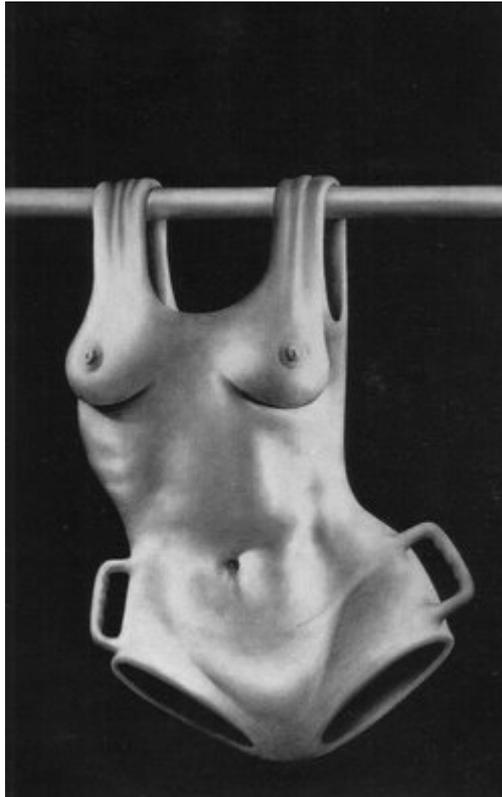


# Tutorial Module

## Gender in the 1960s



### **Lecture Overview**

- Looking back: women and gender before the 1960s
- Regulating sex: women's bodies and the law
- Gender at work: women, wages and the workforce
- Women's liberation: second-wave feminism
- Feminist fictions: gender and women's writing in the 1960s
- Introducing Angela Carter

## Looking back: women and gender before the 1960s

- Feminism not a phenomenon of 1960s: feminist traditions can be traced back in Europe at least 200 years
- Early key texts: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949)
- First-Wave Feminism & Women's Suffrage (ca. 1866-1928):
  1. campaign for women's right to vote
  2. 1918: vote granted to female householders aged 30+
  3. 1928: vote granted to all women aged 21+
- Feminism – as a social and political movement – frequently classified according to 'waves':
  - o First Wave (ca.1900-1928): concerned with legislative and social reform, incl. women's suffrage campaign and women's access to education
  - o Second wave (ca.1960s-1980s): characterised by politics of sisterhood and collectivity; women's rights over their sexual and reproductive bodies (contraception and abortion); equal opportunities; emergence of women's publishing houses; women's studies degree courses; inclusion of more women writers in university programmes
  - o Third wave (ca. 1990s – present): we'll learn more about that next year
- At core of all feminist movements lies usually the aim of women's equality

## Regulating sex: the female body and the law

- 1960s notable for feminist struggle for series of legal reforms and social changes that gave women more personal freedom, particularly in terms sexuality and reproduction
- Contraceptive pill first tested in America in mid-1950s; first prescribed in 1961; by summer 1962 ca. 150,000 women were taking it; ca. 480,000 in 1964; note that access to this form of contraception was still tightly restricted.
- Abortion Act 1967: legislation introduced meant abortions, under certain circumstances, were no longer illegal under certain circumstances.
- Divorce Reform Act 1969: marital breakdown a valid reason for divorce; removal of necessity for either partner to prove other's fault in order to end the marriage
- Matrimonial Homes Act 1967: spouse without property rights may remain in the matrimonial home; act recognizes wife's contribution to the family finances by her work in the house and improvement of the property
- Matrimonial Proceedings & Property Act 1970: gave women claims on assets accrued during the course of the marriage
- Need to see these legislative changes as the result of fundamental changes in attitudes towards the relative status of men and women in society that have taken place during our period of study.

- So what we see is a change in attitude towards women's ownership of their bodies as well as a changing attitude towards women's sexualities
- We also see real shift in the image of the ideal marriage
- For all the images of Free Love, nude dancing and drug-fuelled orgies, marriage reached unprecedented levels of popularity.
- By the end of the sixties, 95% of men and 96% of women under the ages of 45 were married, and the average age of marriage had dropped from the previous generation, to just below 23.
- Idea of a more 'symmetrical' marriage of shared tasks and priorities; romantic partnership based on affection:
  1. "In the modern marriage, both partners choose each other freely as persons. Both are of equal status and expect to have an equal share in taking decisions and in pursuing their sometimes mutual, sometimes separate and diverse, tastes and interests."
 

**Ronald Fletcher, *The Family and Marriage in Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 139**
- Changes in these laws indicate changes in perceptions of what it is to be a woman, and what it is to be feminine.
- Toril Moi: feminist is a political position; female is matter of biology; feminine is set of characteristics defined by society and culture
- Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), one of the founding texts of second-wave feminism, was an early text to suggest idea that gender is not biological, but a mix of nature and nurture:
  2. "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman; it is civilisation as a whole that produces the creature."
 

**Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)**
- These questions around women's bodies, women's rights, their sexualities and femininity also inevitably remind us that feminism and gender aren't all about women
- Roles that come to be questioned in the 1960s force us to reconsider also what it means to be a "man", and to be "masculine", and what historical, social and cultural contexts and constructions define it (cf. Angry Young Men, hairy chested James Bond in *From Russia with Love*)?
- Important not to see 1960s as unambiguously liberated age for women; there were still fundamental gender inequalities in British society
- 'Sexual liberation' created new opportunities for women's exploitation; counter-culture exhibited some despicable and regressive gender politics
- Rosie Boycott said that the underground scene
  3. "Pretended to be an alternative [but] it wasn't providing an alternative for women. It was providing an alternative for men in that there were no problems about screwing around or being who you wanted. You were still able to do it on a chauvinist level and there was still a power game

going on in that women were typists, men were the bosses, men were the ones who decided what wages people got, whether people had jobs. Women were dependent on men.”

