Sociology of Gender, prompts for paper #2

Before you begin writing your paper, please read the comments from your last paper. For each of you I've offered some suggestions for how to tighten up your argument, or take it to the 'next level'.

Regardless of the topic that you choose, please be sure to support your argument with evidence. The prompts provide direction, but they do not provide the argument. Your task, as a writer, is to consider the prompt, choose a set of evidence, evaluate the evidence, draw conclusions, and evaluate what those conclusions mean. Once again, you may use participant observations and interviews as evidence, as well as any form of media.

1) Explore how the media/news represents 'sex hormones'. How does the representation of these hormones engage with gender dynamics? Are these hormones portrayed as gender neutral, or are they 'problematized' or characterized in ways that are gendered, i.e. female sex hormones make losing weight difficult for women, thus they, like women, are inherently 'problematic' or 'by nature' flawed, especially since 'thinness' today is such an integral part of femininity.

2) How does language (and the absence of language) shape our conversations and perceptions of gender?

3) Analyze a modern/popular scientific "fact" concerning gender through a cultural or political lens.

4) Through our readings, we have discovered ways in which the "two-gender system" has affected scientific research. What evidence have you observed in society today that reinforces or refutes this discovery?

5) What are the social advantages/disadvantages to the various sex models that we have learned about (one-sex/two-sex/intersex/spectrum). There are several approaches you could take. First, you could consider this from an historical perspective, in which case you would consider the advantages/disadvantages historically. Second, you could consider how the two-sex model serves to regulate bodies in society today, and the advantages and disadvantages of this system. If you opt for this angle, you might also consider intersex individuals as well. Lastly, you could consider, hypothetically, what a sex system might look like if it included the full spectrum. This segues nicely into the next question...

6) Use the histories of constructing sex we've seen in our readings and offer alternative sex models. What would a vision of a society with different categories of sex look like? If you choose to write a paper of this sort, be sure that your model references/is inspired by the readings concerning the various sex models through time. Your model doesn't have to be explicit in its reference to them, but you might think about the relationship between culture and science as you consider how these

alternative sex categories manifest themselves, especially in terms of social institutions and hierarchies. You might also think about the relationship between sex and gender. How might a society with a different sex model envision gender?

7) Is the female "nesting instinct" actually science? Show how this "nesting instinct" is a scientific claim that promotes/defends gender differences.

8) Why does Frank Lillie believe that people of color possess weak hereditary? Is this based on the pigment of skin or biological factors? Or is it cultural? How does 'culture' and socio-economics inform the sorts of demands placed on science?

9) In the recent readings, science has been used as a mechanism to define the differences between the two sexes. However, how has the addition of science, influenced by culture, furthered the perception and understanding of the world as gendered?

10) With reference to Anne Fausto-Sterling's chapters on hermaphrodites, how have gender polarities and the two-sex model been supported and enforced by doctors? What are the arguments posed by medical experts/intersex people in favor of enforcing the two-sex model? What are the arguments given by these sorts of people against it?

11) Given that there are more than two sexes, should there be more than two genders?

12) Apply the one-sex or two-sex model to one aspect of our treatment of the body today. Explain the benefits and problems arising from this treatment.

13) Both Anne Fausto-Sterling and Thomas Lacqueur claim that pre-existing assumptions affect scientific studies of gender just as much, if not more so, than the science affects mainstream understanding. Given the evidence of this predisposition to revert to prejudice, does our desire for scientific research have the power to change the two-sex, two-gender paradigm? Consider, for example, modern feminism's struggle for abortion rights--does the success of Roe vs. Wade indicate progress, or do the ongoing objections to abortion rights mean that we cannot move beyond pseudo-science? In short: can we find examples where science persuades the populace on matters of sex or gender? Or is Fausto-Sterling's claim universal?

14) How were the one-sex model and two-sex model used to establish a place for women in society, and how are those societal positions different from one another?

15) We already know that the idea of the one-sex model still exists in current society. How have the beliefs that are informed by this (somewhat dated) concept affected, either positively or negatively, gender roles, beliefs about sexuality, public policy, etc in contemporary society?

16) How is searching for physiological differences to reinforce the two-sex system manifested today and what are its effects on society as a whole or on the individual?

17) The assertion that gender differences are biologically based have often been used to define gender roles and oppress women in particular. Can think of any instances where biological determinism has liberated people from gender roles?

18) Fausto-Sterling and Laquer argue that science is a reflection of cultural assumptions about sex and gender, including the study of physical anatomy, the corpus collosum, and sex hormones, that has historically been a conservative tool that maintains a male-dominated power structure. Are there counter-examples to the arguments raised by these two authors that show science acting in support of--or, perhaps, reflecting a culture in favor of--a more open interpretation of our understanding of gender?

19) How is the biological construction of sex and gender exemplified in the culture of professional sports (and their fans)?

20) Trace the changing ways in which the same empirical evidence has been used to argue for the one-sex and two-sex models. Focus your analysis on physiological studies of the body. Though you may use other sources as well, you are not expected to. Next, analyze an example of the way modern empirical data has been mobilized to argue for different gender ideologies at different times. Finally, use these studies as a springboard for articulating why and how changing ideology over time informs the scientific process.

21) In what ways does the birth control pill make hormones gendered?

22) If the basis of the inequalities between men and women are legitimate in regard to gradual scientific developments, why did the dichotomy of the sexes exist prior to the discovery of differential characteristics in the brain?