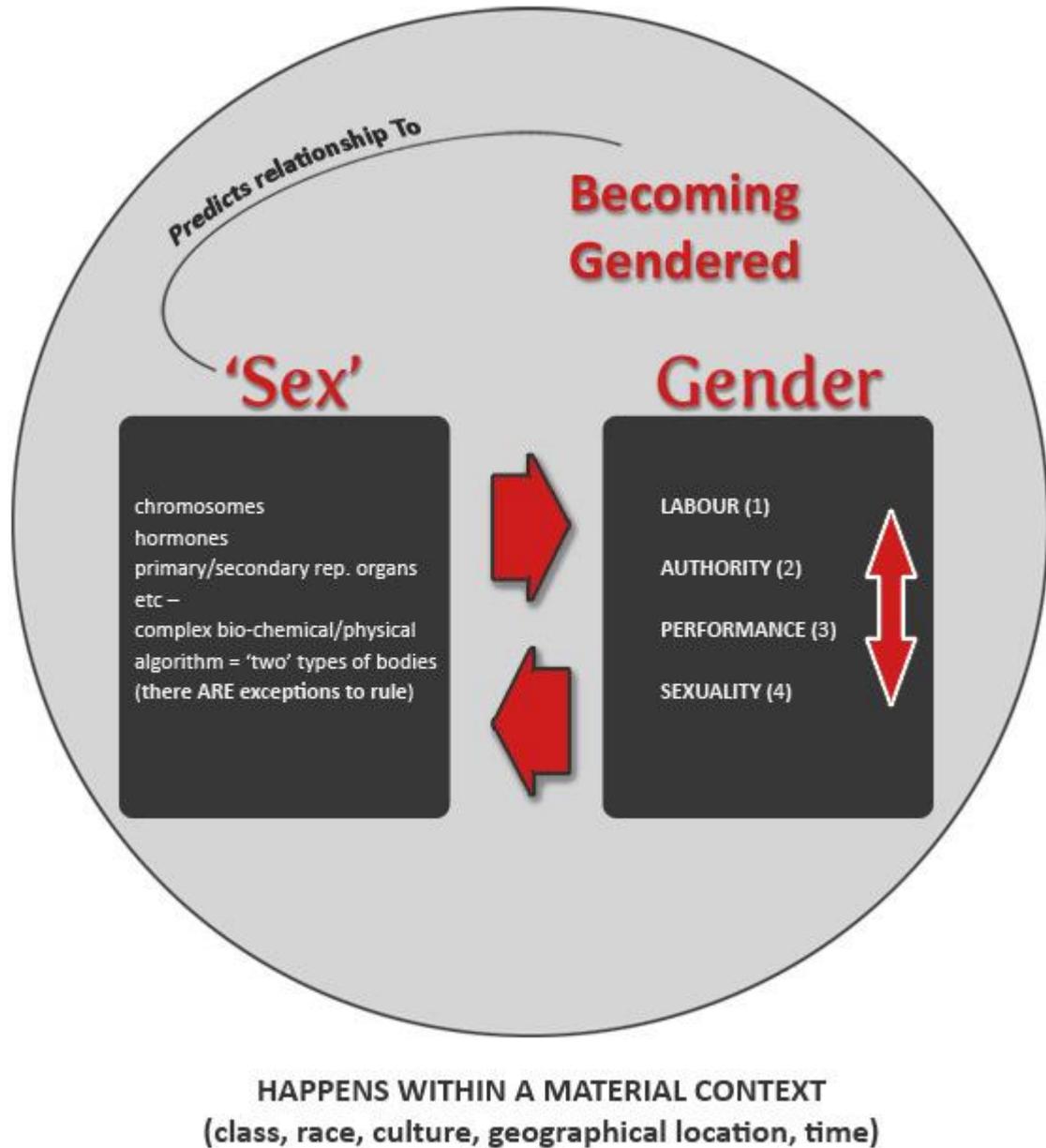


Modeling a relationship between 'sex' and 'gender'

One sex/gender theory could be diagrammed like this:



Reading The Circle: Understanding Gender

Because the processes of becoming gendered are so naturalized and deeply embedded within our cultures, it requires an act of conscious analysis to begin to understand the impact of "*being a man*" or "*being a woman*" on our individual lives, and on broad dynamics within society.

To put it simply, within the cultures into which most of us are born, gender is a critical force. Bodies are often “sexed” as they arrive into the world; on the basis on physical detail, as “male” or “female”. In the model, this is depicted on the left-hand side under “SEX”. “SEX” here refers to the multiple, and complicated, biological processes which energize bodies into (usually - but not always) two distinctive types of body. These processes are not simple, and involve many different, intersecting layers of biochemistry, organic potential, and structure - the story of “SEX” is not as straightforward as it sometimes appears to those without medical training.

