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## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

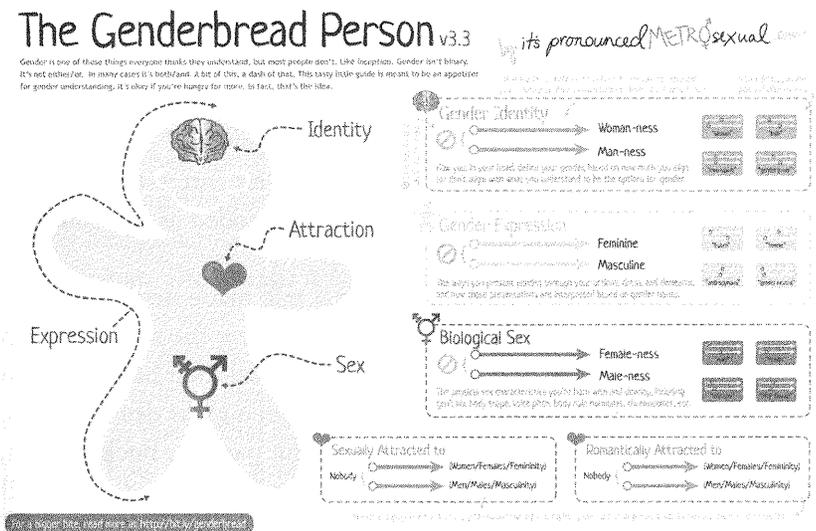


Figure 2.1 The Genderbread Person

Source: First published in *The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook: A Guide to Gender* by Sam Killermann, <http://samuelkillermann.com>

### Opening Illustration

In 1972, at the heart of the second wave of feminist movement, Lois Gould published the fictional tale "X: A Fabulous Child's Story" in *Ms. Magazine*. The story's narrator describes an imaginary parenting scenario in which a baby is born, named "x," and under the guidance

of scientists is deliberately raised in a gender-neutral way. The child is not subject to feminizing or masculinizing influences through toy selection and clothing coded as feminine or masculine, and is co-parented equally by different-sex parents. The story calls attention to the many gendered messages we experience on a daily basis:

bouncing it up in the air and saying how strong and active it was, they'd be treating it more like a boy than an X. But if all they did was cuddle it and kiss it and tell it how sweet and dainty it was, they'd be treating it more like a girl than an X. On page 1654 of the Official Instruction Manual, the scientists prescribed: "plenty of bouncing and plenty of cuddling, both, X ought to be strong and sweet and active. Forget about dainty altogether.

(Gould)

Gould's ultimate moral was that parenting that drew from a range of human virtues would produce well-adjusted, functional children who were free to express themselves and pursue their interests regardless of whether those expressions and pursuits were coded as masculine or feminine.

A contemporary version of this fictional tale made news headlines in recent years, with news journalists documenting the stories of two contemporary couples whose decision not to reveal their baby's sex (up until the child reached school age) earned them a great deal of public scorn and attention (Bielanko). As one of the parents, Beck Laxton, said in an interview with the *Cambridge News*, "I wanted to avoid all that stereotyping. Stereotypes seem fundamentally stupid. Why would you want to slot people into boxes?" ("Couple"). Laxton, a UK-based online editor, and her partner, Kieran Cooper, decided to keep Sasha's sex a secret when he was still in the womb. The birth announcement stated the gender-neutral name of their child but skipped the big reveal. Up until recently, the couple only told a few close friends and family members that Sasha was a boy and managed to keep the rest of the world "in the dark." Another couple announced the arrival of their baby with an email that read "We've decided not to share Storm's sex for now—a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a

stand up to what the world could become in Storm's lifetime (a more progressive place? . . .)."

Gould's story and the contemporary versions of the Fabulous X simultaneously illustrate how gender is encoded and maintained through a variety of strong social cues (i.e., naming practices, parenting responsibilities, toys, clothing, games, interpersonal interactions, and media exposure) and the way that people struggle to carve out space and identities that resist normative constructions of gender. This chapter explores how a social constructionist approach to gender is a key feature of a feminist theoretical lens.

A *feminist stance* understands gender as a system of privilege and oppression; it also assumes that gender is socially constructed, and is deeply interested in mapping out how, where, and to what effect.

### Why a Threshold Concept?

A core premise of feminist scholarship is that gender and sex are distinct from each other, and that our gender identities are socially constructed and not immutable. Key to this concept is that ideas and constructions of gender change across time, between and within cultures, and even within one's lifespan. The specific ways that gender is socially constructed at any given time also serve the purpose of establishing and perpetuating *sexism*, defined as prejudice and discrimination based on sex. Furthermore, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities frame expectations for appropriate gendered behavior, as does social class and sexuality. Simply put, feminist scholars focus on how gender is socially constructed, and to what ends, and they are simultaneously interested in how social constructions of gender are shaped by issues of race, class, age, ability, and sexual identity. This threshold concept, then, is deeply intertwined with both the concept of privilege and oppression, which is the focus of Chapter 3, and the concept of intersectionality, which is the focus of Chapter 4.

### Framing Definitions and Related Concepts

#### *Social Constructionism*

One of the early foundational theories underpinning a social constructionist approach is C. Wright Mills's articulation of the concept

of the **sociological imagination**. In his 1959 book of the same name, Mills argues that

the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances.

(5)

Mills's claims became the foundation of social science and sociology as a discipline. As Mills contended, "[t]he sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (6). As one of the foundations of feminist theory, **social constructionism** can be distinguished from other theories about sex and gender that are used to explain gender role socialization and how gendered systems are created and maintained. There are several hallmark concepts that distinguish a social constructionist approach to gender.

### *Sex and Gender*

The "Genderbread Person" image that opens this chapter—and the accompanying controversies around it—is a case in point of the unsettled social understanding of the relationship between biological sex and the various ways that gender is created, expressed, and defined. What the image attempts to do is complicate our understanding of a binary gender system—boys and girls, men and women—and present a more varied spectrum of elements that make up sex, gender, and sexuality.

Although most scholars acknowledge that gender and sex exist on a continuum, a simple definition pulls apart these two commonly conflated terms into "sex," which focuses on the biological, genetic, and physiological features of people, and "gender," which characterizes the behavioral (and changeable/evolving) characteristics that we define as feminine and masculine. Physical features of sex include reproductive organs and secondary sex characteristics that develop at puberty, such as average difference and variation in muscle-to-fat ratios between men and women, and growth in body and facial hair. Gender, in contrast, is shaped by behavioral cues and social codes that are coded

as "masculine" or "feminine." In the social constructionist understanding of gender, then, gender is performative, that is, something you "do" rather than something that is built into or programmed into you.

The work of feminist sociologist Judith Lorber serves as a touchstone in this area. Her work helpfully provides a number of terms that flesh out the idea of gender as a social construction. She makes clear that gendering is a *process* that has many dimensions and that occurs over time: first, there is the *assignment* of sex and gender, which quickly becomes a **gender status**, according to Lorber, through naming, clothing, and the choice of children's toys and room decor. From there, children continue to be socialized into their gender, developing a **gender identity**, which is a person's gendered sense of self. The expression of that gendered sense of self is referred to as one's **gender comportment**, which Susan Stryker defines as "bodily actions such as how we use our voices, cross our legs, hold our heads, wear our clothes, dance around the room, throw a ball, walk in high heels" (12). This category is referred to as **gender expression** in the Genderbread figure that opens the chapter. Lorber also uses the term **gender display**, defined as the presentation of self as a kind of gendered person through dress, cosmetics, adornments, and both permanent and reversible body markers.

A social constructionist approach to gender rejects the belief that there are only two sexes and two genders, arguing instead that our current binary **sex/gender system** is itself a social construction. Powerful evidence for this argument comes from the **intersex** community (those who are themselves intersexed, parents of intersex children, and researchers who focus on intersexuality). The Intersex Society of North America defines intersex as "a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male" ("What Is Intersex?"). While it has been difficult to get a handle on how frequently intersex babies are born, Anne Fausto-Sterling estimates that intersex births account for 1.7 percent of all births. She helpfully puts this into perspective:

a city of 300,000 would have 5,100 people with varying degrees of intersexual development. Compare this with albinism, another

relatively uncommon human trait but one that most readers can probably recall having seen. Albino births occur much less frequently than intersexual births—in only about 1 in 20,000 babies. (51–53)

Another frequently cited point of reference is redheadedness: being intersex is about as common as being born with red hair. For those who believe that sex and gender are binary—that there are only two possibilities, male and female—intersex babies are “really” male or female, and medical management, including genital surgery, can bring their physical appearance in line with their “true” sex. By contrast, Anne Fausto-Sterling and many others argue that the birth of intersex babies indicates that sex and gender are not binary, that is, that there are more than two categories, male and female, and she envisions a future (an admittedly utopic one) in which a wide range of gender identities and expressions would be permitted, even encouraged. Toward this end, Fausto-Sterling and the Intersex Society of North America call for an end to infant genital surgery on intersex babies, both because they feel strongly that decisions about making any permanent changes to the appearance and sexual function of intersex people should be made by the people themselves, or at least in consultation with them, *and* because the genital surgeries reinforce the idea that there are really only two sexes. Cheryl Chase, founder of the Intersex Society of North America and herself born intersex, argues that “children should be made to feel loved and accepted in their unusual bodies” (Weil).

Recent legal victories would seem to suggest some small steps toward Fausto-Sterling’s vision: India, Pakistan and New Zealand now recognize a third gender, and in 2013, Germany enacted a law that allows parents to refrain from marking “M” or “F” on their intersex baby’s birth certificate. The law was intended to allow parents to defer the decision and allow the child to decide later on whether to identify as male or female; however, the law also stipulates that a child could continue to identify as intersex. In a move that echoes the Gould story that opens this chapter, Germans can choose to use an “X” in the gender field of their passport. And in 2016 in the United States, Kelly Keenan, at the age of 55, successfully had her birth certificate amended to read

“intersex” rather than M or F, after finding out what had been kept a secret from her throughout her life. Keenan’s is thought to be the first birth certificate to read “intersex” (Levin). (Note: Keenan was raised female, and continues to use feminine pronouns.)

While most people experience congruence between their **gender assignment**, gender identity, and gender expression, this is not automatically the case, and a growing number of people are exploring other identities and ways of being, and demanding legal recognition for their right to do so. The term **transgender** has many complex meanings and nuances, but a starting point is that it is used to describe an individual for whom there is a lack of congruence between their gender assignment and gender identity. In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker uses the term “to refer to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender” (1). While it used to be more common for that movement to remain within the boundaries of the binary gender system, that is, by seeking sex reassignment surgery and transitioning from identifying as a man to identifying as a woman (or vice versa), many trans\* people today are increasingly identifying themselves and staking out territory outside the binary altogether. As Stryker points out, some people “seek to resist their birth-assigned gender without abandoning it,” whereas others “seek to create some kind of new gender location” (19). Trans\* people may or may not modify their bodies using surgery and/or hormones and may or may not seek legal recognition for their gender identity if it does not match the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Conversely, the terms **cisgender** and **cissexual** are used to describe people who experience congruence between their gender assignment and gender identity. Stryker points out that the creation of this term helps to name and mark that experience rather than assuming it as the norm. She writes, “[t]he idea behind the terms is to resist the way that ‘woman’ or ‘man’ can mean ‘nontransgendered woman’ or ‘nontransgendered man’ by default, unless the person’s transgender status is explicitly named” (22).

