

Aula 2

INTRODUCTION TO GENDER STUDIES

META

To introduce students to gender studies and its basic concepts.

OBJETIVO

To present the main tenets of Gender Studies, a brief history its development and the basic concepts frequently employed in this field.

PRERREQUISITO

Notions about the historicity of the concept of literature;
Notions of the process of formation and institutionalization of Literary History and Theory of Literature as disciplines that have in Literature its object of study.

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INTRODUÇÃO

Before anything, you should know that we will have two lessons in which gender studies will be discussed. This one aims to provide you with some general information on the field. Therefore, you will be presented to its definition, main tenets, a brief history and the main terms that are commonly used by its scholars. Let us begin, shall we?

You have probably heard the term “gender” before, have you not? However, do you know what it means? Or should we say, are you aware of some of the meanings it might take on? Understanding the distinction between “gender” and sex and the possible meanings the former can express must precede any attempt to define Gender Studies. Although one cannot say it is a strange word, its meaning (s) is less evident than one may think at first. In fact, it has undergone considerable change since its first use or entrance into common vocabulary. Knowing such peculiarities will help us better delineate the scope and object of Gender Studies.

If we trace back its etymology, we will find out that amongst its earliest meanings were that of “kind”, “type” or “sort”. Its Latin counterpart *genus*, based on which the Middle English equivalent was created, meant “birth”, “family”, “nation”. For a significant amount of time, the term had been employed in its grammatical sense, i.e., to refer to linguistic categories such as *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter*. Such a usage, according to Aristotle, was probably introduced by Protagoras in the 5th century B.C.

Henry Watson Fowler (1858-1933), an English lexicographer most known for his *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926) and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1911), provides the following definition “gender... is a grammatical term only. To talk of persons...of the masculine or feminine g[ender], meaning of the male or female sex, is either a jocularity (permissible or not according to context) or a blunder (1926: 221)”.

This is not, however, the only meaning the term in point can assume. In fact, it is not even the most frequent sense in which it has been used in recent years, especially in academic circles. Therein, it has meant more than just an alternative word for “sex”, even though one should not say it has no connection with the latter. It is usually said that the distinction between “gender” and “sex” had been introduced by a sexologist named John Money, in 1955, in *An Examination of Some Basic Sexual Concepts: The Evidence of Human Hermaphroditism*. For him, the concept of *gender* should not be confined to the masculine/feminine dichotomy. It had more to do with social roles, mannerisms, behavior, identity and, ultimately, a “man-made” category (that is, *a social construct*). This sense of the term, however, would not become popular until the 1970s, when it was incorporated into feminist theory. Nowadays, it is used in academia in various fields not excepting literature.



John William Money (8 July 1921 – 7 July 2006) was a psychologist, sexologist and author, specializing in research into sexual identity and biology of gender. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Money

John Money (1921-2006) also coined the expression “gender role”, which consisted of the actions or responses that may reveal one’s status as a boy, man, girl or woman in a given society. Gender roles might refer to activities, clothing, speech patterns, occupations and alike that are assigned by society to individuals according to their sexes. Until recently, household chores, for example, were solely classified as feminine work. Therefore, society expects them to perform such tasks. Although some change has been seen on various fronts, gender divisions can still be widely felt. If you look into the world of sports, you will notice that, for a long time, it was organized according to one’s gender. Ballet, even to this day, is still seen as a feminine sport. Soccer, in turn, as a masculine one, to the extent that if a woman decides to do it, her very gender might be called into question. Another interesting example of a “masculine” sport can be found in *Formula 1*. How often do you see female drivers on TV?

It does not stop there. In addition to what happens in the world of sport, the job market has for a long time been structured according to one’s gender. Occupations such as scientists, engineers, doctors were, and to a significant extent, still are male-dominated. Conversely, jobs such as that of a secretary, administrative assistant, nurse, elementary or middle school teacher, cashier, caregiver, housekeeping cleaner and alike are normally associated with women. This list of male-dominated occupations (and its counterpart) is much longer than one may think at first. Try and do some research on the gendered divisions of labor on a global scale, and you will be surprised.

