LING 156
Language & Gender

Tuesday, April 14th

Last Thursday...

- Recursivity, Erasure, Iconicity
- Heterosexual Market, Discourse, Institutions
- Masculinities & Femininities
- Iconicity: Visual & Linguistic
- Lives that inherently question the gender binary
- Stereotypes & The Hall of Mirrors
Discussion Question #1

Early Gendering

Influences
- mothers' mothering
- father's behavior toward mothers
- peers at school
- television & movies

Environments
- school
- playground games
- weddings
- family dinners

Behaviors
- crying
- giggling
- cursing

Domains
- play (toys)
- clothing
- sports/after-school activities

Other influences
- age
- birth order
- sexual preference

Gender is an Accomplishment

None of us became male or female without some struggle

- What is “naturally male/female” is neither universal nor enduring

- Gender is not a basic property of the individual, but an engrained way of being in the world
Today

‘Doing’ Gender

‘Doing’ Sexuality

Today

• Discursive construction of sexuality
• Linguistic Production of Organizational Categories
• Imagined Communities
• Labels & Language Change
Why Sexuality?

- Understanding gender requires understanding its relation to sexuality
- Our gender order is a heterosexual order
- Heterosexuality is called upon to justify many aspects of the gender order (and vice-versa)

Language & Sexuality

- *Sexuality* -- erotic desire -- is discursively constructed, just like gender

- ‘sexuality’ vs. ‘sex’: terminology meant to highlight the idea that we’re referring to a cultural and social phenomenon (not just a ‘natural’ one)
Language & Sexuality

- 'sexuality' -- often used as a synonym for sexual orientation
  - 'sexual identities'
  - 'sexualities' (ways of being sexual)
- 'homosexual' / 'heterosexual'
  - relies on the gender binary for its meaning

Language & Sexuality

- other variables
  - cultural differences in available categories of identification
  - the extent to which a person defines their identity around sexuality
  - how important sexuality is to a person's identity vs. other aspects of identity
Language & Sexuality

• Understandings of erotic desire are essentialized, resulting from naturalization

• How we interpret sexual behaviors,* preferences,* and practices,* is culturally contingent

*Remember, these all include language!

Language & Sexuality

• Relevant strains of research (and representations of ‘sexuality’)
  - Acts of Identity
    e.g., ‘how do gay men/lesbians speak’
  - Representations of Erotic Desire
    - Discourse Analysis; Textual Analysis
    - Silence and Avoidance in discourse
The Discursive Construction of Sexuality

Discursive Construction

Language is …

- Spoken
- Written
- Read
- Learned
- Taught
- Commented on
- Worried about
- Codified
- Legislated
- Engineered

All of these activities play a role in the construction of gender and sexuality
Discursive Construction

- Sexual experience is communicated and made meaningful through codes of signification
- Those codes are contingent on time and place

Discursive Construction

- Example 1 (Note: here, “culture” = time period)
  Discourses of ‘good sex’ and the meaning of the female orgasm
  - heterosexual male sexual ability
  - female frigidity
Discursive Construction

• Example 2

  “Heterosexual” vs. “Homosexual”
  • the Sexuality Binary
  • just look at the ancient Romans...
  • or anywhere prior to 1869...
  • naturalization all over again!

Discursive Construction

• Our culture views sexuality as dimorphic
  heterosexual vs. homosexual

• Like gender dimorphism, sexual dimorphism is a social construct

• The two support each other
Gender & Sexuality are Mutually Defined

- examples
  - travestis in Brazil
  - any instance of non-heterosexuality
  - any instance of non-normative gender behavior
    - cross-dressers
    - feminists
  - any instance of normative gender behavior

‘Prediscursive’

➤ Gender and sexuality are not prediscursive
➤ How we understand them does not exist prior to discourse
➤ How we understand them emerges from language use
‘Prediscursive’

the argument:
All knowledge is derived and maintained in social interaction

Language Produces Organizational Categories
Language Produces Organizational Categories

- Catholic confession:
  - defines what is forbidden
  - defines what is legitimate
  - defines categories of behavior

- Medicine & Science:
  - defines what is (un)natural
  - defines what is (ab)normal
  - creates a context in which a person’s core being and identity can be characterized by sexual desires

Small Group Discussion

- In Cameron & Kulick Chapter 2, the point about stigmatized behavior versus stigmatized identity is made between the labels “client” (for someone who pays someone else for sex) and “homosexual”

- Identify other examples in the world that demonstrate this difference between behavior labels and identity labels

- Also consider the difference between adjectives and nouns (e.g., an Arab man vs. an Arab)
Labels & Imagined Communities


- Communities without direct contact between all members of the community
- Discursive work is required to produce group identity and individual identification with that identity
- Labels are part of that work

Labels & Imagined Communities

- *Example: The Nation*

Examples of symbolic work:

- stories of origin
- maps of geographical boundaries
- concepts like 'national character'
- anthems & flags
- commemorative rituals (July 4th)
- participation in world events like the Olympics
- labels
Labels & Imagined Communities

- Other Examples of Imagined Communities
  'the African diaspora'
  'the Roman Catholic Church'
  'the Democratic Party'
  'Rural America'
  'the Hip-Hop Nation'
  'the Queer Nation'
  readers of mainstream women's magazines

Labels & Imagined Communities

- Language changes all the time

- Terms of reference can shift in semantic space through their use in discourse

- Labeling disputes can arise in the process of change and shift

- Adopting one label over another can signal ones' political stance
Labels are just another example of how language structures our social world

Discussion Question #2a

a. “Politically Correct” terms of reference & the role of ‘cultural literacy’

Observations? Questions? Critiques?
Discussion Question #2b

b. Teaching women to “just say no”

two points about this...

Observations? Questions? Critiques?

http://www.mencanstoprape.org/
Main Point Summary

- Discursive construction of sexuality
- Linguistic production of Organizational Categories
- Imagined Communities
- Labels & Language Change

Next Time...

- **Language & Sexuality, II**
  - Heterosexuality, Heteronormativity, & Patriarchy
  - Gender-(in)appropriate speech
  - Speech change & transgendered identities
  - Queer theory & radical feminism
  - Indexicality

- **Read:**
  - Cameron & Kulick, Chapter 3, pp 44-59