Social media have also responded to the expanding understanding of gender identity that has emanated from a variety of sources, including the intersex and the trans\* communities. For example, Facebook in 2014

changed the gender field of its profile options to allow for a wider range of user selections, moving from the binary “male/female” options to roughly 50 options including “cisgender,” “trans male,” “androgynous,” and “genderqueer,” among others (Henn). Although the opportunity to choose one’s online gender identity, along with the legal recognition of a third gender in several countries, indicates that change is afoot and many people are actively working to create more cultural space for life beyond the binary, this is not to downplay or diminish the realities of **transphobia**, which Julia Serano defines as “an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against people whose gendered identities, appearances, or behaviors deviate from societal norms.” Even as many, especially younger people, are actively embracing gender fluidity, there are powerful forces that are working actively to police the boundaries of sex and gender. A recent incident in the state of Colorado highlights the uneven nature of change; the Girl Scouts (GSUSA) found themselves under attack over the inclusion of Bobby Montoya, a grade-school-aged trans girl. In fact, Bobby’s desire to join the Girl Scouts was initially thwarted by a troop leader who cited Bobby’s “boy parts” as a barrier to joining, but that decision was quickly reversed based on national GSUSA policy. The FAQ section of the GSUSA website states that “if the child is recognized by the family and school/community as a girl and lives culturally as a girl, then Girl Scouts is an organization that can serve her in a setting that is both emotionally and physically safe.” When Bobby’s story hit the news, however, a group calling itself Honest Girl Scouts encouraged a cookie-buying boycott, citing GSUSA’s “bias for transgenders [*sic*]” (Hetter). Many cities and states are also passing so-called “bathroom bills” which seek to prohibit trans men and women from using the bathroom that accords with their gender identity. Many of these bills constitute backlash to recent political gains for transgender rights, and proponents of them often disingenuously cite their desire to protect women and girls from being preyed upon by men in the restroom.

### *Gender Socialization*

Having made an initial pass through an explanation of the distinction between sex and gender, as well as what gender *is* or consists of, we can

now ask and answer the question of where and how we learn about gender in our culture. Where do we learn what it means to be a boy or girl in our culture, in terms of appearance and behavior, and what are the cues and messages that we receive, both implicitly and explicitly? That is, we can begin to think about where, but also how, we are socialized into our gender. Some of the primary sites and arenas of **gender socialization** include the family, education, religion, popular culture and the media, sports, and the legal and criminal justice systems. What follows are a few examples of how these societal institutions serve as a site of gender socialization (note: institutions as sites and mechanisms for structuring systems of privilege and oppression will be discussed in Chapter 3 as well).

### *Education*

School settings are a key site of gender socialization. The messages children receive about appropriate behavior, attitudes, and appearance for their gender are both explicit and implicit, and come from school policies, teachers, fellow students, as well as the curriculum. Dress codes in middle schools and high schools are a good example of the role of school policy in shaping ideas around gender. An increasing number of schools have instituted dress codes that reinforce a double standard and convey the message to girls and young women that their bodies, by definition, are a distraction to boys and young men, and that it is their responsibility to cover themselves. Some of these dress codes can also have the effect of regulating the dress and appearance of trans\* students. Many of these dress codes are ostensibly gender-neutral, but the language in them often reveals that women’s bodies are the prime focus of the policy. In Appleton, WI, for example, the policy states that “[s]tudents may not wear scanty and/or revealing clothing,” but then goes on to provide examples that are almost exclusively feminine: “short skirts (need to be mid-thigh) or revealing shorts, tube tops, halters, backless tops, spaghetti straps less than one inch, exposed midribs or undergarments.” Around the country, many students are resisting these dress codes and calling out the sexist assumptions that are implicit in them, as when a student in Appleton

posted flyers urging administrators to “teach male students and teachers not to over-sexualize female body parts” (Zettel).

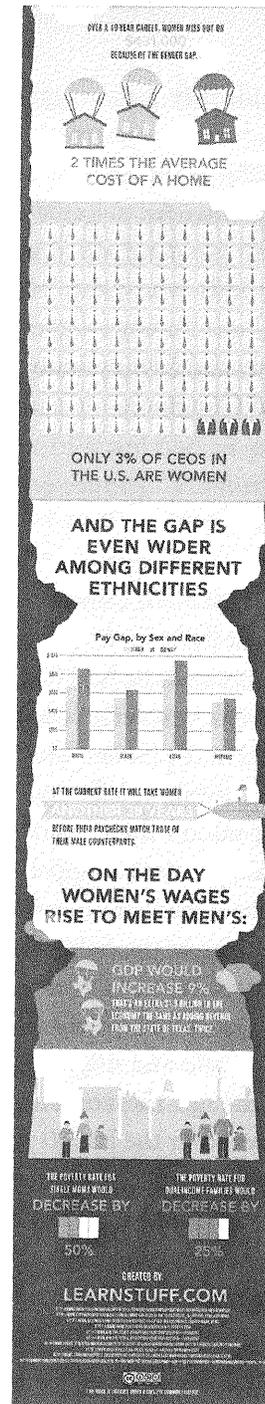
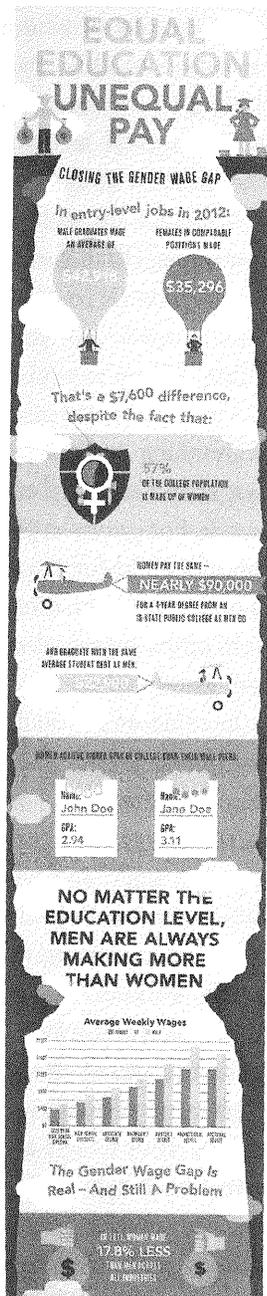
The role of peers in educational settings can be seen powerfully in discussions of boys’ underachievement. A recent article by sociologist Michael Kimmel, “Solving the ‘Boy Crisis’ in Schools,” drawing from qualitative evidence collected from surveys and interviews with middle school students, links expectations about gender norms for boys to attitudes about school, and more specifically, toward particular school subjects. Kimmel argues that “[h]ow little they care about school, about studying, about succeeding—these are markers of manhood in peer groups of middle and high school boys across the country.” He further argues that “what boys think it means to be a man is often at odds with succeeding in school. Stated most simply, many boys regard academic disengagement as a sign of their masculinity.” Kimmel concludes with a call to change the messages that boys receive in school settings, saying that “[w]e must make academic engagement a sign of manhood—which we can only do by interrupting those other voices that tell our young boys to tune out.” On a related note, the values of compliance and obedience are a key feature in many school settings, a fact that has gendered (and racialized) implications. As Sadker and Zittleman explain, boys are more likely to be overdiagnosed with behavioral and emotional problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder, whereas girls’ higher overall average grades and lower test scores may reflect what they note is an educational setting that values “following the rules, being quiet, and conforming to school norms” (78). In this way, particular behaviors are rewarded even if they are not ultimately those that will lead to “success” beyond school and in other settings that prize assertiveness and risk-taking behaviors.

School curricula also contain gendered messages that affect children’s perceptions of intelligence, as illustrated by a recent study published in the journal *Science*. The study documented the shift that takes place as early as age 5 regarding children’s perceptions of “brilliance” or intelligence. At 5, both boys and girls associated brilliance with their own gender; by 6 or 7, however, both boys and girls were significantly less likely to pick women as brilliant. That assessment was distinct from girls’ beliefs about who does well in school, where girls were more likely

to identify girls, suggesting that at least for girls, their beliefs about academic success were disconnected from their perceptions of who is “really, really smart,” as the study framed the question to child participants. As the study concluded, by age 6, then, girls in the study were avoiding activities that were framed by the researchers as being for kids who were “really, really smart,” and the authors assert that “[t]hese findings suggest that gendered notions of brilliance are acquired early and have an immediate effect on children’s interests” (Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian).

#### *Family Structures and the Workplace*

Social and policy structures that assume female caretaking and the primacy of men’s careers send strong reinforcing messages and logistical cues about the responsibility for childcare as women’s work. For example, paid family and medical leave for the birth or adoption of a child (or to care for sick or elderly family members) does not exist on a standard national level in the United States (although it is common in other industrialized countries), and the status of the U.S. leave program as unpaid reinforces the notion that pregnant people can rely on the income of a (usually) male partner to support them during childbirth and throughout infancy. When these are heavily gendered responsibilities, messages about who belongs in the public sphere and who belongs in the private sphere are clear. Children also learn what is considered “women’s work” and what is considered “men’s work” by observing both the amount and kind of domestic and unpaid work performed by their parents and caregivers. Although the amount of housework performed by women has gone down over the last 30 years, and the amount of housework performed by men has gone up, a significant gap remains between the average weekly hours spent by men and women engaged in these tasks, with women still spending roughly twice as much time as men. As the Bureau of Labor Statistics notes, women do 10.8 hours more unpaid household labor than men, and among 25- to 34-year olds, women perform 31.7 hours of household work compared with men’s 15.8 (“Hours”). And while recent studies show that men’s share of meal preparation and childcare has increased, the biggest gap is around cleaning.



These messages are not just conveyed through observation of adults, however; children are also socialized into their gender through the chores they are (or aren't) asked to perform around the house, and the money they may receive in the form of an allowance. The Allstate Foundation's 2014 Teens and Personal Finance Survey revealed that more boys than girls reported receiving an allowance from their parents (67 percent v. 59 percent). A 2007 study by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research found that "girls spend more time doing housework than they do playing, while boys spend about 30 percent less time doing household chores than girls and more than twice as much time playing." And finally, several studies have shown that in families where both boys and girls get allowances, boys' allowances are higher (Dusenbery). Taken together, these findings suggest that chores and allowances are key sites of boys' and girls' gender socialization.

### Religions

Most major religions are based on a heavy foundation of **masculine god language**, and masculine iconography as omniscient and omnipotent; major religions are centered on male prophets and gods and around strict rules for men's and women's conduct, particularly regarding sexuality, reproduction, and marriage. Masculine god language that refers to deities as "Him" and "Our Heavenly Father" reinforce an image of an all-powerful male ruler. Religious texts as well often communicate oppressive notions about gender relationships, such as Biblical passages regularly referenced in Christianity including:

Women should keep silence in churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says.

