***SEX VS. GENDER***

Much popular discourse assumes that biological sex determines one’s gender identity, the experience and expression of masculinity and femininity. Instead of focusing on biological universals, social and behavioural scientists are concerned with the different ways in which biological sex comes to mean different things in different contexts. Sex refers to the biological apparatus, the male and the female—our chromosomal, chemical, anatomical, organization. Gender refers to the meanings that are attached to those differences within a culture. Sex is male and female; gender is masculinity and femininity—what it means to be a man or a woman. Whereas biological sex varies very little, gender varies enormously. Sex is biological; gender is socially constructed. Gender takes shape only within specific social and cultural contexts.

***Masculinity***

*Masculinity* refers to the social roles, behaviours, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time. As such, it emphasizes gender, not biological sex, and the diversity of identities among different groups of men. Although we experience gender to be an internal facet of identity, the concept of masculinity is produced within the institutions of society and through our daily interactions.

The use of the plural—*masculinities* —recognizes the dramatic variation in how different groups define masculinity, even in the same society at the same time, as well as individual differences. Although social forces operate to create systematic differences between men and women, on average, these differences *between* women and men are not as great as the differences *among* men or *among* women.

The meanings of masculinity vary over four different dimensions; thus four different disciplines are involved in understanding gender—anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology.

First, masculinities vary across cultures. Anthropologists have documented the ways that gender varies cross-culturally. Some cultures encourage men to be stoic and to prove masculinity, especially by sexual conquest. Other cultures prescribe a more relaxed definition of masculinity based on civic participation, emotional responsiveness, and collective provision for the community’s needs. What it means to be a man in France or among Aboriginal peoples in the Australian outback are so far apart that it belies any notion that gender identity is determined mostly by biological sex differences. The differences between two cultures’ version of masculinity is often greater than the differences between the two genders.

Second, definitions of masculinity vary considerably in any one country over time. Historians have explored how these definitions have shifted in response to changes in levels of industrialization and urbanization, in a nation’s position in the larger world’s geopolitical and economic context, and with the development of new technologies. What it meant to be a man in seventeenth-century France or in Hellenic Greece is certainly different from what it might mean to be a French or Greek man today.

Third, definitions of masculinity change over the course of a person’s life. Developmental psychologists have examined how a set of developmental milestones leads to differences in our experiences and our expressions of gender identity. Both chronological age and life stage require different enactments of gender. In the West, the issues confronting a man about proving himself and feeling successful change as he ages, as do the social institutions in which he attempts to enact those experiences. A young single man defines masculinity differently than do a middle-aged father and an elderly grandfather.

Finally, the meanings of masculinity vary considerably within any given society at any one time. At any given moment, several meanings of masculinity coexist. Simply put, not all American or Brazilian or Senegalese men are the same. Sociologists have explored the ways in which class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and region all shape gender identity. Each of these axes modifies the others. For example, an older, black, gay man in Chicago and a young, white, heterosexual farm boy in Iowa would likely have different definitions of masculinity and different ideas about what it means to be a woman. Yet each of these people is deeply affected by the gender norms and power arrangements of their society.

Because gender varies so significantly—across cultures, over historical time, among men and women within any one culture, and over the life course—we cannot speak of masculinity as though it is a constant, universal essence, common to all men. Gender must be seen as an ever-changing, fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviours; we must speak of *masculinities*. By pluralizing the term we acknowledge that masculinity means different things to different groups of people at different times.

***Femininity***

Femininity (also called femininity, girlishness, womanliness or womanhood) is a set of attributes, behaviours, and roles generally associated with girls and women. Femininity is socially constructed, but made up of both socially defined and biologically created factors. This makes it distinct from the definition of the biological female sex,  as both men and women can exhibit feminine traits. People who exhibit combination of both masculine and feminine characteristics in equal measure are considered to be androgynous.

Traits traditionally cited as feminine include muliebrity, gentleness, empathy, and sensitivity, though traits associated with femininity vary depending on location and context, and are influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors. In some non-English speaking cultures, certain concepts or inanimate objects are considered feminine. The counterpart to femininity is masculinity.

While the defining characteristics of femininity are not universally identical, some patterns exist: gentleness, empathy, sensitivity, caring, sweetness, compassion, tolerance, nurturance, deference, and succorance are traits that have traditionally been cited as feminine.

An oil painting of a young woman dressed in a flowing, white dress sitting on a chair with a red drape. An easel rests on her knees and she is evidently drawing. She is gazing directly at the observer.

Femininity is sometimes linked with sexual objectification and sexual appeal. Sexual passiveness, or sexual receptivity, is sometimes considered feminine while sexual assertiveness and sexual desire is sometimes considered masculine.

Ann Oakley's sex/gender dichotomy has had a considerable influence on sociologists defining masculine and feminine behavior as regulated, policed, and reproduced in our society, as well as the power structures relating to the concepts. Some queer theorists and other postmodernists, however, have rejected the sex (biology)/gender (culture) dichotomy as a "dangerous simplification".

An ongoing debate with regards to sex and psychology concerns the extent to which gender identity and gender-specific behavior is due to socialization versus inborn factors. According to Diane F. Halpern, both factors play a role, but the relative importance of each must still be investigated. The nature versus nurture question, for example, is extensively debated and is continually revitalized by new research findings. Some hold that feminine identity is partly a 'given' and partly a goal to be sought.

In Carl Jung's school of analytical psychology, the anima and animus are the two primary anthropomorphic archetypes of the unconscious mind. The anima and animus are described by Jung as elements of his theory of the collective unconscious, a domain of the unconscious that transcends the personal psyche. In the unconscious of the male it finds expression as a feminine inner personality: anima; equivalently, in the unconscious of the female it is expressed as a masculine inner personality: animus.