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In this ambitious new book, Henrietta Moore draws on anthropology, feminism and psychoanalysis to develop an original and provocative theory of gender and of how we become sexed beings. Arguing that the Oedipus complex is no longer the fulcrum of debate between anthropology and psychoanalysis, she demonstrates how recent theorizing on subjectivity, agency and culture has opened up new possibilities for rethinking the relationship between gender, sexuality and symbolism.

Using detailed ethnographic material from Africa and Melanesia to explore the strengths and weaknesses of a range of theories in anthropology, feminism and psychoanalysis, Moore advocates an ethics of engagement based on a detailed understanding of the differences and similarities in the ways in which local communities and western scholars have imaginatively deployed the power of sexual difference. She demonstrates the importance of ethnographic listening, of focused attention to people's imaginations, and of how this illuminates different facets of complex theoretical issues and human conundrums.

Written not just for professional scholars and for students but for anyone with a serious interest in how gender and sexuality are conceptualized and experienced, this book is the most powerful and persuasive assessment to date of what anthropology has to contribute to these debates now and in the future.