

Key Terms and Concepts in Gender Studies
Karyl E. Ketchum, Ph.D.

binary, binarities, binarism - Pairs of oppositions which often lead to easy (lazy) categories of understanding--a red flag, don't trust 'em!!! i.e. male/female, nature/culture, good/bad, public/private, art/craft. French Philosopher Jaques Derrida reminds us that these binarisms are always unequal in cultural value, with one pole the more powerful or valued.

gender / sexuality(desire) / biological sex - Identity categories that are interrelated but not determinative of each other.

Continuum - A mode of thought which pays attention to degrees of difference between opposing poles--calls attention to the shades of grey which exist between two opposites. A way to deconstruct binarities, a powerful tool!!

social construction, social constructivism, social constructionist – the idea that many categories of being are not “natural” but are socially constructed. Because of this, these categories are unstable and must be continually re-stabilized through various social processes such as Othering.

Othering – The philosophical concept that the “self” requires an “Other” to establish and insure its own existence.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) – We need the *Other* to have a self. The Master/Slave dialectic, we are locked in with this *Other* –dependant upon them even--as it is the existence of this Other that inaugurates the existence of a “self.”

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) - The world is altered at the appearance of another person and now seems to orient itself around this *Otherness* thereby **posing a potential threat** to self and a need to account for oneself. Emphasizes the role of vision in the process of producing the Other/Self.

Cool Sartre quotes: “Man is a useless passion”; “We humans are condemned to be free”

Edward Said (1935-2003) -*Othering* produces and stabilizes race and dominance. *Othering* is a process through which groups, such as nation states, wield power. Said examines how *Othering* was done by western societies toward those people in the 'Orient' [meaning the East particularly Middle-Easterners, Arabs and Palestinians] for the purpose of colonization and building empire. According to Said, *Othering* as a process, often involves the demonization and dehumanization of groups, which further justifies attempts to “civilize” and exploit these 'inferior' *Others*. Said's work examines *Othering* as the most economical (read: easy, lazy, crude) process through which to produce and stabilize race and racial dominance.

Said quote from 1980: *“So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Muslim life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression.”*

Simone De Beauvoir and French Gender Theory (1908-1986) – Known for extending Hegelian theories of the *Other* to include gender. Woman is *Other* to man, therefore man relies on the category of women –or the feminine--thoroughly for his identity. Because gender is the sign through which we recognize women and men, and gender is an unstable and unreliable cultural construct, the power conferred to men by way of their masculinity is always under threat and, is particularly threatened by bodies that visibly transgress the gender binary.

Homosocial Triangulation -The phenomenon whereby (presumably) heterosexual men bond with each other by way of making a third party abject. This abject status is often/always/occasionally (???) conferred by way of femininity. So, the third party either IS a woman, or is woman-like (i.e. “gay”). Homosocial triangulation offers men a form of bonding

whereby they can have a certain level of intimacy with each other while at the same time reassuring themselves that they do not feel any desire for the same sex. In this way it becomes a psychic defense against the threat of real emotional, physical and sexual relations among men.

biological determinism – The notion that group's biological or genetic makeup shapes its political, social and economic destiny.

culture -The values, symbols means of expression, language and interests that work to define a group of people

dominant culture...(based on above is...)

essentialism -The view that people have some inherent essence, or characteristics and qualities that define them. i.e. women are naturally more caring and nurturing than men. This line of reason is in conflict with cultural constructivism.

strategic essentialism (coined by Audre Lorde) – The idea that, while essentialism is generally negative as it relies upon stereotypes, oppressed groups must **strategically** take up these categories in order to form coalitions for social, political and economic change. Thus while the category of “Woman” is a social fiction, we still must use that category to organize for women's rights.

gender bending - Adopting clothing, body language and/or behavior that challenges and undermines conventional gender norms and expectations thereby drawing attention to the unstable nature of both femininity and masculinity.

race (including whiteness) - A socially constructed category variously based on cultural practices and/or visible (not biological) characteristics.

heteronormativity, heteronormative - The social, political and economic system that supports and rewards heterosexuality. The institutionalized belief that heterosexuality is the superior and singular mode of sexual organization for society.

alienated labor - A concept first discussed by philosopher/economist Karl Marx. In capitalist cultures workers become alienated from their own labor and lives. No longer do they grow, make or produce some “*thing*” directly that they then go to market and sell (as in an agricultural-based economy). Rather, what they sell in a capitalist economy is their own life's time and the use of their body by someone else. In this way they are alienated – separated and without connection to --their own labor and the very moments of their own lives.

reify - Through this process an abstraction is legitimized and is given **cultural** value. i.e. straighter hair, whiter skin

micro-level of analysis -an analysis or critique of power as seen from a personal or individual perspective

meso-level of analysis -an analysis or critique of power as seen from a community or local perspective

macro-level of analysis -an analysis or critique of power as seen from a national or global perspective

exnomination - The theory which states that dominant categories of being often go unnamed and are presumed to be “natural,” neutral or the default. i.e. when we talk of race, it is often assumed that we are only talking about people of color; white people aren't racialized – they are the norm or default. Similarly, when we discuss gender it is often assumed that we are only discussing women; men do not have gender, they are the “norm” or default. This idea regarding gender is reflected in our language as well!

cultural capital - Symbolic value instilled by cultural norms and values [i.e. designer labeled clothing, straight hair, white skin, the presumption of a penis...you get it! •

interpellation - From Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, the process by which ideology addresses or hails the individual thus effectively producing her/him as a subject/citizen – systems of representation make assumptions about what we desire and fear and these notions are affirmed whenever we identify with these systems. We recognize ourselves as being addressed by Culture [systems of representation] and through this internalization we are both made possible and violently delimited as subjects. SO, culture constructs YOU!!!!!!!

Masculine Heterosexual Gaze - the dominant gaze of culture which privileges masculine heterosexuality assuming that its viewer is always a heterosexual man and by way of this erasing the subject position "woman" and "queer" from the cultural landscape – think of Victoria's Secret that sells its products to women by way of images of other women performing sexuality for men

Anthropologists Gaze -A gaze at – or way of imagining --the racialized Other that seals them back in time, eroticizes them and thereby naturalizing categories of race/power. A form of Othering that produces race.