

# PERSPECTIVES: AN OPEN INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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# Gender and Sexuality Learning Activities and Resources

## Learning Activities

### Activity 1: How Does Gender Shape Your Life?

Think about everything, and we do mean **everything**, you did since waking up this morning. Include micro-behaviors, tiny behavioral acts that take minutes or even seconds, as well as objects, substances, and language, spoken and written. Think about all the “cultural” (i.e. not found “in nature”) artifacts associated with these behaviors. For example, while urinating is natural, your “toilet” is a cultural invention. Now, which activities and behaviors were in some way “gendered”? That is, which had an element associated with “female” or “male” in some way?

As you think about how gender has shaped your life today, consider:

- What did you sleep in?
- How did you handle bodily functions?
- How did you clean yourself?
- How did you modify your body? (e.g. “shaving”, “makeup,” “deodorant”)
- What do the names for products, like deodorants, perfumes or aftershave, convey?

List all these gendered (and gender-neutral) aspects of your

day thus far. Also consider: how typical is today? Would a weekend involve more or less “gendered” dimensions?

## **Activity 2. Understanding Gender from a Martian Perspective**

If you were a Martian, what would you have to “know” or “learn” in order to follow gender rules on a college campus? As you consider your response, think about the following questions.

- In what ways are we a gender “binary” culture? An “opposite sex” culture? An “androgynous” culture?
- Are areas of U.S. life informally sexually segregated? Are there, informally, “male” and “female” spheres? Are there male spheres where women are not supposed to go? Or spheres where if they go, they incur certain risks? Are there any parallels for men who enter female spheres?
- Are there any elements of an “honor” and “shame” culture in the U.S. that a Martian should be aware of? What about in your own social circle?

## **Activity 3. Ethnographic Interview: How has Gender Changed Over Time?**

Interview someone at least age 65 (if you are close to 65, find someone a generation older or younger than you). Ask that person: What kind of changes in gender roles, gender relations, gender restrictions or privileges have occurred within your lifetime? After you conclude your interview, compare notes with others to find common threads. Then ask someone closer to your age what changes they anticipate may happen their lifetime?

### **Activity 4. Bathroom Transgression**

Transgender people often face dilemmas when needing to use public restrooms. As a way to experience what it's like to be an ally, some people have started intentionally using bathrooms designated for others—an issue that took on a heightened relevance in 2016, when North Carolina banned transgender people from using sex-segregated bathrooms that did not correspond to the sex registered on their birth certificates. As part of this activity, consider whether you dare enter the bathroom you don't normally use. If you do, then try it! What happens when you enter the men's room, or the women's room? How are these boundaries patrolled and enforced? Many European countries offer unisex facilities; do you think the U.S. should do so as well? Or do you agree with some politicians in North Carolina who cited safety concerns for public restroom use by transgender individuals?

*Note: keep safety in mind if you choose this activity, and beware of settings where people may be hostile to an experiment like this.*

### **Activity 5. Analyzing Gendered Stereotypes and Masculinity in Music Videos**

Popular culture plays an enormous role in shaping our ideas about gender, about femininity and masculinity, and about sexuality. Watch several of the videos below, paying careful attention to how these concepts are visible in current music videos. Do they draw on gendered stereotypes or push boundaries of expected gendered norms? Specify which videos you watched in your response, and also look for examples of other videos that could stimulate fruitful

conversations about masculinity, femininity and other gender dynamics.

- Watch [Maddi & Tae, “Girl in a Country Song.”](#) This song is partly a response to Blake Shelton – [“Boys ‘Round Here,”](#) and Florida Georgia Line – [“Get your Shine On.”](#) What do you think of Maddi & Tae’s portrayal of men in their video? How does it compare with portrayals of women in videos by Blake Shelton and Florida Georgia Line?
- Compare [“Bitch in Business”](#) (created by MBA students), to “Girl in a Country Song.” Pay particular attention to the third and fourth verses of “Bitch in Business.” Would you change any lyrics, or do you think they are justified? What about the word “Bitch” itself? Is it problematic? In what ways? Do words matter? Can you really change the historically negative associations of a word, like “bitch” or “slut”? Are there parallels to ethnic slurs?
- Compare Niki Minaj and Lady Gaga: how do they deploy gender in their songs, lyrics and videos? How do their strategies compare to a male artist from a similar genre?
- Compare Sir Mix-A-Lot, [“Baby Got Back”](#) and Niki Minaj, [“Anaconda.”](#) How do they deploy gender in their songs, lyrics, and videos? Is there any significant difference between what Minaj does in her video and what Sir Mix-a-Lot does in his? How is race used in these videos?
- Should the music video industry be regulated and if so, in what ways and why? Does it make a difference if the videos are frequently consumed by (and marketed to) young people, pre-teens and teens, rather than adults who have a more fully-

developed personal sense of identity? What concerns might you as a parent have?

For further exploration and analysis, view the video, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (<http://www.mediaed.org/>). Do you think the analysis provided by filmmaker Byron Hurt can be applied to these music videos?

Also view *Dreamworlds 3* (<http://www.mediaed.org/>), which analyzes the stories told in popular culture about gender and sexuality. How well does this analysis apply to contemporary videos, including the ones that you've just viewed?

## Resources for Further Exploration

### Educational Media Companies and Distributors:

- Documentary Education Resources. <http://www.der.org>. One of the earliest distributors of anthropology-ethnographic films. Includes older, but still very useful, ethnographic films. Such films document ways of life that are rapidly disappearing.
- Media Education Foundation. <http://www.mediaed.org/> Focuses on contemporary USA culture, with a wide range of videos analyzing mass media, popular culture, and advertising. . Videos often include teaching guides.
- Women Make Movies. [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com). Wide range of films/videos by women filmmakers on diverse topics, social groups, both within the US and throughout the world. One of the earliest distributors of films on gender.

- Women's Media Center.  
[www.womensmediacenter.com/](http://www.womensmediacenter.com/) More U.S.-centered resources, especially contemporary issues of women's representation in the media.

### **Some Key Accessible Readings by Anthropologists:**

Brettell, Carolyn and Brettell, Carolyn B. and Carolyn F. Sargent, eds. *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. 6th edition (New York: Routledge, 2012). Excellent collection of articles, with overviews. Also includes a Film Bibliography for each topical section of the book.

Geller, Pamela L. and Miranda K. Stockett, eds., *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present, and Future* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Many articles by biological and archeological anthropologists.

Hodgson, Dorothy L., ed. *The Gender, Culture, and Power Reader*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Useful reader for students and non-specialist readers. Includes a wide range of articles, often adapted from longer academic articles.

Ellen Lewin, ed., *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). Excellent collection with introductory essay by editor, a pioneer in feminist and Lesbian-Gay studies.

Strum, Shirley and Fedigan, Linda, eds., *Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Ward, Martha and Monica Edelstein, *A World full of Women*. 6th edition (New York: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2014). Readable overview of the field.



## Some Useful Organizational Websites:

[American Men's Studies Association](#)

[Association for Feminist Anthropology](#), American Anthropological Association

[VOICES](#): Journal of the Association for Feminist Anthropology

[Book reviews](#) from the Association for Feminist Anthropology

[Association for Queer Anthropology](#)

[Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University](#)

[Feminist Majority Foundation](#)

[Guttmacher Center](#) (Research on reproductive health)

[National Women's Studies Association](#)

[Planned Parenthood](#)