(1 Cor. 14:34)

I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

(1 Cor. 11:3)

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

(Col. 3:18)

Figure 2.2 Equal Education, Unequal Pay

Source: LearnStuff.com

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

(1 Tim. 2:11–15)

Further, in a number of faiths, women are excluded from religious practices. For example, Hindu women perform rituals of self-denial, such as fasting, in order to create positive energy and power for their husbands. The self-sacrifice of a woman for her husband is understood to be a religious offering. Men do not perform such rituals for their wives (Burn). Women are often also excluded from leadership positions. Female ministers, bishops, priests, rabbis, mullahs, gurus, or sadhus remain relatively rare or nonexistent in many religious traditions. Children who attend worship services learn by observing the roles played by both children and adult men and women in those places of worship, and they also absorb explicit and implicit messages about their “proper” roles.

It should also be noted, however, that many women, both feminist religious scholars and everyday activists, continue to work to challenge power imbalances, including segregated and exclusionary practices, and thereby send a different set of messages to their religion’s practitioners, including children. For example, Kristine Stolakis’s documentary, *Where We Stand*, traces the work of stay-at-home-mom Abby Hansen’s advocacy for women’s ordination in the Mormon church, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Parker). Ordination of women as Catholic priests is also among the many issues tackled by the Women’s Ordination Conference, an organization described on its website as “A Voice for Women’s Equality in the Catholic Church.” And finally, Muslim women have opened a number of women’s mosques in various parts of the world; the first in the U.S. opened in Los Angeles in 2015. These mosques feature women imams (prayer leaders) and are seen as a part of women’s empowerment efforts within Islam.

### *Popular Culture*

From birth, children are exposed to gendered messages in the form of pink or blue blankets and baby name signs, in the gendered division of

toy store aisles, and in TV shows geared toward girls or boys, as well as the dominance of male characters in children’s media. Regarding children’s media, research from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media found that girl characters are outnumbered by boy characters by a ratio of 3 to 1 (Smith). Another example comes from looking at recipients of Best Picture Oscar awards. For example, films that have been praised and rewarded in the film industry are almost universally male-centered. A brief review of the films receiving the Best Picture award over the last two decades demonstrates that male-centered narratives are most typically perceived as worthy of adulation.

For example, the majority of the films center on a heroic male protagonist who overcomes a significant obstacle (such as *The Departed*’s focus on the main character’s navigation of his life as a double agent; *A Beautiful Mind*, documenting the main character as a genius suffering from a mental illness; or Oscar Schindler’s acts of heroism during the Holocaust in *Schindler’s List*). Films such as *The Silence of the Lambs*, while including a central female character, largely are driven by her interaction with or attempts to understand a more significant male character (in that film, Hannibal Lecter). Other filmic conventions rewarded include vengeance stories, such as a male character seeking out revenge for a wrong done to a woman (*Unforgiven*); or the emotional life of a male character presumed to be of depth and thus interest to a viewer, such as *The English Patient* or *American Beauty*. Films centered on war or battle are also overrepresented (such as *Braveheart*, *Platoon*, *Gladiator*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *Schindler’s List*) relative to their overall proportion of film plots. This emphasis on male-centered narratives and male-identified events and activities (war, battle, math, detective work, the Old West) communicate strong messages about what is culturally valuable and what (and who) is interesting. On a similar note, a recent analysis of the roles played by the winners of the Best Actress Oscar showed that almost a third of the winners played roles that were defined primarily through relationship to a man or men; that is, as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, or girlfriends. Tellingly, there was no parallel “relational” category for the Best Actor winners. While the number of relational roles among the Best Actress nominations has slowed in recent years, Brie Larson won the Best Actress Oscar in 2016

for her role in *Room*, about a mother and son who survived long-term kidnapping. In addition, in the last decade more films featuring central girl or women characters have been among Best Picture nominees, including *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *Juno* (2007), *Precious* (2009), *Black Swan* (2010), *The Help* (2011), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2013). Recent progress is uneven: in 2013, four of nine nominated films featured a woman as protagonist, but in 2015, none of the eight films nominated featured a woman as protagonist. And in terms of box-office success, as of May 2014, two of the top three movie releases of 2013 featured female protagonists: *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* and *Frozen*, evidence which counters the notion that male viewers are not interested in paying to see films that feature female protagonists and female-centered storylines. In early 2017, the film *Hidden Figures*, about three African American women mathematicians whose work was instrumental to the U.S. effort during the Cold War space race, was doing extremely well at the box office and had netted a Best Picture Oscar nomination. Recall the Case

Table 2.1 List of Best Picture Award Winners

2016 – <i>Moonlight</i>	1999 – <i>American Beauty</i>
2015 – <i>Spotlight</i>	1998 – <i>Shakespeare in Love</i>
2014 – <i>Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)</i>	1997 – <i>Titanic</i>
2013 – <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i>	1996 – <i>The English Patient</i>
2012 – <i>Argo</i>	1995 – <i>Braveheart</i>
2011 – <i>The Artist</i>	1994 – <i>Forrest Gump</i>
2010 – <i>The King's Speech</i>	1993 – <i>Schindler's List</i>
2009 – <i>The Hurt Locker</i>	1992 – <i>Unforgiven</i>
2008 – <i>Slumdog Millionaire</i>	1991 – <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i>
2007 – <i>No Country for Old Men</i>	1990 – <i>Dances With Wolves</i>
2006 – <i>The Departed</i>	1989 – <i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>
2005 – <i>Crash</i>	1988 – <i>Rain Man</i>
2004 – <i>Million Dollar Baby</i>	1987 – <i>The Last Emperor</i>
2003 – <i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i>	1986 – <i>Platoon</i>
2002 – <i>Chicago</i>	
2001 – <i>A Beautiful Mind</i>	
2000 – <i>Gladiator</i>	

Study in Chapter 1 on using media tests as a way of critically examining gender, sexuality, and race in film.

### *Athletics*

Sports is a primary site of gender socialization, especially for adolescents. Cheerleading in its earliest incarnations was a male activity, developed in 1898 as “pep clubs” (International). Charged with generating crowd enthusiasm, cheer clubs were male-only until 1923, but by the 1940s women became the majority of cheerleaders in the United States. Today, 96 percent of cheerleaders are female (Bettis and Adams). Cheerleading is suggestive of male-centeredness; as a “corollary” or “add-on” to, initially, exclusively male athletic events, primarily football and basketball, cheerleading has evolved to function as a method of (1) drawing attention to the athletic activities and achievements of a group of culture-dominant men, and (2) demanding particular highly compliant, traditionally feminine, and surface-focused standards from its female participants. By the 1970s, the emergence of professional cheerleading squads popularized the erotic image of the female cheerleader and her support of the athletic prowess of her team. As Bettis and Adams observe, “erotic tensions . . . creep into the language, practices, and policies of cheerleading squads at all levels, from preadolescent All-Star squads to collegiate competitive squads” (123). With current cheerleading choreography including what Bettis and Adams call “sexually suggestive” and “sexually provocative” moves, cheerleading becomes outward-looking in its emphasis on drawing attention to male athletics and in the efforts of female participants to garner social status through male attention to the often erotic performance of cheerleading routines. Competitive cheer has evolved as an offshoot of traditional cheerleading; its growing popularity can be seen in movies like *Bring it On* (2000) and the television show *Glee*, which features an award-winning squad called the Cheerios. Many people consider competitive cheer to be a sport, and organizing bodies within the field have petitioned the NCAA to officially recognize it as such on the collegiate level. Some cynically see the push to have competitive cheer recognized

as a collegiate sport as a way for universities to comply technically with Title IX regulations while not supporting more traditional sports for women athletes. Proponents of recognizing cheerleading as a sport argue that competitive cheer is highly athletic, and that those participating in it run the risk of incurring severe sports-related injuries. But while competitive cheer draws its own audience (as opposed to being on the sidelines of another sporting event), it arguably maintains the requirement of traditionally feminine appearance and sexually suggestive choreography.

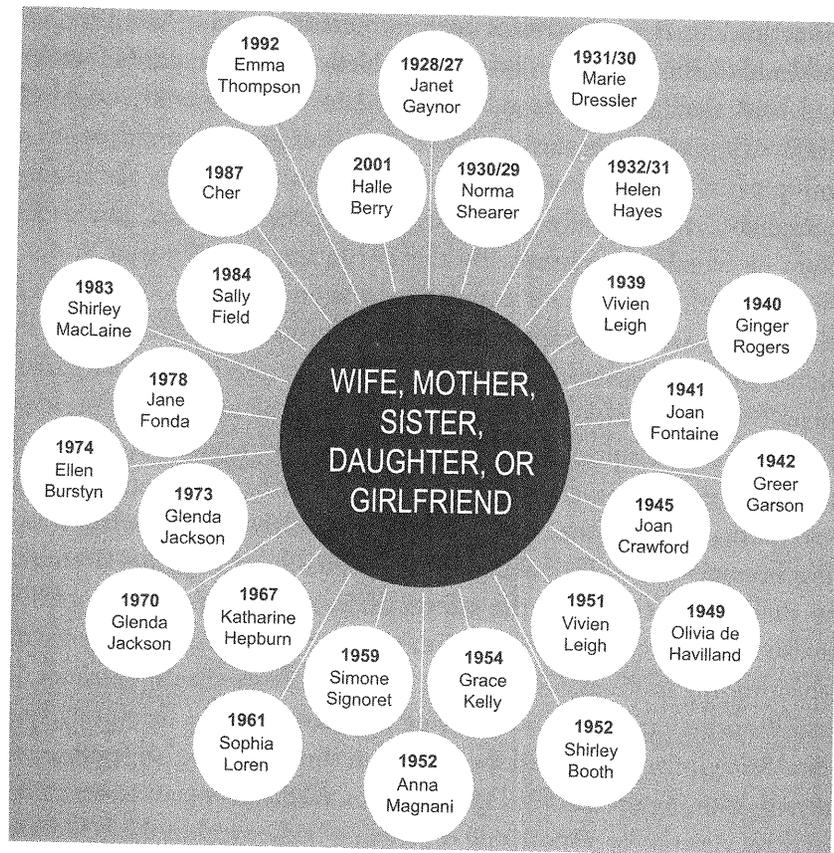


Figure 2.3 Relational Roles and Best Actress Oscars

Source: Infographic by Jan Diehm for the *Huffington Post*, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/16/best-actress-winners\\_n\\_4596033.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/16/best-actress-winners_n_4596033.html)

### Electoral Politics

As of January 2017, according to United Nations data, there were ten women serving as Head of State and nine serving as Head of Government. Fifteen percent of the world's lawmakers were female in 2003; by 2016, that number had risen to 23 percent (UN Women). In the United States, women are extremely underrepresented in elected office relative to their numbers in the general population. As of 2017, according to the Center for American Women and Politics, women represent 19.4 percent of Congress and 24.8 percent of state legislators; only 10 percent of governors are women. And while the U.S. came close to electing its first woman as president (Hillary Clinton won the popular vote in the 2016 presidential election), Clinton was ultimately defeated. The causes of Clinton's defeat are numerous and complex, but sexism was clearly among them.

