Centre for Development, Environment and Policy

P116

Gender and Social Inequality

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Based on the module Gender and Social Development written by Dr Annabel de Frece, Dr Helen Derbyshire and Dr Catherine Locke.
ABOUT THIS MODULE

Gender and social inequality are important spheres of academic study and analysis, and are also key areas of development and poverty reduction policies. Gender and social relations within and between different groups of people are critical to people’s well-being and to the processes by which people’s well-being changes. They are critical determinants of people’s ability to influence, participate in and benefit from social, economic and material change, as well as being intrinsic to people’s sense of identity and the way people interact with one another.

This module examines gender and social inequality from both an analytical and a practical perspective. It begins by exploring the concept of gender and the development of our ideas around gender, how gender informs social relations and is implicated in political, economic and social struggles. Then, by looking at various theories, it examines the different ways that inequality links with key issues, such as poverty, and considers key theories of viewing and explaining gender and other inequalities, as well as how and where changes happen in society. Here, we introduce cases studies to help contextualise these complex issues. The module then expands in scope to provide an exploration of different themes which constitute key challenges facing our global social and political arena. Finally, the module concludes with a look at some of the ways in which gender inequality has been addressed in the context of international development policy and action. It reviews current thinking on how best to tackle inequalities globally and introduces some gender analytical tools.

This module is aimed at students and researchers from the academic world and at development practitioners – from government departments, international development agencies or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – who work to promote development and poverty reduction. The module aims to assist students to understand gender from a number of theoretical perspectives and to be able to consider the ways in which gender and inequality has been theorised and addressed. It also aims to provide thematic topic areas which enable to students to explore key challenges and the ways in which organisations, institutions, groups or individuals seek to address them. The module also aims to assist students in developing their practical skills in addressing gender and social inequality in analysis and in policy design and implementation.
STRUCTURE OF THE MODULE

The course is broadly structured in four parts. The first two units explore ideas of gender, sex and feminism, showing these to be constructed categories with complex meanings. They introduce the scope and history of gender and feminist ideas. Units 3 to 5 explore critical concepts and theories regarding social and gender relations and change. The next four units focus on four distinct but interrelated key global issues and the final unit focuses on gender mainstreaming and organizational change. The material in the three parts is, however, closely related.

Part I: This is an introductory section which sets the scene for the module with an overview of ideas of gender and sex, which we will see are problematic and not necessarily straightforward to define. This unit also locates the concept of gender as an area of study and debate. In Unit 2, the focus shifts to an examination of feminist movements, charting the historical origins, changing perspectives and current debates on equality.

Part II: This part of the module considers a number of key theoretical perspectives which assist our understanding of gender and social inequality. In Unit 3, we examine what theory is and ask why is it important and how can it help us make sense of social phenomena. We introduce ideas of exclusion and explore different ways in which society divides and categorises social groups, often resulting in negative inequalities. Then, we focus our attention on the question of why gender inequality exists and how we can best explain gender and gender inequality. Here, we introduce a number of influential thinkers and their key theories, which contribute to furthering our understanding and help us to provide different perspectives on how to tackle inequality. In Unit 4 we break some of these issues down by looking in a little more depth at the linkages between global inequality and poverty, introducing feminist perspectives on the causes of global inequality alongside the key question of whether poverty is predominantly a female condition. Case studies are included to help illustrate the interaction of poverty, gender and other inequalities. In Unit 5, the wider issue concerning social change is explored. We consider the question; how, where and by what means does change happen? Here, we consider a key discussion at the core of social theory; the long established argument of whether we should privilege structure or agency in explaining the causes and determinants of social behaviour. This unit also explores two major themes in development which link gender inequality and social change – power and empowerment – and provides a case study which demonstrates the interconnectedness of social change and activism.

Part III: This part of the module explores some key issues facing women and vulnerable groups. These topics have considerable relevance across a number of disciplines and influence the political, economic and sociocultural fabric of all societies. The following four units focus on a different area of interest exploring the way in which gender interacts with it, how different perspectives are engaged and the key debates associated with each topic. The areas covered are: religion and culture; politics; gender-based violence and conflict; and the environment.

Part IV: The final unit of this module considers critically the current approach of gender mainstreaming, and focuses on ways to promote organizational change to achieve gender equity.
WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

Module Aims

- To introduce students to the subjects of gender and inequality.
- To outline the historical emergence of feminist activism.
- To explore the meanings and outcomes of inequality.
- To guide students through key theoretical perspectives which seek to explain the causes and conditions of gender inequality.
- To outline the linkages between gender and global poverty.
- To guide students through key debates on social change.
- To explore contemporary challenges facing the global community and outline their major concerns and responses.
- To provide historical background on different approaches to tackling gender inequality in the development context and to introduce students to current mechanisms.
- To explain the concept of gender mainstreaming and its relation to organizational change.
- To facilitate student's critical thinking about the application of theory to gender and social inequality and to enable them to critically discuss contemporary key issues.

Module Learning Outcomes

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

- explain the terms gender and inequality and the contested nature of these terms and to critically consider how words and terminology can influence the boundaries of how we are able to discuss and act within particular concepts
- assess the way the concepts of gender and social development are used across different disciplines and institutional contexts and to analyse the meanings and signifiers that the terms represent in the narrative of international development
- describe the social, political and cultural factors that result in unequal gender and more general social relations
- debate the key challenges that face gender and development practitioners and policymakers
- describe how gender inequality affects women and society as a whole by understanding the relations between gender and employment, household relations, politics and development
- consider the theoretical foundations to thinking about gender and development and apply the theoretical constructs to a variety of policy and practical contexts
- effectively participate in debate, further research, policy design and implementation.
ASSESSMENT

This module is assessed by:

- an examined assignment (EA) worth 40%
- a written examination worth 60%.

Since the EA is an element of the formal examination process, please note the following:

(a) The EA questions and submission date will be available on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
(b) The EA is submitted by uploading it to the VLE.
(c) The EA is marked by the module tutor and students will receive a percentage mark and feedback.
(d) Answers submitted must be entirely the student’s own work and not a product of collaboration.
(e) Plagiarism is a breach of regulations. To ensure compliance with the specific University of London regulations, all students are advised to read the guidelines on referencing the work of other people. For more detailed information, see the FAQ on the VLE.
STUDY MATERIALS

There is no specific textbook for this module.

For each of the module units, the following are provided.

**Key Study Materials**

Key readings are drawn mainly from the textbooks, relevant academic journals and internationally respected reports. They are provided to add breadth and depth to the unit materials and are required reading as they contain material on which you may be examined. Readings are supplied as digital copies and ebooks via the SOAS Online Library. For information on how to access the Library, please see the VLE.

For some units, multimedia links have also been provided. You will be invited to access these as part of an exercise or activity within the unit, and to discuss their implications with other students and the tutor.

