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**ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES**  
**2015/203144**

**PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN TWO MODERN  
PLAYS**

Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between masculinity and femininity depending on the contexts, these characteristics may include Biological Sex (i.e. the state of being woman or man) the modern English word “gender” comes from the middle English gender a loanword from Anglo-Norman and middle French “Gendre.” The word was still widely attested, however, in the specific sense of grammatical gender of noun to categories such as masculine, feminine and neuter.

Sexuality describes the whole way a person goes about expressing himself/herself as a sexual being. It describes how important sexual expression is in a person’s life, how one chooses to express that sexuality, and any preference one may have towards the type of sexual partner they choose. Human sexuality rarely falls into neat categories or lends itself to simple labeling, but rather is a rich and complex area of human experience.

Both the terms gender and sexuality have been historically interchangeable, but it was not until the late 1960s and early 70s that the term gender began to be more thoroughly defined and spread throughout the literature within the field of psychology. Although the term has undergone some changes since then.

Today, it represents how an individual feels and expresses their gender typically through masculinity or femininity. Through this definition, gender has often been

used as a variable to study how particular parts of people (i.e. on sexuality) can ultimately be informed by gender. Psychological research in this area has tended to follow these three modes of looking at gender: firstly, looking at gender through differences in presentation and traits, secondly, looking at gender against individual differences in individuals who identify as male and individuals who identify as female and lastly, looking at how gender influences how both men and women operate in societies. Sexuality, unlike gender, has kept a relatively stable definition by which it refers to all sexual attitudes and behaviours in an erotic or lack of erotic nature. The relationship between gender and sexuality is static, it is fluid and changing in light of this, gendered sexuality does not necessarily follow predictable patterns. A study by MC Cale, Tannaer and Heiman illustrates that gender informs how we understand and conceive of the construct of sexuality.

In Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, Celia represents the epitome of femininity in Renaissance literature. She is beautiful, submissive, quiet and helpless to resist her husband's control over her every movement. Although it is disturbing that her gender renders her a victim to male characters such as Corvino and Volpone, who treat her as though she is a possession to be won, this essay seeks to unravel the reasons as to why masculinity is threatened by female strength and autonomy, not to victimize the female characters within Jonson's play or to vilify the men as the root of this injustice. Because masculinity and femininity cannot exist without each other, both men and women must be voluntarily or forcibly complicit to function within this binary. By examining female sexuality and morality in not only the characterization of Celia but also that of Lady Would-Be Politic, Jonson reveals how women are caught in a double-bind within the patriarchal structure of Renaissance England; they must either conform to their feminine roles or risk being alienated from their communities. Celia, the wife of Corvino (one of

Volpone's victims) has entirely conformed to the feminine role of a proper married woman.

Wole Soyinka examines several gender issues throughout the play *The Lion and the Jewel*. One of the most significant gender issues in the play concerns the role of women in society. Soyinka depicts how women are treated as property in Yoruba culture through the payment of the bride-price. Men are free to buy as many wives as they can afford and women occupy a lower social status than men. Throughout the play, women are valued for their outward appearance and sensuality. Sidi becomes relevant only after her beauty is displayed in a foreign magazine, and Sadiku reminisces about her days as a young woman, when she was the Bale's favorite. Women are also portrayed as the less intelligent gender, which is evident in the way that both Sidi and Sadiku fall for Baroka's trick.

Soyinka also explores the idea of masculinity throughout his play. Baroka's assumed impotence makes him subject to ridicule throughout the village, and he loses his prestige. Also, Lakunle is viewed as less than a man because he is not physically imposing, athletic, or violent. In Yoruba culture, men are physically strong and valued for their ability to produce offspring.