

GENDER AREA EXAM, March 2013

Committee: Elizabeth McClintock, Mary Ellen Konieczny, Erika Summers-Effler

DAY ONE: Foundations, Theory, Methods

Foundations: Answer one of the following two questions (1 hour each)

1. Joan Acker describes sociological understandings of gender as evolving from “from sex roles to gendered institutions” (Acker, 1992). What is meant by this? How have sociological understandings of gender evolved over time (especially since the mid-1900s) and how have they been influenced by feminist scholars/activists? What is the current sociological understanding of gender? To what extent does this understanding remain controversial and in flux? What challenges do you envision for the current sociological conception of gender?

2. Within any time and culture, gender is a central axis of difference. What explains the universality of gender? In your opinion, would a genderless society be possible? Why or why not?

Theory: Answer one of the following two questions (1 hour each)

1. In your opinion, which theoretical perspective on gender is most compelling? Why?

2. Although the various theoretical perspectives on gender can be seen as competing perspectives, they can also be seen as complementary. How do social structural, social constructionist, postmodern, and biosocial perspectives contradict and/or complement each other?

Methods: Answer question one and either question two or question three (2 hours total)

You must answer question one:

1. As Sandra Harding notes, traditional social science theories have been applied “in ways that make it difficult to understand women’s participation in social life, or to understand men’s activities as gendered (vs. as representing ‘the human’).” [Harding. 1988. *Feminism and Methodology*. p.3]. What is meant by this critique and why is it not enough to simply “add women” to these existing social theories? *Your answer should not rely solely on Harding.*

You may choose between question two and question three (answer one of them):

2. What is the relationship between feminism and the sociological study of gender? Given that many gender scholars are politically feminist, what are the implications of merging activism with scholarship?

3. Explain the concepts of standpoint theory and strong objectivity with regards to research on gender.

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DAY TWO: Religion; Violence

Religion: Pick two questions to answer (1 hour each)

1. Scholars have brought different perspectives and/or traditions of feminist theory to bear on the study of religion and gender. What are the major views, and how do these different perspectives theorize religious women's oppression and/or empowerment? How do they conceptualize religious structures as consequential for women as agents, both in the congregation and in the world beyond it? In your view, which approach best explains religion's role in generating/ameliorating gender inequalities, and why?
2. Scholars have consistently documented higher levels of religiosity in women than in men. Why do women consistently display higher levels of religiosity than men? What are the different perspectives in this debate and which do you find most compelling? Can these competing perspectives be reconciled?
3. How do religion, work, family, and gender mutually influence each other? In what ways do religiosity and religious participation shape decisions about employment and family? In what ways do family and gender influence religiosity and religious participation? How does this vary by religious affiliation or denomination, and what explains these differences? What does this suggest for the continuation or amelioration of gender inequality?

Violence: Pick two questions to answer (1 hour each)

1. Feminist scholars argue that domestic violence is rooted in gender and power and represents men's attempts to dominate and control women. Yet family violence scholars argue that women and men are equally likely to engage in violence ("gender symmetry"). Each side has collected compelling empirical support for their position. Which perspective do you prefer, and why? Can these theoretical perspectives and their associated empirical findings be reconciled?
2. What does the social and interactional context of sexual violence against women on college campuses (e.g., party rape, fraternities) tell us about gender and about women's status on campus? What does this understanding suggest for the future of rape on college campuses? What are the broader implications for gender equality (beyond college) and for theoretical understandings of gender?
3. What does the literature on sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the gendered use of violence tell us about gender more generally? How do these processes of violence intersect with other axes of inequality, such as class and race? What are the implications of this research for theoretical understandings of gender, for gender's intersections with race and class, and for the continuation of gender inequality?