**Further Study Materials**

These texts and multimedia are not always provided, but weblinks have been included where possible. Further Study Materials are NOT examinable; they are included to enable you to pursue your own areas of interest.

**References**

Each unit contains a full list of all material cited in the text. All references cited in the unit text are listed at the end of the relevant units. However, this is primarily a matter of good academic practice: to show where points made in the text can be substantiated. Students are not expected to consult these references as part of their study of this module.

**Self-Assessment Questions**

Often, you will find a set of Self-Assessment Questions at the end of each section within a unit. It is important that you work through all of these. Their purpose is threefold:

- to check your understanding of basic concepts and ideas
- to verify your ability to execute technical procedures in practice
- to develop your skills in interpreting the results of empirical analysis.

Also, you will find additional Unit Self-Assessment Questions at the end of each unit, which aim to help you assess your broader understanding of the unit material. Answers to the Self-Assessment Questions are provided in the Answer Booklet.
In-text Questions

This icon invites you to answer a question for which an answer is provided. Try not to look at the answer immediately; first write down what you think is a reasonable answer to the question before reading on. This is equivalent to lecturers asking a question of their class and using the answers as a springboard for further explanation.

In-text Activities

This symbol invites you to halt and consider an issue or engage in a practical activity.

Key Terms and Concepts

At the end of each unit you are provided with a list of Key Terms and Concepts which have been introduced in the unit. The first time these appear in the study guide they are **Bold Italicised**. Some key terms are very likely to be used in examination questions, and an explanation of the meaning of relevant key terms will nearly always gain you credit in your answers.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

As you progress through the module you may need to check unfamiliar acronyms that are used. A full list of these is provided for you in your study guide.
**Tutorial Support**

There are two opportunities for receiving support from tutors during your study. These opportunities involve:

(a) participating in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

(b) completing the examined assignment (EA).

**Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)**

The Virtual Learning Environment provides an opportunity for you to interact with other students and tutors. A discussion forum is provided through which you can post questions regarding any study topic that you have difficulty with, or for which you require further clarification. You can also discuss more general issues on the News Forum within the CeDEP Programme Area.
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**Examined Assignment**
Check the VLE for submission deadline

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**Examination entry**
July

**Revision and examination preparation**
Jul—Sep

**End-of-module examination**
late Sep—early Oct
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UNIT INFORMATION

Unit Overview

This unit provides an introduction to the topic of gender. The first section begins with an examination of the relationship between sex and gender and the complex nature of that relationship. The unit then focuses on the study of gender as a field of enquiry both within its own discipline as well as within other disciplines. It provides a brief outline of the history of gender studies, then considers the direction that gender studies is taking and what possible implications and challenges this poses.

The third section outlines key terms that are used in the discourse on gender and draws attention to the importance of the contested and constructed nature of language and meaning, particularly when it is used in the context of policymaking and social change.

Unit Aims

• To outline past and current understandings of the terms gender and sex.
• To introduce the topic of gender through an examination of its lineage in academic study and its relevance to the development context.
• To consider the contested and constructed nature of key terms and concepts within the topic of gender.

Unit Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

• understand the historical changes in the construction of the concepts of gender and sex
• understand the historical background of the study of gender
• define and explain some key terms associated with gender studies
• demonstrate a critical understanding of the contested nature of the terms and their constructed meanings
• show an appreciation of the study of gender and its importance in development.

Unit Interdependencies

This is an introductory unit that sets out the groundwork for many of the themes picked up later in the module: in particular, issues of identity and experiences of inequality in the context of development, which are found across Units 2, 3, 4 and 5. Unit 2 provides an account of feminist movements and the convergence of feminism and development. In Units 3 and 4, we look at different perspectives and experiences of gender and inequality, how difference of gender can result in discrimination and the form that discrimination takes. Identity and representation are also picked up in different ways in Unit 8, where there is an examination of key issues such as religion and politics.
KEY STUDY MATERIALS


In this paper, Delphy looks back on the work of Margaret Mead and Ann Oakley in dissecting the relationship between sex and gender, and encourages us to rethink the common perception that sex precedes gender. She argues that this perception is based on the proposition that sex is natural and gender is social. Delphy argues that we need to question this relationship and employ the concepts of division and hierarchy in this analysis.


Here, Kabeer gives a brief overview of the work of feminists in the field of development with a focus on poverty, gender and inequality and, in doing so, draws out the links between these concepts. This paper provides a useful grounding from which to begin this module as it frames the issue at its core, the gendered nature of inequality.
1.0 INTRODUCTION TO SEX AND GENDER

Section Overview

This section establishes a foundation for thinking about sex and gender and the way men and women are constructed, both historically and currently. Through this path, we can begin to ask certain important questions that are central to the study of gender inequality: What do we mean by the terms gender and sex? What distinguishes the two terms and how can we best define them? How have the meanings developed and changed over time and why is it important to understand the lineage of these terms? How has the construction of sex and gender influenced the way we think and the way in which women and men are treated in society and what does this mean for the way people experience their own sex and gender? It will be clear that formulating definitions is a difficult task. Many working definitions do not acknowledge the complexity of gender and, in some cases, assumptions are made which do not accurately reflect the way people experience their sex or gender. This section aims to pick apart these complexities through an examination of the different ways in which we have thought about sex and gender.

Section Learning Outcomes

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

- understand the relationship between sex and gender and its historical ancestry
- understand sex and gender as constructed concepts
- define and explain some key terms and concepts associated with gender and social development discourse
- demonstrate a critical understanding of the terminology within the discourse on gender.

1.1 Under construction: sex and gender

In the literature on gender, there are some key areas with which theorists grapple. First, the issue of the common categorisation of two sexes: male and female. Where does this distinction come from? And how has it been so pervasive? Second, the question of whether sex is biological and gender socially constructed. Is this configuration correct? And what does it mean if it is not? Finally, what is the relationship between sex and gender? And what implications does this have on how we live our lives?

To begin the study of gender and, indeed, gender inequality, we must first consider some of the basic terms, concepts and assumptions in use throughout the vast literature on this subject. First and foremost, we should examine what is meant by the terms sex and gender, how they relate to each other and why understanding the lineage of their meanings is important for examining how ideas have been formed around concepts such as gender norms and gender roles which underpin much of the discourse in gender inequality.
Think about these statements:
(a) There are two sexes: male and female.
(b) The sex you are born indicates your gender.
(c) Sex is biological (nature).
(d) Gender is social (nurture).
(e) Gender can take two forms: masculine and feminine.
(f) A male form will express masculinity.
(g) A female form will express femininity.
(h) Gender is organised according to ideas of masculinity and femininity.
How much would you agree or disagree with these statements and what do you think your opinions are based on?
If you disagree with any of the statements, write down your reasons.

Ask yourself the following questions:
(a) What determines your sex?
(b) What determines your gender?

