

## **Sociology of Gender and Sexuality Comprehensive Exam Question Bank**

revised April 14, 2015

1. Assume that you are being asked to present an introductory lecture on the sociology of gender. How would you outline the nature of the field and its relationship to general sociological theory and methods? Make sure to use examples to illustrate your points.
2. Discuss the gender dimensions of social policy, especially as pertains to emergence and growth of the welfare state. What have been the basic ideas about gender behind these developments, and what are the gendered implications of welfare state policies?
3. Many important works in the sociology of gender emphasize the intersections between gender and race, ethnicity and/or class. What does the attention to intersectionality add to the study of gender? What problems does it introduce to the researcher? Give examples of works from this subfield that address this problem of intersectionality particularly well and particularly poorly. What are the key elements of these works that distinguish them from one another?
4. Gender inequality has been a particular interest of many scholars in sociology. Discuss the relationship between gender, work and family, as three inter-related social institutions, and the role that these have in producing gender inequality. Pay particular attention to the changes in these institutions over time and the relative durability of gender inequality.
5. Sociologists have long thought of gender as a binary concept that refers to the social aspects of men's and women's lives. Recently, attention to the ways that some people do not fit into the binary categories "man" and "woman" call these assumptions into question. How do the transgender and intersex bodies complicate our understandings of corporeality? What are the implications of these insights for sociological research on gender? Make sure in your answer to explain and critique the concept of essentialism.
6. The study of sexuality was once dominantly based on individual, biological or psychological approaches. Drawing on sociological approaches to sexuality and gender, explain the various dimensions through which sexuality can be understood as social rather than individual.
7. Think about gender and sexuality as intersecting and overlapping social institutions. How can we understand them in this way? (Explain this in detail, as if you were teaching this perspective to undergraduate students). What evidence do you find among the readings to support this view, and what empirical findings or theoretical insights have been developed by researchers who have adopted such a perspective? What are the limits of this perspective?
8. In what ways does the state define itself through gender and/or sexuality? How does it constitute and enforce traditional gender and heteronormativity through its policies and practices? According to sociologists, why do states regulate sexuality, gender, and family?

9. Discuss the contested politics of gender and sexuality in North America, through the lens provided by the reading list. What social processes have been engaged by activists to challenge the "naturalness" of heteronormativity and gender inequality and to render visible the social structures, cultural practices and social forces that produce these inequalities? Through what processes has social change occurred?
10. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, first theorized by Raewyn Connell, has had a significant impact on gender theory. It has also been heavily criticized. Drawing on empirical research of gender and sexuality, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of empirical research that uses this concept. What is the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, and other forms of privilege?
11. A prevalent sociological approach to the study of gender inequality points to its maintenance and reproduction through interactional/relational processes. How is gender inequality perpetuated through interactions, and what are the limitations of the interactional perspective in fully understanding gender inequality?
12. Sociologists approach the concept of sexual identity from multiple perspectives. What are the different theoretical perspectives about how and at what age people develop a sexual identity as straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual (or something else)? Drawing on empirical research, make a case for which perspective you find most convincing.
13. The gender division of labour within households that assign women responsibilities for domestic work and childcare is crucial in understanding gender stratification within a variety of institutions (politics, education, labour market, etc.). How does this gender division of labour get reproduced, even in the face of more equitable opportunity for women in public institutions? Review the explanations for the continued reproduction of a gender division of labour in the home. Is there evidence this division of labour is breaking down in contemporary heterosexual households in Canada, the United States or elsewhere, and if so, does that tell us anything about the mechanisms of reproduction?
14. Gender plays a prominent role in the experience of paid and unpaid labour in Canada and the United States. Discuss how gender influences roles, responsibilities, and conflict across these two spheres. Do you foresee these patterns converging as we move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Refer to transformations in political and social institutions to discuss why or why not.