



Gender ^[1]

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Within anthropology, gender is a popular topic of study. This broad topic covers a variety of aspects of a culture, and is included in almost every ethnographic study.

Underlying anthropology is the concept that sex and gender are distinct. While both concepts are related, understanding their difference in meaning is key to understanding anthropological writings. Sex is used to describe the biological characteristics that an individual is born with, while gender is used to describe the social characteristics that a society considers either masculine or feminine.

History

When anthropology originated as a discipline, anthropologists did not consider the differences between sex and gender, and instead saw them as obvious, natural elements. However, today anthropologists recognize that the situation is much more complex than this, both in Western culture and in other cultures around the world.

As well, past anthropologists tended to not focus on the role of women in a culture in their ethnographies. Instead, they focused on men. Today, ethnographies should all include a clear analysis of the important role of women, who make up about half of the population.

Anthropologists, looking at gender, examine a variety of topics, including:

- Different cross-cultural gender roles
- Why most societies tend to be patriarchal (male-dominant)
- How gender and language interact
- The agency of women
- Feminist studies
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Other Genders

While we tend to view gender as either masculine or feminine, anthropological and other academic research has revealed that this is not always the case. Other forms of gender identities exist, and not all cultures follow rigid gender roles.

For example, an individual may identify as being both male and female, neither male nor female, or something different. Some cultures have a third (or even fourth or fifth) gender. These gender identities vary greatly across cultures. Clearly, it is important to recognize that gender is not a simplistic concept, but instead requires careful research and respect.

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