In any book, policy or course that deals with the issue of gender, most often the following definition from the World Health Organization (WHO) is provided:

“Sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

“Gender” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.’

Source: WHO (n.d.)

This definition has been the basic framework for the way that we have thought about the two concepts of sex and gender for at least the last 50 years. It is also what influences much of the discourse within gender and, consequently, the way we formulate policy surrounding issues of gender and sex. The framework within which this idea of sex and gender is formulated is rooted in relatively recent European history that conceives sex to be divided into two categories: male and female. Within this currently dominant framework, sex is considered to be biologically definable and gender is socially constructed, ie the specific roles and behaviours acceptable for each sex are prescribed by society, and that gender is determined by sex.
The word sex is commonly used to distinguish between the male and female physical forms. There is, therefore, a tendency to perceive the biological sex of a person as their 'true' sex, as something definite, sometimes also referred to as the result of 'nature'. The term gender is often introduced when we are considering the behavioural differences between males and females and is referred to as learnt or constructed behaviour. The social and cultural influences associated with what it is to be male or female are often considered to be ‘nurture’ processes. This discussion of whether sex and gender are the result of nature or nurture is the site of great debate among many disciplines and professions from biologists (Fausto-Sterling, 1992), geneticists, physicians, psychologists (Martin & Ruble, 2004), philosophers (Butler, 1990) and sociologists.

Each discipline and theoretical position may approach the use of these words in different ways. To make matters more confusing, the terms sex and gender are often used interchangeably in everyday life and in literature. Nevertheless, trying to understand these concepts better is important because the categorisation of people as male or female entails a whole set of complex issues of definition, identity and the associated social and cultural consequences that affect peoples’ lives, opportunities and livelihoods. Let us begin by untangling some of these terms and concepts, starting with two issues: the construction of the sexes as two categories and the idea that sex is biological and not socially constructed.

1.2 The difference between men and women: biological constructions of sex

Surprisingly, our understanding of the distinctiveness between male and female has historically and culturally been rather inconsistent. First, let us discuss what is currently meant and understood when we speak of the sex of a person. We should note here that cultures construct sex in different ways, but we shall first look at how sex has been constructed in European culture. In general, biological definitions have been used to describe the sex of a person, and this is commonly based on the chromosomes inherited by the foetus and which can be readily determined from about 6 weeks’ gestation (Ainsworth, 2015a). It is assumed that the foetus will have either XX chromosomes for assigned females or XY chromosomes for assigned males, in addition to the corresponding internal and external reproductive organs. In most cases, it is the observable sex of a person which society determines to be ‘sex’ and the designated ‘gender’ role that a person will be expected to conform to throughout their life.

In this way, our contemporary understanding of sex is conceived as two binary opposites: XX = Female, XY = Male. Birth certificates demand that the sex of the child is documented as male or female; passports, official forms, schools and, of course, public toilets all expect us declare our sex according to one of these two options.
1.2.1 The binary opposites of gender

These two sexes are seen to be differentiated, not only in biological and physiological characteristics but also in their moral and psychological attributes. For many people, this binary opposition is obvious and, of course, most of our lives are determined by which camp we fit in to, yet the origin of this binary view of the male and female is a relatively recent phenomenon. In Western culture, for example, for almost 2000 years the male and female physical forms were understood in terms of their similarities rather than by their differences (Oudshoorn, 2006: p. 7). Up until the 18th and 19th centuries, the female form was conceived to be the same as the male form, only that the reproductive organs were internal rather than external. Historian Thomas Laqueur considers the way in which men and women were perceived in ancient Greece.

**Differentiating men and women in ancient Greece**

‘Turn outward the woman’s, turn inward so to speak, and fold the man’s and you will find the same in both in every respect’.


In Galen’s model of the reproductive organs of the male and female, each element is a mirror image of the other and to each similar element he gives one name. During this time in history there may have been two genders; yet they each belong to the same sex. Laqueur (1992: p. 26) comments that rather than ‘being divided by their reproductive anatomies, the sexes are linked by a common one.’ This seemingly egalitarian way of looking at the sexes belies the view that actually it was the male form that was considered the norm and the female form a diversion from the norm. Men were considered to be the perfect form while women, in possession of exactly the same organs, had them in the ‘wrong’ place, and were, as consequence, the imperfect and inferior variation of it (Laqueur, 1992).
As noted by Mangan, Galen’s anatomical model of the nature of the male and female reproductive organs, which dominated Western conceptions of sexual identity from its inception in the 2nd century CE until the time of the Enlightenment, asserted that women were essentially imperfect men (Mangan, 1997). The notion of man as a universal category is taken up by Buchbinder (2012) who considers the normalisation of the masculine form as represented by Leonardo Da Vinci’s ‘Vitruvian Man’ (c. 1485) in 1.2.2 below, which has the male form situated in the circle and a square depicting the perfect proportions of man. Da Vinci’s use of ‘Vitruvian Man’ was also a representation of the analogy between man and the workings of the universe.

1.2.2 Vitruvian Man by Leonardo Da Vinci

In this ‘one sex model’, the female was understood only in relation to the male. The body of the female sex was considered not a different sex but a lesser, imperfect version of the male sex (Laqueur, 1992). The lack of differentiation between the male and female was an interesting reflection of the patriarchal culture in which women were constructed only in reference to man, and ‘woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category’ (Laqueur, 1992: p. 62).

Two sexes, two ‘natures’

At the beginning of the 18th century, the male and female bodies began to be conceived of as two distinct sexes and, by the 19th century, medical scientists had begun to focus their attention towards defining the female body as separate from the male body. This shift saw women’s bodies become medical objects as physicians became preoccupied with what they termed ‘the essence of women’.
The differences between the male and female forms were now no longer seen to be limited to the reproductive organs but explored the whole body, including the brain (Oudshoorn, 2006). The female was now being seen as wholly separate to the male, not just physically but in relation to function and capability.

The conceptualisation of women’s and men’s differences as a biological function took hold and scientific enquiry in the 1800s was driven to ascertain the nature of their different characteristics, ie how differences affect the functioning of the two forms, physically, intellectually and psychologically, all of which were perceived to be biologically determined. Women’s distinctiveness from men was, at this time, located in the uterus; however, by the mid-19th century, this had relocated to the ovaries. Not merely a theoretical exercise, the meaning of this ‘discovery’ caused a paradigmatic shift in medicine resulting in the removal of the ovaries as a common treatment for neuroses in women. By the end of the 19th century, scientific enquiry into the differences between male and female brains had become popular. The methods of anthropometry and craniometry, which dominated the human sciences at this time, provided what was considered to be irrefutable scientific proof that women’s intellectual capabilities were inferior to men’s. Biological determinism, a dominant approach in the 19th and early 20th centuries, played a major role in establishing a culture in which women were perceived to be inferior to men, and laid the foundations for the subordination of women. Anthropologist Paul Broca, during the late 19th century, undertook his study into the brain size of the male and female. His experiments measured the weight of 292 male brains and 140 female brains and concluded that the male brain was on average 181 grams heavier than the female, leading him to conclude that brain size and intelligence were inextricably linked. This experiment was seen as scientific proof that women were intellectually inferior to men. This work occurred at a time when similar efforts were being made in anthropology to analyse different races in an attempt to find scientific justification for race theory and social evolution. Leading anthropologist Edward Tylor (1930) proposed that there ‘was a connection between a more full and intricate system of brain cells and fibres and a higher intellectual power, in the races which have risen in the scale of civilisation’ (Tylor, 1930: p. 46). [Influential work was also produced at this time by Herbert Spencer [1820–1903]]. Presented as scientific fact, the accepted but unexplained link between skull size or, indeed, brain size and intelligence can be seen to be more informed by accepted cultural perspectives than it was by scientific evidence, as shown here in a statement by Broca:

