

## **"Capitalist Science and the Medicalization of the Gendered Body"**

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### **Course Description:**

In the 1970s, anthropologist Sherry Ortner posed the question: is nature to nurture as woman is to man? Her argument, constructed to explain what she claimed was women's near universal subjugation, was rooted firmly in the notion that women were constrained to the "natural" and private domain: reproduction, child raising and rearing. Accordingly, men were free to become cultural producers, in charge of not only the construction and dissemination of values, beliefs and rituals, but also of knowledge.

Other theorists posit that nature and culture are inextricably tied, united by a mutual link to science. In claiming that science reflects cultural values, Worsley averred that capitalism, as manifested through science, was culpable for inequality in the scientific realm. A capitalist notion of science seems to have the potential to transform the natural into the cultural, debunking Ortner's earlier analysis of nature and nurture as distinct categories. Her argument remains salient, however, as males, under the capitalist system, continue to be the writers of cultural knowledge of which the body is one canvas.

This course examines how such capitalist science indeed transforms the natural into the cultural, often leaving inequality in its wake between the private and public spheres. Specifically, we will look in depth at the gendered body in regards to matters of reproduction. Using the medicalized body as a cultural template, the following questions can be explored: How, specifically have gender inequalities been exacerbated by science under capitalism? How has nature, constructed by science, essentially become culture? How would a theoretical Marxist approach help to elucidate women's subversion in the scientific and technological realm? Apart from these questions, broad theoretical relationships, such as a Marxist-feminist approach will also be explored to create a platform for further theoretical inquiry.

### **Key Issues:**

- Women and the experience of capitalism:
  - Engels, Friedrich. (1884). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2005.
  - Ortner, Sherry B. (1974). *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* In M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds) *Woman, Culture and Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 68-87
- Marxist-Feminist critique:
  - Firestone, Shulamith Firestone. (1970). *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*
  - Rubin, Gayle. (1975). *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex* in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2005
  - Hartmann, Heidi (1981). *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union*

- Science and the production of social hegemony:
  - Conrad, Peter. (1992). Medicalization and Social Control in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 18: 209-232
  - Browner, C. H. and Nancy Press: The Production of Authoritative Knowledge in American Prenatal Care in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly, New Series*, Vol. 10, No. 2
  - Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English. (1978). *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor.
  
- The Cultural Construction of the Body Under Science
  - Douglas, Mary. (1970) *Natural Symbols*, London. Cresset.
  - Foucault, Michel. (1973). *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. A. M. Sheridan Smith, trans. New York: Vintage Books.
  - Goslinga-Roy, Gillian M.(2000). Body Boundaries, Fiction of the Female Self: An Ethnographic Perspective on Power, Feminism, and the Reproductive Technologies. *Feminist Studies* 26(1): 113—140.
  - Martin, Emily. (1987). *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.
  - Butler, Judith. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
  
- Case Studies: Surrogacy and Intersex
  - Surrogacy:
    - Berkhout, Suze G. Buns in the oven: objectification, surrogacy, and women's autonomy, January 2008
    - Teman, Emily. The Medicalization of "Nature" in the "Artificial Body": Surrogate Motherhood in Israel. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Volume 17, Issue 1
  - Intersexuals
    - Dreger, Alice. (1998). *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press
    - Fausto-Sterling, Anne. (2000). *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*: New York, New York
    - Preves, Sharon E. (2000). *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

## **Annotated Bibliography**

Butler, Judith. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.

Philosopher Judith Butler wrote *Bodies That Matter* to clarify her earlier misunderstood assertions of gender as a daily performance. Rather than being something that a person can put on or remove, she claims that gender, while constructed, is more potent and indispensable than that—a potency that often manifests onto the body through the projection of regulatory ideals. Much of this has been due to the heterosexual imperative, which mandates that bodies align with a hegemonic understanding of sex and gender. In doing so, she challenges the readers and broader culture to use the tools of a hegemonic society, but to re-adapt them.

Conrad, Peter. (1992). Medicalization and Social Control in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 18: 209-232

Conrad examines the relationship between medicalization and social control, by employing studies published on the topic since 1980. Of particular focus are changes in the medical profession and how it effects medicalization, as well as the social dilemmas faced in the realm of medical research and practice.

Dreger, Alice. (1998). *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Foregrounding the medical treatment of intersexuals and hermaphrodites in a historical perspective, Alice Dreger traces the advancements of medical technology and how it affects the individuals who often suffer from its pernicious consequences. In doing so, she creates a compelling discourse not only around sex, sexuality and gender, but how the conditions (namely intersex) that blur our understanding of them, should be treated both within the medical community and broader society, championing a social response rather than a medical one.

Martin, Emily. (1987) *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Martin discusses women's bodies by using the metaphor of the machine. The machine, she claims, produces culture's perception of normalcy with its systematic mechanisms. A machine runs regularly; women, she claims, do not. Thus, she claims that like other mechanisms of the body, such as the heartbeat, women's body and their impossibility to attain normalcy, should be alluded more

to a chaos model than to a machine. In doing so, unattainable standards for women will be eradicated.

Ortner, Sherry B. (1974). Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? In M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds) *Woman, Culture and Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 68-87

In one her most seminal works, Ortner poses the title question as a lead-in to the claim that females were oppressed because of their roles as child bearers and caretakers. As such, men were free to go out and create culture, thus controlling the production and dissemination of all knowledge. Essentially, Ortner claims that women's initial oppressions begins with the constraints of her physical body and that, like de Beauvoir said, "...the woman is adapted to the needs of the egg rather than to her own requirements". This has not only explained why culture is often exalted above nature, but also why women have not had an integral role in its production.

Preves, Sharon E. (2000). *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

While Preves work focuses on the contentious issue of intersexuality and how it should be treated, she was also one of the first to speak with intersexed individuals to get their perspective, including how they cope with their conditions and how they perceive their own identities, often times in contrast to medical diagnoses. This book offers a rare glimpse into the world of intersex by the individuals who live it. In sharing intersex voices, Preves challenges, like so many others, the restrictive binary gender categories we live by.

Rubin, Gayle. (1975). *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex in Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2005,

In this essay, Rubin attempts to pinpoint the locus of female oppression, especially those social mechanisms which are responsible for it. She suggested that there was a "sex/gender system" at work which she defines as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied". In doing so, Rubin leverages the work of previous theorists, including Marx, Levi-Strauss (exchange of women) to show how women have been subverted within various frameworks, but also reinterprets their theories to more fully explain the female situation.

Teman, Emily. The Medicalization of "Nature" in the "Artificial Body": Surrogate Motherhood in Israel. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Volume 17, Issue 1

Springboarding off the understanding of motherhood as connected to nature, Teman looks at the medicalization of the mother category in Israel, using

surrogacy as her locus of investigation. She examines the personal agency of surrogate mothers, as well as redefines the surrogate body as artificial and locates nature in the commissioning mother's womb. By doing so, Teman showcases how surrogacy in Israel is exalted as a means for women to achieve normal and natural reproduction.

### **Class Pedagogy**

While this course will be mainly reading and discussion-based, I would also like to have the students choose certain ideological positions in regards to specific course topics for each class where this is pertinent. This is meant to be more than a simple pro/con exercise, but to encourage the students to engage deeply with the theory, so that they may begin to consider and develop their own working theories on how such contentious issues, like surrogacy and intersex, may be approached and understood. Pulling from the literature for each week, I would like students to examine specific issues through these lenses, augmenting or subtracting from the existing body of knowledge where necessary. I anticipate this being an anthropology graduate course of around 10-20 students who are interested in gender, sexuality, the body, and how each of these categories intersect with medical science.