Sex, Subjectivity and Representation
Feminism is a plural field of theory and politics that has competing perspectives and prescriptions for action. In general, feminism asserts that sex is a fundamental and irreducible axis of social organization which, to date, has subordinated women to men. Thus, feminism is centrally concerned with sex as an organizing principle of social life and one that is thoroughly saturated with power relations. Feminists have argued that the subordination of women occurs across a whole range of social institutions and practices. That is, the subjection of women is understood to be a structural condition. This structural subordination of women has been described by feminists as patriarchy, a concept that has connotations of male-headed family, mastery, and superiority. – Barker, p. 281
As a movement, feminism has been concerned with two key issues. First, to win citizen rights such as voting and equality before the law. Second, to influence cultural representations and norms in ways that are beneficial to women. Feminists have constructed a range of analysis and political strategies by which to intervene in social life in pursuit of the interests of women. – Barker, p. 281
- **liberal feminism** – Liberal feminists regard differences between men and women as socio-economic and cultural constructs rather than the outcome of an eternal biology.

- **difference feminism** – Liberal and socialist feminists stress equality and sameness. However, difference feminism asserts that there are essential distinctions between men and women... difference is celebrated as representing the creative power of women and the superiority of their values over those of men.

- **socialist feminism** – Socialist feminists point to the interconnections between class and gender, including the fundamental place of gender inequalities in the reproduction of capitalism.

- **poststructuralist feminism** – Feminists influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern thought have argued that sex and gender are social and cultural constructions that are not to be explained in terms of biology or to be reduced to functions of capitalism. This anti-essentialist stance suggest that femininity and masculinity are not universal and eternal categories but discursive constructions. That is, femininity and masculinity are ways of describing and disciplining human subjects.

- **black and postcolonial feminism** – Black feminists have pointed to the differences between black and white women's experiences, cultural representations and interests... Gender intersects with race, ethnicity and nationality to produce different experiences of what it is to be a woman.

- **postfeminism** – The idea of postfeminism suggests that the most significant and systematic institutional barriers to women's participation in politics and culture have been removed in the west. Women are citizens and have equal legal rights with men... As such, postfeminism advocates a libertarian form of feminism founded on women's autonomy.
Sex, Gender and Identity
Arguments for the cultural construction of gendered identity and the evidence for a genetic core to sexual difference are not necessarily contradictory stances. – Barker, p. 285
Biochemical similarity amongst women (and difference from men) is able to co-exist with cross-cultural divergence for the following reasons:

- Cultural difference operates ‘on top of’ genetic similarity.
- Biological predispositions have different outcomes in divergent contexts.
- Human culture and human biology have co-evolved and are indivisible.
- The language of biology and the language of culture have different purposes and achieve different outcomes.
The Social Construction of Sex and Gender
Joan Scott has argued that the equality-difference debate relies on a false binary since it is possible for equality and difference to co-exist. ‘Equality is not the elimination of difference, and difference does not preclude equality’ (Scott, 1990: 137-8). That is, sameness is not the only ground for claims to equality and difference is the condition for all identities. – Barker, p. 290
Sex as a Discursive Construct
The distinction between sex as biology and gender as a cultural construction is broken down on the grounds that there is in principle no access to biological ‘truths’ that lie outside of cultural discourses. Thus, there can be no biological ‘sex’ that is not also cultural. Sexed bodies are always already represented as the production of regulatory discourses. In this view, the body does not disappear. – Barker, 290
Sexed Subjects
Foucault: Subjectivity and Sexuality
For Foucault, subjectivity is a discursive production. That is, discourse (as regulated ways of speaking/practice) offers speaking persons subject positions from which to make sense of the world. In doing so, discourse also ‘subjects’ speakers to the rules and discipline of those discourses. A subject position is that perspective or set of regulated discursive meanings from which discourse makes sense. To speak is to take up a subject position and to be subjected to the regulatory power of that discourse. – Barker, p. 291
Foucault propounds an anti-essentialist argument in which there are no universal ahistorical subjectivities. To be a man or a woman is not the outcome of biological determinism or universal cognitive structures and cultural patterns. Gender is historically and culturally specific, subject to radical discontinuities over time and across space. This does not mean that one can simply pick and choose genders or that gender is a matter of random chance. Rather, we are gendered through the power of regulated and regulatory discourses. – Barker, p. 291
Foucault is concerned with ‘the over-all “discursive fact”, the way in which sex is “put into discourse”’ (Foucault, 1979: 11). He suggests that discourses of polymorphous sexualities have proliferated and been disseminated through:

- medicine
- the church
- psychoanalysis
- education programs
- demography
Nevertheless, according to Foucault, wherever discursive power operates, so also does resistance become possible, not least through the production of ‘reverse discourses’. For example, medics and clerics put the idea of homosexuality into discourse in order to condemn it. However, the very discursive production of a homosexual subject position allowed homosexuals to be heard and to claim rights. – Barker, p. 292
Foucault’s work has been criticized for its inability to explain why some discourses are ‘taken up’ by subjects and others are not. Consequently, some critics have looked for ways to connect the discursive ‘outside’ with the psychic ‘inside’. For Stuart Hall (1995, 1996a), identity is the point of ‘suture’ between a domain of discursive operations and the realm of the imaginary or unconscious. – Barker, pp. 293-294
Anatomy is destiny because it is hard to escape the regulatory scripts that surround the signifiers of bodily difference. – Barker, p. 294
Judith Butler:
Between Foucault and Psychoanalysis
In Foucauldian fashion, Butler argues that discourse defines, constructs and produces bodies as objects of knowledge. Discourse is the means by which we understand what bodies are.