‘we must not forget that women are, on the average, a little less intelligent than men, a difference which we should not exaggerate but which is, nonetheless, real. We are therefore permitted to suppose that the relatively small size of the female brain depends in part upon her physical inferiority and in part on her intellectual inferiority.’

Supported by a paradigm which saw science as ‘fact’, the notion that women were weak and subordinate was also set within the historical context of the expansion of the colonial empires and was thus used to legitimise both male domination of women and the colonial domination of the colonised territories, and one ethnic race over another, as Sowerwine notes:

‘That women’s brains were smaller than men’s justified the male domination of the Republic. That measurements based on preconceived notions showed – wrongly – non-white brains to be smaller than white brains legitimated European domination of the world. Each of these claims strengthened the others.’


Before reading on, reflect on your own ideas of distinctiveness between the sexes. How much do you think they are influenced by biological factors or social factors?

What influences your ideas of what the differences are between male and female?

What does it mean to be a women and a man in the society in which you live or have grown up in?

**Women’s position in society: biologically or socially determined?**

The ‘scientific’ establishment of the differences between men and women, the location of the characteristics and nature of those differences in the physical body, as well as the psychological and intellectual capabilities, were to have a great influence on the opportunities that women were to have in society. In the late 19th century, sociologist and social psychologist Gustav Le Bon (a founder of social psychology) made the following statement in opposition to American lobbyists for women’s access to higher education:

‘A desire to give them [women] the same education, and to propose the same goals for them, is a dangerous chimera. The day when, misunderstanding the inferior occupations which nature has given her, women leave the home and take part in our battles; on this day a social revolution will begin, and everything that maintains the sacred ties of the family will disappear.’

Tying together the concepts of nature and sex and, by extension, the characteristics and roles assigned to the (now) two sexes made these scientific 'truths' extremely persuasive and they became entrenched in the Western cultural and political psyche, having a profound effect on the social, political and cultural lives of women and men. The work of authors such as Bleier (1984), Haraway (1989) and Longino (1990) condemn the biological sciences for contributing to prevailing ideas of women's biological inferiority and for legitimising women's subordination (Doyle McCarthy, 1996). The notion that the physical forms (male and female) directly correlate to an individual's ability to perform certain tasks is continuously reinforced culturally though childhood upbringing and media, so that these differences are taken to be the natural expression of an individual's sex: men are strong, women less so; women are more nurturing and caring, men more aggressive; men have mechanical skills, women have more fine motor skills; men are rational, women intuitive; and so on. The portrayal of these characterisations as natural and founded on scientific enquiry serves to legitimise and fix them. Science's longstanding preoccupation with establishing these sexual characteristics as natural has been confronted by feminist critics who also challenge the notion of scientific enquiry as objective and argue, as Haraway does, that

> *the detached objectivity of science is an ideological fiction and a powerful one [rooted in a] history of "White Capitalist Patriarchy" that turns everything into a resource for appropriation. [...] Nature is the only raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism. Similarly, sex is only the matter to the act of gender; the productionist logic seems inescapable in traditions of western binarisms.*


Hubbard (1990) makes the argument that the concept of sex 'difference' itself is ineluctably political and moral and linked to domination of women and its legitimation (cited in Doyle McCarthy, 1996). The writings of these critics uncover the way in which evolutionary theory and primatology were grounded in androcentric and sexist conceptualisations which informed method, interpretation of data and theory building. Doyle McCarthy also points to the way science's focus on difference has affected the way we think about race and class (1996: p. 93).

The theories of biological determinism presented regarding the construction of sex and gender may seem to be ideas from a distant past, yet it is it is precisely these ideas which inform our everyday lives. Fausto-Sterling argues that conclusions regarding the sexes continue to be based on assumptions and views established during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Regardless of these criticisms, biological determinism continues to play a central role in the biological science of human behaviour: examples of this can found in research in genetics for understanding the basis of criminal behaviour or learning development. What our capacities are and where we place ourselves in the social and economic hierarchy remains as relevant today as it was when scientists were busy conducting experiments to 'prove' women's inferiority.
Scientific objectivity

‘In analyzing male/female differences these scientists peer through the prism of everyday culture, using the colours so separated to highlight their questions, design their experiments, and interpret their results. More often than not their hidden agendas, non-conscious and unarticulated, bear strong resemblance to broader social agendas.’


What the discussion above illustrates is that the way the modern world categorises the distinctiveness of men and women is founded on what appears to be fundamental truths rooted in scientific enquiry, yet as Laqueur and others point out, and as writers Butler and Haraway argue, our understanding of sex is found to be situational and historical. Science and scientific method are not created out of some higher truth but out of the ideas of subjective people.

1.2.3 Changing scientific perceptions

‘Science (including biology) has a history. People produce ideas and methods for science based on their sense of what is important for their society. None of these ideas is neutral. The categories that science creates are often seen as truths that cannot be challenged. Yet studying the history of science shows us that ideas and methods have always changed. Feminists are interested in tracing the ways that women and men have been identified, described and categorised by science in any given location and time period. In the case of sex difference, we need to learn the history of how categories of male and female (i.e. gender categories) are created and used by the sciences. Moreover, we need to see how gender is intertwined with and often dependent on other categories, such as racial and class difference.’


Widening our enquiry into how ideas come to shape our knowledge about the way we categorise ourselves and others is a useful step for exploring the foundations of inequality and discrimination within society and more specifically between the sexes. As this brief examination of Western scientific epistemology has shown, sex seems to be as constructed as gender, and as located in the historical context as gender is perceived to be. The way in which sex has been given biological status as opposed to cultural status has meant that sex has been fixed in this more recent categorisation of two binary opposites and has influenced and informed ideas of what male and female are. The definition of the differences between men and women, physically, psychologically and intellectually has thus been fixed and, as a consequence, has had a great role to play in the way women and men are perceived in society.
In the first decade of the 20th century, the search for the ‘essence’ of the female brought about the discovery of sex hormones. These chemical substances were seen to be responsible for the behaviour, characteristics and functions of the male and female. The construction of sex differences according to hormones continues to be regarded as the driving force for what makes a person feminine (or not). It is within this dominant paradigm, termed the hormonal model, that synthetic hormones were developed in the 1930s. Today, the hormone paradigm still reigns and hormone therapies are used widely to control fertility, menopause and cancer, as well as in transgender care through hormone reassignment. The paradigm of the hormone as the root of femininity or masculinity has been a contributing element in the persistence of the binary model, it is also partially responsible for the prevailing notion that the perceived attributes of males and females are the result of nature; ‘biological’ rather than social constructions.

