Sex, Gender and Society

1. Sex vs Gender:

   a. Sex: The biological distinctions between females and males
      - Sexually dimorphic human biological traits include:
        - Primary sex traits: genitals, organs used for reproduction (internal and external)
        - Secondary Sex Traits: muscle mass, skeletal structure (pelvis, feet), amount of body hair (facial), hormone levels, tonality of voice (vocal cords), mammary glands, etc.

   b. Gender:
      - The cultural distinctions between women and men; meaningful feminine and masculine traits and behaviors.

   b. Gender:
      - Being a cultural phenomenon, gender traits may take on:
        i. Material forms: tangible, objective aspects of gender
           - For example: fashion - dress, hair, and jewelry
        ii. Non-material forms: learned or subjective characteristics and ideas
           - "feminine" behaviors (such as nurturance and focus on body image) and "masculine" or "macho" behaviors (such as toughness and a focus on the external world).

   - Repercussions: In US society, women tend to be hypercritical of themselves (because they tend to be held to a higher standard than men). This can lead to increased risk of eating disorders and other psychological and physical illnesses.
2. A Brief History of Sex Norms in America

A. Victorian Sexuality (mid/late 1800s–1900)

i. Sexual taboos were common.
It was widely believed that sexual stimulation sapped a person’s “vital energies.” Masturbation was particularly demonized and forbidden in “decent” Victorian society.

Views of:
- **Men**: naturally sexual and animalistic
- **Women (and children)**: idealized as pure and virtuous—it was believed that women did not experience sexual desire

ii. Because of these perceptions, premarital and extramarital sexual relations for men were accepted, but **not for women**: this set up a sexual double standard.

*For example:* Up until 1884, a woman could be sent to prison for denying a husband sex, but no laws existed to prohibit male adultery.
Sex, Gender and Society

2. A Brief History of Sex Norms in America

b. Sexuality in the 1900s – 4 Main Eras

i. 1900-1945: small increases in the number of singles having sex before marriage; (particularly in the "Roaring '20s"). However, the sexual double standard continued;

ii. 1945-1967 (the summer of love): greater sexual permissiveness with affection; sexual relations were seen as OK outside of marriage if the couples were in love and devoted; but sex norms were still restrictive.

iii. 1967-1981 (’67 – the “summer of love”): increasing view that sexuality is natural and expected from both men and women – a period of sexual revolution.

c. 1980s: the sexual “counterrevolution”

1981: AIDS is discovered and named by the CDC

Other examples of changing norms of sexuality:

- The “Porn Wars” of the late 1980s
- Frank Zappa’s fight
- The Internet and “Cyberporn”
- Non-traditional groups such as the elderly expressing their sexuality
- The conservative backlash against the sexual revolution has clashed with the increasing normalization of sexuality in U.S. society.

Sex and gender are much more openly discussed than 50 years ago, largely because of the influence of the mass media; however, religiously conservative “family values” clearly conflict with this normalization; this leads to cultural schizophrenia.

Sex, Gender and Society

3. Feminism and Patriarchy

“Feminism” is a recurring movement that focuses generally on the gender stratification.

Inequality by sex (stratification) is a result of gender discrimination.

The gendered structure of power in American society is defined as:

Patriarchy: a social structure in which male power dominates the social institutions.
3. Feminism and Patriarchy: Focus on Inequality

a. Economic Inequality

i. Inequality of opportunity

- High status jobs that are still predominantly held by men
- There are jobs that need to be reserved only for women
- Internationally there is a huge gap in technology (cf. Hans Rosling)

ii. Wages gap: females still make on average 80 cents for every male dollar

iii. The “glass ceiling”: regardless of education and experience, the “old boys” network makes it hard for women to enter the top ranks of business

iv. U.S. labor force participation for women has risen nearly 30% since 1970. Cross-culturally, however, we are only in the middle.

b. Political Inequality

Women and their political interests are NOT represented equally at the local, state and national level of politics.
### Table 9.2

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