Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender. Biological Theories About Women and Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). For some web-based examples of these nineteenth century views, see article at <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>. For a list of descriptive terms, see http://www2.ivcc.edu/gen2002/Women_in_the_Nineteenth_Century.htm.
4. For an example of a textbook, see Herant A. Katchadurian, *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality* (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989). See also Linda Stone, *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013).
5. Material in the following paragraphs comes from Mukhopadhyay, unpublished Human Sexuality lecture notes.
6. Herant A. Katchadurian, *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality*, 365.
7. Phyllis Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields. A Study of the Economic Position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons* (Colonial Research publication 14. London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1952) The image comes from the cover of her book, which is also available online: http://www.era.anthropology.ac.uk/Kaberry/Kaberry_text/.
8. See Barry S. Hewlett, *Intimate Fathers: The Nature and Context of Aka Pygmy Paternal Infant Care* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); and personal communication with Mukhopadhyay.
9. W.H. Masters and V.E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966).

10. Some feminist scholars have also questioned the “naturalness” of the biological categories male and female. See for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]).
11. For genital similarities, see Janet S. Hyde and John D. DeLamater, *Understanding Human Sexuality* (McGraw Hill, 2014), 94–101. For more parallels, see Mukhopadhyay’s online Human Sexuality course materials, at www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay.
12. For some idea of the enormous variability in human physical characteristics, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in C. Mukhopadhyay, R. Henze, and Y. Moses, *How Real is Race: Race, Culture and Biology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).
13. Information about alternative gender roles in pre-contact Native American communities can be found in Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women* (Boston: Pearson, 2013). Also, see the 2011 PBS Independent Lens film *Two Spirits* for an account of the role of two-spirit ideology in Navajo communities, including the story of a Navajo teenager who was the victim of a hate crime because of his two-spirit identity.
14. Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women*.
15. Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: the Hijras of India* (Boston, MA: Cengage, 1999); Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity: Cross-cultural Variations* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland 2000); and Gayatri Reddy and Serena Nanda, “Hijras: An “Alternative” Sex/Gender in India,” in *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. C. Brettell and C. Sargent, 278–285 (Upper Saddle River New Jersey: Pearson, 2005).
16. Janet S. Hyde and John D. DeLamater, *Understanding Human Sexuality*, 99; Martha Ward and Monica Edelstein, *A World Full of Women*.
17. Beverly Chinas, personal communication with Mukhopadhyay. See also her writings on Isthmus Zapotec women such as: Beverly Chinas, *The Isthmus Zapotecs: A Matrifocal Culture of Mexico* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers 1997). For a film on this culture, see Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne, *Blossoms of Fire, Film* (San Francisco: Film Arts Foundation, 2001).
18. Gilbert Herdt, *The Sambia* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 2006). For an excellent film see Gilbert Herdt, *Guardians of the Flutes* (London UK: BBC, 1994).
19. More information about the Nu shu writing system can be found in the film by Yue-Qing Yang, *Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1999).
20. Ernestine Friedl, *Women and Men: An Anthropologist’s View* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975). See Audrey Richards, *Chisungu: A Girl’s Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia* (London: Faber, 1956) and A. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia, An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (London: Oxford, 1939).
21. See for example, Ian Hogbin, *The Island of Menstruating Men: Religion in Wogeo, New Guinea* (Scranton, PA: Chandler Publishing Company, 1970).
22. Susannah M Hoffman, Richard A Cowan and Paul Aratow, *Kypseli: Men and Women Apart A Divided Reality* (Berkeley CA: Berkeley Media, 1976).
23. Denise Lawrence, Menstrual Politics: Women and Pigs in Rural Portugal, in *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*, ed. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, 117–136 (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1988.), 122–123.
24. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03k6k0h>. Some women are posing with photos of menstrual pads and hashtags #happytobleed: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indian-women-launch-happy-to-bleed-campaign-to-protest-against-sexist-religious-rule-a6748396.html>.
25. See the film by Michael Camerini and Rina Gill, *Dadi’s Family* (Watertown, MA: DER, 1981).
26. Cynthia Nelson, “Public and Private Politics: Women in the Middle Eastern World” *American Ethnologist* 1 no. 3 (1974): 551–56.
27. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, “Family Structure and Indian Women’s Participation in Science and Engineering,” in *Women, Education and Family Structure in India*, ed. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay and Susan Seymour, 103–133 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
28. Elizabeth Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik. an Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965).
29. Susan Seymour, *Cora Du Bois: Anthropologist, Diplomat, Agent* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).
30. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, “Women in Science: Is the Glass Ceiling Disappearing?” Proceedings of conference organized by the National Institute of Science and Technology Development Studies, the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India; Indian Council of Social Science Research; and the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum. March 8–10, 2004. New Delhi, India.
31. See for instance, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-powerful-documentary-about-pakistans-honor-killings> and <http://www.latimes.com/world/afghanistan-pakistan/la-fg-pakistan-oscar-20160229-story.html>.
32. For more details, see the film by Leslee Udwin, *India’s Daughter* (Firenze, Italy: Berta Film). The Wikipedia article about the film notes the reluctance of the Indian government to air the film in India, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India's_Daughter.
33. For a critique of the “myth” of the medieval chastity belt, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/chastity-belts-the-odd-truth-about-locking-up-womens-genitalia>.