 Pause for thought:

Let us think about biological determinism. How would you answer this question?

(a) What is the relationship between the Western scientific construction of the sexes as binary oppositions during the 19th century and the political and social context in which women find themselves today?

(b) Is women’s subordination to men biologically determined?

(c) Is male violence towards women biologically determined?

(d) If we reject ideas of biological determination, then what causes these phenomena?

1.3 Multiple constructions of sex

More recently, biomedical research is finding that there are more variations of sex than we are currently able to confidently categorise. Genetic variation can cause events in foetal development that may lead to differences between the sex chromosomes and the sexual anatomy. While not within the scope of this course, we should briefly consider what implications genetic variation may have for the way that we view the sex and gender of a person, since this not only affects the way that we relate to each other but also the way that a person is viewed in society, by the law, and by the social and cultural norms that we subscribe to as a society.

New insights into the development of sex in the foetus highlight the stark reality of how little we understand about our bodies. Yet many social and cultural norms and values are based exactly on the perceived sex of a person and are constructed accordingly.

 Listen to the podcast by Clare Ainsworth (Ainsworth, 2015b; available from the Key Study Materials listing) and write some notes on how this made you feel about your own sex and gender and also what social consequences you think these new understandings may have.
If, as new research indicates, sex is not easily defined, what does this mean for our identity and the rules, laws and behaviour that are in many societies inextricably linked with our perceived sex? Is it actually necessary that we define individuals according to those binary opposites that constitute the male and female? In answer to this question, we may wish to look to places, times and cultures where the distinctions between male and female are more fluid and less defined. This fluidity is often given the term, intersex or gender variance. Gender variance is, according to Jacobs and Cromwell (1992: p. 63) 'the cultural expressions of multiple genders (ie more than two) and the opportunity for individuals to change gender roles and identities over the course of their lifetimes'.

Alongside research into the ‘biological’ sexing of the foetus, there has been dramatic social change in some regions of the world with reference to the recognition of more than one sex and gender identity. An expanding ethnographic literature has highlighted the prevalence of different multiple sexes and genders but also served to support the importance of social processes in definitions of sex categories and gender expression. People who do not conform to either of the binary configurations of sex or gender are often categorised as the ‘third gender’. Within this category there may a number of different configurations.

In Thailand, several different sexes are recognised, with different gender roles and identities, and with many diverse forms of what constitutes masculinity and femininity. In the Philippines, the third gender is referred to as Bakla. In Canada, the ‘manly hearted’ woman is known as Ninauposkitzipxpe, and in Mexico, Muxe. In Navajo culture, there are four recognised genders. Knowledge of the existence of multiple sexes and genders in Asian and Native American cultures, but also across the Middle East and Europe, has always existed, but acceptance of people whose sex and gender expression does not conform to the binary model has often not. This has resulted in people who fall outside of the binary categorisation being without some basic human rights such as voting rights, access to work, health services, education and perhaps most importantly the right to define one’s own identity.

1.3.1 Variations on the binary opposition model: Navajo cultural constructions of gender

Navajo culture recognises five gender forms as follows:

1) Woman: the primary gender of the Navajo is asdzaan, meaning woman. The female gender is primary in Navajo origin stories, and it is considered to be the most important gender.

2) Man: the next gender is hastiin (man).

3) Nadleeh: the third gender category is nadleeh/hermaphrodite. Nadleeh is a Navajo term, and hermaphrodite is a Western medical term. Western definitions of hermaphrodites have been applied to nadleeh. The Navajo view nadleeh as individuals who demonstrate characteristics of the opposite gender. Individuals who identify as nadleeh are further classified as female-bodied nadleeh or male-bodied nadleeh. The third gender category of nadleeh reflects the Navajo tradition of accepting gender diversity and rejecting the concept of gender dysphoria or a dyadic system of gender.
Masculine female: the fourth gender category is masculine female, or female-bodied *nadleeh*. Navajo culture views masculine females separate from other female-bodied people because their role in society is different from primary gender women. Today, masculine females occupy some roles usually associated with men. Historically, female-bodied *nadleeh* had specific ceremonial roles.

Feminine male: the fifth gender is the feminine male, or male-bodied *nadleeh*. Feminine males identify with gender diversity, and they typically perform work also performed by women.

Source: adapted from Thomas (1997)

The *hijras* of India

The *hijras* are a group of people in India and are sometimes referred to as the third gender, although this categorisation is misleading as it hides the diversity of configurations which exist in the expression of gender within the *hijra* community. A *hijra* is born male or intersex although there are multiple expressions of that identity. *Hijras* tend to identify with their femininity rather than their masculinity and express their identity through dress, behaviour and household affiliation. They often play a dominant role in the performance of *Badhai* (singing and dancing at weddings and newborn celebrations in return for gifts in cash and kind) and are considered to be bringers of fertility. In the Hindu text of the ‘*Shiva Purana*’, Ardhanarishvara is the personified the male/female form of Shiva. As a consequence, prior to British colonialism, the *hijras* were celebrated. Being *hijra* has been interpreted as being religiously inspired ritual sacrifice in return for which the *hijra* in India become spiritually powerful beings with the capacity to both bless and curse (Nanda, 1999: pp. 24–26). *Hijras* were accepted within society and also had power in the Mughal courts. However under British rule, a law was passed in 1897 classifying all *hijras* or eunuchs as criminals. This had a devastating impact on *hijras* who were excluded from society. *Hijras* formed their own communities, being looked after by a guru or mother for protection and security. Because *hijras* are socially excluded, many are forced to beg and work in prostitution, making them a vulnerable community which experiences high rates of HIV infection. They are also the victims of hate crimes, including verbal, physical and sexual abuse. They have no rights and are excluded from any occupation that is not *hijragiri* (the occupation of the *hijras*) (Hossain, 2012).

India is among a small group of countries which recognises or gives equal rights to people who identify as belonging to the third gender. Nepal was the first country to officially recognise and give equal rights to people of the third gender followed by Australia, Bangladesh, New Zealand and Germany. What this means practically varies from place to place. On 21 December 2007, the Supreme Court of Nepal ruled in the case *Pant versus the Government of Nepal* that there should be:

> ‘full, fundamental human rights for all sexual and gender minorities – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.’

