

Masculinity, Femininity, Difference

The aim of this lecture is to critically explore key theoretical perspectives and visual practice that respond to the subject of gendered identity.

Gender: The notion of gender can be understood to be [...] the cultural assumptions and practices that govern the social construction of men, women and their social relations. The concept gains much of its force through a contrast with a conception of sex as the biological formation of the body. Thus, femininity and masculinity as forms of gender are the outcome of the cultural regulation and behaviours that are regarded as socially appropriate to a given sex. Given that gender is held to be a matter of culture rather than 'nature', so it is always a matter of how men and women are represented.'

(Barker, C., 2004, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, Sage Publications, p.73)

What characteristics are considered to be 'socially appropriate' for men?

Traditional masculinity has encompassed the values of strength, power, action, control, independence, self-sufficiency, camaraderie and work amongst others.' These categories of masculinity may no longer be serving men well and as such in contemporary society leading to what theorists refer to as a 'crisis of masculinity' rooted in the adoption of impossible images of masculinity.

(Barker, C., 2004, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, Sage Publications, p.115)

What characteristics are considered to be ‘socially appropriate’ for women?

‘It is the patriarchal symbolic order that tries to fix all women as feminine and all men as masculine’.

(Barker, C., 2004, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, Sage Publications, p.68)

Masculinity



Femininity



‘Throughout history ‘women are depicted (by male artists) in quite a different way - not because the feminine is different from the masculine- but because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of women is designed to flatter him.’ (John Berger)





Cindy Sherman *Untitled Film Stills* 1977-1980

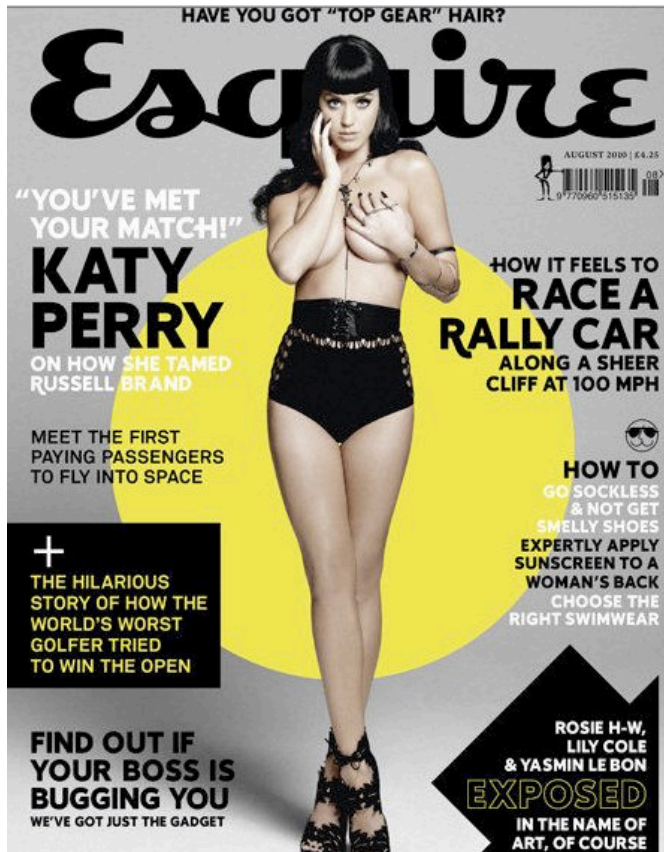
<http://vimeo.com/2176377>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiszC33puc0>

‘To mime is not merely a passive reproduction, but an active process of reinscribing and recontextualising the mimicked ‘object’. It is to position oneself both within and outside the system duplicated [...] using recognisable actions for new purposes.’

(Betterton. R., 1996, *An Intimate Distance*, p.48)





Annie Sprinkle, *Bosom Ballet*

<http://vimeo.com/103546981>

Parody – Giorgio Agamben wrote an essay on Parody where he suggests that parody is a discourse that mocks another discourse by imitating it, and therefore contains two voices; parodied and parodist.

Bakhtin refers to this as ‘double-voicing’ where two distinct speakers can be identified as the source of the same utterance.





Peter Land, *The 5th May*, 1994



Even though the male figure, performed by Peter Land himself, is entertaining and self-ironic the troubling body and gender issues show a man in despair and in search of stereotypical manhood.



Jesper Just, *Bliss and Heaven*, 2005, film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CA5O1ej0YBQ>



Butler argues that *‘drag can destabilize and recast gender norms through re-signification of the ideals of gender. Through a miming of gender norms, drag can be subversive to the extent that it reflects on the performative character of gender.’* (Barker 2004: 143)

Poststructuralist feminists have argued that gender is a social and cultural construction and as such suggests that there may be a range of possible masculinities and femininities.

Gender theorist Judith Butler also advocates that identity should encompass *'multiple forms of identity – not a range of restricted categories – but an abundance of modes of self-expression.'* (www.theory.org)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc>