

Mw 2:50 class

Sociology



MW 2: 50 class Gender Project The film XXY (really not a Y, but an X that has a leg snapped off) follows the life of Alex, a 15-year old intersex person struggling with her gender identity. She was born with both male and female genitalia, and because of this her family moved to a small seaside village in Uruguay to avoid stigma and prejudice that Alex would undoubtedly face in Argentina. She lives with her mom and her dad who is a marine biologist and has also written a book on sexuality. Alex has been raised as a girl, and she has been taking medication to block development of male features.

However, she has recently stopped taking the medication. The turmoil begins when Alex's mom invites friends to stay with them. The purpose of their visit is unclear until Alex overhears a conversation between her mother and her mother's friend. The friend is a surgeon and has come to discuss Alex's gender reassignment surgery. Her mother's friends have also brought their son, Alvaro who discovers Alex's below-the-waist anatomy. Other village boys soon find out via Alvaro and, wanting to see for themselves, assault Alex. Her father realizes that going to the police would alert the whole village to Alex's condition. Despite this, Alex decides that it is the right thing to do, and that it does not matter if others know. She also eventually decides, despite her mother's wishes, not to resume taking her medication or have the gender-reassignment surgery. Norms are standards for accepted and expected behavior. Alex goes against the norms of society. At the end of the film, it is still unclear if she is going to continue living as a girl, or transition to living as a boy. Most people, including me, find this annoying. As people in our gendered society, we want to know! We don't know what category to put Alex in, and this leaves us feeling uneasy. Alex doesn't fit into our system of schemas, mental categories into which our mind organizes

information. Symbolic Interaction theory uses social construction perspective to interpret gender and sexual identity as learned and not inborn. Culture and society shape our experiences, with some forms of gender and sexuality acceptable and others not. In XXY, Alex experiments with both gender and sexuality in ways that would not fit into the acceptable category. Alex's primary group, her family, is supposed to teach her society's values and norms, including gender-appropriate behavior. Functionalists like Durkheim might say that Alex is part of the "necessary deviance" that draws people together and keeps norms and values intact. Indeed, in XXY three boys band together to physically harm Alex because they perceive her as different in a negative way. People are motivated to preserve societal norms and work to encourage social conformity and its presumed "normal" gender roles.

Likewise, Alex's mother and her surgeon friend want to alter her anatomy so it will align with norms for being female. Studying gender is imperative in creating a more accepting, less prejudiced world. Conflict theorists see gender as an instrument in maintaining inequality. I think as we study the effects this inequality has on individuals and communities we can begin to undo it. Gender is right in the middle of many debates and issues today. It has been half a decade since the Equal Pay Act was passed, yet women are still paid less than men and are less likely to receive a promotion. In a divorce, custody of the child almost always goes to the mother. Boys are given more attention from teacher in schools. And the way a mother talks to her unborn child even varies according to its sex. Aside from the inequalities men and women face, the products of simply having a gendered society can also be huge. Society's gender binary has an enormous effect on people who identify as transgender, intersex, or some other gender variant. You are

assigned a gender at birth based on your biological sex. There is a gender marker on your drivers' license. You are asked to report your gender on surveys, applications, and countless other forms. If you want to talk to or about someone, it is almost impossible not to use gendered pronouns like he and she. To me, something so pervasive as gender is a topic that cannot and should not be ignored. Works Cited Andersen, Margaret L., and Howard Francis Taylor. *Sociology: The Essentials*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011. Print. Fine, Cordelia. *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. Print. *XXY: Uomini, Donne O Tutti E Due?* Dir. Lucía Puenzo. Perf. Ricardo Darán, Valeria Bertuccelli, Inés Efron, Martín Pirojansky. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 2007. DVD.