

## **SOCIOLOGY II**

**2025: TERM 3**

### **INTRODUCTION TO GENDER AND SEXUALITIES**



**Lecturers:**

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the module on gender and sexualities. This module will run from the 7<sup>th</sup> of July until the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. The Introduction to Gender and Sexualities provides a sociological lens for understanding how gender and sexuality are socially constructed. The first half will be facilitated by Mr. Sizani and the second half by Ms. Ntshona. These segments are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interdependent. The first half of this module introduces frameworks for understanding gender and sex, focusing on the meaning-making processes involved in the gendering of individuals. Additionally, African scholarship on gender and sex are reviewed to understand how different gendered identities are constructed in African societies.

The second half of the module focuses on theorising femininities and masculinities, exploring the complex ways in which these identities are socially constructed and maintained. We will then turn to an overview of sexuality and queer theory, examining how both gender and sexuality influence lived experiences and shape social identities. A key focus will be placed on the South African context, where we will critically engage with the tension between the constitutional rights afforded to all citizens and the everyday realities faced by individuals. Students will be encouraged to think critically about the intersections of gender, sexuality, and power in both local and global settings.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS MODULE

The lectures for this module will be delivered in person. The lecture slides will be uploaded on RUconnected. Ms. Juanita Fuller, the departmental administrator, will send you the enrolment key for the module page. It is in your interest to read the relevant readings prior to each lecture so that you have some idea of what the lecture will cover. If you read prior to the lecture, you will realise that many of the issues covered in the lectures are not entirely new to you. You are also encouraged to do additional reading on the topics covered in this module.

For assessments and examination, you are expected to know what has been covered in lectures, but you also need to provide evidence of having read the relevant sociological material. You will be rewarded for evidence of reading, especially independent reading of material not listed in the module outline. Just make sure that the readings you consult are from a reliable source such as a book by a reputable publisher, a sociology department website, an official report or policy document or a refereed journal article.

While all the reading material prescribed in this module will be uploaded on the RUconnected page for this module, you are encouraged to familiarise yourself with the library where you can borrow the books. A link to prescribed journal articles will be provided on the RUconnected page of the module.

## CONSULTATIONS:

Wednesday – Friday: 09h00 to 13h00

All consultations will take place in the Department. Please email the relevant lecturer for an appointment.

### **LEARNING PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE MODULE**

- You do not do a degree, you *read* for a degree.
- Sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and all other forms of oppressive speech and action are not acceptable.
- Passive rote learning = shallow learning.
- Active participatory learning = deep learning.

### **MODULE EVALUATION**

As a department, we are committed to reflecting on our teaching practices and module content to strengthen our modules. Towards the end of the term, you will be asked to participate in a module evaluation process. Please take this seriously and evaluate the module honestly and comprehensively. Your input will be highly appreciated and make a real contribution to enhancing teaching and learning in the department.

### **MODULE ASSESSMENT**

Your class mark comprises 40% of your module mark. This mark will be made up of:

- Class Test 1: 25 July 2025
- Class Test 2: 12 August 2025

The material to be covered in each test will be communicated to you during the lectures. Ms. Juanita Fuller will communicate the times and venues for these tests.

There will be an exam in November that comprises 60% of the mark for this module.

Please consult the Sociology Handbook for an outline of the University's policy on plagiarism, guidelines on the formatting and writing of assignments, the departmental rules regarding citations and references, and the criteria for assessing written work. A copy of the Assignment Cover Sheet, which must accompany all assignments submitted to the Department, is also available in the Handbook.

### **WEEK 1: INTRODUCING SEX AND GENDER**

This week we delve into two contrasting frameworks for understanding gender and sex: social constructionism and essentialism. Sex is generally used to refer to a binary of being either female or male as denoted by attributes that comprise biological sex. Gender, on the other hand, is meant to refer to the various socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender-diverse people.

Social constructionism posits that our understanding of the world, including the concept of self, is constructed through social and interpersonal interactions – mainly through language and shared meanings. Social constructionism rejects the notion of a fixed and universal world but rather emphasises that reality and identity are rooted in historical and cultural specificity. It also recognises the role of power relations and how they shape accepted realities. Conversely, essentialism posits that certain categories of people have an internal ‘essence’, which dictates their characteristics, behaviours, and fundamental nature – viewing these distinctions as natural and absolute. Essentialism, often linked to biological or genetic determinism, tends to produce stereotypes and prejudices due to its undermining of individual variation and the impact of social factors. By the end of this week, students should be able to:

- Critically engage constructionist and essentialist ideas.
- Distinguish between sex and gender.

