

# Sex, Gender and Bodies

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## Chapter 5



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# ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SEX

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- ❑ There are only two sexes —sex is a binary category.
- ❑ Sex exists as a biological fact independently of anyone's beliefs about it.
- ❑ Sex and gender naturally go together.



# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Sexual differentiation*—the formation of sex during prenatal development
- *Autosomes*—a chromosome that is not a sex chromosome
- *Sex Chromosomes*—pair of chromosomes usually designated X and Y
  - **Female:** two X chromosomes
  - **Male:** one X and one Y chromosome



# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Sex-differentiation region of the Y chromosome (SDY)*—gene that causes embryonic sex glands (*gonads*) to grow and develop into *testes*—the pair of male sex glands that will later produce sperm starting at puberty

# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Androgens*—several steroid hormones produced by the testes
  - *Testosterone*—androgen that causes the internal structures of the male sexual anatomy to develop
  - *Dihydrotestosterone*—androgen that causes the penis to grow and testicles to form
  - *Mullerian duct inhibiting hormone (MIH)*—prevents internal embryonic structures from developing into female organs



# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Estrogens*—group of steroid hormones produced by the *ovaries*—female sex glands that contain eggs
- *Assigned sex*—label of female or male given to a baby based on the appearance of its genitals
- *Intersexuality*—number of specific variations on the theme of biological sex
  - *Intersexed*—people with any of these variations

# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Klinefelter's syndrome*—chromosomal irregularity (XXY) in men that causes them to have a less masculine appearance
- *Complete androgen insensitivity syndrome (CAIS)*—androgens produced by testes during fetal differentiation fail to prompt development of male reproductive structures
- *Turner's syndrome*—missing sex chromosome, resulting in XO chromosomal composition; because fetus lacks androgens, it does not develop complete internal reproductive structures



# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Hermaphrodites*—people with sexually ambiguous bodies
- *Partial androgen insensitivity (PAIS)*—externally, causes sex organ that looks like a small penis or large clitoris; internally, testes may be located in abdomen or labia rather than the scrotal sac





# HOW DOES SEX DEVELOP?

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- *Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH)*—genetically inherited malfunction of one or more enzymes needed to make cortisol; causes overproduction of other hormones by mother's body

# SEX, GENDER IDENTITY and GENDER TYPING

- *Core gender identity*— fundamental sense of belonging to one sex or the other
- *Gender identity disorder*— official psychiatric category for individuals who experience a disjunction between their assigned sex and their core gender identity.



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# SEX and SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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- *Sexual orientation*—multidimensional concept involving erotic attraction, affectional relationships, sexual behavior, erotic fantasies, and emotional attachments
  - Evidence for a genetic component to sexual orientation is preliminary.
    - For males, where evidence is the strongest, there is also evidence for non-genetic factors.
    - For females, whether there is a genetic component to sexual orientation is still an open question.

# SEX as a SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

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- ***Social construction***—the assumptions underlying our common-sense beliefs about sex and gender are the products of a specific culture, not universal or fixed truths about nature.
- ***Optimal gender***—which sex will fit a child best when she/he is intersexed



# BEYOND THE BINARY

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- In some cultures, the idea that people come in more than two sexes *is* a commonplace.
  - In India about half a million people identify as *hijras* or *Aravanis* (in southern India)—they represent a third sex category; they take female names and wear women's clothes, but set themselves apart from women by being much more sexually overt (Nanda, 1990; Mahalingam, 2003).



# BEYOND THE BINARY

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- In Thailand, third sex people are called *kathoeyes*—they have male genitalia but wear women's clothes; however, they do not try to pass as proper women (Herdt, 1997).
- In the South Pacific, Samoans call the third sex *fa'afafine*—translates as "in the way of a woman"; biological males who dress as women and take up women's characteristic tasks, such as caretaking and teaching (Fraser, 2002).



# BEYOND THE BINARY

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- Some North American Indian cultures have a third sex category called the *berdache* or *two-spirit people*—biological males who wear women's clothes and take up some of the roles and tasks of women. They could also adopt men's customs and clothing, switch back and forth, or combine the two (Wilson, 1996; Roscoe, 1996).



# BEYOND THE BINARY

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- In the Balkans, the *pledged virgin* is a third sex category for women. She takes over a man's roles when there is no man available and is no longer thought of as a woman (Gremaux, 1996).



# BEYOND THE BINARY

- *Transgender movement* —an increasingly visible and vocal movement for the social acceptance of more than two sex categories; some people permanently adopt a transgender identity that is neither female nor male, but rather a third gender category (Marecek, et al., 2004).



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# BEYOND THE BINARY

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- Some transgender activists claim their lives reveal the social construction of sex, and thus their perspectives are crucial to feminist social change.



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