When compared to women's representation in elected office in other countries, it appears that the United States is *losing* rather than gaining ground. For example, in 1997, the United States ranked 52nd in the world for women's representation in government; as of 2016, that ranking had fallen to 97th. The short answer for why we are losing ground, according to Sarah Kliff and Soo Oh, is that, unlike in other countries around the world (Sweden, Rwanda, Bolivia, Canada, Mexico, and France, just to name a few) neither the U.S. government nor the country's major political parties have made increasing women's participation a priority through instituting quotas.

The patterns and expectations are set at an early age, with many high schools and universities electing fewer young women to student government positions. For example, in 2013 at Phillips Academy, an elite prep



Figure 2.4 Gender and Race Breakdown of U.S. Legislators

Source: Hill, Catherine. "Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership." *American Association of University Women*. 2016. [www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/](http://www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/), accessed 5 July 2017

The gap is even worse in the U.S. Congress ...

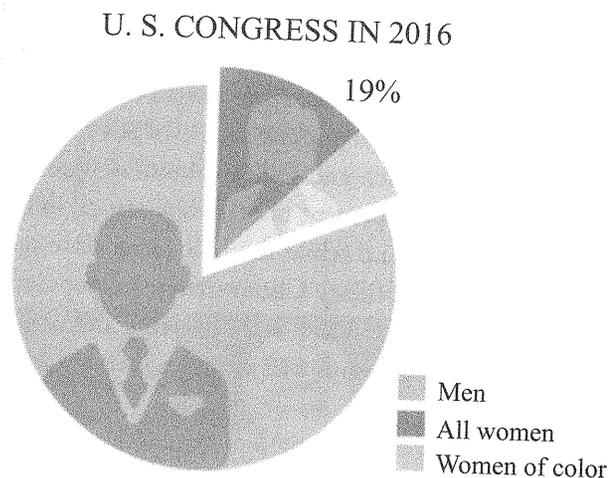


Figure 2.5 U.S. Congressional Demographics

Source: Hill, Catherine. "Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership." *American Association of University Women*. 2016. [www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/](http://www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/), accessed 5 July 2017

school in Andover, Massachusetts, students spoke out about the lack of female student leadership since the school opened its ranks to female students in 1973. According to a *New York Times* article written about the campus controversy, only four young women have been elected to the position of school president in the past 40 years. In an effort to increase female representation in student government, the school's administration adopted a co-president model in the hope that mixed-gender groups would run for office. Although the intended effect was not produced in 2013 (when two young men were elected), each pair of finalists in the 2014 election consisted of one young man and one young woman, ensuring the election of a woman to the co-presidency (Seelye). At the postsecondary level, the American Student Government Association

estimates that 40 percent of student presidents are women, also noting, however, that that number does not distinguish between two-year and four-year campuses; the assumption is that the number of women presidents on four-year campuses is lower (Johnson). A May 2013 report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement adds nuance to the discussion of women's underrepresentation in political office by pointing out that although women are "severely underrepresented at virtually all levels of elected office," girls and young women outpace their male peers "on many indicators of civic engagement, including volunteering, membership in community associations, and voting" (Kawashima-Ginsberg and Thomas 2). The report attempts to explain what leads to and creates the gender gap in leadership, and several of those factors clearly stem from the differing gender socialization of boys and girls. More specifically, they point to a gap in both confidence and expectations. They cite survey data from the Higher Education Research Institute that shows that women in their first year of college "are far less likely to claim personal characteristics such as leadership and public speaking skills, competitiveness, social skills, and popularity, all of which are commonly named characteristics of a political leader" (4), and they note that the gap has not narrowed in the past 50 years. Finally, they cite a study from American University that found that 30 percent of young college women had been encouraged to run for office, compared to 40 percent of young college men. More specifically, women "were less likely to be encouraged by parents, grandparents, teachers, religious leaders, coaches, and even friends" (6). In sum, both the implicit and explicit gendered messages boys and girls receive about political leadership shape the paths they pursue in adolescence and adulthood.

### *The Legal System*

Broadly speaking, the legal system, including courts of law, the police, and the prison system, are sites that convey powerful messages about gender. According to the Sentencing Project, over half of incarcerated women are mothers of children under the age of 18. And the number of incarcerated women has grown enormously over the past

30 years, more than 700 percent, from 26,378 in 1980 to 215,332 in 2014. While there continue to be far more men than women in prison, “the rate of growth for female imprisonment has outpaced men by more than 50 percent between 1980 and 2014.” Children, then, are increasingly learning about the criminal justice system from an early age as a result of having an incarcerated parent, an increasing number of whom are mothers. According to the Pew Research Center, there were 2.7 million children in the U.S. with an incarcerated parent as of 2010 (Reilly). However, in spite of the fact that the numbers of incarcerated women have grown tremendously in recent decades, women (particularly white women) are treated more leniently than men (both white men and men of color) within the criminal justice system, by a number of measures. According to a study entitled “From Initial Appearance to Sentencing: Do Female Defendants Experience Disparate Treatment?,” which analyzed almost 4,000 felony cases from 2009, they are less likely to be detained while awaiting trial, their bond amounts are lower than men’s, and they are less likely to be sentenced to prison. Racialized gender stereotypes, then, clearly operate within the criminal justice system in ways that directly impact both men’s and women’s experiences.

Children and teens are also increasingly encountering the criminal justice system through what has been termed the school-to-prison pipeline, which describes the ways that some K–12 students are being pushed out of schools and into the criminal justice system as a result of increased police presence in schools and the criminalization of minor infractions of school rules. This so-called pipeline disproportionately affects students of color and disabled students, and also has a gendered dimension, according to a 2015 report from the African American Policy Forum entitled “Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected.” According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the authors of the report, the disparity in punishment between black girls and white girls is greater than the disparity between black and white boys. In an interview with NPR News’s Karen Grigsby Bates, Crenshaw hypothesizes that this disparity is a result of the fact that black girls are targeted for school discipline not only because of their race, but also because their behavior does not conform to normative expectations of white femininity. In

short, black girls are often misperceived as defying authority because their gender expression is not seen as properly feminine.

A social constructionist approach argues that our gender identity, that is, our personal understanding of our own gender, is shaped by the intersection of experience and institutions. We receive implicit and explicit messages through our interactions with each of these institutions that fundamentally shape our understandings of ourselves and our beliefs about the world.

A final point here is that as we learn about gender through these societal institutions, masculinity and **femininity** are defined in relation to one another. More specifically, masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity. As Raewyn Connell puts it, “[m]asculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’” (252). In *Full Frontal Feminism*, Jessica Valenti puts a finer point on it: “masculinity is defined as whatever *isn’t* womanly” (185). The oppositional and relational nature of socially constructed masculinity and femininity is evident in Table 2.2.

### *Gender Norms, Gender Policing*

Reinforced across institutions and ideologies, gender norms are communicated in many settings that individuals experience throughout their lives. In the discipline of psychology, gender norms might be called

Table 2.2 Stereotypical Gender Qualities

<i>“Masculine” Qualities</i>	<i>“Feminine” Qualities</i>
aggressive/assertive	passive
logical/analytical	indirectly aggressive (“catty”)
physically strong, athletic	sensitive
responsible	other-oriented
protective	physically weak/er
self-oriented	compromising
emotionally unexpressive	emotionally expressive
in control	collaborative
authoritative	submissive
invulnerable	nurturing
sexually aggressive	chaste or pure

“gender roles,” while sociologist Lisa Wade uses the term “gender rules.” Whatever the term, those messages communicate our society’s norms or expectations for gender, in ways that we may only dimly be aware of. It is often only when we inadvertently break a gender rule that we become consciously aware that it exists.

Gender norms of both masculinity and femininity are maintained through many mechanisms, including what is referred to as “policing.” In this context, “gender policing” means monitoring behavior or gender display, and granting or withholding social approval based on those behaviors. Gender norms are internalized to greater or lesser degrees by everyone, and we all participate (again, to greater or lesser degrees) in policing our own and others’ gender expression. An example of this type of policing is the phenomenon of “**slut shaming**,” in which a woman’s sexual choices and behaviors (or presumed choices and behaviors) are critiqued by others; gender studies scholar Leora Tanenbaum’s book-length study, *Slut!*, traces how women who violate traditional sexual expectations for their gender are subject to direct and indirect social consequences ranging from virtual or real-life name-calling, harassment, and assault. When oppressed groups police other members of that group, this is referred to as **horizontal hostility**, a phenomenon that will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

### *Gender Ranking*

The concept of gender ranking helps us understand the purpose and function of gender rules or norms. Masculinity and femininity are not valued equally in our culture; instead, greater value is typically attached to masculine qualities than feminine qualities. In *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, Johnson argues that *androcentrism*, or centering on and valuing of those qualities associated with masculinity, is a part of our cultural norms. This male-centeredness becomes visible through a close look at how status and power are distributed in our society. With positions of power that are male-dominated, and higher value attached to masculine personality traits like

control, strength, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy,

self-sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values (such as invulnerability) . . . these male identified qualities are associated with the work valued most in patriarchal societies—business, politics, war, athletics, law, and medicine. (7)

This **gender ranking** is often framed as both biological in origin and immutable, with masculine qualities defined in opposition to—and more culturally valued than—feminine qualities.

Within a society that engages in gender ranking, it is important to police people’s gender expression in order to ensure the “proper” distribution of rewards and punishments. Within a sex/gender system that privileges masculinity, a certain latitude is given to girls and women to emulate masculinity. In other words, we have space in our culture for girls to be “tomboys,” because there is a certain logic in many people’s minds to why a girl would want to adopt masculine styles of dress, behavior, and play. But because femininity is devalued, boys who are termed “sissies” frequently endure merciless teasing. In adulthood, masculine styles of dress, within certain parameters, are open to women; think, for example, of the popularity of “boyfriend” jeans, chinos, sweaters, and button-down shirts. The same cannot be said of men’s clothing; there is no parallel “girlfriend” styling of men’s clothing. This point will be explored visually in the “Bodies” portion of the Anchoring Topics section.

But aside from clothing, the emulation of masculinity by adult women can be fraught. There is a double standard of behavior for men and women in the workplace and in politics, for example, where the same behavior is judged very differently depending on whether the person engaging in the behavior is a man or woman. Sheryl Sandberg’s Lean In organization is attempting to raise awareness of one manifestation of this double standard with its “Ban Bossy” campaign. As the campaign’s website puts it, “When a little boy asserts himself, he’s called a ‘leader.’ When a little girl does the same, she risks being branded ‘bossy.’”

Closely related to this concept of a **gendered double standard** of behavior is the idea of the **double bind**, whereby women in the public sphere

are faced with two less-than-desirable options of adhering to or rejecting feminine gender norms, risking negative repercussions either way. Amanda Fortini captured this double bind in an article she wrote about the 2008 U.S. presidential race, in which Hillary Clinton sought the Democratic presidential nomination and Sarah Palin was the Republican vice presidential candidate. Clinton's style was deemed more masculine, whereas Palin's was more traditionally feminine, but both received negative media attention. Fortini's title: "The 'Bitch' and the 'Ditz' (How the Year of the Woman Reinforced the Two Most Pernicious Sexist Stereotypes and Actually Set Women Back)". This gendered double standard also has everything to do with race and class; traditional femininity is often implicitly coded as both white and middle-class. African American women in positions of power in the workplace and in politics, for example, have to negotiate a gendered double standard that is also interwoven with racial stereotypes, such as the Angry Black Woman trope.