*Source: Gerber (2014) p. 3.*
The court legally established a third gender category and ordered the Government of Nepal to form a committee to study same-sex marriages. However, political opposition and indecision has hindered this process and the legalisation of same-sex marriage is yet to be realised. Furthermore, legislation to support and protect LGBTQI persons has not been forthcoming. This means there are no laws against same-sex rape, hate crimes against LGBTQI persons or discrimination in the workplace, healthcare services and education.

In 2014, hijras were given official status as a third gender under Indian law giving hijras the same rights as men and women. For hijras, this meant that they are now legally enabled to work; in fact, there are now legal quotas for government jobs and college places to be given to hijras. Despite these important progressive steps, homosexuality remains a criminal offence. Although it was briefly decriminalised in 2009, in 2014 the ruling was overturned and Section 377 of India’s penal code remained in force with a homosexuality violation receiving a 10-year sentence.

In Pakistan, third gender people are recognised although this recognition is not supported by law. In Germany, parents are simply allowed to place an 'X' in the gender box on birth certificates; this also means that parents are not forced to choose the sex of a child when it is, in fact, not clear at birth.

What is clear about these different cases is that gender is not only a personal issue, it is institutional and political, and involves issues of fundamental human rights which affect peoples' ability to live without fear and discrimination.

This section has explored the historical construction of the male and female forms and their perceived distinctiveness. It has been shown that sex divided into the binary opposition of male and female is a relatively new configuration of the way we perceive the sex of a person. While criticised by many as being based on androcentric and sexist assumptions, this binary notion remains strong and pervasive in our current culture.

1.4 The idea of gender and its construction

The word gender is thought to have been in existence since the 14th century, although not commonly used in the English language until the last 40 years.

Definition of gender in English:

`noun`

1 [mass noun] The state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones): traditional concepts of gender

1.1 [count noun] The members of one or other sex: differences between the genders are encouraged from an early age

2 Grammar (In languages such as Latin, French, and German) each of the classes (typically masculine, feminine, common, neuter) of nouns and pronouns distinguished by the different inflections which they have and which they require in words syntactically associated with them. Grammatical gender is only very loosely associated with natural distinctions of sex.
2.1 [mass noun] The property (in nouns and related words) of belonging to a grammatical gender: "determiners and adjectives usually agree with the noun in gender and number"

**Usage**

The word gender has been used since the 14th century as a grammatical term, referring to classes of noun designated as masculine, feminine, or neuter in some languages. The sense “the state of being male or female” has also been used since the 14th century, but this did not become common until the mid-20th century. Although the words gender and sex both have the sense “the state of being male or female”, they are typically used in slightly different ways: sex tends to refer to biological differences, while gender refers to cultural or social ones.’

*Source: Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.)*

Today, most people have some idea of what gender is. We see ‘gender’ in action when we observe children growing up, the toys they play with and the sport that they take interest and participate in, the way our fathers and mothers act in the home, the clothes we wear and the fashion industry that creates the images of what men and women are expected to look like, the advertisements of household appliances and consumables, the jobs that people do and the opportunities available to men and women, who governs our societies, who runs the financial world and who cares for, teaches, cleans and cooks for society.

‘Gender’ therefore has come to designate the social and cultural differences between men and women, in the same way that the word ‘sex’ had come to designate the physical differences between men and women.

In many social science disciplines during the 1960s, the term gender gradually replaced sex because it was thought to better reflect the social and cultural construction of identities, roles and behaviours of men and women. This idea was developed by anthropologist Margaret Mead (1935), whose work investigated the division of social roles between men and women within three different cultures. She concluded that masculine and feminine characteristics are the result of social conditioning rather than being biologically determined. Although her work did not make explicit the term gender, it was considered to be the pioneering beginning of the notion of socially constructed sex roles. This work was taken forward by many sociologists and philosophers with much of the work in this area focusing on the arbitrariness of sex roles and the independence of sex and gender.
French feminist Simone de Beauvoir further emphasised the ‘making’ of women as a cultural genderisation in her landmark 1949 book, ‘The Second Sex’, in which she famously argued that:

‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature’
Source: de Beauvoir (1949) p. 295.

‘The concept of gender was first employed to emphasize the social and relational differences between women and men in contrast to biological differences between the sexes. Sex was nature and gender was nurture.’

Eventually the notion of sex roles became gender roles with a clear distinction between the idea of sex as being biologically defined and the idea of gender as being socially conditioned.

As more historical and cross-cultural research was carried out, it didn't take long for a large body of work to build up on the multiple constructions of gender through time and place. Reeser (2011) notes that:

‘European renaissance men were much more expressive about the male–male relations that existed. Within that socio-historical context this display of affection and interest did not denote some lack of masculinity, on the contrary, the opposite was true, it reaffirmed their masculinity.’

There is enough evidence to suggest that what constitutes male and female is culturally constructed, and behaviour and traits attributed to gender are dependent on that culture within a specific time. In India, for example, it is culturally acceptable for men to walk arm in arm, while in the UK or USA this would be unusual behaviour for men. Masculinity and femininity is therefore relative, a fabrication, a construct of a given historical context (Reeser, 2011: p. 2).

The development of the idea of gender as a construct led to number of (at times unintended) consequences:

- it reinforced the dichotomy between sex and gender and the idea that the former was biological and the latter was a social construct
- this also reinforced the idea that gender was informed by sex, ie one follows the other
- it provided a foundation for feminists to challenge gender roles and championed the idea that if gender roles are socially conditioned and arbitrary (depending on place and time) then they are susceptible to change (a fundamental basis for challenging dominant and unequal gender roles).
On the assumption that sex is biological and gender is constructed

Judith Butler, philosopher and gender theorist, argues that ‘if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way’ (Butler, 1990: p. 9). This means that there is an assumption that gender follows sex, ie first there is the sex (male or female) and then there is the gender. Butler questions this because she believes that if the definition of male and female has changed over time and is differentiated across cultures, how can we assume, first, that sex is defined and, second, that that gender follows sex?

There is no reason why gender would be governed or defined by sex, nor should it be confined to it (Butler, 1990: p. 10).

‘When the relevant “culture” that “constructs” gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny.’

Source: Butler (1990) p. 11.

Judith Butler, in her book ‘Gender Trouble’, reasons that the way we view sex is as dependent on the social and cultural context as the way we view gender. According to Butler, both gender and sex are socially constructed because the establishment of sex as a duality also has a history – it is also set in its own cultural and social context. So, if the duality of sex really only came into prominence during the 18th century, then surely the entire concept of sex is also contested.

We now understand that gender identity is very closely related to a person’s psychological perception of themselves – their sense of themselves. Gender identity refers to a person’s sense of maleness or femaleness. This could be that a person identifies wholly with the female or male role, partially with both, or not at all. Gender identity is not fixed but may change over time. A person’s gender identity can be different to the sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is usually developed from about 18 months to 3 years.