### **Prescribed Readings**

Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism? *Grounded Theory Review*, Vol. 11 (1), pp. 39–46.

Burr, V. & Dick, P. (2017). Social constructionism. In B. Gough (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical social psychology*, pp. 59–80. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51018-1\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51018-1_4)

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2004). The five sexes: Why male and female are not enough. In: M. Kimmel & R. Plante (eds.) *Sexualities, identities, behaviors and society*, pp. 39–44. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Chapter 5]

Rhodes, M. & Moty, K. (2020). What is social essentialism and how does it develop? *The Development of Social Essentialism*, Vol. 59, pp. 1–30. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S006524072030029X>

## **WEEK 2: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER: BEYOND UNIVERSALISMS**

For many, gender is such a routine aspect of daily life that is often thought to be ‘bred into our genes’. In reality, gender, much like culture, is a human construct that is constantly (re)created through human interaction. This week we examine how Western European Enlightenment ideas, through colonial imperialism, used ‘all-inclusive paradigms’ such as

scientific rationalism, universal culture, and universal truth, to deliberately impose Eurocentric ideas of gender and sex on African cultures. We will further examine the extent to which some Western feminist concepts, which are a foundation of most gender discourse, are rooted in the Western nuclear family model and as such cannot be universally applied, particularly to African contexts. By the end of this week, students should be able to:

- Explain how sex and gender are socially constructed.
- Critically engage with Western ideas of gender and sex towards Africa.

### **Prescribed Readings**

Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Chapter 5]

Namisiko, E. & Kisiang'ang, W. (2004). Decolonizing gender studies in Africa. In: A. Signe (ed.) *African gender scholarship: Concepts, methodologies, and paradigms*, pp. 2–11. Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA.

Oyewumi, O. (2002). Conceptualizing gender: The Eurocentric foundations of feminist concepts and the challenge of African epistemologies. *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Vol. 2 (1), pp. 1–9.

Richardson, D. (2008). Conceptualising gender. In: D. Richardson & V. Robinson (eds.) *Introducing gender and women's studies*, pp. 8–22. London: Red Globe Press.

### **WEEK 3: COMPLICATING GENDER AND SEX: THE CASE OF AFRICA**

Continuing with our critical engagement with Eurocentric ideas of gender and sex, this week we will explore some African epistemologies and experiences relating to gender and sex. In many African societies, gendered social categories are fluid, situational, and not biologically determined. Moreover, African women hold exclusive power and authority in various cultural and traditional practices. This reality challenges the notions of Africa riddled with patriarchy and prompts an analysis of African traditional gender relations being flexible, fluid, and complementary. To critically evaluate the notions of African societies being patriarchal and dominated by men, we will review case studies from South Africa and Zambia to understand how some gendered identities are constructed in these societies. By the end of this week, students should be able to:

- Critically engage with Western ideas of gender and sex towards Africa.
- Explain how sex and gender are flexible and fluid in the African context.

## Prescribed Readings

- Clarke, Y. (2021). Considering 'gender fluidity' in Zambia: Femininities, marriage and social influence. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 39 (4), pp. 576–588. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2021.1938974>.
- Hellemann, P. C. & Sipungu, T. (2024). Aunty with a key: Aunties' power, status and authority in African traditional ceremonies. *Inkanyiso*, Vol. 16 (1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4102/ink.v16i1.76>.
- Magadla, S., Magoqwana, B. & Motsemme, N. (2021). Thirty years of male daughters, female husbands: Revisiting Ifi Amadiume's questions on gender, sex and political economy. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 39 (4), pp. 517–533. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2021.1926442>.
- Mail & Guardian. (2013). *Mandla vs Makaziwe: Gunning to be the top Mandela*. [Accessed June 10, 2025]. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-06-30-mandela-heirs-fight-for-control/>

## WEEK 4: THEORISING FEMININITIES AND MASCULINITIES

This week, we will examine key concepts and theories related to femininities and masculinities. Feminism is a theoretical framework that seeks to understand and challenge gender-based inequalities. In the Global North, feminism has largely centred on individual rights and formal equality. In the Global South, feminist thought is often shaped by collective struggles, cultural specificities, and postcolonial contexts. Recognising that these regional differences are crucial, feminism can sometimes disrupt or challenge conventional ideas about gender. We will explore how both women and femininities, as well as men and masculinities, are theorised. Using a sociological perspective, we will examine how femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and represented in contemporary culture, and how these constructions either reinforce or resist dominant systems of power. In addition, this section will introduce the concept of intersectionality – a framework that helps us understand how gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class, ethnicity, age, etc. shaping complex social identities and lived experiences.