This ascription, “SEX”, predicts the relationship a newborn person will have with labour, authority, performance and sexuality. **LABOUR (1)** includes all aspects of work: reproductive, productive, community-building, and so on. **AUTHORITY (2)** is a way of referring to given power: the rights to be valued as a “*knower*” in (say) a kitchen, a religious space, a governmental zone, a military environment,. **PERFORMANCE (3)** is a shorthand term for all those aspects of life in which human beings act out their identity amongst others: their clothing, their movement, their habits of leisure and pleasure, rituals of identity, behaviour around speech, and representation, patterns of engagement with food, housing design, and so on. **SEXUALITY (4)** involves the social construction of a biological drive - the way in which a person is expected to live out their desire for reproduction and sexual pleasure. In most contemporary contexts, people are strongly predicted to be, for example, heterosexual, living out their desire in relation to someone differently “sexed”. The four zones, labour, authority, performance, and sexuality, interact with one another, creating relations of power, status, and value for individuals within their context.

All the predictions can be referred to as **GENDERING** someone, so that **BECOMING GENDERED** operates deep within the values and practices of a cultural tradition and context. A baby identified as “male” in one context may be impacted differently to a baby, also identified as “male”, in another context. To give an example, a “male” baby born today within a Jewish cultural tradition would be vulnerable to circumcision rituals at an early age while a baby born within amaXhosa traditions could expect these rituals at a much later age, and with different meanings. These rituals belong to the area of performance, which involves the body and its presentation - dress, physical movement, speech, access to food (which parts of which animals may be eaten), location within cultural rites of passage. Because labour, authority, sexuality, and performance are such all-encompassing areas of human activity, becoming gendered has a very powerful impact on an individual’s location within society and his/her options, opportunities, and potential. The impact is both external (e.g., roles and responsibilities are assigned and expected) and internal (self-esteem is derived from engagement with masculinization/becoming a “woman”).

The process of becoming gendered is historical, and contextual. Thus, a c18 Nama woman, in a particular context, may have had very different access to spiritual or community authority than her current girl-child does; **GENDERING** as a process is vulnerable to the influence of political forces. British colonialism, for example, radically shifted notions of “*being a good woman*” in the c18, and c19, especially through the influence of missionaries, who disapproved of some of the sexual norms they encountered as settlers and actively sought to change indigenous citizens’ self-concepts about gendered authority, performance, and labour. **BEING GENDERED** never occurs outside a context of other routes to social categorizations. Critical variables of categorization change according to history and place; those most dominant currently are ethnicity, ‘*race*,’ class, sexual orientation, age, religion, and location within the global binaries (“*South/North*”; “*third world/first world*”; “*developed/developing*”; etc). At different points in time and place, variables such as lineage, age, spiritual authority, or land ‘*ownership*’/use would have had much more influence than they do in many current contexts. Analysis of the impact of **GENDER** therefore has to take into account individuals’ multiple sources of identity in order to understand the political dynamics with which any one person negotiates.

For people gendered as women, in most contemporary African contexts, the relation to sexuality is probably the most influential in the way they are seen as ‘women’ and in what options are available to them. Being gendered as a “*woman*” usually means that a person’s sexual options are expected to include prioritisation of fertility, reproductive labour, and heterosexual desire. This has implications for all other aspects of a person’s labour, her performance, and her arenas of authority. Constructions of woman-hood and man-hood, specific to a particular context, may get called “*cultural*”. Here, “*culture*” probably refers to a nexus of behaviours, practices, beliefs, norms, and values that “*make sense*” - through understandings of history/experience – to a group. Relations between one group and another may cause debate about who accepts these “*sense-making*” behaviours and who wants to change them. If you unpack the differences, within a specific context, between being gendered as a ‘*man*’ and being gendered as a ‘*woman*’ (something that is a process), the analysis usually reveals differences in power between the two identities, especially when it comes to sexuality (including reproduction).

The model is useful as a start to describing current theories which stress that ‘sex’ can be usefully separated from ‘gender’, when talking about social, political, and cultural dynamics. It also creates a way of discussing the interactions between context, culture, political and economic environments and the processes of ‘*becoming gendered*’ as ‘*men*’ and ‘*women*’. These are processes of constructing masculinities and femininities/relations-to-womanhood that not only

organize power between men and men, women and women, and women and men, but also engage human beings in life-long processes of self-identification through a gendered lens of expectations, ideologies, and experiences. It is never possible to construct masculinities and femininities **OUTSIDE** a context in which other social forces (such as race, class, ethnicity, or religion) are also shaping power, lives and identities.