What you must bear in mind, however, is that such divisions are not considered “natural”, but as social constructs and therefore susceptible to change. This assumption is advocated for by feminists as well as those in the field of Gender Studies, about which we start to talk henceforth

GENDER STUDIES: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Having made a few remarks on the possible meanings that the term “gender” can assume, you are now ready to be introduced to Gender Studies. As an academic field of inquiry, Gender Studies is relatively young. In fact, the academic study of gender can be traced back to the 1960s, and it should be understood in its connection with a new wave in feminism, which played an important role in its development as a new analytical category. At the time, second wave feminism was speaking up against all sorts of gender inequalities. In academia, disciplines started to be criticized for contributing to the marginalization of women, by producing knowledge that did not take gender into consideration. Until the 1970s, gender had not been a concern for social sciences, the arts or the humanities. Sociology, for example, would study mostly male individuals and address issues from a strictly male perspective. Only after some struggles the term started to be incorporated into such fields (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004: 9).

Such a questioning of male-centered approaches also reached the English Literature. Here the issue was the need to redefine a masculine, European, white “canon”, which clearly excluded women and was not interested in the historical circumstances that kept them marginalized in literary circles. There was an effort to bring to light the male-centered ideology upon which the English literature and, by extension, the Western literary canon had been founded. This move would trigger a wave of renovation of the literary canon, through which some attention would be given – not without resistance – to once marginalized and forgotten female writers.

A book which embodies such an effort is the one by American literary critic and feminist Elaine Showalter (1941-) entitled *A Literature of Their Own*, published in 1977. She is one of the founders of feminist literary criticism in the United States and the main proponent of what came to be known as *gynocriticism*. This consisted of a literary project that intended to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature. According to her, such an intellectual undertaking includes three major aspects: (i) - the examination of female writers and their place in literary history; by means of which one should notice the way women had been “pushed” to its margins or even left out of it (ii) – the analysis of how female characters were treated in books written both by male and female writers; (iii) and, most importantly, the discovery and exploration of a canon of literature written by women. This latter aspect, as you can see, is totally in tune with the attempt to renovate the Western (and English) literary canon, by securing a long-denied place for women.

Feminist literary criticism gained so much momentum that literary critics did not confine themselves to literature, but started to address what lied beyond literary boundaries *per se*. This was the case with American activist Kate Millett. In her 1971 book *Sexual Politics*, considered by many to be an

important theoretical touchstone for second wave feminism, Millett starts out her analysis in literary criticism, but continues all the way to put forth a critique of Freud's and Marx's works. This would later become a common practice in feminist literary criticism.

You must have noticed by now that the field of literary criticism produced important female intellectuals who wished to question all the knowledge [including far-reaching theoretical paradigms such as Marxism] built under a patriarchal mindset. This notable contribution is related to a fact of some relevance in the development of gender studies. Such a fact is that the humanities concentrated a significant number of women, which made of it a fruitful garden of feminist critics in the 1960s and 1970s. It was around this time that women's studies, to which Gender Studies is to some extent tributary, started to develop and the humanities were its natural habitat. Despite being notably interdisciplinary, women's studies initially resided in disciplines such as English, history and sociology (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004: 10).

Women's studies programs became more and more common. On the one hand, they fostered various critiques that ended up transforming many fields. On the other, many people saw them as specialized areas of academic concern. Gender Studies, as it is seen by many, amplified the field of women's studies. In most cases, what was once called "women's studies" are nowadays referred to as "gender studies". The latter came to be seen as more inclusive, since the former label tended to place some emphasis solely on women. Also, with the advent of postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches, the very idea of "woman" as a unitary category started to be called into question, causing many scholars to avoid the term. "Gender" has presented itself as a possible substitute for it. However, even though Gender Studies has gained currency in our day, it has also been targeted with criticism.

