

# GENDER / SEX IDENTITY

IDENTITY & LIT (SU, 13)

GUIDRY-GRIMES

# A Few Appetizers

- ◆ *Killing Us Softly*
- ◆ *“Brittney Gringer Will Model Men’s Clothing for Nike”*
- ◆ *“My Secret Self” on 20/20*

# Sex, Gender

- ◆ Sex: based on biological features (genitalia)
- ◆ Gender: based on social and cultural constructions
  - ◆ Traits (passive vs. aggressive), roles (house wife vs. breadwinner), preferences (dolls vs. trucks)
  - ◆ Problem of false binaries: one picture of femininity and masculinity

# Relationship b/w Sex & Gender?

## ◇ Biological determinism

- ◇ Sex and gender are naturally coextensive (e.g., women are biologically disposed toward motherhood, emotionality)

## ◇ Social determinism

- ◇ What gender someone adopts completely depends on the social environment, pressures

## ◇ Concerns about any form of determinism

- ◇ New and free expressions of sex, gender
- ◇ Limits of categories

# Problems with Sex/Gender Distinction?

- ❖ **Gender realism:** everyone of given gender shares common experiences and features; can distinguish genders based on what *all* women experience vs. what all men experience
- ❖ **Particularism challenge:** intersecting identities of race, class, ethnicity, etc. will result in many experiences of womanhood, manhood

# Problems with Sex/Gender Distinction?

- ◇ Normativity challenge: false gender realist accounts  
→ normative expectations (criteria for being a “real” woman)
- ◇ Problem of reinforcing normative requirements for what gender attributes women and men should have (so should not try to define these categories)
- ◇ Problem of exclusion: Those who do not conform are not real women or are failed women

# Problems with Sex/Gender Distinction?

- ◆ Construction-of-sex challenge: social, cultural factors at play in how 'sex' is defined
- ◆ Social pressures on how secondary sex traits have been manipulated over time (e.g., causes for smaller stature of most women)
- ◆ Social meanings determine what is picked out as most relevant and salient for identifying sex (e.g., chromosomes, hormones, inner vs. outer genitalia)

# Butler on Performativity of Gender

- ◇ Mistaken to believe in “gendered core” – women *qua* women share essential traits (same with men)
- ◇ Gender as illusion
  - ◇ No essential gender traits
  - ◇ Asymmetrical power relations create and maintain gender categories

# Butler on Performativity of Gender

- ◇ Gender as intelligible only if it matches constructed expectations
  - ◇ Women as feminine with sexual desire for men
  - ◇ Men as masculine with sexual desire for women
  - ◇ → limited by accepted discourse
- ◇ Marginalization, policing, and discrimination against those who do not fit these norms and definitions
  - ◇ E.g., lesbians are viewed as mistaken about their identity, failing in femininity

# Butler on Performativity of Gender

- ◇ Aims of gender illusion:
  - ◇ set up easy binaries that fit power structures
  - ◇ make gender identifications appear inevitable
  - ◇ make gender identities uniform
  - ◇ make heterosexuality seem the only natural desire
- ◇ Gender performance through habitual acts –clothing, gait, body manipulation, role adoption
  - ◇ Making oneself gendered through these sanctioned, expected habits
  - ◇ Regulatory practices of gender formation **constitute** gender identity (so should reject gender to reject practices)

