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**TOPIC:**

**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND  
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AND EFUA SUTHERLAND'S *THE MARRIAGE OF  
ANANSEWA***

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# THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MACHIAVELLI'S *MANDRAGOLA* AND EFUA SUTHERLAND'S *THE MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA*

## INTRODUCTION

A contemporary analysis of the terms sexuality and gender indicates that they are Conventions that are socially, historically and culturally constructed, therefore proving to be complex to define. However, i will attempt an explanation of both. Gender refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex differences. It is a social or cultural category, influenced by stereotypes about 'female' and 'male' behaviour that exist in our attitudes and beliefs. Gender is a social construct which defines the role of women and men in the society. It is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of women and men) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in the society and in the public and private life. Gender expresses the difference between women's and men's interest even with the same household and how these interact and are expressed. It also involves the conventions and hierarchies which determine women's and men's position in the family community and society at large whereby women are usually dominated by men.

In a similar vein, Human sexuality refers to people's sexual interest in and attraction to others, as well as their capacity to have erotic experiences and responses. People's sexual orientation is their emotional and sexual attraction to particular sexes or genders, which often shapes their sexuality. Sexuality may be experienced and expressed in a variety of ways, including thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles, and relationships. These may manifest themselves in biological, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual aspects. The *biological and physical* aspects of sexuality largely concern the human reproductive functions, including the human sexual-response cycle and the basic biological drive that exists in all species. *Emotional* aspects of sexuality include bonds between individuals that are expressed through profound feelings or physical manifestations of love, trust, and care. *Social* aspects deal with the effects of human society on one's sexuality, while *spirituality* concerns an individual's spiritual connection with others through sexuality. Sexuality also impacts and is impacted by cultural, political, legal, philosophical, moral, ethical, and religious aspects of life.

We will be exploring the presentation of this two concepts; gender and sexuality in MACHIAVELLI'S *MANDRAGOLA* AND EFUA SUTHERLAND'S *THE MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA*.

What separates the men from the women in *The Marriage Of Ananse* and *La Mandragola* is the feeling of vulnerability with which the women are repeatedly left. From a young age, learning dependence and helplessness, rather than self-assurance and self-reliance, becomes one of the primary tasks of female socialization.

In the play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Efua T. Sutherland, the author presents the role of women as a tool for money-making and economic advantage. Ananse being a picaro and a trickster sees an opportunity of making it in life through the use of his daughter as a commodity. Anansewa writes letters that she does not know whose they are. Ananse insists that she writes the letters herself so as to consolidate his plans. Although the entire plan is on her head, she is kept unaware of every detail. Even when the plans are revealed to her, she is only told not to suggest her opinion but rather to play along. Anansewa on the receiving end, does not make any kind of objection to the game, instead she accepts it as her fate. As such women are only required to fulfil an already made up plans of course by superior characters- the men. The character of Christi presents these very well. Christi accepts every duty assigned to her by Ananse to fulfil in order to achieve her own desire of getting Ananse to marry her. She does not ask much question and even when she does, Ananse will only give her an order to carry out. On her part she is determined in getting the attraction of Ananse. As such she does not object or insist to know why in every of the occasion. Even when Ananse reveals to Christi and Anansewa about his plans, they both played as if they already planned it with him.

In *Mandragola*, Lucrezia is the object that Callimaco must have and will stop at nothing to possess. Lucrezia's life is ruled by those around her and it is not until she allows herself to be possessed by Callimaco that her situation begins to improve. In exchange, however, Lucrezia gives up her humanity. Her status is reduced to that of a thing, a mere sexual instrument. Callimaco, who always has a kind word when it comes to Lucrezia, is obviously not interested in her because of her high moral character. He seems best able to express his true feelings when speaking with the devious Ligurio, a man who will do anything to improve his own situation. When talking to Ligurio, Callimaco offers no praise of Lucrezia instead only his need to possess her. His love is an expression of the lover's physical needs and his selfishness is made clear throughout the play.