Associations between traditionally gendered behavior—and unequal penalties for men and women who do not adhere to expectations—is illustrated in a series of public columns by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, who examine how biases and assumptions about the superiority of masculine qualities—but the simultaneous social consequences for women who behave in traditionally 'masculine' ways—operates in the workplace. For example, Grant and Sandberg report on a study that

asked managers to read a transcript from a job interview of a candidate described as either female or male. At the end of the interview, the candidate asked for higher compensation and a nonstandard bonus. . . . they were 28 percent less interested in hiring the female candidate. They also judged her as 27 percent less likable. The same information did not alter their judgments of male candidates.

(Grant and Sandberg, 2014)

Only being told that stereotypes exist had a negative impact on participants' abilities to moderate their stereotypes, but if they were told not only that stereotypes were present but also that most people

work to be aware of and act in ways that counter them, people in the study were much less likely to have discriminatory reactions. As Grant and Sandberg report, "[w]ith this adjustment, discrimination vanished in their studies. After reading this message, managers were 28 percent more interested in working with the female candidate who negotiated assertively and judged her as 25 percent more likable." What this demonstrates is the complicated relationship between gendered behaviors and qualities and the lived experience of gender—and the complex challenges of navigating institutions that have been built upon and around traditional ideas about gender rules and gender roles.

### *Reimagining Masculinity*

Gender ranking serves the purpose of maintaining and perpetuating *sexism*, that is to say, a system of male dominance. However, there is a growing realization that boys and men often experience deep and lasting harm as a result of adhering to, striving to adhere to, or failing to adhere to the very masculine gender norms that form the foundation of sexism. Paul Kivel's articulation of the contents of the **act-like-a-man box**, as well as its purpose and function, has been key in this area. He calls it a box to emphasize the rigidity, narrowness, and confining aspects of the social construction of masculinity. He writes,

[I]t feels like a box, a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week box that society tells boys they must fit themselves into. One reason we know it's a box is because every time a boy tries to step out he's pushed back in with names like wimp, sissy, mama's boy, girl, fag, nerd, punk, mark, bitch, and others even more graphic. Behind those names is the threat of violence.

(148)

Kivel points out that this policing of boys can come from other boys, but also from girls, who "don't seem to like us when we step out of the box" (148). This policing can also come from adults, who "seem convinced that if they 'coddle' us, we will be weak and vulnerable" (148). A graphic illustration of the policing of the "act-like-a-man-box" can

be found in the story of a young boy in Raleigh, North Carolina, who attempted suicide in February 2014 after a long period of being bullied because he was a fan of the television show *My Little Pony*.

A growing body of psychological and medical research has linked boys' and men's adherence to traditional masculine gender norms with a number of connected negative outcomes: loss of intimate friendship, high rates of depression, and lower life expectancy. Regarding friendship, according to sociologist Lisa Wade, the qualities needed to extend and receive friendship are coded feminine in our culture, thus causing a gender role conflict for men. She writes,

To be close friends, men need to be willing to confess their insecurities, be kind to others, have empathy and sometimes sacrifice their own self-interest. "Real men," though, are not supposed to do these things. They are supposed to be self-interested, competitive, non-emotional, strong (with no insecurities at all), and able to deal with their emotional problems without help. Being a good friend, then, as well as needing a good friend, is the equivalent of being girly.

She cites research by psychologist Niobe Way that found that younger boys report having close, intimate friendships with other boys, but that there is a shift around the age of 15 or 16, when boys "start reporting that they don't have friends and don't need them." Later in adulthood, however, many adult men report wanting intimate friendships but are not sure how to forge them. This example not only illustrates the limitations of adhering to traditional norms of masculinity, but it also reveals the need to consider how the social construction of masculinity changes across an individual's life span. Put differently, these examples show the importance of thinking about gender in relation to age.

Beyond identifying the limitations and harm of traditional masculinity, a growing number of men are making strides in their personal, professional, and activist lives toward reimagining masculinity. Guante, a hip hop artist, poet, and social justice educator, has a spoken word piece, "Ten Responses to the Phrase 'Man Up,'" that resonates deeply

with audiences. Another poet, Carlos Andres Gomez, published a book entitled *Man Up: Reimagining Modern Manhood* in 2012. Both men offer analysis of masculinity as a forced performance, make public declarations that they reject traditional masculinity, and instead claim for themselves a reimagined manhood that, as Guante puts it, entails having meaningful, emotional relationships with other men, admitting weakness, and being "strong in a way that isn't about physical power or dominance." Indeed, a huge emphasis of the work of men like Guante and Gomez, and groups like A Call to Men, is reimagining masculinity toward the end of preventing violence, whether that's men's violence against women, against themselves, or against other men. Men's work to reimagine masculinity benefits girls and women, then, in the sense that it is focused on reducing violence against women, but it also benefits boys and men per se, in the sense that it can result in raising their quality of life, even as it may entail giving up some of the unearned privileges of masculinity.

The examples described in this section give a sense of how complex the gender landscape is in the 21st century. Many people, young and old, chafe against the restrictions of the gender binary that dictate that masculinity and femininity are relational and oppositional, and that masculinity is more highly valued. Simultaneously, however, other individuals, along with structural forces, work hard, in ways both visible and invisible, to shore up traditional norms and gendered expectations.

### *Learning Roadblock*

"It's how you were raised." It can be tempting to analyze gender through a lens that imagines family structures are the sole and most important influence on a person's gender identity. Typically, these binary characterizations of gender are psychoanalytic in origin. Psychoanalytic theories typically explain gender differentiation through relationships to others. Such theories originated from two different sources: **Freudian** views and those of other psychologists about how humans develop their sense of gender identity from deep roots in their childhood experience of family origin (experiences that are gendered); and theories that build on

those psychological evolutions by positing essentialized views of masculine and feminine ways of developing psychologically, morally, and emotionally. Freudian theories undergird the psychological approach because of Freud's role in laying the groundwork for the study of the human psyche. Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex is sometimes used to explain the difference between male and female development of identity; in sum, Freud theorized that male children must individuate from their primary (female) caretaker and identify with the male parent in order to fully develop into an adolescent and adult. Freud's theory supposed a deep and unconscious basis in an unrealized sexual desire for the mother, one that is displaced by identification with the father. In contrast, female children do not need to individuate and become independent in their identity formation because their primary caretaker is the same-sex parent. Thus, boys and men, in this view, develop an identity characterized by separation, independence, and individuality whereas girls maintain an emphasis on identification, interdependence, and cooperation/mutuality.

Other theories, such as that of feminist Carol Gilligan (in response to Lawrence Kohlberg), challenge assumptions about moral development that emphasize independent decision-making based on a moral truth and disconnected from the needs of others as the pinnacle. By this logic, women (in general) were perpetually "immature" in their moral development because they were more likely to be driven by moral decision-making that accounted for the needs and feelings of others—the emotional or affective dimension—than by disconnected or objective applications of a moral principle. Psychoanalytic theories typically use essentialist assumptions about the moral or psychological orientation of men and women; as such, psychoanalytic explanations of occupational segregation focus on women's attraction to and suitability for relational care work and work guided by a sense of moral obligation to others. Conversely, more independence, or what Gilligan calls an "ethic of justice," is ascribed to men, which purportedly explains their attraction to fields that provide work that is objective, mechanical, or conducted independently.

However, as this chapter illustrates, families themselves are subject to and part of structural and cultural contexts that grant privileges to

certain types of family structures and withhold them from others; parents themselves absorb and reproduce cultural values about gender. Family structures are part of larger institutional contexts that reproduce values around class, race, gender, sexuality, and other categories of identity—values that do not begin and end around the boundaries of families of origin. In short, it's not inaccurate to say that "how you were raised" shapes one's ideas about gender, but what *is* inaccurate is the assertion that the only necessary changes that need to be made to the structure of gender can be brought about through child-rearing practices.

### *Learning Roadblock*

"*Women and men are naturally \_\_\_\_\_.*" Historically and in our contemporary "commonplace" understandings of gender, *biology* holds a great deal of explanatory power, because physical differences between men and women are typically the first "cues" we experience about gender identity. Biological determinist explanations for gender role development are rooted in assumptions about men's greater average muscle mass and physical strength, in theories about genetics and hormonal differences between men and women, and in claims about reproductive strategies and the influence of women's reproductive life cycles, for example, on the development of their emotional and psychological priorities. A biological determinist looks at the occupational segregation of labor and locates the explanation for this division in genetic, biological, and evolutionary differences. The determinist might assert that because women are biologically responsible for reproduction, gestation, and lactation, as well as, because of these physiological realities, caring for children, that women are attracted to fields that make use of these "natural" dispositions. Lower-compensated and lower-status work such as early childhood education, childcare, social work, secretarial work, and nursing are naturally suited to women's biological and evolutionary impulse toward caring for others, they would argue. On the flip side, the physically demanding occupations such as logging and construction, for example, are occupied by men, whose larger bodies and greater muscle strength make them physically suited for this work. Further, historical associations between men and logic as well

as spatial skills (borne out by some neurological research) are used to justify the concentration of male workers in fields like law, architecture, and engineering.

Although the idea that gender and sex are biologically and genetically determined can have great explanatory power, scientific research as well as careful reflection reveal that many of the gendered behaviors we take for granted are actually highly socially constructed by the overlapping institutions we experience on a daily basis: the family, media, medical communities, religion, educational institutions, and so forth. The scientific and historical evidence of the malleability of gender—the wide range of sexualities across cultures; the range of expectations for masculine and feminine behavior across culture, time, and even an individual's life span; and the significant cultural energy spent on ensuring that boys and girls conform to particular gendered ideologies (through such mechanisms as gay- and lesbian-baiting, stigmatizing gender non-conforming behavior, and maintaining policies and practices that reward traditional gendered behaviors)—suggests that gender is not quite as “natural” as we suppose. A story featured in the online arts and culture magazine *Slate* showcases the strong explanatory power of biological and genetic explanations for gender differences. Calling attention to the media coverage of two studies published in the prestigious scholarly journal *Nature*, the story observes that

[t]he *Huffington Post* quoted one of the studies' authors as saying that these “special” genes “may play a large role in differences between males and females.” Yet what the *Nature* articles *actually* show is the exact opposite. The 12 genes residing on the Y chromosome exist to ensure sexual *similarity*.

(Richardson)

Although the original study findings emphasized sexual similarity, the story was “translated” to emphasize sexual difference—even though this was not actually borne out by the research.

Taken together, these interrelated framing concepts—social constructionism, the relationship between sex and gender, gender socialization, gender identity, gender expression, and gender ranking—are all part

of understanding how a social constructionist approach is critical to feminist analysis.

## Anchoring Topics through the Lens of Social Constructionism

### *Work and Family*

One way of understanding the varying theories about gender construction is to look at the phenomenon of what is called **occupational segregation of labor** and how it illustrates gender ranking and gender role socialization. Specifically, the predominance of men in some occupations and women in others both communicates expectations about work and gender, and is valued and compensated differently based on the predominance of men or women in that workforce.