Much of it has come out of women's studies circles within which some think that "the rise of gender studies can take the form of making women *per se* invisible in the study of masculinity or male/female relations" (de Groot and Maynard 1993: 6). In other words, those who are critical of such a shift in terminology say that it removes the emphasis placed on "women", since the new label [gender studies] can also accommodate "men and masculinity studies". In this respect, it is seen by many as a dilution and a depoliticisation of the field or an attempt to "tame" it if you will.

Despite the controversy around its label, throughout its development, Gender Studies has been characterized as being multi- and inter-disciplinary. This is probably one of its defining features and partly explains why such an area of inquiry has made so great an impact on so many different fields. In fact, it has changed the knowledge-production process itself, since it called into question the very foundations upon which Western intellectuality had

been erected. Nowadays, it still remains a central perspective for the study of gender and is widely embraced by students in academia.

Now that we have said a few words about the historical circumstances under which Gender Studies came into being, here goes a simple definition for it, in case you have not been able to quite get it. It is an academic field which is primarily concerned with the study of the manner in which the norms and patterns of behavior associated with masculinity and femininity are fixed and maintained and how they impact women and men alike. Let us now turn to some of its basic concepts, some of which we have already mentioned in the introduction to this class.

SEX AND GENDER

As already suggested before, sex and gender are not interchangeable within Gender Studies. It is important to understand such difference so one can realize the role played by culture in defining what a man or a woman is. To put it simply, the term “sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. In other words, there are anatomical features (male and female reproductive systems are the most mentioned) that are able to determine whether an individual is male or female. Such features are considered by many to be somewhat objective and verifiable. Gender, on the other hand, is a term usually employed to refer to socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that are commonly associated with being male or female. Therefore, it is a product of social, cultural and psychoanalytical factors. Unlike sex, which is usually seen as a fact of nature, gender is a social construct and – due to its very composition – can be changed. One can say that gender is closely linked to how a given society confers meaning upon biological difference (maleness and femaleness).

The shaping of an individual so that s/he conforms to a certain gender s/he is supposed to belong starts at a very early age. Let us think of babies, for example. If they are male, the color of their rooms or clothes must be appropriate to their gender. It is hard to imagine parents painting their baby room pink after being told they will have a boy. This would be unlikely because in our society colors are still seen from a gendered perspective, which means to say that there are colors considered masculine, such as blue, and feminine like pink. Such gender-based categorization extends itself to encompass almost all aspects of life. Thus, there are boy and girl games, toys (such as cars and dolls), behaviors, occupations, and the list goes on. In terms of behavior, for example, being too emotive is considered to be a feminine behavioral pattern. You have probably heard the maxim “real men don’t cry” at least once in your life. Such statements emerge from a highly gendered culture, which still takes women as the weaker sex. In order

to help you better understand the differences between these terms, have a look at the table below:

SEX	GENDER
A natural fact	A social construct
It is biological. It denotes to visible differences in genitalia and related differences in procreative function	It is a socio-cultural construct and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, related roles and responsibility, etc.
A universal term	It is variable it changes under the influence of time, geographical and socio-cultural settings.
Nature	History

GENDER STEREOTYPES

This is another frequently used expression with which you must be familiarized. Gender stereotypes pervade our life. They have been naturalized in such a way that one has a hard time trying to recognize them. It is not uncommon to see people inadvertently reinforcing them both by their actions and discourse. That is why knowing what they are and learning how to spot them is of great relevance if one wishes to dispel them. What are they then? The answer to this question is rather simple and it could be phrased as follows: gender stereotypes are simplistic generalizations as to gender attributes, differences or characteristics. Such stereotypes are almost invariably inaccurate yet they portray themselves as faithful depictions of a given gender. In addition to being inaccurate, they can also be described as essentializing, since they show a set of characteristics as the defining traces of a group or gender. Many of these stereotypes have been around for centuries and can be easily found in literature, philosophy, religious works – including the bible and the Quran –, painting, sculpture and alike.