‘From a vast array of gendered cues in their social worlds, children quickly form an impressive constellation of gender cognitions, including gender self-conceptions (gender identity) and gender stereotypes.’


Gender identity is a person’s innermost feeling of which gender they most identify with. In some cases, this does not match the assigned sex and the individual is obliged to live as their assigned sex or they may undergo social, hormonal and physical changes in order to best match their sex with their identity.
Section 1 Self-Assessment Questions

1. The World Health Organization defines gender as:
   (a) the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women
   (b) the differences between the male and female physical forms
   (c) the genetic (chromosomal) differences between women and men, although these are not always unambiguous
   (d) the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

2. One important implication of the idea of the constructed nature of sex as a category is:
   (a) there is little we can do about inequalities between men and women because these reflect essential biological differences between the sexes
   (b) the idea of sex ‘difference’ is seen as political and moral and linked to domination of women and its legitimation
   (c) people naturally fit into a binary categorisation (‘male’ / ‘female’) which is the basis for social organisation
   (d) people who do not naturally fit into a binary categorisation (‘male’ / ‘female’) are defined as not having a sex or gender.
2.0 THE STUDY OF GENDER

Section Overview
This section introduces you to the study of gender. First, we locate gender within the theoretical academic discourse in order to better understand the development of the subject as a discrete area of study and enquiry. We will explore where its foundations lie and what its lineage is. It also introduces the study of gender in relation to development and outlines the importance of gender as a central issue for development and social equality.

Section Learning Outcomes
By the end of this section students should:

• be aware of the history of gender studies as a discipline
• understand the difference between women’s studies and gender studies
• understand the genealogy of gender studies and how it relates to development.

2.1 Locating gender as an area of study

Gender is both a lived experience and a studied phenomenon. As a lived experience, it is one of the lenses we use to view the world and the most obvious part of our identity to which people relate, and on which they base their attitudes and behaviours. As a ‘studied’ phenomenon, gender is at both the centre and periphery of many disciplines and is an area of fervent academic study and debate. Gender is also a key area of policy and organisational management in an increasing number of fields and within many institutions. Gender is of concern and interest to a vast and increasing number of disciplines including the sciences, psychoanalysis and sociology, and more recently gender is being studied in law, development studies, geography, history, economics and politics among many other disciplines.

Academic interest in gender as a discrete topic did not begin until the early 1960s in the form of ‘women’s studies’. Universities in the USA were the first to provide undergraduate and graduate courses in women’s studies throughout the 1970s with the UK following suit at the start of the 1980s. The University of Kent (Canterbury) provided the first named MA programme in women’s studies in 1980. The areas studied within this academic field were reflective of the feminist concerns of the time. Early work in women’s studies focused predominantly on women’s inequality in the public arena. Issues related to women’s civil rights such as voting and legal access to the political space. Later, as feminists began to address personal issues such as body politics, women’s studies followed with analyses of sexuality, personal freedoms, gender violence, and gay and lesbian cultures (Grewal & Kaplan, 2006).
The multiple identities of gender studies

Most university courses on gender are found within other disciplines and are usually ‘added on’ to courses within traditional university departments such as history, sociology, media studies, etc. Downing (2013) argues that the lack of dedicated undergraduate courses in gender or women's studies should trigger a real concern among social scientists. A marked reduction in named gender or women's studies courses, particularly at undergraduate level, has occurred partially as an outcome of the main criticisms levelled at women's studies: that it existed in a vacuum and that it neglected the intersections with other subjects such as race, masculinity and disability – instead favouring a sole focus on the female experience. Another contributing factor occurred as a result of changing views within the subject influenced by the work of Michel Foucault and writers such as Judith Butler and Susan Stryker. Together this work formed a new perspective on identity, sexuality and gender roles which was to have a powerful impact on the discipline of women’s studies and which played a dominant force in recasting women's studies as gender studies. This influential body of work emerged as ‘queer theory’. Queer theory constitutes an increasingly large body of work and has relevance to a wide range of disciplines. A very brief introduction here helps us to understand some fundamentals in examining the definitions of gender and sex and also helps to locate the subject of gender within the wider work of gender as academic enquiry, as well as gender as a lived experience.

Central to queer theory is the proposition that identity categories are socially constructed, fluid and do not determine who we are. This thesis had a major impact in changing the direction of women's studies: if our identity is not fixed by our sex then the idea of studying or talking of women or men as being discrete bodies is meaningless. Women’s studies was predicated on the idea that a person’s sex was seen to be the foundation upon which a person’s gender identity was formed, creating two binary oppositions: female/male = feminine/masculine. Women’s studies was founded on a number of assumptions: that women shared a collective experience, or that women were defined by their female sex. However, queer theory rejected this binary opposition together with the concrete inflexibility of what it means to be a man or woman, as well as the idea that gender follows sex. It argued that sex could not form the ‘natural’ basis of gender because sex itself is a construction.

Each academic discipline has its own parameters and theoretical lenses through which to study the subject of gender and they will be liable to change over time. Some have applications which are very distant to those with which they were originally associated (Cornwall & Eade, 2010). Lesbian feminists have pointed out, for instance, that across much of the development discourse there has been an assumption that women form a homogenous group of heterosexual oppressed people, and they have criticised the narrow definitions and conceptualisation of women’s experiences expressed in development literature. While we shall examine different forms of feminism in greater depth later, it is relevant to note that the different debates within feminism between Western and non-Western theorists and activists has had an important part to play in the expansion of the study of gender in universities but also among activists, non-governmental organisations and international organisations. Another influential factor in widening the study of gender to encompass other areas of oppression was the intersections between gender, race and class. This is now understood in terms of ‘intersectionality’.
Intersectionality concerns itself with the examination of the interactions between the different forms of domination, subordination, oppression and discrimination. Some theorists (e.g., Scott, 1986) maintain that gender exists as part of other relations, such as race and class, and that identity is a process rather than a characterisation of a person (Acker, 1992: p. 567). This view sees gender as part of a process that exists as result of a multitude of influences including practices, ideologies, images, law, politics, the state, religion, the economy and the distribution of power within all sectors of society. As such, gender cannot be studied in a vacuum. Intersectionality has proven to be a valuable methodological lens through which to view social inequality.

### 2.2 The study of gender in relation to development

The word ‘gender’ has become so widely used in relation to social development that it can found in almost every policy document, report, paper or article. This phenomenon has occurred over the last 30 years but has proliferated most recently as policymakers, academics, activists, practitioners and groups increasingly attempt to understand (and more recently change) the historical subordination of women which has led to universal social, cultural, political and economic inequality. Throughout the 1970s, gender was often used as a replacement for the words sex or women.