### *Overview of Gender Wage Gap/Occupational Segregation of Labor*

As research from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources consistently shows, occupations are strongly separated by gender; that is, particular segments of the labor market are occupied by women, and men are clustered in other labor segments. As the chart below illustrates in broad terms, particular types of work such as administrative and clerical work are fields that women are concentrated in; by contrast, production and craft work is largely done by male workers (91 percent).

A more fine-grained analysis suggests that very particular jobs such as secretaries and administrative assistants are mostly done by women (97 percent); work that involves small children is almost entirely performed by female workers (preschool teachers, 97.7 percent). By contrast, male-dominated occupations—those that typically pay significantly higher wages—are also as disproportionately dominated by men as those clerical positions are by women. Law enforcement officers are 84.5 percent male, 98 percent of automotive technical work is performed by men, and 97 percent of construction workers are men. Occupational segregation of labor is a useful and robust topic through which to develop a more complicated picture of how the **gender wage gap**—the common gap between men's and women's earnings, with women generally receiving lower pay—is promoted and reproduced. However, for the purposes of

Table 2.3 Gender Differences in Occupational Distributions among Workers

Occupation	Men			Women		
	Percentage of occupation that are men	Number (in thousands)	Percentage of all men employed in each occupation	Number (in thousands)	Percentage of all women employed in each occupation	
Total	...	67,334	100.0	59,787	100.0	
Managerial	54	11,005	16.3	9,387	15.7	
Professional and technical	46	12,063	17.9	13,552	23.3	
Sales	52	7,601	11.3	6,953	11.6	
Clerical and administrative support	21	3,751	5.6	14,128	23.6	
Service	39	6,465	9.6	10,066	16.8	
Production and craft	91	3,516	20.1	1,283	2.1	
Operatives	76	9,302	13.8	3,007	5.0	
Laborers	78	3,631	5.4	1,011	1.7	

Note: The Index of Dissimilarity across all occupations in 2001 was 31.1.

Source: [www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2007/06/art2full.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2007/06/art2full.pdf)

this chapter the topic is discussed to illustrate various theories about how and why men and women occupy different labor market segments. As Gabriel and Schmitz explain, “31 percent of men or women (or a combination of percentages that add up to 31 percent) would have to change occupations for there to be complete gender equality in occupational distributions” (19). The social construction of gender is both reflected and reinforced by the gendered segregation of labor.

Two terms that capture the issues in labor segregation include **vertical segregation of labor** and **horizontal segregation of labor**. For example, women are more likely to work in administrative and clerical positions whereas men are more likely to work in manufacturing and skilled labor; this is the horizontal segregation of labor, and this clustering of women in lower-paying occupations partly explains the gender wage gap. Vertical segregation takes place simultaneously, and refers to the fact that even in fields where there is a more even mix of men and women working, women tend to be clustered in positions with lower pay and prestige. For example, as the U.S. Department of Labor notes, more women than men work in professional fields, but women are more likely to be found in health and education professional fields (68 percent of women in this category worked in these types of fields compared with 30 percent of men) and are paid less than those occupied by men, such as computer science and engineering. For example, “[i]n 2015, 9 percent of women in professional and related occupations were employed in the relatively high-paying computer and engineering fields, compared with 45 percent of men” (2). Other notable statistical information includes the higher proportion of female workers in part-time positions—as the Department of Labor data show, “[w]omen who worked part-time made up 26 percent of all female wage and salary workers in 2010. In contrast, 13 percent of men in wage and salary jobs worked part-time” (2). Even within the same field, for example, medical professions, women are more likely to occupy lower-paying specialties such as public health or pediatrics, with men in higher-paid specialties like neurosurgery or internal medicine.

In this way, thinking back to Table 2.2 in this chapter, the connections between traditional notions about gender—and socialization into these qualities—maps fairly clearly on to the occupational segregation of labor. Occupations that focus on managing the emotions, logistics, or

bodies of others (education of young children, administrative support for professions, hands-on healthcare fields) are vastly female-dominated, while occupations that focus on interactions with objects or things and that call for objectivity, mechanical skills, and less human care work are male-dominated. The relationship between traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity, gender role socialization, and reproduction of gender norms, in this way, is complicated and recursive. As women and men cluster in particular occupations, this communicates a “norm” about the gendered nature of types of work; this, in turn, is represented through other institutions like education or media, which are thus part of creating a network of images and symbols that shape perceptions of gendered norms.

Notably, then, gender ranking is demonstrated by the occupational segregation of labor by the different compensation that single-gender dominated fields receive. For example, on average, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, returning to the highly single-gender dominant fields mentioned at the start of this section, average wage comparisons reveal how fiscal value follows gender ranking, considering the level of postsecondary education required for these trade and technical fields:

Table 2.4 Comparison of Single-Gender Dominant Occupations and Annual Wages

Occupation	Percent Gender	Average Annual Wage
Preschool teachers	97.7% women	\$32,500
Secretaries and administrative assistants	79% women	\$39,360
Law enforcement officers	84.5% men	\$56,860
Construction trades workers	98% men	\$46,290
Automotive technical work	98% men	\$41,290

Source: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.htm>

Certainly some of this differential valuing comes from cultural assumptions about the relative difficulty of types of work. Work that requires physical labor rather than emotional or social labor has been valued as more challenging. Feminist sociologists and feminist scholars from other fields continue to reframe this assumption in order to make the cognitive and emotional work required to do quality care work visible and press for compensation that appropriately values that work.

For women in elite and/or corporate positions, the construction of leadership itself may be gendered. For example, as Joan Williams and Rachel Dempsey discuss in *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know*, even as women make up the majority of college students and have made inroads into many professions, positions of power remain starkly gendered masculine. Just 3.6 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women, for example (4), and just 15 percent of law firm partners are women. Workplace values centered on the unencumbered worker—historically, a male employee with few if any commitments outside the workplace—exert unequal pressures on men and women workers. Williams and Dempsey report that motherhood is the strongest trigger for bias: women with children are 79 percent less likely to be hired, only half as likely to be promoted, and earn a lot less money than women with identical resumes but without children, while this bias was untrue for men with children (5). A 2013 research study showed that women CEOs were more likely to be fired than their male counterparts—38 percent versus 27 percent, partly because they tend to be “riskier” hires brought in at times of corporate crisis (Duberman). Leadership qualities that require unencumbered workers and that are synonymous with traditionally masculine characteristics—self-assuredness, assertiveness, daring, and authoritative and commanding demeanors—all work against women and construct leadership work as masculine in nature. Further, expectations about women’s roles within the workplace often reproduce the social expectations of other environments. As Grant and Sandberg discuss, women workers who demonstrated stereotypically feminine behaviors were neither helped nor hurt by their conformity to gender socialization; however, women who did not conform experienced social and economic consequences. Reporting on a study by psychologist Madelin Heilman, the *New York Times* column shows that when comparing the performance of two employees who were asked to stay late to help with preparations for an important meeting the next day,

[f]or staying late and helping, a man was rated 14 percent more favorably than a woman. When both declined, a woman was rated 12 percent lower than a man. Over and over, after giving identical

help, a man was significantly more likely to be recommended for promotions, important projects, raises and bonuses. A woman had to help just to get the same rating as a man who didn't help.

(Grant and Sandberg, 2015)

Differential penalties between men and women for similar behaviors like those documented by Grant and Sandberg are illustrative of the key concepts in this section: gender ranking, the double bind, and a gendered double standard.

Methods of untangling socially constructed gender norms from biological ones are complicated but still present a strong picture of the gap between "natural" or "biological" explanations and the realities of gender construction. For example, although there is a stereotype that boys and men are better at mathematics and related fields than girls are, the gap in performance on standardized tests between boys and girls has narrowed. Further, gaps in standardized math test scores vary by country—there are no sex differences between boys and girls in Russia, India, and Japan, and in Iceland and Japan, girls *outscored* boys on math tests. Were mathematical or other abilities fixed, we would not see cross-cultural variation at this rate, nor could we explain the increase in the number of women engineers from 0.3 percent of bachelor of science degrees in 1970 to 18.9 percent in 2012.

Further, cross-cultural expectations for gender vary widely, suggesting that, were genetics or biology at work in shaping an immutable set of expectations around men and women, boys and girls, we would not see so much variation between cultures and nations about what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine, nor occupational segregation at the rate we see it in the United States.

### *Language, Images, and Symbols*

As mentioned previously, a key aspect of assigning a gender to infants when they're born happens through the naming process (side note: many parents find out the sex of their baby, using ultrasound technology, in utero, which means that the process of gender assignment begins even *before* birth, particularly if parents-to-be take seriously the suggestion to talk to the fetus and begin addressing it by name

while still in the womb). In the United States, the majority of given names are unambiguously gendered and considered appropriate only for girls or only for boys, although there are exceptions that add nuance to this discussion.

Studies have looked at how names that were historically considered masculine, like Ashley or Courtney, have been claimed and appropriated as girls' names. There are two related aspects of this sort of shift that connect to how gender operates in our culture. In terms of explaining *why* parents have chosen "boy" names for their daughters, it would seem that *gender ranking* comes into play here, meaning that within the logic of patriarchy, giving a girl a boy's name is an act of emulating privilege. That same "logic" also explains why there has been no parallel trend of parents choosing "girl" names for their sons; giving a boy a girl's name would be adopting the status of the less-valued gender (an interesting take on this issue can be found in Johnny Cash's classic country song, "A Boy Named Sue"). In terms of the *consequences* of parents choosing "boy" names for their daughters, we see that as more parents choose these names for their daughters, *fewer* parents choose those same names for their sons. In effect, then, there seems to be a tipping point; if too many parents choose a "masculine" name for their daughter, parents of male children avoid that name as it comes to be seen as feminine.

The popular website Nameberry, which tracks baby naming trends, has noted, however, that some new trends may be emerging. The site reports, in a 2012 post, seeing "parents 'reclaiming' for their sons unisex names that had veered girlward and names rising in tandem for both sexes." Another phenomenon that has yet to be quantified but has been reported anecdotally is that more parents are deliberately choosing gender-neutral names. Some parents, for example, are choosing not to find out the sex of their baby before its birth and decide on a name that could be used for either a boy or a girl.

Fast forwarding to adulthood, two recent studies that focus on gender bias in the workplace highlight the role that gendered names play in maintaining inequality. In one study referenced perhaps most notably by Sheryl Sandberg in her *Lean In*-based TED Talk, a business school professor gave his students a case study of a successful entrepreneur

named Heidi Roizen, only he changed the name to Howard in one section. The professor, Francis Flynn, recalls

[b]efore class, I had the students go online and rate their impressions of "Roizen" on several dimensions. As you might expect, the results show that students were much harsher on Heidi than on Howard across the board. Although they think she's just as competent and effective as Howard, they don't like her, they wouldn't hire her, and they wouldn't want to work with her. As gender researchers would predict, this seems to be driven by how much they disliked Heidi's aggressive personality. The more assertive they thought Heidi was, the more harshly they judged her (but the same was not true for those who rated Howard).

The ultimate point here, of course, is not about names per se, but about the gendered double standard for workplace behavior. And yet the study is a stark reminder that names almost always convey our gender, and that gendered stereotyping and double standards often kick in on that basis alone.

