

Lecture Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Subject: Gender

Introduction

- A. In social science, the distinction between the biological and cultural aspects of being male or female is important.
- B. Sex is biological: refer to male or female
- C. Gender is the social and classification of masculine and feminine
- D. When Anthropologists speak of "gender" they mean any culture's expectation for those classified as men and women and what it means to be masculine or feminine in that particular culture.

I. CROSS-CULTURAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT GENDER.

- A. All cultures recognize distinctions between male and female but each culture differs in:
 - 1. the meaning attached to these categories
 - 2. the source of the difference between them, and
 - 3. the relationship between sex and other cultural/social facts
- B. All Cultures recognize 2 sexes: male and female and 2 genders masculine and feminine, but some cultures recognize other sexes and genders

II. THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

- A. In 1930's Anthropologist Margaret Mead **challenged biological determinism**. She organized research around one question: **Are the characteristics defined as masculine and feminine in western culture universal.**
- B. Her studies of three New Guinea groups revealed masculine and feminine roles and temperament were cultural patters.
 - 1. **Arapesh men and women** were expected to act in ways Americans considered "naturally feminine."
 - 2. **In Mundugamor** society, both sexes were what American culture would call "masculine."
 - 3. Among the **Tchambuli**, personalities of men and women were opposite to American conceptions of masculine and feminine: women were practical in business; men were decorative and sensitive.

III. ALTERNATIVE SEXES, ALTERNATIVES GENDERS

- A. Some cultures recognize more than 2 sexes, more than 2 genders; and heterosexuality and homosexuality may have different definitions.
 - 1. Among the **Igbo of Nigeria** either sex fills male gender roles, see page 204

2. Women-woman marriage continues in more than 30 African groups despite missionary disapproval; these relationships are not sexual.
 - a. in woman/woman marriages, the female husband takes on a variety of economic and social gender roles depending on the culture
3. Alternate genders, i.e., neither man or woman) are the Xanith of Oman, the **Hijras**, of India, and the **Two-Spirit Role**, in Native America. See page 204.
 - a. Hijras, see page 206, are emasculated through surgery; they adopt female behavior and dress; their subculture is partly a religious cult and have a place in Indian society as they perform at lifecycle ceremonies, i.e., marriages and births.
 - b. Two-Spirit role took different forms in different tribes and different value in different tribes.
 - c. Two-Spirit role usually refers to a man who dressed as a woman, engaged in man's work and has supernatural powers.
 - d. The French term **berache**, used by European explorers and missionaries, means male homosexual prostitute. However, the terms reflect European rather than indigenous associations with crossing dressing and identifying sexual object choice with gender identity.

IV. CULTURAL VARIATION IN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

- A. Cultures vary I their definition of appropriate sexual behavior.
 1. Sexual activity is generally regarded as “doing what comes naturally,” yet every aspect of sexual activity is patterned by culture and influenced by learning. **Cultural patterns include**
 - a. how people treat different body parts.
 - b. what is considered erotic behavior and what is disgusting.
 - c. acts of foreplay
 2. **Appropriate sexual partners vary in different societies.** Homosexuality may be forbidden, approved, ignored or be obligatory, as it is among the Sambia of New Guinea.
 - a. Among the Sambia, girls are viewed as “naturally” growing into woman, i.e., menstruation.
 - b. The Sambia believe that “women are born.”
 - c. The Sambia believes that the “menstrual blood” grows girls into women—filling out their bodies and making them capable of pregnancy and child-birth.

- d. Since men have no such “blood”, The Sambia believe that men must be made. **In other words, men are made not born. not born.**
- e. Masculinity is constructed in a ritual; this contrasts sharply with Western notions that femininity and masculinity have strong biological components.
- f. The Sambia, like other New Guinea societies have a high degree of sex segregation and hostility between the sexes enforces by powerful taboos.
- g. Males and females live in separate houses. Between 7 and 10, young boys are taken from their mothers and live with their fathers and other male kin.
- h. Sambian males are “grown” in men through a series of male initiation rituals beginning once they enter the male house.
- i. The ritual entails the **obligatory homosexuality**, i.e. the ingesting of semen, which according to the Sambia, is necessary so that “maleness” grows.

V. SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND IDEOLOGY: A CROSS CULTURAL COMPARISON.

- A. The Irish of **Inis Beag** and the **Polynesians of Mangaia** clearly show the role of culture in sexuality.
- B. The sexually repressed **Inis Beag** regard all aspects of sex negatively.
- C. Although in **Mangaia**, sexual intercourse is a major interest in life, it is unacceptable conduct for boys and girls to be seen in public.
- D. Values and physical responses of both peoples are learned as this section clearly demonstrates.

VI. THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY IN SPAIN

- A. In the Andalusian region of Spain, control of female sexuality is central to the construction of masculinity.
- B. The view that women are lustful, seductresses and “whores” possessed of insatiable sexual appetites is justified with reference to Christian scripture.
- C. Medieval beliefs in women’s ability to overpower and weaken men through their sexuality are given a contemporary twist by informants who claim women make sexual demands that drive men to their premature death so they live off their husbands’ entire social security benefits.
- D. **The cultural construction of manhood in San Blas (Southern Spain) opposes that of women.**
 - 1. Space has gender: women belong to the home; men to the streets, bars and public spaces

2. Men, fearful that their wives will be unfaithful and dishonor the family, adhere to an image of manliness constituted by aggressive sexuality.