

## **GENDER AREA EXAM, March 2018, Student #1**

Committee: Elizabeth McClintock, Abi Ocobock, Sarah Mustillo

### **DAY ONE: Foundations, Theory, Methods**

**Theory and Foundations: Answer either question one or question two, and pick one of questions two, three, or four (2 questions total; about 2 hours total)**

You may choose one of the following two questions (answer one of them):

1. Within any time and culture, gender is a central axis of difference and of inequality. Across cultures and eras, gender is ubiquitous and male advantage over women is nearly ubiquitous. What explains the universality of gender and the near-universality of male dominance?
2. Across time and culture, sex, gender, and sexuality are generally, albeit imperfectly, aligned. Even in societies that accept multiple gender identities, there are two predominant genders, aligned with biological sex and associated with heterosexuality. What is the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality? Why are they usually congruent but never perfectly so?

You may choose one of the following three questions (answer one of them):

3. 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?
4. Joan Acker describes sociological understandings of gender as evolving from “from sex roles to gendered institutions” (Acker, 1992). What does she mean by this? What is the current sociological understanding of gender and to what extent does this understanding remain controversial and in flux?
5. How have theoretical perspectives on gender evolved over time? How has this influenced research on gender? What do you envision as the future trajectory of gender theory/theories, and how might this influence research?

**Methods: Answer two of the following three questions (2 questions total; about 2 hours total)**

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*

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*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.*

2. How have the concepts of “feminist method,” a “feminist methodology,” and/or a “feminist epistemology” shaped research on gender and on the intersections of gender with race, class, and sexuality? How might these concepts be useful to you in your own work? *Your answer should differentiate between these terms.*

3. In her essay, “The Master’s Tools Will never Dismantle the Master’s House,” what does Audre Lorde mean by this metaphor? In what ways does she extend the feminist critique of science as androcentric and falsely “objective”?

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**DAY TWO: Religion; Bodies and Sexualities**

**Religion: Answer question one, and then either question two or question three (2 hours total)**

You must answer question one:

1. Feminist activists and scholars have long engaged with religious doctrine and institutions. Have they adequately engaged with sociologists of religion? Have sociologists of religion adequately incorporated gender into their theoretical perspectives? How has this dialogue developed over time? How have shifts in scholars' understanding of feminism and gender (e.g., first, second, and third-wave feminism) altered their perspectives on religion?

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

2. Avishai (2016) critiques "the feminist dilemma of religion: assumptions about religion's inherent incompatibility with the interests of women and gender and sexual minorities that results in ambivalence and hostility toward studying religion and learning from religion cases." Does the debate over religious women's agency, particularly in gender-traditional/conservative religions, reflect Avishai's "feminist dilemma"? How have gender and religion theorists conceptualized religious women's oppression and/or empowerment?

3. Scholars often focus on the experiences of individuals whose gender, sexual, or religious identities or performances are in contradiction (e.g., gay Catholics, conservative Christian women married to gay men or using "immoral" reproductive technologies, couples with egalitarian marriages who espouse patriarchal marital doctrines, etc.). Using insights from such cases, consider how religion, gender, and sexuality are interdependent and mutually constructed. How have scholars conceptualized the integration and/or tension between sexual, gendered, and religious identities and practices?

**Bodies and Sexualities: Answer question one, and then either question two or question three (2 hours total)**

You must answer question one:

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1. How do scholars theorize the body, beauty, the “work” to maintain them, and their relationship to gender and sexuality? How do they conceptualize agency, empowerment, and oppression within body/beauty work practices? Consider and contrast competing perspectives.

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

2. Scholars have argued that sexuality and sex are undertheorized in sociological literature. Do you agree? Describe and comment on the major theoretical perspectives and intellectual shifts in the sexualities literature over time.

3. How have scholars conceptualized and theorized sexual pleasure and orgasm? How do bodies, gender, heterosexism, media, and religion shape sexual subjectivity? Describe and comment on the major theoretical perspectives and directions for future research.

## **GENDER AREA EXAM, March 2018, Student #2**

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### **DAY ONE: Foundations, Theory, Methods**

**Theory and Foundations: Answer either question one or question two, and pick one of questions two, three, or four (2 questions total; about 2 hours total)**

You may choose one of the following two questions (answer one of them):

1. Within any time and culture, gender is a central axis of difference and of inequality. Across cultures and eras, gender is ubiquitous and male advantage over women is nearly ubiquitous. What explains the universality of gender and the near-universality of male dominance?
2. Across time and culture, sex, gender, and sexuality are generally, albeit imperfectly, aligned. Even in societies that accept multiple gender identities, there are two predominant genders, aligned with biological sex and associated with heterosexuality. What is the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality? Why are they usually congruent but never perfectly so?

You may choose one of the following three questions (answer one of them):

3. 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?
4. Joan Acker describes sociological understandings of gender as evolving from “from sex roles to gendered institutions” (Acker, 1992). What does she mean by this? What is the current sociological understanding of gender and to what extent does this understanding remain controversial and in flux?
5. How have theoretical perspectives on gender evolved over time? How has this influenced research on gender? What do you envision as the future trajectory of gender theory/theories, and how might this influence research?

**Methods: Answer two of the following three questions (2 questions total; about 2 hours total)**

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*

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2. How have the concepts of “feminist method,” a “feminist methodology,” and/or a “feminist epistemology” shaped research on gender and on the intersections of gender with race, class, and sexuality? How might these concepts be useful to you in your own work? *Your answer should differentiate between these terms.*

3. In her essay, “The Master’s Tools Will never Dismantle the Master’s House,” what does Audre Lorde mean by this metaphor? In what ways does she extend the feminist critique of science as androcentric and falsely “objective”?

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### **DAY TWO: Religion; Bodies and Sexualities**

**Queer Theory: Answer question one, and then either question two or question three (2 hours total)**

You must answer question one:

1. Gamson (1995) describes queer theory as arising from an “impulse to destabilize identities from within” the identity-based gay and lesbian rights movements. How has this political debate between identity-based and queer movements translated into the academic dialogue between queer theorists and scholars espousing existing theoretical and epistemological paradigms within the sociology of gender? What are the key points of debate and agreement?

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

2. Sociological research is sometimes criticized as implicitly utopian. For example, research on inequality may assume that the ideal world is one without this inequality. What visions of utopia do queer theorists present? How does the queer vision of utopia align (or not) with the utopian visions of conventional (conventional meaning not queer theorists) gender and sexuality scholars?

3. How does queer theory account for transgender individuals? Contrast the queer perspective on transgender identity with the accounts offered by conventional gender and sexuality scholars. Where do these perspectives on transgender individuals succeed, and where do they fail?

**The Body: Answer question one, and then either question two or question three (2 hours total)**

You must answer question one:

1. How do scholars theorize the body, body “work,” and body modification within broader perspectives on gender and sexuality? How do they conceptualize agency, empowerment, and oppression within body work and body modification practices? How do these practices disrupt and/or maintain definitional boundaries on the gendered body? Consider and contrast competing perspectives.

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

2. Like many feminist scholars, King (2004) critiques Foucault's account of power and its effects on the body as problematically gender-neutral. Do you agree with this critique? What is the relationship between the body, sex categorization, and masculinity/femininity in regards to bodily discipline, modification, and oppression?

3. Hausman (1995) argues that developments in endocrinology and plastic surgery were necessary, as material and discursive conditions, to produce the demand for sex change. That is, she largely credits medical technologies for the emergence of transsexualism. Do you agree? How do other scholars account for body narratives and embodiment among transsexual women and men?