34. See for example, the film by Sabiha Sumar, *Silent Waters* (Mumbai, India: Shringar Film). While this is not a documentary, the film reflects the tumultuous history of the partition into two countries.

35. For the !Kung San, see Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: Life and Words of a Kung Woman* (New York: Vintage, 1983). For Trobrianders, see Annette B. Weiner, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1987).
36. Shanshan Du, *Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs: Gender Unity and Gender Equality Among the Labu of Southwest China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
37. Zhou Huashan, *Zhong nu bu qingnan de muxi mosuo: Wufu de guodu?* [Matrilineal Mosuo, Valuing Women without Devaluing Men: A Society without Fathers or Husbands?] (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 2009 [2001]).
38. Ernestine Friedl, *Women and Men: An Anthropologist's View* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).
39. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, "Sati or Shakti: Women, Culture and Politics in India," in *Perspectives on Power: Women in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, ed. Jean O'Barr, 11–26 (Durham: Center for International Studies, Duke University 1982).
40. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
41. Mukhopadhyay and Seymour use the term "patrifocal" to describe households that consist of related males, usually brothers, and their sons, and the spouses and children of those males. See C. Mukhopadhyay and S. Seymour, "Introduction" in *Women, Family, and Education in India* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
42. For powerful documentaries see, the film by Nishta Jain, *Gulabi Gang* (Stavanger, Norway: Kudos Family Distribution, 2012); and the film by Kim Longinotto, *Pink Saris* (New York: Women Make Movies, 2011).
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44. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay, *The Sexual Division of Labor in the Family*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1980, 192.
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159. See Christina Wasson et al., *We’ve Come a Long Way, Maybe: Academic Climate Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology*, 2008, 5, 8. Available from [https://web.csulb.edu/~lemaster/Publications%20\(PDFs\)/2008-coswa-academic-climate-report.pdf](https://web.csulb.edu/~lemaster/Publications%20(PDFs)/2008-coswa-academic-climate-report.pdf) and Elizabeth Rudd, E. Morrison, J. Picciano, and Maresi Nerad, “Social Science PhDs—Five+ Years Out: Anthropology Report. CIRGE Report 2008-01,” 2008. <http://www.education.uw.edu/cirge/social-science-phds-five-years-out-anthropology-report-2/>.
160. Ibid.
161. See Agatha M. Beins and Judith L. Kennedy, *Women’s Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Florence Howe and Mari Jo Buhl, *The Politics of Women’s Studies: Testimony from the 30 Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2000); Marilyn J. Boxer and Caroline Stimpson, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women’s Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Susan Shaw and Janet Lee, *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2014).
162. Rachel Adams and Michael Savan, *The Masculinity Studies Reader* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002); Judith Keagan Gardiner, *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Matthew C. Gutmann, “Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 no. 1 (2007): 385–409. There were a number of earlier explorations of masculinity, several focused on African-American males. See for example Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Warner Books, 1980).
163. See especially numerous films available through Media Education Foundation and Women Make Movies. See also Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1999); Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014). Also, Jackson Katz’ film *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity* (2013) and the website www.jacksonkatz.com/ have other books, articles, and workshops on gender violence prevention. See also Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009).
164. Thomas Grego, *Mehinaku: The Drama of Daily Life in a Brazilian Indian Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). See also Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder, *Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands* (Washington DC: American Anthropological Association, 1976); Gilbert Herdt, *Guardians of the Flutes* (film); Stanley Brandeis, *Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, *Sexual Meanings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
165. See article by Matthew C. Guttman, “Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (2007): 385–409.
166. See several excellent videos through Media Education Foundation including *Dreamworlds 3*, *Killing Us Softly 4*, *The Purity Myth* as well as those addressing masculinity such as *Tough Guise 2*, *Joystick Warriors*, and *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*.
167. Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg, *Righteous Dopefiend* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Seth M. Holmes, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Mary H. Moran, “Warriors or Soldiers? Masculinity and Ritual Transvestism in the Liberian Civil War,” in *Situated Lives*, ed. Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragone, and Patricia Zavella, 440–450. New York: Routledge, 1997); Kimberly Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia,” in *The Gender, Culture, and Power Reader*, ed. Dorothy Hodgson, 420–429 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Casey High, “Warriors, Hunters, and Bruce Lee: Gendered Agency and the Transformation of Amazonian Masculinity” *American Ethnologist* 37 no. 4 (2010): 753–770.
168. James W. Messerschmidt, *Masculinities in the Making: From the Local to the Global* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2015).
169. Liu Shao-hua, *Passage to Manhood: Youth, Masculinity, and Migration in Southwest China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
170. See Marcia C. Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Marcia C. Inhorn, Wendy Chavkin, and Jose-Alberto Navarro, *Globalized Fatherhood*. New York: Berghahn. For discussion of Japan, see Mark J. McLelland. 2005. “Salarymen Doing Queer: Gay Men and the Heterosexual Public Sphere in Japan,” in *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, edited by M. J. McLelland and R. Dasgupta, 96–110 (New York: Routledge, 2014).
171. Dipanita Nath, “Mardistan: Four Men Talk about Masculinity in Harjant Gill’s Film,” *The Indian Express*, August 25, 2014. <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/be-a-super-man/> The film is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSrGuXTEHsk>.