In literature, for example, one could mention numerous instances in which gender stereotypes were in play. In love poetry, representing women as delicate, defenseless creatures, always in need of male protection and that should be treated tenderly given their weaker nature had been a common practice for a long time. Portraying them as angelic or saint-like was not rare, too. Conversely, explicitly negative stereotypes are not hard to find in human “literary” productions – “literary” taken in its broadest sense. It should be enough to mention a book that has impacted Western mentality and culture in a unprecedented fashion: the bible – which for many is a poetic masterpiece. In the tale of the “Fall of man”, Eve is the one to

blame, since she let herself be seduced by the serpent and eventually caused Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Such a story will become the genesis of many negative stereotypes about women that will irradiate their prejudices to religion and culture. A woman (Eve) motivated the first man's fall (Adam) and so has been thought throughout much of Western history that women are potential evils or "bringers of destruction".

Another stereotype which can emerge from the tale of the fall of man is that women are gullible, i.e., inclined to be persuaded by words, since that is the means used by the serpent to talk Eve into eating from the prohibited tree. Another skill long associated with women is that of seduction, by the use of which they can make men do whatever they please. Such stereotypes will flood into later literary productions and are still around to this day. Every now and then they emerge if not in books, in advertisement, cinema, theater, or personal interactions. There are many another stereotypes one can mention, but instead of talking about all of them, we will provide you with a list of some personality traits that are usually organized from a gendered perspective. These traits are the raw material for the formation of gender stereotypes about both men and women.

Masculine Traits	Feminine Traits
Rational	Sensitive/emotional
Assertive	Passive
Independent	Dependent
Aggressive	Submissive
Strong-Headed	Caring
Tough	Gentle/tender
Strong	Weak/soft

PATRIARCHY

If you ever had the opportunity to read a piece of writing or hear a lecture that addressed gender issues, you have probably heard that word at least once. But do you know what it means? We could say "patriarchy" is part of the language commonly used within the field of Gender Studies. In its literal sense, it translates as "the rule of the father". Historically, it came to refer to social systems dominated by men only. It resembles power relations within a "traditional" family in which the father rules over the others.

In such a society, men occupy the positions of power. They are allowed to do all sorts of jobs and almost invariably hold leading positions. Women, on the other hand, are usually confined to the domestic sphere. They are supposed to bear and take care of children, do household chores, and make

sure to keep themselves away from men's businesses. In a society that is founded upon patriarchy, men are considered superior to women, by which reason they should be leaders. In fact, this leadership at times comes at a price: violence and harassment. In order to "keep women in check", males more often than not resort to violence, which may be either symbolic or physical or a combination of both.

Such aggression may come as deprivation of rights considered by many to be basic. Prohibiting women from occupying leading positions in a company would be a common example. Or, as it happens in some Arabic countries, not allowing them to drive or attending soccer stadiums. In most cases, religion is put to the service of patriarchy, providing a moral justification for a number of restraints that are imposed upon the female population. It is important to note that considerable changes have been taking place in various fronts, but patriarchy still maintains its grip on social relations. Only difference is that such an ideology has been able to adapt itself so it becomes more resilient to the attacks that have been undertaken against it.

However, one cannot deny the important achievements attained by the efforts of many women in recent decades. These efforts have been able to secure a place for them in once extremely male-dominated areas. It is incredible to note how new perspectives have emerged in fields that had long been ruled by men, such as history – which used to be told from a male point of view –, literature – which marginalized female writers –, and psychoanalysis whose first theorizations (those undertaken by Freud) were framed within a male perspective, according to some feminists, which explains why women are described therein as lacking something [the male sexual organ].