By the end of this week, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the core principles of feminist theory, its key branches, and its development within the South African context.

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of how social systems (e.g., religion, race, class) intersect with gender to shape identity and lived experience.
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the social construction of femininities and masculinities.

## **Prescribed Readings**

### ***Feminist Theory***

De la Rey, C. (1997). South African feminism, race and racism. *Agenda*, Vol. 13 (32), pp. 6–10.

Hooks, B. (2014). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. New York: Routledge. [pp. 1–15]

Lewis, D. (1993). Feminisms in South Africa. *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 16 (5), pp. 535–542.

### ***Intersectionality***

Meer, T. & Müller, A. (2017). Considering intersectionality in Africa. *Agenda*, Vol. 31 (1), pp. 3–4.

Runyan, A. S. (2018). What is intersectionality and why is it important? *Academe*, Vol. 104 (6), pp. 10–14.

### ***Femininities and Masculinities***

Aapola, S., Gonick, M. & Harris, A. (2005). *Young femininity: Girlhood, power, and social change*. Houndmills: Palgrave. [pp. 157–160, Chapter 8]

Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. Oakland: University of California Press. [Chapter 3]

Mfecane, S. (2018). Towards African-centred theories of masculinity. *Social Dynamics*. Vol. 44 (2), pp. 291–305.

Paechter, C. (2006). Femininities and schooling. In: C. Skelton, B. Francis, & L. Smulyan (eds.) *The Sage handbook of gender and education*, pp. 365–377. New York: SAGE Publications. [Chapter 26]

## **WEEK 5: AN INTRODUCTION TO SEXUALITY**

This week we will unpack the concept of sexuality, exploring how individuals experience, express, and understand themselves as sexual beings. Sexuality encompasses a range of elements including sexual orientation, behaviours, identities, and desires – all of which are deeply shaped by cultural, social, political, and historical contexts. We will critically examine

how these factors intersect and influence lived experiences of sexuality across different settings. A key focus will be on engaging with foundational and contemporary scholarship on sexualities in Africa, challenging dominant global narratives and highlighting region-specific understandings and resistances.

By the end of this week, students should be able to:

- Explain the concept of sexuality and its various dimensions.
- Engage with key scholarship on sexualities in Africa.

### **Prescribed Readings**

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. New York: Basic Books. [Chapter 9]

Kaoma, K. (2016). Unmasking the colonial silence: Sexuality in Africa in the post-colonial context. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Vol. 155, pp. 49–69.

Okechi, O. S. (2018). The indigenous concept of sexuality in African tradition and globalization. *Global Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, Vol. 6 (1), pp. 1–5.

Simonelli, C., Galizia, R. & Eleuteri, S. (2023). Sexuality and sexual orientation in the twenty-first century. *Practical Clinical Andrology*, Vol. 2, pp. 13–23.

## **WEEK 6: QUEER THEORY 101**

In the final week, we turn our attention to queer theory, a critical framework that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a response to normative and fixed understandings of gender and sexuality. Queer theory interrogates how power functions to institutionalise and legitimise certain identities and expressions, while marginalising others. Central to this perspective is an emphasis on the fluidity and constructed nature of gender and sexual identities. We will also explore how these dynamics shape lived experiences and social identities. A key focus will be on the South African context, critically examining the disjuncture between constitutionally enshrined rights and the everyday realities faced by women and queer-identifying individuals.

By the end of this week, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of queer theory.
- Reflect on the gap between constitutional protections and lived experiences in South Africa.



### **Prescribed Readings**

- Allan, J. A. (2020). Queer theory and critical masculinity studies. In: L. Gottzen. & T. Shefer (eds.) *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies*, pp. 125–133. New York: Routledge.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press. [Chapters 1 & 7]
- Watson, K. (2005). Queer theory. *Group Analysis*, Vol. 38 (1), pp. 67–81.

### **Additional readings:**

- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Connell, R. & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, Vol.19 (6), pp. 829–859.
- Gouws, A. (2017). Feminist intersectionality and the matrix of domination in South Africa. *Agenda*, Vol. 31 (1), pp. 19 - 27.
- Gqola, P. D. (2007). How the ‘cult of femininity’ and violent masculinities support endemic gender-based violence in contemporary South Africa. *African Identities*, Vol. 5 (1), pp. 111–124.
- Howson, R. & Hearn, J. (2020). Hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, and beyond. In: L. Gottzen & T. Shefer (eds.) *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies*, pp. 41–49. New York: Routledge.
- May, V. (2015). *Pursuing intersectionality. Unsettling dominant imaginaries*. New York: Routledge. [Chapter 1]