In another recent study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States*, researchers asked natural sciences professors to rate the application materials of college students applying for a position as a laboratory manager. As with the Flynn study, the materials were identical in every way except for the name of the applicant: Jennifer or John. According to the study's authors, "[f]aculty participants rated the male applicant as significantly more competent and hireable than the (identical) female applicant. These participants also selected a higher starting salary and offered more career mentoring to the male applicant" (qtd. in Sharp). A final study shows how names are not only gendered but racialized. In this study, published by the Social Science Research Network, researchers sent an identical email to 6,500 professors across the United States. The researchers posed as prospective students asking to meet with the professor, with the only thing distinguishing the emails from one another being the names of those prospective students: Brad Anderson, Meredith Roberts, Lamar Washington, LaToya Brown, Juanita Martinez, Deepak Patel, Sonali

Desai, Chang Wong, and Mei Chen. The findings: "faculty ignored requests from women and minorities at a higher rate than requests from Caucasian males, particularly in higher-paying disciplines and private institutions" (Milkman, Akinola, and Chugh). In other words, professors were more likely to respond to the prospective students who, based on their name, were perceived to be white and male. These examples clearly reveal some of the workplace and education-related implications of gendered and racialized naming practices, and how social constructionism is at work in large and small ways in communicating gender and race, as well as social roles and status.

A different way that gender comes into play in relation to naming has to do with the use of first names, last names, and/or titles in social interactions. Henley and Freeman argue that status is often communicated and reproduced by the levels of intimacy allowed to be expressed between two people depending on their social or employment status. Subordinates and superordinates have varying levels of freedom to address each other by first or last names, with the superordinate granted greater levels of familiarity than the subordinate. On a related note, many women professors note the tendency of students to refer to them either by first name or as "Mrs.," but not by their title of Doctor or Professor. While campus culture varies greatly across the United States, anecdotal evidence suggests a gendered dimension to this, with female professors consistently experiencing this phenomenon to a greater degree than their male colleagues.

Perhaps one of the most notable gendered controversies around naming, and socially communicated messages about naming and status, is the issue of (typically) heterosexual women changing their last name upon marriage. As Scheuble, Johnson, and Johnson explain, "[t]he practice of married women taking their husband's last name originates from the patriarchal family system under which women were considered their husband's property" (282); yet, despite the many strides toward gender equity, this practice continues for the majority of women. Research and demographic information suggests that 80 percent to 90 percent or more of heterosexual women choose to take their husband's last name upon marriage, with women with greater levels of educational attainment and who marry at older ages less likely

to adopt their husband's surname (Lockwood, Burton, and Boersma 827). As part of the social construction of gender roles, name changing remains a controversial practice among feminists, but a widely held cultural norm. One research study reported that women who change their surnames identified tradition and relationship bonding as key reasons for their decision, yet Lockwood, Burton, and Boersma concluded that concern for family dynamics—including upsetting extended family members with nontraditional naming choices—remained an important consideration for many women (837). That is, despite feminist critique of this patriarchal tradition, many women continue to adhere to traditional values. Some arguments suggest that with other strides in gender equity, taking a spouse's last name is not as meaningful now as in the past, such as Lynn Harris's argument in a 2003 *Salon* article, "Mrs. Feminist":

[t]oday, a woman's decision to take her husband's name is not necessarily, or merely, "retro." When it comes to such political-slash-personal acts, the stakes have changed, and therefore so have the statements we're making with them. I would argue that we're not losing battles; we're choosing them. We're not retreating; we're showing, subtly, how far we've come.

Although a clear minority, some women keep their name upon marriage or take their husband's name without ditching their own, through hyphenation. An even smaller number of couples have gone further, by having the husband take his wife's name (either alone or through hyphenating with his last name), or by the couple legally declaring a new last name that is sometimes a combination of their two names. Whatever the decision and accompanying rationale, the argument seems to rest on the value attached to names and the weight ascribed to this practice within the context of cultural values around names and identity.

### *Bodies*

Gender is inscribed *on* our bodies in terms of their shape, size, and appearance, and is also performed through how we use and move our

bodies in the world. Our culture constructs masculine and feminine bodies in opposition to one another, with feminine bodies expected to be slender, soft, and hairless, and masculine bodies expected to be taller, broader, more muscular, and hairy. One way to explore and reveal how this works is to look at images that deliberately reverse these constructions.

As feminist sociologist Judith Lorber asserts, "[g]ender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced." Among fans of comic books, there are extensive and ongoing conversations about the gendering of comic book characters, with a vibrant feminist critique of the way that women characters are depicted and the storylines they are given. Below is an example of one artist, Aaron Clutter, who draws attention to how gender is constructed in this aspect of popular culture by depicting male superheroes in feminine clothing and poses. Note that the artist has separated out three distinct aspects of the social construction of gendered bodies: (1) the bodies themselves, in terms of their size and muscularity; (2) the clothing; and (3) bodily posture/presentation. The bodies themselves are still coded masculine, with broad shoulders, square jaws, and defined, bulging muscles, but the clothing and poses are distinctly feminine and sexualized.

Artist Hana Pesut's photographic series entitled "Switcheroo" explores similar terrain. The series consists of paired, side-by-side photographs; in the first, a couple poses together wearing their own clothing, whereas in the second the couple switches places and clothing, and also recreates the other's pose and posture.

In this example, we get a visual reminder and confirmation that in some ways, the boundaries of femininity are more elastic than the boundaries of masculinity when it comes to clothing. When the women in these photographs swap the clothes previously worn by the man, they are often oversized but not necessarily categorically different than clothing we would recognize as commonly seen worn by women, whereas the reverse is much less often true for the men in the photographs. At the same time, however, the postures and poses are often quite different, such that seeing the women mimic the men's posture and pose and vice



Figure 2.6 Depiction of Male Superheroes in Feminized Postures

Source: Aaron Clutter, Editor-in-Chief, *Comic Booked*, [www.comicbooked.com](http://www.comicbooked.com)

versa is startling and upsets expectations. Feminist philosopher Sandra Bartky has explored these gender differences in “gesture, posture, movement, and general bodily comportment,” noting that “[f]eminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty: all three” (81). Henley and Freeman’s early work in this area explores similar territory; they note that

[i]t is often considered “unladylike” for a woman to use her body too forcefully, to sprawl, to stand with her legs widely spread, to sit

with her feet up, or to cross the ankle of one leg over the knee of the other. Many of these positions are ones of strength and dominance. (82)

They further note that differences in masculine and feminine clothing styles help reinforce these differences, as masculine clothing allows greater range of motion and more coverage. Bartky makes a similar point when noting that “women in short, low-cut dresses are told to avoid bending over at all, but if they must, great care must be taken to avoid an unseemly display of breast or rump” (83). While the increasing sexualization of women’s bodies has meant that there are, for better or worse, fewer restrictions on exposing bare skin, we can see evidence of the continuation of this gender norm on websites devoted to celebrity gossip and entertainment “news”; these sites delight in posting paparazzi photos of so-called wardrobe malfunctions or inadvertent flashing, not only to titillate viewers but also to subtly or not-so-subtly shame said celebrities for lapses in ladylike presentation.

Yet another way that gender is inscribed on the body is through tattooing. The global history of tattooing is long and complex, and social norms related to tattoos have changed considerably in the past few decades. While historically it was considered to be a significant



Figure 2.7 Artist Hana Pesut draws attention to gender cues in her photographic series “Switcheroo”

Source: Photography by Hana Pesut, [www.sincerelyhana.com](http://www.sincerelyhana.com)

transgression of feminine gender norms for women to be tattooed, the norms are much more nuanced today, and there is no longer a significant gap between the number of men and women who get tattooed. Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn (2004) cite a study that estimates that “women currently acquire half of all tattoos, a rate that has quadrupled since the 1970s” (594). In spite of the relatively equal numbers of men and women getting tattooed, however, studies seem to suggest that there are gendered differences in perceptions of tattooed people.

In order to get at the nuanced ways that tattoos inscribe gender on the body, we need to consider a number of factors, including the placement, type, and size of those tattoos, as well as the race/ethnicity and social class of tattooed women. As we consider each of these factors, we are reminded of how women’s bodies are a central site of social negotiation and struggle. On the one hand, many women get tattooed as a way to deliberately reject normative constructions of femininity, whereas other women do so with deliberate and conscious attention toward staying within the bounds of gendered social expectation. With regard to placement, there is first the question of whether a tattoo is visible or generally hidden from view while wearing clothing. Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn’s (2004) study found that both men and women had a more negative attitude toward women whose tattoos were visible. For some women, this is precisely the point; they aim to defy expectations of feminine appearance. A 2013 study in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior* found that tattooed women were more likely to be viewed as sexually promiscuous and were quicker to be approached by men in the experiments conducted, while their level of physical attractiveness was unaffected by the presence of the tattoo (Guéguen), suggesting that body modifications like tattooing become social indicators with particular symbolic, and gendered, functions.

Beyond visible versus hidden, however, is the question of where on the body the tattoo is placed. Some parts of the body are particularly laden with meaning when it comes to both gender and sexuality. Many young women get tattooed on the small of their back; in slang terms, these tattoos are frequently called “tramp stamps,” language that is both gendered and sexualized, in that it is an aspect of slut shaming. Arguably, there are also classed associations with the “tramp stamp” label.

A tattoo in that location is often described as “trashy,” as opposed to respectably middle-class. Research shows that the size of a woman’s tattoo is also a factor in whether and to what extent it is seen as a violation of feminine gender norms, with smaller tattoos being seen as more feminine than larger ones. Color and type are also important factors; pastel or primary-colored tattoos of butterflies, hearts, roses, the names or footprints/handprints of children, and inspirational words or phrases are all generally considered feminine.

A final point here is that the consumer marketplace has responded to women’s desire to navigate this tricky gender landscape and perhaps to try to have it both ways, so to speak, as evidenced by the cosmetic company Sephora’s tattoo concealer makeup, which carries the name of Kat Von D, celebrity tattoo artist, star of reality television show *LA Ink*, herself heavily tattooed. From the Sephora website:

Kat says, “If you wanna hide a tattoo just for one day, the proper concealer can make that happen! No one has to see what you don’t want them to see!” Take it from the tattoo pro: “I think just as much as people have the choice to be tattooed, they should also have the liberty to look whatever way they want whenever they want.” This is your ticket to tattoo freedom!

## Case Study

### *Gender Shifts in Professions*

#### *Clerical and Secretarial Work*

In today’s labor force, clerical work generally and secretary or receptionist positions specifically are female-dominated; however, clerical work up through the late 19th century was an exclusively male profession. As England notes, prior to the 20th century, few women engaged in paid work; less than one-fifth of women worked outside the home, and they were typically employed in the areas of domestic work, agriculture, and factory work (particularly textiles). In 1871, according to England and Boyer,

clerical work accounted for a tiny proportion of all workers, less than one percent in the US in 1870 and Canada in 1871. Clerical

work in the US grew by over 450 percent between 1900 and 1903, at which point 9 percent of the labor force held clerical jobs.