The discourses of sex are ones that, through repetition of the acts they guide, bring sex into view as a necessary norm. Sex is a construction, but an indispensable one that forms subjects and governs the materialization of bodies. – Barker, p. 298
Butler conceives of sex and gender in terms of citational performativity, with the performative being ‘that discursive practice which enacts or produces that which it names’ (Butler, 1993: 13). This is achieved through citation and reiteration of the norms or conventions of the ‘law’ (in its symbolic, Lacanian sense). A performative is a statement that puts into effect the relation that it names…Thus, the statement ‘It’s a girl’ initiates a process by which ‘girling’ is compelled. – Barker, p. 298
Performativity is not a singular act for it is constituted by a reiteration of a set of norms. Nor should it be understood as a performance given by a self-conscious, intentional actor. Rather, the performance of sex is compelled by a regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality that reiterates itself through the forcible production of 'sex'. Indeed, the very idea of an intentional sexed actor is a discursive production of performativity itself. ‘Gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect that very subject it appears to express’ (Butler, 1991: 24). – Barker, p. 299
Drag: Recasting the symbolic
Butler argues that drag can destabilize and recast gender norms through a re-signification of the ideals of gender (Butler, 1990). Through a miming of gender norms, drag can be subversive to the extent that it reflects on the performative character of gender. Drag suggests that all gender is performativity and as such destabilizes the claims of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity as the origin that is imitated. That is, hegemonic heterosexuality is itself an imitative performance which is forced to repeat its own idealizations. That it must reiterate itself suggest that heterosexuality is beset by anxieties that it can never fully overcome. The need for reiteration underlines the very insecurity of heterosexual identifications and gender positions. – Barker, p. 300
For Butler, all identity categories are necessary fictions which, though we continue to use them, should simultaneously be interrogated. – Barker, p. 301
Men and masculinities
Most of the chapter is centered on women and the pertinent debates within feminism and cultural studies. However, reflection upon the social construction of gender must apply to men as well as women.

In particular, we must speak of masculinities rather than a masculinity since not all men are the same (Connell, 1995). Masculinity is also marked by difference. – Barker, p. 301
The sense that masculinity is not an unchanging given of nature has sparked a growing research interest into men and masculinity. The central areas of interest have been:

- cultural representations of men and masculinity
- the character of men's lives as they experience them
- the problems that men face in contemporary culture
Gender, Representation and Media Culture
Images of women

The concept of the stereotype occupies a prominent place with the ‘images of women’ perspective. A stereotype involves the reduction of persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits. ‘Stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes “difference” (Hall, 1997c: 258). Through the operation of power, a stereotype marks the boundaries between the ‘normal’ and the ‘abjected’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. – Barker, p. 307
The Problem of Accuracy

Illuminating though such studies are, the ‘images of women’ approach presents us with an epistemological problem. Namely, it asserts the truth and falsity of representations. For example, Gallagher (1983) describes the world-wide representation of women as demeaning, damaging and unrealistic. As Moi comments, an ‘images of women’ approach ‘is equivalent to studying false images of women constructed by both sexes because the “image” of women in literature is invariably defined in opposition to the “real person” whom literature somehow never quite manages to convey to the reader’ (Moi, 1985: 44-5). The central problem is that the “real” is always already a representation.

– Barker, pp. 309-310
Consequently, later studies become concerned less with representational adequacy and more with a ‘politics of representation’. This approach explores the subject positions constructed by representations. – Barker, p. 310
Here the marginality or subordination of women is understood as a constitutive effect of representation realized or resisted by living persons. – Barker, p. 310
Subject positions and the Politics of Representation

A subject position is that perspective or set of regulated and regulatory discursive meanings from which the text or discourse makes sense. It is that subject with which we must identify in order for the discourse to be meaningful. In identifying with this subject position, the text subjects us to its rules; it seeks to construct us as a certain kind of subject or person. – Barker, p. 310
Sexual identity is held to be not a universal biological essence but a matter of how femininity and masculinity are spoken about. Thus, both feminism and cultural studies must be concerned with matters of sex and representation. For example, cultural studies has explored the representation of women in popular culture and within literature. It has argued that women across the globe are constituted as the second sex, subordinated to men. That is, women have subject positions constructed for them that place them in the patriarchal work of domesticity and beautification or, increasingly (within the west), of being a mother and having a career and being able to explore one’s individuality and looking attractive. Women in postcolonial societies carry the double burden of having been subordinated by colonialism and native men. Nevertheless, we also noted the possibility of destabilizing representations of sexed bodies. – Barker, p. 314
It was more than her face that launched a thousand ships.
Nivea for Men