As follows is a famous poem in the English language that was clearly written from a male's point of view:

TO HIS MISTRESS GOING TO BED (1633)

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
 Until I labour, I in labour lie.
 The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
 Is tired with standing though they never fight.
 Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening,
 But a far fairer world encompassing.
 Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
 That th' eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.
 Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime
 Tells me from you, that now 'tis your bed time.
 Off with that happy busk, which I envy,
 That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
 Your gown going off, such beauteous state reveals,
 As when from flowery meads th' hill's shadow steals.
 Off with that wiry coronet and show
 The hairy diadem which on you doth grow;
 Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread
 In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.
 In such white robes heaven's angels used to be
 Received by men; thou angel bring'st
 with thee A heaven like Mahomet's paradise;
 and though Ill spirits

walk in white, we easily know By this these angels from an evil sprite, Those set our hairs, but these our flesh upright. License my roving hands, and let them go Before, behind, between, above, below. O my America, my new found land, My kingdom, safest when with one man manned, My mine of precious stones, my empery, How blessed am I in this discovering thee! To enter in these bonds, is to be free; Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be. Full nakedness, all joys are due to thee As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be, To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views, That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem, His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them. Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made For laymen, are all women thus arrayed; Themselves are mystic books, which only we Whom their imputed grace will dignify Must see revealed. Then since I may know, As liberally, as to a midwife, show Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence, Here is no penance, much less innocence. To teach thee, I am naked first, why then What needst thou have more covering than a man.

Try to think of the following questions: 1) How are women represented in the poem? From which perspective is the speaker writing? Do you agree with the suggestion that the poem was written from a male point of view? What evidence can you produce?

FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

We could not end this class without saying a few words about these other two terms that are frequently used in gender studies. To a certain extent, they are closely linked to another one that we have discussed already, namely, gender roles. Femininity refers to a set of characteristics, behaviors or roles associated with the condition of being a woman. Thus, womanhood is constructed socially through such manifestations. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", that is how Simone de Beauvoir described what being a woman meant. A female must learn how to behave like a woman and this can only be achieved by her being feminine, i.e., playing the roles assigned to them by society. Attributes that are usually described as feminine are "sensitive", "instinctive", "shyness", "emotional", and alike.

Masculinity, in turn, also refers to a set of characteristics, behaviors and attributes that are classified by society as being linked to the condition of being a man. Male individuals, therefore, must conform to such norms if they want to be seen as men. Those who deviate are often referred to as being effeminate, that is to say, "woman-like" or having characteristics untypical of men. Some of the attributes associated with men are roughness, rationality, strength, sense of leadership and alike.

CONCLUSION

As we hope it has become clear, our society has for a long time been ruled by the dictates of the patriarchy. However, such a situation had become so natural that it went unnoticed for a long while. Gender Studies, though young if compared to other areas, has come to mean an organized effort whose aim is to study and eventually call into question gender inequalities that have long been the norm. No doubt, important changes have been achieved by many of its advocates and scholars. However, much more still needs to be done, since the questioning of patriarchal ideology has also caused it to reformulate itself.



RESUMO

In this class, you will be introduced to gender studies, a brief account of its emergence and the basic concepts used within this field. Firstly, an important distinction will be made between “sex” and “gender” and the possible meanings the latter can assume. Afterwards, you will read a concise account of the historical circumstances out of which gender studies came into being. While at it, we will point out some of its characteristics, one of which would be its multi-interdisciplinary nature. Then, we will turn to frequently used terms with which everyone should be familiarized before attempting to enter further afield. Such terms are as follows sex/gender, gender stereotypes, patriarchy and femininity/masculinity.



ATIVIDADES

Write a short summary (at most two pages) of the main points of the class. Try and focus on the definition of gender studies and the main concepts commonly used in the field. Use 12-point font size, Times New Roman, and 1.5 line spacing.

ACTIVITY COMMENT

This activity aims at building a text-synthesis of the main points addressed in this lesson. One can only do it satisfactorily, if one clearly understood what has been exposed therein. This will help students consolidate what they learned about gender studies and its main concepts.



PRÓXIMA AULA

Next class, we will discuss the life and work of Judith Butler

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