



Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History

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In the 1990s, questions of sex roles and individual identity have taken a central position in intellectual debates. These eleven essays in history and anthropology offer a novel perspective on these debates by questioning the place of sexual dimorphism in culture and history. They propose a new role for the study of alternative sex and gender systems in cultural science, as a means of critiquing thinking that privileges standard male/female gender distinctions and rejects the natural basis of other forms of sexuality. The essays cover a wide range of times and cultures, starting in the Byzantine Empire and moving eclectically forward, with a special focus on the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The anthropological studies include the Native American berdache, the Indian Hijras caste, hermaphrodites in Melanesia, third genders in Indonesia and the Balkans, and transsexuals in America. *Third Sex, Third Gender* emphasizes desires on the margins of society, and pleasures and bodies outside the assumed arenas of social reproduction. It opens up the possibility of understanding in new ways how, for example, Byzantine palace eunuchs and the Hijras of India met the criteria of special social roles that necessitated self-castration, and how heartfelt yet forbidden desires were expressed among seventeenth-century Dutch Sodomites, the Mollys of eighteenth-century England, and the Intermediate Sex or so-called hermaphrodite-homosexual of nineteenth-century Europe and America. Gilbert Herdt is Professor of Human Development at the University of Chicago. He is the author, coauthor, or editor of a dozen books, including *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*, *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, and *Intimate Communications*. The essays: Introduction, Gilbert Herdt. *Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium*, Kathryn M. Ringrose. *London's Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture*, Randolph Trumbach. *Sodomy and the Pursuit of the Third Sex in Early Modern Europe*, Theo van der Meer. *Woman Becomes Man in the Balkans*, Rene Gremaux. *A Female Soul in a Male Body: Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth Century Sexology*, Gert Hekma. *The Hijras: An Alternative Sex and Gender Role in India*, Serna Nanda. *How to Become a Berdache: Toward A Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity*, Will Roscoe. *The.., Third Sex Among the Sambia*, Gilbert Herdt. *The Waria of Indonesia: A Traditional Third Gender Role*, Robert

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

Most modern discussions of the relationship of biological sex to gender presuppose that there are two genders male and female, founded on the two biological sexes. But not all cultures share this essentialist assumption and even Western societies have not always embraced it. Bringing together historical and anthropological studies, *Third Sex, Third Gender* challenges the usual emphasis on sexual dimorphism and reproduction, providing a unique perspective on the various forms of socialization of people who are neither "male" nor "female". The existence of a third sex or gender enables us to understand how Byzantine palace eunuchs and Indian hijras met the criteria of special social roles that necessitated practices such as self-castration and how intimate and forbidden desires were expressed among the Dutch Sodomites in the early modern period, the Sapphists of eighteenth-century England or the so-called hermaphrodite-homosexuals of nineteenth-century Europe and America. By contextualizing these practices and by allowing these bodies, meanings and desires to emerge, *Third Sex, Third Gender* provides a new way to think about sex and gender systems that is crucial to contemporary debates within the social sciences.

About the Author

Gilbert Herdt is Professor of Human Development at the University of Chicago. He is the author, coauthor, or editor of a dozen books, including *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*, *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, and *Intimate Communications*.

Users Review

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Ricky Streeter:

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