(310)

Workers performing clerical functions were almost exclusively male, and the clerical occupation was “high status work, offered good job security and for those men in senior positions was a most prestigious job of the sort associated with middle management today” (310). With the development of technologies like typewriters and stenography, in 1880, cultural attitudes about women’s stereotypical traits like compliance and fine motor coordination/dexterity led to occupational shifts, although these were visions of femininity typically connected to white women; over time (through various media imagery and advertising campaigns, an increase in demand for clerical workers that accompanied technological and industrial shifts from agricultural to urban industries), the demand and rewards for this type of work changed. England notes, “[i]n the popular imaginary, clerical work was promoted as a desirable job for young, educated white women to do for a few years prior to marriage” (313); race and ethnic bias accompanied this shift as office work was believed to be “reserved only for young, white protestant women” (314). Feminist scholars have examined the way that secretarial work offered some women opportunities to enter the labor market, while simultaneously positioning the work as low status, even as the technology aptitude and literacy required to do the work effectively was high. For example, Liz Rohan has challenged the class bias that has framed salaried professional work as higher skilled than the hourly wage work done by secretaries and clerical staff, even when the “amount of technological skill [and] . . . the amount of training and literacy the secretaries need to proofread technical documents” is substantial (Rohan 242).

In today’s economy, secretarial work is almost exclusively performed by women and yet the tasks associated with this occupation have not substantially changed. An occupation once assumed to be high status and requiring traditional masculine traits has become dramatically female-dominated with no accompanying change in duties. This

transformation highlights the way that social institutions can shift and adapt our understanding of gender over time.

#### *Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Medicine*

A contemporary example of the feminization of a profession comes from veterinary medicine, which went from being male-dominated to being female-dominated over a relatively short span of time. In 1960, only 2 percent of veterinarians were women, but as of 2015, according to the American Veterinary Medicine Association, women comprised 55.2 percent of veterinarians in private practice, and 52.2 percent of veterinarians in public or corporate settings (“Market Research Statistics”). Women’s numbers in the profession may grow even larger in the decades to come, because women now constitute almost 80 percent of all students studying veterinary medicine. Sociologist Anne E. Lincoln studied the feminization of veterinary education and found that

what’s really driving feminization of the field is what I call “pre-emptive flight”—men not applying because of women’s increasing enrollment. Also, fewer men than women are graduating with a Bachelor’s degree, so they aren’t applying because they don’t have the prerequisites.

Lincoln’s research challenged the belief that women’s entry into veterinary medicine was an expression of caretaking, as well as the belief that women are less concerned than men with high earnings (Lincoln, 2010). It should be noted that Lincoln’s research comes from outside the field itself (as noted above, she is a sociologist), and that professionals and professional organizations within the field have struggled to go beyond offering guesses as to why the gender composition of the profession has changed so rapidly and thoroughly in recent decades. A final note is that though women have represented the majority of veterinarians in the U.S. for several years, leadership in the field’s professional organizations, as well as leadership in schools of veterinary medicine, is still largely male. The Women’s Veterinary Leadership Initiative is focused on eliminating this leadership gap in the profession.

Though the first two examples of the feminization of a profession discussed here resulted in declining prestige and pay, feminization does not of necessity have that result, as can be seen in the case of pharmaceutical medicine, which was dubbed “The Most Egalitarian of All Professions” in a 2012 report by two Harvard University economists, Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz. According to Goldin and Katz, only 8 percent of pharmacists were women in 1960, but that number had risen to over 55 percent by 2012. Unlike veterinary medicine, however, in which women’s entry both coincided with and resulted in a decline in pay and status, the earnings of pharmacists continue to be strong, the status of the profession has not fallen, and women pharmacists earn 92 cents for every dollar earned by men in the field, the smallest wage gap in health care fields, and a lower wage gap than in most other high-paying professions, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. What sets the profession apart from the others discussed here is that women began entering the field at the same time that it was undergoing many structural changes; the number of jobs available for pharmacists has remained strong, and there has been a decline in small-business owners running their own pharmacies. Today, there are far more available positions for pharmacists in the pharmacies of chain drugstores (Walgreens and CVS, for example) and big box stores (Target, Wal-Mart, etc.). Significantly, these types of positions offer more flexible schedules and fewer responsibilities than being a pharmacist who is also a small-business owner. Goldin and Katz also report that “[p]harmacy earnings appear to be highly linear in hours and in that sense pharmacy has a relatively low ‘career cost of family.’” For a number of reasons, and for better or worse, the market for pharmaceuticals has expanded in recent decades in ways that have positively impacted women’s entry into and experience of the field.

## End of Chapter Elements

### *Evaluating Prior Knowledge*

1. Think about your own exposure to gender identity and gender awareness. Do you remember when you first became aware (or were made aware) of your gender? What moment or moments in your

- life have you experienced a sense of what it means to be a boy or a girl? What cues did you get that led you to that awareness? How was your awareness of your gender intertwined with other aspects of your identity, such as your social class, your race/ethnicity, and/or your sexual identity?
2. Have there been moments in your life that you’ve felt limited or empowered by your gender identity? In what settings did you have those experiences?
  3. This chapter briefly discusses several of the sites or arenas where gender socialization takes place. What do you recall about your experiences with those institutions when you were growing up? And today?
  4. Prior to reading this chapter, had you ever encountered the word “cisgender” or “cissexual”? If so, where? If you had not encountered these terms before, what do you make of them? If you identify as cisgender, how does it feel to have a label to describe that identity?

### *Application Exercises*

1. Occupational segregation by gender is one explanation for the gender pay gap. See Tables 2.3 and 2.4, which document the occupational segregation of labor, and examine the dominance of each gender in particular occupations. Select one female-dominated field and explain what qualities are typically associated with the responsibilities of that work environment. Do the same for a male-dominated occupation. How might a biological determinist explain this occupational clustering? What would a social constructionist focus on?
2. Choose a favorite film genre, and screen at least three films in that genre. Take note of the number and type of women characters and relevant identity factors—marital status, educational attainment, race, class, **sexual orientation**. What conclusions can you draw about “women in X genre” of film based on your analysis? What messages about gender would you draw as a viewer just paying attention to norms, values, and behaviors exhibited by female characters in that genre?

3. Take a field trip to a local department store like Wal-Mart or Target and peruse the toy aisles. Jot down what you observe about the messages, implications, and subtext communicated by the arrangement of the toys; how they are divided, marketed, packaged, and directed; and what they communicate about gender.
4. While the kind of dress codes discussed above in the gender socialization section are not nearly as widespread at the collegiate level as they are in middle schools and high schools, this is not to say that the explicit and/or implicit gender policing of clothing does not occur on college campuses. For example, investigate whether the recreation and wellness center on your campus has a dress code; if so, analyze it for gendered messages. Also, what are the tacit rules on your campus for classroom attire, and how are those rules gendered?

#### *Skills Assessment*

1. View the 2016 science fiction film *Passengers*, paying careful attention to the gendered identities of the two main characters, played by Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt. Analyze the film's plot using chapter concepts.
2. Two of the academic fields with the smallest percentage of women earning doctorates are engineering<sup>1</sup> (22 percent) and philosophy<sup>2</sup> (21.9 percent). Explore your impressions and associations with these two fields of academic study; are they "gendered masculine" in ways that explain this disparity? If so, are they gendered masculine in similar or different ways?
3. Gender reveal parties are becoming more popular in the United States. Here's a description of a typical gender reveal party:

The house was filled with balloons and confetti, and the guests were decked out in team colors, ready to cheer. Minutes before the party kicked off, they eagerly cast votes on the outcome. But this festive gathering was not a Super Bowl celebration. The decorations were all in pinks and powder blues, and the sides involved were "Team Boy" and "Team Girl." This was a gender-reveal party, during which expectant parents share the moment

they discover their baby's sex, unveiling results of the ultrasound test among loved ones.

Write a two to four paragraph analysis of the gender reveal party as a cultural phenomenon. Using concepts from this chapter, how can you complicate our understanding of these parties and what they signify about our culture?

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. Why do you think that biological explanations for gender roles and expectations are so powerful and common sense? In what ways do biological explanations fail to account for human experiences broadly or your own experience specifically?
2. In what ways can you observe race, class, and sexuality operating in definitions of masculinity and femininity?
3. Review the chapter sections on institutions as agents of gender socialization. In what ways do you see institutions operating not just independently but in overlapping ways? Explore how different pairs of institutions operate together to reinforce gender socialization. For example, organized religion and the family are interconnected both because of theological beliefs about gender roles and family responsibilities and because religious involvement can be a significant source of support and community for families.
4. Read Charlotte Alter's article in *Time*, "Seeing Sexism from Both Sides: What Trans Men Experience" (<http://time.com/4371196/seeing-sexism-from-both-sides-what-trans-men-experience/>). How might trans men be uniquely poised to shed light on how gender is socially constructed in our society?

#### *Writing Prompts*

1. Describe a gender norm that you regularly perform and that, for the purposes of this assignment, you are willing to break for a set period of time. Describe how you broke the norm and who saw you break it. What reactions did you receive? How does your experiment support and/or challenge the arguments contained in this chapter? How does your experiment illustrate this chapter's key concepts?

2. Screen the documentary *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood, and American Culture* or *The Bro Code: How Contemporary Culture Creates Sexist Men*. Then do some Internet research into some of the school shootings that most traumatized Americans: the Columbine shooting in 1999 and the Newtown shootings in 2012. Write an essay in which you examine the phenomenon of school shootings through a social constructionist lens that considers the formation of masculine identities in the United States.
3. Select two of the following comedic films targeting young male viewers. What vision of masculinity do they construct? *Van Wilder*, *Old School*, *Pineapple Express*, *Caddyshack*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Tropic Thunder*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Swingers*, *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*.
4. Take a brief tour through a department store or big box store like Target or Wal-Mart (or their websites), looking carefully at the newborn, baby, and toddler sections of clothing and accessories (e.g., bibs and pacifiers). Make a list of all the gendered messages that are communicated through text, images, colors, styles, and so forth. What conclusions can you draw about how gender is “framed” even as early as infancy? What qualities, activities, and characteristics are emphasized for girls versus boys?
5. Watch the following commercial, entitled “Pretty” for Droid phones: ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=w83UQkiuNZQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w83UQkiuNZQ)). Here is the text of the voiceover in the commercial:

Droid. Should a phone be pretty? Should it be a tiara-wearing digitally clueless beauty pageant queen? Or should it be fast? Racehorse duct-taped to a Scud missile fast. We say the latter. So we built the phone that does. Does rip through the Web like a circular saw through a ripe banana. Is it a precious porcelain figurine of a phone? In truth? No. It's not a princess. It's a robot. A phone that trades hair-do for can-do.

How does this ad illustrate several key concepts from this chapter? Write a three- to five-paragraph essay that analyzes the cultural messages that this commercial reinforces.

## Notes

- 1 [www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/09/14/doctorates#sthash.1uZBi8e6.dpbs](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/09/14/doctorates#sthash.1uZBi8e6.dpbs); see also Yoder.
- 2 [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/women-in-philosophy-do-the-math/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=2&](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/women-in-philosophy-do-the-math/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=2&)

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### Suggested Readings and Videos

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## 3

## PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION



Figure 3.1 Kathrine Switzer runs the Boston Marathon in 1967

Source: Getty Images/Boston Globe