Discussion 3: Sex, Gender, and the Body

Embodied Knowledge:
- How do we know what we think and do? What is embodied knowledge?
- How has sex = male/female and gender = masculine/female become conceptually “fixed” in the academic community?

What is the relationship between science (the biology of one’s sex) and culture (the idea of gender among other things)?

Refer to Emily Martin’s article, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles”:
- What romantic language does Martin see in the scientific materials she examines?
- Are her arguments historically constructed? Does the date of publication correspond to outdated stereotypes?
- Is there a neutral description attached to the egg and sperm in any textbooks you have seen? What is it?
- What gendered qualities do the egg/sperm apparently embody?
- How is the idea of the passive female expressed in Martin’s article? At the prom does the guy or girl ask the other out? Who is passive/active?
- How is aggressive heterosexuality expressed? Does Martin claim that the scientific treatment of the egg and sperm are in an example of this paradigm?
- Is there a fear that females can emasculate males in the reproductive process?

What is anthropomorphism? How/Why do we consciously/unconsciously attach gender to inanimate objects?

How does the power of fairytales/the images of princesses and princes affect us?

Refer to Anne Fausto-Sperling’s article, “The Five Sexes”:
- How has her work impacted the intersex community?
- How do we conform to dimorphic behaviours? Can we resist them?
- Should we have non-gendered bathrooms? If one does not identify as a male or female, what bathroom stall does s/he choose?
- How does one question the norm? Oneself? Why heterosexuality? Why gender dimorphism?

Body Discipline:
- How is the body disciplined? Created externally?
- Refer to Sandra Lee Bartky’s article, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”. Why do we want to discipline ourselves?
- What “boxes” confine us?
- What characteristics discipline the female/male body? What is conformity? Non-conformity?
- Why/How do we internalize body image?
What role does media play?
What “kinds” of females are accepted/not accepted? Are different things expected from them? (ie. The nerdy, female science student is allowed to be fashionably impaired, whereas the cheerleader dating the quarterback is expected to know and be a part of the latest social trends.)
Do the dichotomies specific to a sex overlap? For example, how does one balance the “professional” and the “homemaker” as a female, male, or transgender?
Does attractiveness lead to empowerment? Does one’s conformity to an image of “male” and “female” give one more credibility and power in society?
How does society treat those that deviate from the “male/female” image?
How are those who are “too fat” treated? Are they seen as those who have “failed” to self-discipline? Are people who do not “fit” the social norm categorized as less-abled?
What free will exists in our society? How are we homogenized? How does society push towards a common image?
For example, what does hair signify? Is hair a symbol of male power? How is it expressed this way?
Who do people dress for? Shave for? How is there pressure to be more feminine? Does a woman do these things to attract women or men, for herself, or for the societal approval of other women?
What wealth markers are encouraged in dress? How do markers discipline and discriminate?
What marks degree of gender dimorphism?
How do we know what is natural? How have we decided that?

How do we reclaim our bodies? As an image of art? As a representation of the individual?

**FILM:** “Juggling Gender,” a story of Jennifer Miller by Tami Gold

- What are your thoughts after viewing the film? Has Jennifer claimed/reclaimed herself?
- Is she accepted as a woman into female spaces like lesbian bars?
- How does this film challenge our conception of gender?
- Is Jennifer perceived differently in the film depending on the scene? For example, when she is in the bath versus when she is performing?
- How do these images affect you?
- How does she “act” on stage and in her life? How do we all “act”? Are our lives merely “acts”?
- Is Jennifer able to construct her own gendered role in society? Is she free to construct, or bound to conform? Does she conform?
- How does she embrace being a woman? A man? What gendered male/female behaviours does she exhibit?
- What is Jennifer’s comfort level with herself?
- How has she rejected the “butch” and “fem” roles as a lesbian? Are those roles relevant?
- How is the beard an object in this film as opposed to a trait that makes one male? Does the beard give Jennifer power?