The literature on gender within the development discourse uses many concepts and terms which aim to explain or explore the implications of gender within development. However, many of the terms are used interchangeably, which can cause confusion and be unhelpful when formulating policy. For those in the field of development, the focus was on the differences between men and women. One particular area of concern, for instance, was how the household or the wider economy was divided between the sexes. This approach focused on who did what and who gained what, according to their biological sex. Analysis of any diversity within the two sexes was all but ignored, and women and men were pigeonholed within one group or the other. At this time, there was little, if any, analysis of the many ways in which the genders related to each other, what their roles were, how those roles changed over time and how they differed from locality to locality.

By the 1990s, the study of gender had broadened and had gradually become a field of study about relations between men and women. Gender as a discursive field became theorised as a ‘basic principle of social structure and cultural interpretation’ (Acker, 1992: p. 565). The focus of study was the social and relational differences between men and women rather than merely the biological differences. This was later developed to encompass a more fully understood expression of gender. Consequently, for example, researchers began to investigate in more depth the notion of gendered institutions: the conceptualisation of institutions that are historically developed and organised and culturally determined by men. According to Acker, this includes ‘the law, politics, religion, the academy, the state and the economy’ (1992: p. 567). Research also focused more on masculinities as an area of study that was increasingly understood to be relevant to development.
Why is this relevant to development?

Increasingly, issues of violence against women, sex trafficking, sexual discrimination, female genital mutilation (FGM), reproductive rights, ‘honour-’ and dowry-related violence and marriage rights, among other issues, are all inextricably bound by the perceptions and behaviour that are associated with women and men and their gender and sexual roles and identities. The prevalence and persistence of these many forms of discrimination are root causes of social inequality and poverty. The power relations that exist between men and women and the cultural and social norms that support them are increasingly being examined.

Why is gender a development issue?

An understanding of gender from a development perspective encompasses an enquiry into the various aspects of women’s and men’s lives. Gender intersects with development at various locations including rights, labour, economic freedoms, sexual identity and sexual politics. Those interested in development are concerned with the ways that women and men are able to secure their basic human needs and rights.

The relationship between gender and development is a complex one with multiple outcomes. First, development may have a different effect on men than on women. This can occur on a number of levels and can be disadvantageous to women. One example is the modernisation of agriculture and accompanying changes to property rights, since mechanisation has affected the gender division of labour. Land titling also profoundly affects women’s land rights.

Second, development can affect the relations between men and women. Historically, many Asian, African and South American countries have been affected by colonialism, which has had a profound impact on economic, political, social and cultural structures. The degree to which this has affected gender relations varies worldwide; however, colonial governments have played a major role in remodelling economic, political and social institutions through land privatisation, taxation and changes in the gender division of labour, as well as the criminalisation of eunuchs and hermaphrodites, and the systematic erasure of non-conforming bodies.

These examples illustrate that gender is complex area of study, and policymaking on gender when it comes to development and livelihoods may be far from straightforward.
Section 2 Self-Assessment Questions

3 Regarding intersectionality, which of the following statements is NOT true?
   (a) Intersectionality focuses on the intersections between gender, race and class.
   (b) It is concerned with the interactions between different forms of domination, subordination, oppression and discrimination.
   (c) It argues that gender exists as part of other relations, such as race and class relations.
   (d) It argues that identity is a characterisation of a person rather than a process.

4 Over time, gender studies has increasingly focused on:
   (a) the power relations that exist between men and women and the cultural and social norms that support them
   (b) women’s civil rights such as voting and legal access to the political space
   (c) differences in household income between men and women
   (d) body politics.
UNIT SUMMARY

This unit has introduced the concepts of sex and gender, illustrating that these notions are now understood to be more complex than was once thought. The unit has examined some of the history of thought about sex and gender, showing that both are socially constructed categories that reflect power relations as much as biology. The unit has traced some of the developments in thinking about gender as a subject of study, showing that it has historically been examined within a wide range of academic disciplines, but more specifically within women’s studies and gender studies. Recently, the study of gender has encompassed other areas of oppression through focusing on the intersections between gender, race and class, so it is now understood in terms of intersectionality, which offers powerful insights into social inequality.

Evolving ideas about gender are important to the theory and practice of development, as reflected in the proliferation of interest in ‘gender’ in the development discourse. Again, the idea of gender in relation to development has had its own historical trajectory, from an initially narrow focus on the differences between men and women, to a broader and more inclusive consideration of the social and relational – as well as the biological – differences between men and women. Recent work has focused on gendered institutions (including legal, state and religious institutions) and on masculinities, as well as more traditional areas of study.

Many – if not all – major contemporary challenges in society have a gender dimension: for instance, violence against women, sex trafficking, sexual discrimination, FGM, reproductive rights, ‘honour’- and dowry-related violence, marriage rights, labour rights, economic freedoms, sexual identity and sexual politics. All of these issues are inextricably bound up with the perceptions and behaviours that are associated with women and men, and their gender and sexual roles and identities. The prevalence and persistence of these many forms of discrimination are now understood to be root causes of social inequality and poverty. The power relations that exist between men and women and the cultural and social norms that support them are increasingly being examined, questioned and challenged. These new understandings can form the basis for richer, deeper conceptions of development, equality, freedom and well-being.
UNIT SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What have been the main developments in the understanding of sex as a category over time?

2. What have been the main developments in the understanding of gender as a category over time?

3. Summarise briefly how an understanding of gender is relevant to development.
**KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**

**gender**
The state of being male or female, typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.

**gender relations**
The relations that occur as a product of individual’s gender roles. This is comprised of a multitude of relations, including the gender division of labour, economic, political and social norms, as well as sexuality. Gender relations are often mediated by power and social conformity.

**(gender) traits**
The qualities or characteristics of a person commonly associated with a given gender. Men and women may be considered to have particular traits which are nurtured and encouraged throughout childhood. Boys may be encouraged to display characteristics that are perceived to be masculine, such as strength, independence, competitiveness and rational behaviour. Girls may be encouraged to display passivity, dependence, submissiveness and emotional behaviours.

For instance, women in Shona culture are more expected than men to display tsika, a characteristic of politeness, civility and circumlocution.

**intersectionality**
The study of the interactions between different forms of domination, subordination, oppression and discrimination (eg gender, race and class), which are viewed as a process involving many practices, ideologies, images, law, politics, the state, religion, the economy and the distribution of power in society.
FURTHER STUDY MATERIALS


This ethnographic study describes social exclusion of the hijra in Bangladesh. It provides an examination of the experiences and challenges of gendered bodies that are considered outside accepted cultural and social norms. The student will be able to perceive the links between gender identity, human and sexual rights, and social inequality.


The UN WOMEN site contains useful resources and information about gender inequality and women’s situation worldwide. It is a recently amalgamated site that builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system which focused exclusively on gender equality and women’s empowerment: (a) Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), (b) United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), (c) Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) and (d) UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW).


This site contains links to the UNIFEM biennial publication *Progress of the World’s Women*.
REFERENCES


