

Chapter 10 - Gender and masculinity

- **Biological sex** – possession of male or female genitalia
- **Sexual identity** or orientation – erotic attraction to members of the same or opposite sex (someone attracted to both sexes has a bisexual identity)
- **Gender identity** – display of traits, mannerisms, and general behavior that falls somewhere along a spectrum from very masculine (rational, independent, self-sufficient, stoic, “tough”) to very feminine (emotional, relational, dependent, vulnerable, “soft”)
 - All individuals possess masculine and feminine characteristics
 - A given society may value one part of this spectrum more than another
- **Closeted** – masked sexual identity for individuals who are not heterosexual
- **Coming out** – open acknowledgment of a non-heterosexual identity
- **Male identity** – strong investment in appearing autonomous, independent, self-sufficient, achievement-oriented, and as represented by action heroes, invulnerable
- **Action heroes** fulfill teenage fantasies of male power and autonomy

Performing like a man

- Herbert Marcuse
 - **Performance principle**
 - Principle that revolves around work, toil, sacrifice, discipline, obedience
 - **Pleasure principle**
 - Principle that centers on play, pleasure, spontaneity, creativity, and joy
- **Performance anxiety**
 - Strong visceral feelings of self-doubt, feelings of inadequacy, fear of rejection, humiliation, or failure

Repressed desire, sublimation, and alternative communities

- **Repression** – denial of the existence of certain thoughts or feelings, or the stifling of alternative gender identities or sexual orientation
 - Can be external in the form of social pressures that encourage individuals to conform to the status quo
 - Can be internal in the form of psychic process that removes some thoughts and desires from consciousness by pushing them into the unconscious
- **Sublimation** – conversion of a basic drive, such as sexual desire, into a non-overtly sexual form
 - Form of **displacement** from a physical urge to a more creative or spiritual activity

Classic heterosexual desire and alternatives to it

- **Sexual perversions** – forms of sexual behavior that strikes many as strange, aberrant, unpleasant, or distasteful partly because they are typically uncoupled from any reproductive goal)
- **Voyeurism** – alternative form of sexual pleasure in which looking without being seen replaces direct physical contact as the source of erotic excitement
 - **Male gaze**
 - Surveys the scene, taking pleasure at will while the female remains unaware of the objectifying male gaze
 - The female cannot see that her own agency is denied her by the voyeuristic gaze of an other

- In films, voyeurism frequently correlates with violence
 - Slasher films
 - *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) by Tobe Hooper
 - Slashers hand out violent punishment linked to the sexuality of their female victims and the arrested, infantilized sexuality of male perpetrators
 - The male voyeur can punish women or redeem them
 - He decides their fate
 - *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) by Edward Dmytryk
- **Fetishism** – a form of emotional overinvestment
 - Excessive devotion, overvaluation of a fetish object
- **Fetish** – projection of the male’s fantasy of female perfection
 - Female stars often embody an idealized image of feminine allure, sexuality, and power that converts them into fetish objects
 - *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) by Biller Wilder
 - “the perfect body of Marilyn Monroe reduces the male protagonist, played by a nervous, fidgeting Tom Ewell, to a state of fumbling adolescent adoration” (Nichols, 379)
 - **Neo-noir** films – films made after the hey-day of film noir in the late 1940s to late 1950s but in the same spirit and style
- **Sadism**
 - Men may also punish the woman trapped beneath an image that is not of her own making when she fails to deliver the goods this image promises
 - Men may assign blame to an image they themselves project onto women
 - Since women appear as irresistible sirens, it must be their own fault that they simultaneously pose a threat to male independence and autonomy
 - *Gilda* (1946) by Charles Vidor
 - “Put the blame on Mame, boys, put the blame on Mame”
 - Film noir – femme fatales are a classic case of the woman punished for her fatal powers when these powers are the product of male projection
 - A woman seduces and deceives and is ultimately punished for her deceptions, but not before she destroys the men who fall into the web they have unconsciously wanted her to construct
 - Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity* (1944) by Billy Wilder
- **Masochism**
 - A willingness to be dominated rather than to dominate
 - *Blue Velvet* (1986) by David Lynch