**Rosie Boycott, interviewed in Jonathon Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground* (London, 1998), pp. 407-8**

### **Gender at work: women, wages and the workforce**

- Feminism also about women as members of the workforce and of the public sphere
- 1960s saw incremental change in attitudes that led to collapse of unwritten rule that a woman would leave her job as soon as she got married
- ‘Careers for Girls’ book series (*Air Hostess Ann*, *Pam Stevens Secretary*, *Jill Kennedy Telephonist*, *Sheila Burton Dental Assistant* and *Kitsy Babcock, Library Assistant*)
- These books and their eponymous careers ended with marriage; marriage or Career, never both.

4. “Ask any man if he’d rather his wife worked or stayed at home and see what he says; he would rather she stayed at home and looked after his children, and was waiting for him with a decent meal and a sympathetic ear when he got home from work ... You can’t have deep and safe happiness in marriage and the exciting independence of a career as well.”

**Monica Dickens, *Woman’s Own* (28 January, 1961)**

- 1 in 5 married women work in 1951; in 1961 it was 1 in 3; and in 1971 it’s 1 in 2.
- Women were paid only a fraction of what men earned; in 1958, a woman would be paid less than two-thirds of what a man received for doing the same job
- Equal Pay Act of 1970: addressed this inequality by determining that men and women must be paid the same wage for the same work
- Also significant issues surrounding unpaid domestic labor (women’s work as housewives was seen as a necessity, and often not even acknowledged as work)
- Women’s “invisible”, domestic labour serves construction of man as economically – and thus overall – dominant one in marriage

### **Women’s liberation: second-wave feminism**

- Second-wave feminists protested – in writing, on the streets, and in living rooms – against these economic, social, legal and sexual inequalities
- Some second-wave feminists held belief that women’s difference to men should be acknowledged, insisted upon and valued (“equal but different”); e.g. feminist anti-war activists saw war as product of male rule
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- 20<sup>th</sup> November 1970: Miss World pageant, held in London in the Albert Hall, disrupted by women protestors who attacked the host with flour, smoke bombs and general abuse; received huge publicity
- Until new rhetoric and new activism brought by second wave, feminism was thought to be outdated and associated with suffragettes of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries
- As Sheila Rowbotham, later a prominent campaigner for women's rights, says, feminism, before the second wave, seemed incompatible with the youth culture of the 1960s; feminists were

5. “[S]hadowy figures in long old-fashioned clothes who were somehow connected with headmistresses who said you shouldn’t wear high heels and make-up. It was all very prim and stiff and mainly concerned with keeping you away from boys.

**Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 12**

- We can think about 1960s as a kind of swelling of the second wave, an accumulation of changes in gender roles and perceptions of gender
- By the end of 1969 there were about 70 ‘women’s liberation’ groups operating across the country
- Feminism or ‘women’s lib’ still seen as an extremist (and thus minority) point of view at the end of the decade, though that changed soon enough in the 1970s
- Transformation of the British woman was unquestionably one of the most important social changes of the century:

6. “A girl of sixteen in 1970 was far more likely to remain in education than a similar sixteen-year-old in 1956. She was more likely to pursue her own intellectual and cultural interests for as long as she liked, to marry when and whom she wanted, to have children when and if she wanted, and, above all, to choose whether she remained at home as a housewife or pursued her own career. These were not small advances, and they had a profound effect on the way men saw women and women saw themselves. If we are looking for a genuine revolution in the sixties, then perhaps this was it: a revolution with its roots deep in British social history, but a revolution nonetheless.”

**Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (Abacus, 2006), p. 704**

- Suggested that what is at stake here are huge things – social equality, personal liberation, transformation of the economy, of religion, of sex.
- But issues of gender influence + determine even the smallest choices we have in life:

7. “We want to drive buses, play football, use beer mugs not glasses. We want men to take the pill. We do not want to be brought with bottles or invited as wives. We do not want to be wrapped up in cellophane or sent off to make the tea or shuffled in to the social committee. But these are only little things. Revolutions are about little things. Little things which happen to you all the time, every day, wherever you go, all your life.”

**Sheila Rowbotham, *Black Dwarf* (10 January 1969)**

### **Feminist fictions: gender and women's writing in the 1960s**

- On screen: new 'kind' of woman with Emma Steele in *The Avengers*, and in *From Russia With Love* with Tatiana Romanova
- Obviously these depictions owed great deal to male fantasies, but still represented radical break with passive cinematic women of 1950s
- Literature as one of the most powerful means of expressing experiences for which no previous or available concepts exist within public discourses
- Second-wave feminism responsible for inclusion of women writers in university curricula
- When it came to literary criticism, feminists in the 1960s began to highlight that there was still a lack of literary foremothers; a lack of role models.
- Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969): relationship between men and women must be understood as a deeply-embedded power structure with political implications (i.e. sexual politics)
- Literature can be seen as a tool of patriarchal ideology, recreating sexual inequalities and cementing the patriarchal values of society
- Literature can do this by instilling moral codes: what is (un)acceptable behaviour (dichotomised visions of women as either virgin/ angel/ mother or whore/ seductress/ witch)
- But in the 1960s, we also find a new wave of feminist fiction emerging, including texts such as Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* (1965), to name but a few famous examples.
- Women's fiction of 1960s deals with issues we've discussed, e.g. with abortion, unwanted pregnancies, female sexual pleasure
- In doing so, these texts also create new, alternative role models for women – models which are no longer silent domestic goddesses but women with careers and sexual appetites

### **Key Texts**

**Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962)**

**Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)**

**Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone* (1965)**

**Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (1969)**

**Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1969)**

**Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (1970)**