Lucrezia has no say in the matter that concerns her and in order to achieve success Callimaco only has to convince Lucrezia's husband, Messer Nicia, that the plan he has put forth is a good one. Once in Lucrezia's bedroom, Callimaco is able to force himself upon her. Sex is something that men do to women; men take the initiative, make things happen, and control the event. This case is no exception and only after he has had his way with her body, does Callimaco take a chance and tell her the truth about himself. Through the ages, imperial conquest, deeds of valor and expressions of love have gone hand in hand with violence against women in both thought and in deed. Despite the fact that this is the first time that Callimaco and Lucrezia have actually spoken, he claims to be madly in love with her and unable to live without her caresses that he has only just had, or better put, that he has only just taken.

That a woman must worry about the possibility of being raped is a process of intimidation that keeps all women in a constant state of fear of all men. When Lucrezia cannot become pregnant, she alone must shoulder the blame. Her husband, Messer Nicia, tries everything possible to cure his wife of her supposed infertility and yet he will not consider the possibility that he could be the cause of the couple's pregnancy problems. In certain cultures, a woman's erotic capital is closely tied to her fertility. For Lucrezia, her problems come from her inability to become pregnant. She is seen as a lesser woman because she cannot provide her husband with an heir. Even though Lucrezia's problems stem from her husband's sterility, she is to blame for the failure of conception. Lucrezia's only desire, the reader is told, is to live an honest life in the grace of God. In the words of Callimaco, were it not for all of the pressure from outside forces, Lucrezia would never have *sinned*. At this point in the story all of the forces are working against her. In order to do what she thinks is right, Lucrezia would have to go against the wishes of her husband, her mother, her doctor and her priest. If she continues with the plan they have laid out for her, she will be forced to make a cuckold of her husband. Yet as authority figures emanate an aura of rightness and their actions cannot easily be challenged, what else can Lucrezia be but wrong if she resists the will of those around her? As socialization teaches that men know best, Lucrezia eventually gives in. The only reason, however, that the opportunity arose for her to go against what she believed to be right was because of her unparalleled beauty.

By taking Callimaco as a permanent lover, Lucrezia is able to resolve the legal problem of an heir and secure her own future. In accepting Callimaco, Lucrezia establishes the ground rules. Lucrezia submits to the heroic rapist in order to improve her situation. Were something to happen to Messer Nicia, Callimaco, who readily accepts Lucrezia's proposal, would be right there to take his place. Lucrezia gains some power over Callimaco by exploiting her own weakness. Females learn the subtle lesson of controlling powerful men through demonstrated helplessness but this "learned helplessness" also serves to entrap

women. Callimaco has taken title to Lucrezia's body, a great sexual convenience as well as a testament to his intellectual stature, and in return he has to assume the burden of protecting her from potential harm. This is what Callimaco promises Lucrezia

Conclusively, in literature as in life, division of gender roles as a defining factor in the construction of social norms and acceptable behaviour existed long before the renaissance and is still prevalent today. These socially created expectations serve to determine, and many cases limit, masculine and feminine behaviour. The socialization of gender roles begins at birth; male and female infants receive different treatment, immediately setting them on entirely different life paths. Once these social arrangements have been established, those who have become accustomed to the greater privileges and power – in this case, men—consider it to be both natural and imperative to defend the status quo. The group that benefit most from this arrangement comes to believe that it truly deserve the dominant position and as a result, guards it vigorously. Historically, women have been able to increase their bargaining power with men by refusing to give in to a man's sexual desires. By holding out on sexual favors, women could influence the men that courted them. As female beauty and implied sexuality are associated with male success, a beautiful and sexy woman is seen as an enviable prize for a successful male. As great beauty is considered to be in short supply, it is universally valorised and desired resulting in women typically possessing more erotic capital than men. This advantage in erotic capital potentially gives women an advantage in negotiations with men. However, this took a different dimension in these two characters-Ananewa and Lucrezia. For Lucrezia and Ananewa it is instead the opposite. Their power comes from giving in to a man's sexual advances. Once Lucrezia becomes the woman possessed, she ceases to be the woman desired. After Callimaco possesses her body, Lucrezia holds the key to his happiness and it becomes something that she can give to him, or take away, whenever she pleases. On the side of Ananewa, she is not faced with a sexual advance rather by a total submission to the father's will without any recourse. The two characters are faced with a total submission to the desire and dictates of those around them without much questioning if at all there is. Although, there is no much implicit expression of sexual attribute, yet it is implied in many cases as shown above.